is to combine the two, so that romance may shine more glamorous against humdrum surroundings. We have swung back to the Elizabethans in fact, to whom romance and fancy dress were not synonyms. Shakespeare dressed Julius Cæsar in doublet and hose, made Bottom a London guildsman, Theseus a county squire. Windsor was quite as good as Zenda for him.

And so, just now, for us. Consider " Road-House "—typical light comedy, perhaps the best of the year. It finds romance no farther off the map than in an unsuccessful pub on the fringe of London. Its types are commonplace—car bandits, motor-cycle police, and a cute speculator who has brought the pub up to date. In brief, it mirrors our normality; its romance springs from individual enterprise, not from strange settings or types; nor is there anything exceptional about its hero but his stupidity, on which the whole story depends. In Zenda times that hero would have stopped in the North-West Mounted; or had he strayed into the English police, must have turned realist and come no nearer romance than the arrest of some clerk, after four hours of family dispute in the suburbs of Manchester. To-day he makes a much more interesting best of both worlds.

I grant that " Road-House " is the lightest of fare; but the same principle holds good in more weighty productions. Not fancy dress, but the vagaries of normality caught off its guard, are now perceived to be the proper stuff of romance, which is summed up by a north country apophthegm—" Nowt so queer as folk!" And I suggest that the old fancy-dress criterion sways Mr. Sydney Carroll too strongly, when he deplores the realistic tendency of our current plays. Where are the " Zendas " and the " Scarlet Pimpernels "? Mr. Carroll asks.* He admits the romance of " Road-House," and somewhat grudgingly that our more serious authors mix romantic leaven with their " depressing fidelity." He cites " Evensong." I must confess that, to my mind at least, romance predominates in this play. The term is relative no doubt; to a grand-opera singer " Evensong " might seem realistic (and " Zenda " too, to the inhabitant of some pre-War Balkan state?). But to the bulk of us Irela is no less exotic a personage than Rupert of Hentzau himself; and as such, for the bulk of us, Miss Evans interprets her, with a high glamour all the more enhanced by her realistic surroundings.

But there is no confuting Mr. Carroll when he quotes " Children in Uniform." Romantic " relativity " cannot here be urged; even to unsophisticated males this fine play is stark realism, and its avoidance of subjective sentiment (in a piece where the sentiment of girlhood, treated objectively, is the central theme) is admirably maintained. I am less sure of " Musical Chairs," which Mr. Carroll groups among the realistic productions. I find the leaven of romance more potent there than he thinks it. But I agree that it owes nothing to the trappings of Zendaism. The scene, Galicia, is as real as Lancashire—coalfield or oil-field, there is nothing to choose; the Schindlers are wholly credible; it is their quintessential humanity, flaring up in harsh conflict, that makes this magnificent play.

And what about playgoers? Romance in realistic guise may draw audiences, but is there any public for the fancy-dress kind whose dearth Mr. Carroll deplores? I fear his modesty has made him overlook the success of his " Twelfth Night." True, this was helped by the exceptional support of the Press—and rightly; its merit was exceptional—but not ten times as much support would have enabled it to run for three or four months, as it did, had there not been a large " romantic " public to welcome it. " Julius Cæsar " did creditably; and the continued vogue of the Old Vic needs no comment.

I note too that Mr. Carroll makes no reference to " Twelfth Night's " successor at the New—" Too True to be Good." Perhaps he shrank from classifying Mr. Shaw, who has at all times flouted labels by his knack of turning romance inside out. In this last play the situations are romantic as ever; but the reactions of the characters explode their romance, with true Shavian gusto. " Too True " was savagely attacked in the Press for falling short of Shaw's best; though it received small credit, contrariwise, for being infinitely more worth listening to than most of its rivals. But it is smart just now to pooh-pooh Shaw—witness our critical indifference to this year's revival of " Heartbreak House," an indubitably great play. " Too True "—a lesser piece and somewhat crudely produced—would have been hailed as " nearly as good as Shaw " had you or I written it; and yet when Mr. Shaw writes nearly as well as himself he is abused by the most up to date and praised with faint damns by the rest. I fancy he must see the humour of this; he can afford to. Whether the theatre can afford such smug superiority is more doubtful; I am sure the " smart " critics cannot; it is the sort of cleverness that justly brings their so-called craft into contempt.

* In the *Daily Telegraph*, October 22nd.

# FILMS OF THE YEAR

By Charles Davy

Not a very exciting year. The American talkie is stationary at a high level of technical efficiency and shows little sign of throwing up new ideas. In Russia, the wave of inspiration which started with " Potemkin " seems to have died down, and in any case Russia's experiments are now largely hidden from us by the language barrier. France has René Clair, but no other director of particular importance. Germany, in spite of her economic difficulties and political preoccupations, has the best record of any country during the year. Great Britain has had a successful year commercially; her studios have hummed away busily and made quite a lot of money. But most of her best work has been done under foreign influence; a distinctively British school of production, dealing imaginatively with serious native subjects, is not yet in sight.

" Mädchen in Uniform." (German.)
" Westfront: 1918." (German.)
" Kameradschaft." (German.)
" The Faithful Heart." (British.)
" Movie Crazy." (American.)
" A Nous la Liberté." (French.)

At the head of my list I have placed " Mädchen in Uniform," not only because of its rare dramatic merit but because it represents a healthy and hopeful break with several cherished screen traditions. The schoolgirls (there are no male characters) were nearly all played by young theatre students with no previous screen experience. They owe much of their success to the brilliant direction of Leontine Sagan, but some also to their own enthusiasm. They had no fixed salaries and agreed simply to share whatever profits there might be. The result is a film with no " star values " to upset its teamwork. The corporate life of the school—the struggle of young emotions against Prussian discipline—has a vivid existence on the screen; and it is the school you remember, not this or that person or incident. To some extent the film suffers in cramped movement from its stage origin; but it is a quite unusually sensitive and sincere piece of work, truthfully conceived and superbly photographed.

Of Pabst's two films, " Westfront, 1918 " and " Kameradschaft," I prefer " Westfront," though " Kameradschaft " has had more praise. " Westfront " tries to do too much—to show the effect of war on civilians as well as soldiers—and the total effect is perhaps inevitably uneven and

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episodic. But the front-line scenes have a grim realism which gains immensely from Pabst's relatively impersonal approach. No other war film gives such a convincing impression of war itself as distinct from individual reactions to it—of war as a storm of destruction that dwarfs the men who are waging it and eventually even the national animosities it represents.

In "Kameradschaft" Pabst points a rather similar moral a little too obviously. His French and German miners work in adjoining pits, separated by the frontier. An atmosphere of suspicion and friction hangs over the frontier villages, but as soon as an explosion occurs in the French part of the mine national differences are forgotten, and the German miners hasten to help their French comrades.

This idea is sound enough, but Pabst weakens its effect by occasionally forcing the note. There are moments when we seem to be witnessing an abstract moral lesson rather than a flesh-and-blood drama.

Still, a great deal in "Kameradschaft" is finely done. Apart from one unreal frontier-breaking incident, the arrival of the German rescuers is handled with a cumulative rhythm that becomes extremely exciting, and the echoing semi-darkness of the underground galleries is captured with wonderful skill. "Kameradschaft" does not quite live up to the scale of its conception, but its best episodes are masterly, and you come away feeling that Pabst has used the talkies to give you an experience not to be had from any other artistic medium.

What has Great Britain got to set against these German achievements? Her success up to the time of writing has been mostly in two fields—low comedy and light comedy. In her low comedies she has exploited the robustly coarse traditions of the British music-hall, but without distinction. In her light comedies she has been influenced partly by René Clair and partly by such German films as "The Road to Paradise" and the decorative but overrated "Congress Dances." She has learnt how effective an atmosphere of musical irresponsibility can be on the screen, and "Sunshine Susie," her first effort in this line, was so successful that the order at once went out for more.

In "Love on Wheels," Victor Savile produced an ingenious and amusing fantasia hampered by too rambling a story, and in "Jack's the Boy," Mr. Walter Forde—with the invaluable assistance of Jack Hulbert and Cicely Courtneidge—devised a profitable cross between "Sunshine Susie" and the Aldwych farces. But Mr. Savile's best work, I think, was his direction of "The Faithful Heart." Monckton Hoffe's simple little play—a play of sentiment which avoids the grosser forms of sentimentality—is well suited to screen treatment, and Mr. Savile succeeded in endowing it both with a remarkable veracity of feeling and a delightfully easy and fluid narrative rhythm. At last we were shown a film which could stand up to the best American pictures on technical grounds, and which was at the same time distinctively English in its story and its setting. It was not a masterpiece, but it was a thoroughly creditable piece of work, and for the moment, at any rate—with Mr. Asquith and Mr. Hitchcock temporarily in eclipse and Mr. Grierson hidden from the commercial limelight—Mr. Savile deserves to rank as the leading British director.

I am not going to assert that Harold Lloyd's "Movie Crazy" is the best American film of the year. There have been plenty of good American pictures which might claim that title, but few outstanding ones. I single out "Movie Crazy" because here, for the first time, the Chaplin tradition is translated with almost complete success into talkie terms. There is far less slapstick than in Lloyd's earlier films; instead, he reveals quite unsuspected acting powers, and the film's familiar story of the small-town youth's efforts to break into Hollywood is touched with just enough of that underlying pathos which is so valuable for making screen humour sympathetic and saving it from seeming mechanical.

We are left with René Clair's "A Nous la Liberté"—last and perhaps best. It lacks the controlled rhythm of "Le Million" and the poetic atmosphere of "Sous les Toits," but it is delightfully fresh and generous in spirit, with some glorious moments. Again Clair shows his peculiar gift for giving slapstick an intellectual edge and so blending it with social satire. I believe that he wanted the film to be more satirical, with the resemblance between prison and factory more sharply emphasised, but his backers insisted on a milder tone. Perhaps this is why the film seems at times to waver in purpose; and certainly the open road ending is too trite and facile a resolution of the theme. But it is a film which no one but Clair could have made; and in it he nearly solves the problem of making a talkie independent of its national language.

Almost—but not quite. This unfortunate problem remains to haunt the cinema of to-day and to-morrow, damming up so many fertilising ideas behind national frontiers.

# HISTORICAL WORKS OF THE YEAR

By Alfred Tresidder Sheppard

**"England Under Queen Anne: Ramillies and the Union with Scotland." By Professor G. M. Trevelyan, O.M.**

**"Letters of Queen Victoria (1896-1902)." Edited by G. E. Buckle.**

**"Julius Cæsar." By John Buchan.**

**"The Revolt of the Netherlands." By P. Geyl.**

**"The Jacobite Movement." By Sir Charles Petrie.**

**"Metternich." By Arthur Herman.**

Swift depicts Criticism as a malignant deity dwelling on a snowy mountain-top in Nova Zembla; her father is Ignorance, her mother Pride, while among her children are Noise, Impudence, Vanity, Pedantry and Ill-Manners. But she has also a gay and giddy sister named Opinion, perhaps the least unattractive of the family.

Calling Opinion to my aid, I think that thus far 1932 has been marked rather by a high general standard than by many historical books of startling and outstanding merit. Scissors and paste compilations without any permanent value, which at the end of every season begin to litter the cheap book boxes and shelves, are less in evidence. An unfortunate practice of giving pretentious and uninformative titles to historical biographies seems to be on the increase. Why, for instance, "Superman" for Frederick the Great in the translation of Nathaniel Ausubel's biography—or "Empress Innocence" for Marie Louise—or "Jovial King" for Jerome Bonaparte—or "Imperial Brother" for de Morny in a work which, calling itself a novel, is in fact an extremely useful and well-documented historical biography? The comparatively new art of nomenclature conceals so much more than art. We shall be having Elizabeth next as "Bachelor Woman" or Anne as "Dead Majesty."

Without attaching such importance to order as in the numbering of a squad on parade, I think high place must be given to the second volume, "Ramillies and the Union with Scotland," of Professor G. M. Trevelyan's "England under Queen Anne." We have not too many historians of the first rank to succeed the great writers of the past; the early chroniclers from whom we still glean much of our knowledge of the Middle Ages; and such later English historians as Clarendon, Gibbon, Hume, Froude, Stubbs,

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