

* * * Let's Go to The Movies! * * *
 Being a Critique of Leading Current Screen Offerings
 By Mrs. GEORGE READ

THE BIG PARADE. One cannot casually say of Laurence Stallings's scenario, *The Big Parade*, shown this month at the Ideal, simply that here is another good war picture. It is a convincing account, in the main, of human beings in war. It is a snapshot of the man who thinks and the man who does not think. Both of them feel. It is an admirable attempt to portray by means of the physical world the idea of war. And Laurence Stallings's idea is not a glorious but an unhappy one. The young writer must be weary by now of having everyone call attention to the fact that he was a serious *bléssé de la guerre*. The fact has been exploited in advertising everything he has yet offered the public. He has been dragged before the curtain in the New York playhouse where his and Anderson's—we believe it was Maxwell Anderson who was co-author—*What Price Glory?* offended the universal optimists and militarists so profoundly, and had his missing leg all but pointed at. In fact many people took the stand that was the reason he let himself be coerced into the glare of the footlights and, perhaps, feeling that way about it, hardened their hearts against the living document he himself is of the cruel destruction of War.

Almost the first subtitle of the picture reads: "What a thing is patriotism. We go for years not knowing we have it, when suddenly—martial music flags waving! friends cheering! And the first thing we know it becomes life's greatest emotion!"

John Gilbert in the leading rôle makes live the young man of perception, the young man who is careerist, who is thoughtful without being too introspective, gay without being reckless, who finds himself caught up in the all-too-sudden mobilization maelstrom, and before he knows it is marching along the road to Champillon. We say all-too-sudden mobilization advisedly, for although the United States was remained cosmically untouched by what was going on in Europe for over two whole years, surely in 1917 she put out a campaign of sled-hammer propaganda which brought the country nearer to arms almost overnight. That it was a war to end war was the greatest morsel of bunk the propagandists fed the multitude; a poisonous manna which the youth of many countries swallowed whole, and marched out together

To a quiet grave in a foreign land,
 And our heart's desire.

The Big Parade evidences neither the disgruntled spirit of John Dos Passos nor the bitterness of Henri Barbusse. However, it bears actual witness to the causes of Barbusse's bitterness.

"National aspirations," says Barbusse in *Light*, "confessed or unconfessed, are contradictory among themselves. All populations which are narrowly confined and elbow each other in the world are full of dreams vaster than each of them. The nations' territorial ambitions overlap each other on the map of the universe, economic and financial ambitions cancel each other mathematically. Then in the mass they are unrealizable."

"And since there is no sort of higher control over this scuffle of truths which are not admissible, each nation realizes its own by all possible means, by all the fidelity and anger and brute force she can get out of herself. By the help of this state of world-wide anarchy, the lazy and slight distinction between patriotism, imperialism and militarism is violated, trampled, and broken through all along the line, and it cannot be otherwise."

There have been excellent war pictures released which have only sought to play on one string, that of the humorous side of the situation. In a way, they have been of a high order and indicate a fine attitude, from the individualistic point of view.



Renée Adoree, beautiful and competent star in *The Big Parade*. See text

In *The Big Parade* we are conscious that the author is well aware of this humorous side, but that he seeks to go farther, and to portray the feeling of lyric sacrifice that agitates the breast of the true soldier.

Frances Ledwidge in Ireland, Rupert Brooke in England, Alan Seeger in America, all spoke the same language; and it was the single voice of the thousand thousand who did drink the sacrificial cup to the dregs. Far finer than the commonly quoted *Rendezvous With Death* of Alan Seeger, are his *Liebstod* and *The Hosts*.

From the latter we read—
 There was a stately drama writ
 By the hand that peopled the earth and air
 And set the stars in the infinite
 And made night gorgeous and morning fair,
 And all that had sense to reason knew
 That bloody drama must be gone through.

And from the *Liebstod*—

Truth or delusion, be it as may,
 Yet think it true, dear friends, for, thinking so,
 That thought shall nerve our sinews on the day
 When to the last assault our bugles blow:
 Heads high and hearts aflame and bayonets bare,
 And we shall brave eternity as though
 Eyes looked on us in which we would seem fair—
 One waited in whose presence we would wear,
 Even as a lover who would be well seen
 Our manhood faultless and our honor clean.

It will be remembered that he was a member of the Foreign Legion, and fell at the battle of Belleau-en-Santerre in July, 1916.

The scenes in *No Man's Land* in *The Big Parade* are indeed set like a stately epic drama. Why raise the technical objection that the advances were not made according to the actual manner of attack among the allies; that the men were too massed in their lines and so forth and so on? These scenes did not purport to be out and out realism. Instead, they were staged to convey the impression of millions of individuals going together to what? To annihilation or to resurrection? The artillery barrage, suns and moons bursting in space, comets of momentary duration flaming across the void, earth sending up its boulders and herbage, its granite foundations and vestiges of devastated pastoral beauty under the indifferent heavens. And in the midst of it all, wave on wave of human beings being vastly destroyed, the while they destroyed one another.

Jimmie's goodbye to his mother on the eve of his departure for France is one of the best scenes in the picture, filled with excellent ones. Here is no Spartan mother who bids her son come home with his shield or upon it. Here is human intelligence and perception and devotion; the recollection of the young child alive to the ecstasy of living and at the same time the full appreciation of the man-child still in love with living, going prematurely to his death. Not only the conception of the rôle, but Claire McDowell's acting conveyed most movingly the idea of responsibility engendered by parenthood and the deeply rooted instinct to protect the offspring from danger, with the last drop of energy. There were no theatrics on the part of either Miss McDowell or of John Gilbert at any moment in the picture, with the exception of the scene in *No Man's Land* when good taste was strained to the breaking point.

Jimmie goes out over the barbed-wire entanglements to look for his friend "Slim" calling him at the top of his lungs. All is quiet except the occasional fire of a machine gun. Probably, his commanding officer would have shot him for the insane disclosure of the whereabouts of

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his troops when every pore of the earth was apt to have an enemy ear.

Renée Adorée was charming as Jimmie's sweetheart. She was alluring without being openly sex-conscious. She overlaid nothing, with one exception, and she cannot be held responsible for that. She hangs onto Jimmie's leg as he climbs into the truck that is to take him to the front, and when his leg does not obediently dismember itself and stay behind, Melisande (Miss Adorée) then swings onto the back of the truck and appears to think that she has to do to keep it from getting away from her is to hang on tenaciously. She is dragged in the mud for yards and yards, yet when she finally lets go and rises to her feet, she looks more lovely than she has looked in the entire drama—in spite of mud and tears. So that we are ready to overlook that absurdity. But what Melisande fails to do, a German machine gun very effectively does, that is to say, it removes the leg.

It is with pleasure that we find Jimmie's fiancée on the verge of marrying Jimmie's brother when the war is over and he returns home. We doubted her, along with Jimmie, from the first, for having a brass-button complex, and saying "You'll look gorgeous in a uniform. I'll love you more than ever. When are you going overseas?" And we felt even more elated when Jimmie announced to his mother, his relieved mother who had suffered a disillusion in advance for her son, that there was a girl in France, and his mother says, "Then there is nothing else that matters". Romance if you like, but who does not like it? And when we see Melisande and her mother reworking the ruined fields, preparing the land with plow and oxen, as the women did, and the long classic line of sparring, fluttering poplars against the subdued French sky, we wonder if it was not France that Jimmie ached to return to, as well as Melisande.

Don Juan. "If the movies have ever produced a picture that justifies the most extravagant superlatives, *Don Juan* is that picture."—the Manila Times of March 25. "Nothing about it, from the star to the last details of the authentic setting, but can be said to be the greatest and finest ever."

Of course we realize the *Times* isn't being serious, but if one goes on speaking in superlatives indefinitely one will in time reduce one's vocabulary to a row of exclamation points, about as intelligible as the Eskimo parlance of the comic strip. Truly the movie *Bismarck*, of whatever it is called, in most daily papers, tells absolutely nothing about a picture. Is one reading a critique of *Monte Cristo*? Or is it *Monte Carlo* this week? The flimsy tells one and the same thing. It is the most marvelous picture yet shown on the screen and the parts are more gorgeously, humorously, beautifully taken than any parts ever assumed by any actors and actresses since the world began.

But speaking of *Don Juan*, why all this blurbal mazzetta with the usual Fairbanks was his own tail? *The Times* goes on to say that even if John Barrymore had never before been heard of—perhaps there is due significance in this, for who under the sun could associate him, for example, with the young poet of *The Jest*—his work in *Don Juan* would be sufficient to establish him as an equal—one of the many equals—of Fairbanks and Valentino in the minds of countless trillions of screen devotees." Another daily places him on the same high level of acting with Estelle-Jack-Dempsey-Taylor, whose imagination might be stretched to encompass what went on *Up in Mable's Room*, but hardly more than that. In other words, she is a retailer of the common or garden variety of E. A., with which the movie market is vulgarly flooded. As Lucretia Borgia she is convincing enough, if that is your conception of Lucretia Borgia. However, as in the case of the purple coat, it's easier to see a Borgia than to be one. If we were called upon to better the things we so ardently cry down, most of us

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would be in a sorry plight. Yet everyone has the privilege of stating preferences, with whys and wherefores.

As to our preference for acting in *Don Juan*, it went in bulk to Mr. Montagu Love as the swashbuckling, licentious, domineering Donati. Every man is self-conscious in his own right. Mr. Love as Donati was unobjectionably so, and at the same time undemandingly charming and witty. But Mr. Barrymore was so exquisitely pleased with every one of his own changes of facial expression that he must have the camera focus upon each with a time exposure. We would enjoy seeing him play the *Pied Piper of Hamelin* in the same costume he wore when he did his dipping swallow coup at Donati's neck in the typical movie final fight. So far as the Fairbanks clichés were concerned, the stage business would have been convincing enough in films like *The Gaucho* and *The Mark of Zorro*, but for fastidious noblemen of the Cinquecento, fisticuffs seem inappropriate compared to

stiletos and rapiers. We regretted that *Don Juan* did not neatly run Donati through, as we believe was the socially accepted thing to do in the days when the more famous Borgias emigrated from Spain. Donati was his man. If he chose to let him go, well and good. If he did not so choose, and this *Don Juan* did not, the final thrust would have been brief, elegant, much to the point. But Hollywood would not get out of its time-honored groove. The stiletto must be placed on the floor within struggling distance of the villain. The villain must possess himself of it. The hero, now justified in no longer considering his adversary's life, takes the stiletto away from him and stabs him effectively to death. Mr. Barrymore registered much the same expression of sensuous satiety as he washed his hands of Donati as he did when he was gesturing graceful get-thee-gones to the innumerable beauties who surrounded him. There was much atmosphere of mardelhall sets, and little or nothing of Renaissance Italy.

Dear Bill: I Take My Pen in Hand To Say . . .

Life would be fine and comfortable in a nipa-hatch house in the Philippines, were it not for the inmates: the scorpions, spiders, centipedes and millipedes, cockroaches, termites (white ants), flies, ant lions, book lice, doing havoc to one's library, butterflies, shedding noisome pollen into the butter-tin, moths, supplementing the not altogether puerile efforts of the butterfly, to make the evening meal uncomfortable, fleas, bees, wasps, ants (true ants of a dozen species and countless varieties—all with the typical antish proclivities), beetles, frogs, lizards (including the vulgar and notorious talking lizard), and bats, carnivorous and vegetarian, only to be told apart by an examination of their teeth.

You catch a bat, when you have acquired the necessary technique, of course, hold him down in such a manner as will prevent his thumbnails from slitting the arteries in your wrists, and, prying open his jaws with a convenient pair of pincers, examine his mouth under the light of an oil lamp burning fitfully between times when flying ants, moths and butterflies are using it for a cremation plant. If the grooves in your fellow-householder's teeth run cross-wise, put a steel-mesh glove on your hand and wring his neck—whereupon the ants will take care of him. If, however, the grooves run lengthwise in his teeth, turn him loose with due apologies, since the worst he will do is to devour your garden. And in the tropics one may always make a new garden. The only drawback is, the ravenous hordes of bats and their aids and accomplices

among the insects are well aware of this, and, when your repeated efforts have borne fruit, return to devour the fruit.

Francis X. Williams, an entomologist in the employ of the Hawaiian Sugar Association, spent two years at research in the Philippines, lived in nipa houses, and found his companions in these huts that house the Filipino millions so diverting that he produced a paper about them which appears in the current issue of *The Philippine Journal of Science*. He found a good name for the paper too: *The Natural History of a Philippine Nipa House*.

What could be more apropos than that? The materials of such a house are rattan thongs in lieu of nails, bamboo in lieu of posts, beams, rafters, sheeting and siding, and the fronds of nipa palms made into a huge but light and feathery type of shingle. These shingles are fastened to bamboo strips laid over the rafters, with thin rattan thongs, and stouter thongs hold the strips fast to the rafters. Still stouter thongs lash the rafters together in pairs and as the framework of an entire roof. So you go on, with bigger and stronger rattans, tying the house together and lacing the floor, of bamboo strips, down to the joists of round bamboo beneath it.

In pastoral countries God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, until the lamb is fat enough to go to the butcher's. In the Philippines, He doesn't need to mind about the wind. There

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