

The BOOK RECORD

Conducted by "ANTAR"

BIRTH AS SHADOWGRAPH

Film Critic-Novelist Writes Fictional Pre-
History of Cinema—and Administers
Kick in Pants

Special Review by "O.M.A"

ALTHOUGH the dust cover of E. G. Cousins's "Three To-days" promises very badly, the novel itself is actually rather good reading. Its theme is the development of the cinema through the ages, from its birth as a shadowgraph in the time of the Egyptians to its present stature as a powerful force for good or evil in the world.

To serve his theme, the author has used the principles of reincarnation and karma, showing how four people—three men and a woman—are brought together in different ages to carry on their self-appointed task of teaching the nations by shadow-shows. It is an ingenious device, if a trifle laboriously worked out, and it gives to the three books of the novel a special significance apart from their own intrinsic interest.

Nevertheless, as tales of exciting action and romance each book could very well stand on its own merits. The story of Phanes, the swineherd who entered the Sacred Temple as an acolyte, under a false name, and was cast out when his secret was uncovered by one of his fellow acolytes, the Princess An, is crisply and sincerely told. If the Egyptian characters are inclined to talk with the knowledgeability and breadth of understanding of educated twentieth century men and women, that is a fault which does not jar too badly on a reader more interested, anyway, in the action of the story than in its characters. And in the second book, with its setting the England of King Arthur, action moves even faster.

BUT the real interest of "Three To-days" is in the last book, where Mr. Cousins reveals to his reader certain very disreputable and unpleasant aspects of British film production at the present time. Although this is fiction, Mr. Cousins's reputation as film writer and critic leads the thoughtful reader to suppose he is dealing in material no worse than the truth. The inactivity of British studios recently, their continual changes of schedule and the outcry of sincere English critics against the inefficiency and wastage permitted and even practised by the studio heads, only goes to support the accusation of "Three To-days," which depicts the film business as a racket crippled by graft and indecision, the breeding-ground of all kinds of sexuality, and the tomb of

honest men's endeavour and purposes for good.

IT is clear from the ring of anger in this novel—although it is an anger touched with satiric amusement—that Mr. Cousins is not just writing for profit here, but would like to teach the film people a very salutary lesson. Unfortunately, I do not think he will do it. His earnestness at times defeats itself by leading him into digressions that will be tedious to all but those deeply interested in film affairs. His book has not enough sting to be an indictment and not half enough skill to be a best-seller.

All the same, "Three To-days" is a good novel, competently and smoothly written, with bright action to grip attention. To thoughtful filmgoers particularly, and to lovers of a good tale generally, it can honestly be recommended.

"Three To-days," by E. G. Cousins (Methuen: London). Our copy from the publisher.

LEISURELY TALE

J. L. Hodson's New Book

AMONG people who like a leisurely tale about real people, J. L. Hodson's new novel, "Mr. Arkwright's Marriage," will find sufficient admirers.

There is not much to the book. It is simply the romance of a Lancashire man of near-sixty who went on a cruise to Madeira and allowed the heat, the excitement of a Portuguese rebellion, and a sprightly Irish widow, to go irresistibly to his head. After the marriage, however, the widow remained as sprightly and flirtatious as ever, tempting even the fiancé of Mr. Arkwright's daughter by his first marriage to give her a kiss at the end of a gramophone dance record. Finally, she eloped with a dirt-track rider who had had so many accidents he was only held together by stays and screws. Mr. Arkwright went back quietly to his violin and his talks with his friend Mr. Bates. "Romance," he decided, "cannot stand with age."

The pace of the novel seems to suit Mr. Arkwright's own, the author relying very little upon incident to carry his characterisations. But Mr. Arkwright himself, his friend Bates, the Irish widow and the young fiancé, Geoff, are all drawn with a sure pen in colours which, if not bright, are at least realistic. The stolid, philosophic



temperament of the Lancashire people has been Mr. Hodson's forte for some time, and this latest work shows he has not lost the old cunning. One feels he might have thrown the sometimes too placid main characters into sharper relief by giving more attention to the young hardness and restless energy of Mr. Arkwright's daughter. But that is a matter of opinion.

"Mr. Arkwright's Marriage" is not the book to set any Thames on fire, but will nevertheless find many friends among its own public.

"Mr. Arkwright's Marriage" (Victor Gollancz, Ltd.). Our copy from the publishers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

TO a list of some thirty other books, Kathlyn Rhodes has now added "Strange Quartet," which is written in the same "true-romances" vein. Centre of the tale is Dion Loraine, an upright young English aristocrat who inherits his father's fine estate on the supposed death of his elder brother. He marries, goes on a trip to Egypt, and finds the missing brother and a half-caste son living happily on an orange plantation. The brother dies almost immediately after the meeting, and Dion is persuaded by his new-found nephew to carry on as steward at the old home. His wife has a son, which dies of convulsions, thereby strengthening her intuitive conviction that the old home does not welcome them any longer. And a young cousin of hers, who comes to stay, falls in love with Dion, is firmly repulsed, and commits suicide in a lily-pond on the Egyptian orange plantation. After these troubles, Dion's nephew gives him the estate as a gift, and everyone, presumably, lives happily ever after.

"Strange Quartet," by Kathlyn Rhodes (Hutchinson and Co. Ltd.: London). Our copy from the publishers.