Dr Who and the Smugglers (BBC-1): William Hartnell as Dr Who and George Cooper as Cherub in the first of a new series of adventures

Adam Adamant Lives! (BBC-1): Gerald Harper in the part of the hero

The Troubleshooters (BBC-1): a scene from *Error of Judgment* with left to right, Robert Hardy as Alec Stewart, Neil McCallum as Ray Kennedy, and Morris Perry as Giraud

Ransom for a Pretty Girl (BBC-2): Nike Arrighi as Princess Nadia

The Consul (*Thirteen against Fate*, BBC-1): Jonathan Burn as Adil Bey and Michele Dotrice as Sonia

The Suspect (*Thirteen against Fate*): Mary Miller as Alice and Marius Goring as Monsieur Hire, the recluse suspected of the crime

Independent criticism of BBC television

Drama and light entertainment

BY J. C. TREWIN

'FRANCE', WROTE AN under-valued poet, 'beloved of every soul that loves its fellow-kind'. No doubt; but it would be amusing to know how the Simenon sequence, *Thirteen against Fate*, just ended on BBC-1, has affected the popular image of the French—if 'image' still means what we have been told it does mean; possibly by now it is out of fashion.

In *The Suspect* (September 4) we had the hounding of a man, an outsider, who had not committed a peculiarly horrible murder, but who was doomed to be the scapegoat. Marius Goring, hunted and haunted Parisian, hair and moustache straggling, beret on head, cigarette in mouth, sticking-plaster on his face, blood on his collar, and a shuffle lolloping and precise, acted with cumulative grey pathos. Living just within the law, he was hardly a pleasant type: I preferred him to the police superintendent, a man named Godot, waiting for a victim and getting one. Even if the series has had some bad mistakes, it has moved, at its meridian, to a level that Maigret (in my experience) never reached—though sometimes, maybe, this has been at the expense of unofficial public relations with France.

Certainly, *The Suspect*, with its clot of unlikables, would hardly have helped; but the sequence closed with a play, *The Consul* (September 11), dramatized by Leo Lehman, which took us from France to the Russian Black Sea port of Batum in 1933, and turned out, I thought, to be the Simenons' crown: as much as anything for the sense of atmosphere in John Gorrie's direction. This caught one immediately in its summoning of extreme want, the envy of the poor in the streets for the more fortunate above them (one remembered Arnold's 'Happy he, who lodges there with silken raiment, store of rice'). That aside, Mr Gorrie suggested with craft a dark mesh of intrigue and espionage. Plot was secondary: there was something Kafkaesque in the wanderings of Jonathan Burn's Turkish consul, a man nightmare-held. Michele Dotrice, as a young party member and consul's secretary, proved herself to be an actress in the class of Gemma Jones. The Simenons have gone, as they came, in murky fascination (also with a final note of ironical laughter). Remembering the more dramatic qualities of the landscape, we can afford to forget some of the houses in between.

Back to France for an episode of *The Troubleshooters* (BBC-1, September 3). Being a compulsive pedestrian, I approached this sourly. It seemed to concern an international car rally; I groaned at the thought of noise and speed. As it happened, James Gatward, the director, had the right visual ideas; a sudden chilling passage reminded one of the music-hall illusion in which a car, furiously driven, must surely crash at any moment. The Mogul car, with a semi-madman at the wheel, did not crash; it knocked a French village girl from her bicycle. Then emphasis shifted to the 'simple village policeman'—perfectly realized by Morris Perry—who kept driver and navigator until the girl's fate was known, and who was neither as simple nor as emotionally detached as he appeared. Here was a view of France to respect: a piece that began in gloom, ended fruitfully (it could be, of course, only a marginal note on the records of that tiresome firm, 'Mogul, the oil people').

Though, before long, a flood of 'repeats' must subside, we have to cling hopefully to various series that are like rafts on the surface. *Adam Adamant Lives!* (BBC-1) is a fairly stout raft if we trust ourselves to it: a moment's indecision, and it sinks. Resolving not to sink, I welcomed (on September 8) an urgent official, Sir Nigel, who explained that they had been having the devil of a time at M.I.6: London murders were shaking the financial capitals of the world. Here is the kind of challenge that delights Adam Adamant. In the person of Gerald Harper (ninety-nine, but you wouldn't think it), he responds romantically, with little Miss Jones to help. Last time, we recollect, they were chained up together. This time they were roped, back-to-back, on the premises of an 'escort agency': all too easy, because Adam merely worked himself free, and without gnawing his bonds in the manner of Antipholus of Ephesus: in a note on the play, I once saw this misprinted as 'bones'.

Having freed himself and friend, Adam had his usual three victims. Sir Nigel told the dear fellow that he could hardly go round London, cutting them down like daffodils; but that is just what Adam (with or without swordstick) will continue to do. Mr Harper will be there to say such things as 'I am not given to idle chatter', 'My sword is at your service', 'I cannot be bought, madam', and 'He would appear to be an eligible candidate for an evil machination'. Anybody with a devil of a mess brewing can call on him, as well as on Juliet Harmer and Jack May (too good for a gentleman's gentleman given to limericks, and ready, if needed, with a French accent). Moira Armstrong directed the recent episode with zest.

One of our friends, as eccentric as Adam, has returned to service: I wait for a day when there will be a conflation of the serials. Let me record a new and properly absurd *Dr Who* (BBC-1, Saturdays). On September 10 we had no trouble with exposition. When a Cockney seaman and girl friend roamed into the 'Tardis', fun began immediately. 'Why did you follow me?' asked Dr Who (William Hartnell again), a trifle rattled. 'This is a vessel for travelling through time and space'. It landed in the seventeenth century, on a strip of English coast that looked uncommonly familiar, and bang in the middle of a sub-*Treasure Island* narrative: murder of a churchwarden who had been mate of the black 'Albatross', and arrest (by the law) of two of the space-travellers. Meanwhile, captured by the enemy, Dr Who was being trundled off—like Pickwick by Captain Boldwig's men—to the presence of the deadly Captain Pike. It was, apparently, a matter of pirate's gold. I merely state the situation. We need not worry about anyone, though whether Ben, the able seaman with a twentieth-century train to catch, will get back in time for it, I cannot say.

Affairs had been equally difficult for the hero of *Mr John Jorrocks* (BBC-2). In the final instalments (September 3 and 10), he was first elected to parliament and then unseated by sharp practice and the High Commissioner for Lunacy. All worked out; at length he was charging back towards Handley Cross and his hounds. I fear that by this time I had grown weary of repetitive mannerism, though Jimmy Edwards frothed richly, Angela Baddeley bridled, and Michael Bates's Duke ('We're monstrous popular, I take it') used again a remarkable voice that was like the ringing of a glass from the middle of a fur rug, and followed it by what might have been a soundless chuckle from the depths of a ventilation-shaft. Quite the gayest event in the last two instalments was the appearance of Brian Oulton as the Lord Chancellor, pardonably disturbed by the entire business.

Another serial, *Quick Before They Catch Us* (BBC-1, Saturdays) has got involved in a story of art frauds, dull and complicated. In recent instalments I enjoyed little except a colloquy between Charles Lloyd Pack and (speaking, I believe, for the National Gallery), Llewellyn Rees. True, there was also a good moment when Mr Pack explained to one of the young people involved that she had destroyed a piece of auto-destructive art.

Among newer visitors, Ian Stuart Black's *Ransom for a Pretty Girl* (BBC-2, September 10) has opened hopefully with the kidnapping in Glasgow of a Princess (very well done by Nike Arrighi): Adam Adamant ought to be in on this also. In the fifth *Double Image* (BBC-2, September 12), interlinked plays and documentaries on the pursuit of happiness, a sharp study of the Simon Community in Kentish Town was paired with, I am afraid, a really tedious play: fact defeated fiction in two straight sets.

More predictably, a genial old acquaintance, Cyril Fletcher (BBC-2, September 10) offered a variety of voices and appropriate eye-work, sang a Robey song with suitable Chekhovian pauses, related what somebody like Conan Doyle would have called the Remarkable Occurrence of the Chambermaid in Reading, and—rather jarringly in the context of this programme—recited a Masefield poem.

I yielded to the 'repeat' of *Dr Knock* (BBC-2, September 4) because Granville-Barker's version of the Jules Romains comedy, with its super-charlatan, has developed on acquaintance through the years. (G.B.S. probably liked it.) This production, Herbert Wise's, moved round Leonard Rossiter, vastly professional and carefully casual as the fantastic Knock, with John Le Mesurier as his butt. I am not sure what this might have done to the French 'image', but I do think the play could very well have closed upon the ironical, the mocking, laughter that is now our last memory of the Simenons.