

(continued from previous page)

make a mistake and boo good films instead of bad ones, but that is "only a question of education," he says. Indeed, as a member of what is generally regarded as a fairly cynical profession, he appears to have a remarkably high opinion not only of his own calling but of audiences. "Films are not a soporific," he is reported as saying, "They are primarily entertainment, but that is no reason why they should not also be educational. Documentary films simply dramatise fact: the only difference between it and the ordinary fiction film is that with a documentary film you start off with real situations."

He refuses to put blondes in the bomb-racks when he makes war films; he thinks that British films have gained prestige during the war (so do I, by comparison with American); and he has a "dream" about a scheme of reciprocal exchange of film technicians throughout the world after the war—Englishmen going to Australia, Australians going to Russia, Russians going to America, and so on. When questioned about his cinematic ideals he prefers to express them in the words of Alexandr Dovjenko, the great Russian producer:

*"Film workers! Don't varnish the world of to-day. Do not 'make it up' out of your imaginings. The world is now very ill. Do not divert your art to trivial individual matters. The cinema must and can give the answer to the sorest, sharpest contemporary problems. It must honestly help suffering mankind to find its bearing."*

Fine words, but Harry Watt strikes one as the kind of man who might try to make them mean something. He is young enough—only 37. And having discovered all this about him, I was finally not altogether surprised to learn that he started film work with John Grierson, pioneer of the documentary. This is the Grierson touch—this almost inspired belief in the serious mission of the cinema.

## THE MAN FROM DOWN UNDER

(M-G-M)



AFTER the rosy glow of optimism about the future of Australian films engendered by the above, it is distinctly depressing to have to turn from British theory to American practice. *The Man from Down Under* is Hollywood's idea of a story about Australia and Australians: only the fact that it is probably meant quite sincerely prevents it from appearing offensive and libellous. It does not prevent it from being dismal entertainment or Charles Laughton's worst film to date. He is presented as an uncouth, bibulous gambler who, at the end of the last war, adopts a couple of Belgian orphans, brother and sister, and takes them back to Australia where one (Richard Carlson) grows up to be a boxing champion and the other (Donna Reed) grows up to be a little lady—and both grow up, very disconcertingly, to be in love with one another. By way of diversion amid this distinctly Freudian tangle, the Japs drop a few bombs and a few suicide troops on the Northern Territory, but they are successfully cleaned up, and so is the boy-girl problem by the revelation—surprise, kiddies!—that they aren't really brother and sister at all. There were moments in this film when I found myself wondering how I had ever imagined that Charles Laughton was a great actor.

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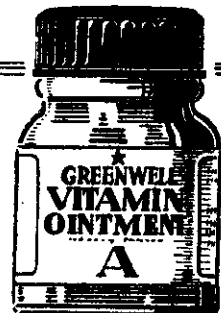
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