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Mlle. Isabelle has been imparting to the children under her charge, is of a most gravely irrational kind. (This examination of the children, whose nature-knowledge is of a wildly Peter-Panish description, is a most amusing episode.) Yes, Isabelle is in love with the Spectre, or rather, perhaps, with the idea that her faith can enable the dead to return, and that this is her mission in life. The Spectre was played by Mr. Norman Chidgy, whose grave voice and sombre impassivity were important assets, though I think they should have been aided by a dimmer light than he was vouchsafed in his scenes. The dialogue between him and the schoolmistress about the conditions of the after-life is sufficiently imaginative to be tolerable, while the charm of the whole piece lies in the bland assurance with which the supernatural is taken for granted and in the ridicule, often extremely painful, which is directed against those who ignore it. There is one distinctly dramatic surprise. The Inspector, who, of course, does not believe in spectres, is convinced that this one is merely a criminal who is hiding, and arranges that two comic ex-executioners, now in retirement, shall ambush and fire upon him. The Spectre falls; Isabelle and the Druggist are in despair. For a moment we, too, believe the Inspector has been right—but then the body disappears!

Isabelle is also wooed by a terrestrial lover, the Surveyor of Weights and Measures. He typifies the cosy romance of the actual—and he wins, Isabelle having for the first and last time been held for a moment in the Spectre's arms would have died, had not the Druggist improvised round her inanimate form the senseless confusion of the voices of Life: the gossips twitter above her (the deaf sister was excellently acted), the Inspector orates, the children sing, her lover implores, and the barrel-organ plays. She revives. The Druggist is an interesting figure. He typifies men who are born to be go-betweens; moderating between people who hold conflicting views, or smoothing over the transitions from the commonplace to the mysterious which occur in the lives of all.

This is an inadequate account of *Intermezzo*, but perhaps it is a little fuller than those which have hitherto appeared. Mr. Giraudoux's play is poetic and witty (I could tell that from Mr. Alan Wade's translation), a fabric made out of spun-steel as well as spun-sugar. It might prove much to the taste of London, so I hope that once again the Stage Society will have proved to be a "go-between." DESMOND MACCARTHY

THE LACE-MAKERS

IN odd villages among the Chilterns, and along the valleys of the Ouse and the Nen, as far as Huntingdonshire, the little old women still sit at cottage doors, against the sun-white walls or in the shadow of the thatch-eaves, making their pillow-lace to immemorial patterns. They are the last survivors of their kind. Sitting there, nearly always very old and with a quietness about them that seems immemorial too, their white lace-caps very prim over their cottony hair and their sun-yellowed heads, they look more than anything else like figures from old Dutch pictures that have come to life. They are so old, and their age so absolute and perfect, that it seems impossible that they were ever young. They are eternal figures who have sat there through centuries of sunlight doing nothing but work on those eternal patterns of leaves and flowers.

But not only are they themselves and their patterns old. Their methods, their lace-pillows, their myriad pins, their lace-bobbins, their bobbin-winders, their pin-pricked parchments that are the same sun-stained colour as their own skins—they are all out of the past. They are the very same things that the little old women first used when they began to learn lace-making as girls, in the rather élite Victorian lace-schools of their day. Only, perhaps, their cottons are new, and the soft cream-coloured silk that they run in a serpent thread through their ribbons of delicate insertion.

Of all English country arts this lace-making is, I think, the

most fascinating. There is a quality of mystery about it. The lace itself is a miracle of beauty. There is no other art quite so simple-looking but so intricate, so artless and yet so miraculous, so apparently aimless and yet so faithful to a thousand principles.

Thus, as they sit there, the old women seem so often to be motionless, to be doing nothing, to be simply at rest, staring into the sunshine. In reality their hands are moving over the lace-pillow more rapidly than a bird pecking for food or fluttering its wings. They seem also to move casually, without design, in a sort of silly dithering of old age, as though they had grown childish and were simply playing with the bright-beaded bobbins and the pins, weaving an inane tangle of cottons and trying for ever to unweave it again.

And this is the mystery and miracle of the lace-makers, the vitality of their old hands. They seem to come to life on the lace-pillow, losing that crabbed deadness that will not let them button up their shoes or hold a cup. It is a kind of second nature, coming to them as naturally as speech or hearing, and is something of which they may be capable even when they can no longer speak with ease or hear anything but the shouting of fog-horned voices.

I have watched this lace-making over and over again, ever since my boyhood. But I have never understood it fully. Perhaps it is better not to understand it. There is a kind of secrecy about it all, as though it were the precious prerogative of the old women alone. Sometimes I ask them how it is done, but they only smile and talk vacantly and perhaps tell me to watch, going on with that wonderful juggling of the bobbins unbrokenly, making it all more incomprehensible still.

They sit with the pillow resting before them on a wooden stand that is rather like a frail sawing-horse. The pillow is more like a bolster, a sort of hard fat sausage, covered nearly always with some flower-sprigged stuff, blue or pink, that was once a dress. Across the pillow, on the line of circumference, they fix the strip of parchment with the pattern pricked out upon it. The patterns are dateless, their origins lost or forgotten. A million pins are stuck in thick groups about the pillow, in readiness, and the bobbins are spread out, on either side of the parchment, in two fans of old ivory-colour, with a half-circle of beads jingling and shining over the curve of the pillow and the cottons converging on the centre of the fan. It is the bobbins that are moved with that miraculous vitality of the old hands. They are interchanged with each other infinitely, into a thousand combinations, the cottons twisting into the pattern, the pattern repeating itself, the pins being moved incessantly. It is a miracle not only of vitality, but of patience. The lace evolves very slowly out of that infinite intricacy by an inch or two a day.

It is the bobbins that are the mainspring and delight of it all. They are like children's playthings, little sticks of white bone or creamy ivory or black wood, not quite so long as a pencil and a little thinner. They are thinner still at the unbeaded end, where the cotton is wound. They are carved softly, inlaid sometimes with spirals of gold-coloured wire or painted with spots and rings of emerald and black and scarlet. A few are undecorated and uncoloured, but many are adorned with names and inscriptions, family names and inscriptions of love or longing or remembrance, printed almost always in red and black—*Dear Rachel, Lovely Thomas, My Darling, Forget Me Not*—the faint records of histories and dreams. And on each bobbin hangs the threaded circle of beads, little transparent seeds of ice and emerald and ruby and amber, pearls of milky blue and primrose, and here and there a great solitary bead of chicory-blue or purple, large as a bird's egg and as clear and shining as a bird's eye.

Like the vital motions of the old women's hands the colours of the bobbins and beads seem to be pointless; but like those movements they are, in actuality, full of significance. They have separate meanings and values. The little dots and lines are, as it were, the quavers and semi-quavers of the music of lace-making, and the old women, with that apparently aimless fluttering of their fingers, are faithfully playing to a score and

keeping to a time, knowing every dot and line and bead and name by heart.

It is significant that one never sees a young woman at the lace-pillows—only the little old women with the traditional country faces, the cottony hair and skinny hands, and the pale blue eyes of great tranquillity. There are arts of necessity, like the baking of bread and the making of shoes, which seem as if they can only perish with mankind. It is the arts of luxury which die out, and the art of making lace on a pillow is one of them. It seems likely that in another ten years' time there will be precious little left of it but a legend.

H. E. BATES

THE LEAPING LAUGHERS

WHEN will men again
Lift irresistible fists
Not bend from ends
But each man lift men
Nearer again.

Many men mean
Well: but tall walls
Impede, their hands bleed and
They fall, their seed the
Seed of the fallen.

See here the fallen
Stooping over stones over their
Own bones: but all
Stooping doom-beaten.

Whom the noonday washes
Whole, whom the heavens compel
And to whom pass immaculate messages,
How soon will men again
Lift irresistible fists
Impede impediments
Leap mountains, laugh at walls?

GEORGE BARKER

ROMANCE AND REALITY

Man of Aran—New Gallery

THE documentary film is, in a realm of make-believe, the greatest deception of all. *Le grand film documentaire*, it receives reverence, as though it constituted a part of Absolute Truth. Dziga-Vertov elevated it to a religion. Forgetting that Eisenstein and Pudovkin used real people and real things, not because they are more "true" than actors or stage properties, but simply because they are more effective for a given arbitrary purpose, he forgot also the purpose. The real ingredient *per se* is good, he proclaimed, anything but the real ingredient—meretricious. Presenting a false picture.

This is fallacy. As all objectivity is fallacy. The two term equation—camera (a mechanical process) + object = a true picture—is entirely imaginary. The equation that corresponds to reality has three terms—selector of object (a human being) + camera + object = a personal picture. For every document a man. And hence each document is as partisan as the evidence he files to support his suit in a court of law. The man with the camera who made *Man of Aran* is Flaherty, king of all documentators. And, essentially personal, he is attracted always by man's struggle against nature. In *Nanook* he showed man winning his food from the blizzard and the ice. In *Moana* he showed the dialectical opposite, Nature so bountiful that food is there without the winning and, to attain manhood, man has to substitute in his own nature a mock struggle, the ordeal of initiation. *Aran* he has made another *Nanook*. Man's struggle with the stones, from which the wind would blast the soil he painfully scrapes upon it from dust and seaweed. His struggle with

the storms, that wrestle to add him to the contents of which he would rob the sea. With his poet's eye, his unforgettable choice of faces, he has drafted another document as rare, austere, and moving as his first two. But still a document that presents only one side.

Man also is a part of Nature. Man's struggle with Nature is incomplete unless it embraces the struggle of man with man. Man on this windswept rock is no less a social organism, no less bound to the common ills of humanity than he is on any one of the self-imposed islands constructed at the Geological Museum. The precarious roof over his head is held not only against the fury of the wind, but also by grace of a triumph against the fury of the landlord. Imperial rivalry, as ruthless as a poor season of fish, strikes him through the tariff on his cattle. His surplus sons, driven from America by the world crisis, return to challenge him for his limited space. Even this poverty is not too poor for priests to ride. To portray the bareness of the subsistence afforded him by the sea and to ignore the hardships inflicted on him by his fellows is not to be objective, but to be sharply partial in minimising their effects. There is a sense in which even *Mala the Magnificent* is a far truer document than *Nanook*. No less than Hollywood, Flaherty is busy turning reality to romance. The tragedy is that, being a poet with a poet's eye, his lie is the greater, for he can make the romance seem real.

IVOR MONTAGU

PLAYS AND PICTURES

The Austrian Exhibition at Dorland Hall

Gratitude towards the organisers of this exhibition is not inconsistent with two suggestions. Could it not have been larger, and, secondly, a little cheaper? Nothing could be nicer than to go to Austria for the afternoon, but my press ticket seemed a great privilege to my companion, who was paying 2s. 6d. entrance fee, 2s. for a catalogue, 2s. 6d. for the marionette show, and something more in the charming *treillage* café in the basement: a thimble of red wine for 10d. is a sad thing. With the wine, cigarettes, coffee, sausages, beer, etc., I learn that the usual customs have been exacted. This is extremely short-sighted. The wailing of London retailers of the same brands and commodities should be disregarded in a semi-official exposition, particularly as an increased sale would only increase the demand.

The chief interest lies, perhaps, in the judiciously selected, but limited, art exhibits. (While the clothes, with the exception of the delightful things from Salzburg, are rather too dull, the modern glass and china is rather too gay.) On the ground floor besides the Gobelins and the Canalettos are some very engaging paintings of the Biedermeier period, among the best being a family group by Waldmüller, and some fine examples from the Bloch-Bauer porcelain collection. There are also pieces of "Ranftbecher" and "Mildner" glass, the former enamelled in colour, and the latter engraved in gold. On the second floor are modern Austrian pictures: the Klimts are interesting, but Kokoschka is very poorly dealt with. The marionette theatre of Prof. Teschner is ingenious, but marionettes are undoubtedly better when moved from above by strings, rather than poked about from below. Aesthetically, too, *c'est du Munich*, I am afraid. The general decoration of the exhibition is careful, and fresh. The Viennese talent for big, lucid lettering and down-right colour in their cartoons and posters is most invigorating: let us hope it leaves its mark.

"There's Always To-morrow"

It soon becomes obvious to the puzzled playgoer at the Shaftesbury that Miss Mary Newcomb's excellent intelligence declines point-blank to accept Lady Grace Carlingford as anything but "a case." She resolves on presenting a sympathetic study of a morbidity which is all but maniacal, and to that end employs a glassy smile of such unnerving intensity that one wonders why her eminent bacteriologist husband has failed to realise that she should not be at large. Each nervous gesture at her golden hair reveals fresh straws in it, the while she showers ocellades and caresses upon the grown-up son (just back from America) for whom she has an obsession bound up with her vanishing youth. The son has brought a girl home with him, however, and tragedy is in the wind. It never appears, and her ecstasy of passion