

HEARD AND SEEN
Le Dialogue Des Carmélites

IT is not only in the competition proper that films are presented during the Cannes Film Festival; all over the town, from nine in the morning until ten at night the lights go down on performances of films not submitted—or not accepted—for showing in the Palais du Festival. So if one had the endurance for three feature films in a day, one could see all kinds of rarities. Most important of all, one could see the world première of *Le Dialogue des Carmélites*; on fighting one's way in, this seemed to be what everyone in Cannes had decided to do.

It is a trifle sad that, after all these years of waiting, the film by Père Bruckberger and Philippe Agostini should have made its first appearance before a public audience in circumstances a little less than edifying. It seems that after a certain amount of hesitation, the finished film was submitted to the French selection committee so late that the choice of French films had already been made for the Festival, and it was not found possible to include *Le Dialogue* as well. It was therefore decided by the producers that it should be shown in one of the biggest of the commercial cinemas while the Festival was on; a showing which would be, in effect, a world première and which was in fact advertised as a gala. As ill-luck would have it, the evening chosen was also that chosen for the official showing of the only British full-length entry in the Festival competition, *Sons and Lovers*. For once the easy-going British proved intransigent and stated that if something were not done about this, *Sons and Lovers* would be withdrawn altogether, which was certainly a tribute to the pull of *Le Dialogue des Carmélites*. In the end, honour was satisfied all round; the official French entry was substituted for the British film that evening, and the showing of *Les Carmélites* was put forward until ten o'clock, so that everybody could see everything if they really wanted to.

The story, now a long way after Gertrud von le Fort's novel, *The Last to the Scaffold*, has passed through many metamorphoses since then, but has suffered curiously little in the course of this excessive manipulation. It is a deeply moving, deeply religious, deeply tolerant study of the effect of crisis upon character, and character moulded, moreover, by the tremendous formation of Carmel. The only episode I found unsatisfactory is one that has certainly been interpolated since the Bernanos play was published, in which Jean-Louis Barrault sails into one of his disturbing mimes—something tangential to the main story and, it seemed to me, also quite out of key. Otherwise the unity of conception has been upheld with the greatest purity.

Madeleine Renaud as the first, dying, Prioress is formidable; Pascale Audret as Blanche de la Force suggests wonderfully well the nightmare life of one who must struggle with pathological fear in an historical period when even the bravest could be forgiven for trembling: while Soeur Constance, that most perfect portrayal of a child of God, whom even routine acting can scarcely weaken, is here made something so touching, so

precisely the embodiment of Cordelia's 'So young, my lord, and true', that Anne Doat's performance reduces one nearly to tears. The most risky piece of casting is undoubtedly that of Jeanne Moreau as Mère Marie de l'Incarnation, for this outstanding young actress has largely made her name in films in the most contemporary, not to say extreme, manner. She starred, you may remember, in *Les Amants* and was seen later in Cannes in Peter Brook's spell-binding *Moderato Cantabile*, a performance for which she was given the prize as best actress. It must at once be admitted that she has subordinated herself with the greatest discipline to this exceedingly harsh role, and her control, her devotion and her true appreciation of the Bernanos ethos more than justify the risk taken by the director in using her here.

I was a little disappointed in the choice of Alida Valli as the second Prioress, for she was not up to making that strong contrast with the first which the script demands; and it seemed to me (though I must admit that my French colleagues were not in agreement) that the opposition to Mère Marie's urging of the vow of martyrdom was not sufficiently stressed. The singular intelligence with which the Revolutionary characters, led by Pierre Brasseur as the Commissaire, were both directed and played emphasized the crucial politico-religious problem so cogent in our own day, and gave the film an added dimension. The photography, as one would expect in an Agostini film, was beyond praise, and the shots of the nuns in their orchard, of the clandestine Good Friday service, of the mounted men clattering erratically round the church will always stick in the mind. Not only is the music by Jean Francaix excellent, but the whole sound-track seems to me far above average, carrying with it overtones of menace and violence integral to the story of Blanche and her terror.

Where the film dilutes the uncompromising Bernanos *Dialogue* there its effect becomes weaker: where no concessions are made it succeeds triumphantly. This is not so tough a piece of cinema as *Le Journal d'un Curé de Campagne*, but it is a Catholic film for which no apologies need be made in any company: Père Bruckberger and M. Agostini have acquitted themselves heroically—we must hope that their film will come soon to England.

MARYVONNE BUTCHER

SCOTTISH SURVEY

The Fourth Centenary of the Scottish Reformation

THE eulogy on Pope Pius XII, spoken by Dr Charles L. Warr, minister of the High Kirk of St Giles' in Edinburgh, was a landmark in the history of Protestant-Catholic relations in Scotland. On the Sunday following the late Pope's death, Dr Warr said:

'In Pope Pius XII a prince and a great man has fallen in Israel, and however far we may have been divided from him in matters of doctrine and ecclesiastical practice, it behoves us to pay our humble tribute of respect.

'In the personality of Eugenio Pacelli, for the last nineteen years a lamp of sanctity, wisdom and moral grandeur has shone from the Vatican