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Speaking Candidly, by G.M.

BE HE ALIVE OR BE HE DEAD?

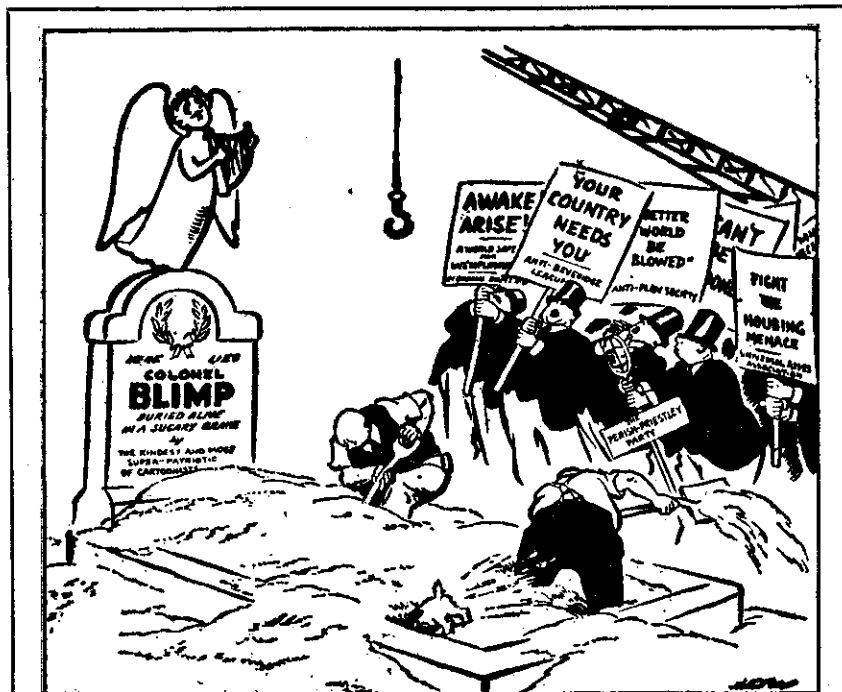
THE LIFE AND DEATH OF COLONEL BLIMP

(Gaumont British)

DESPITE its inordinate length (two and three-quarter hours and no interval), this is an exceedingly good production by contemporary standards; an imaginative, warm-hearted, well-acted, and technically skilful study in better-than-average technicolour, of a British soldier over the past 40 years. I wouldn't go as far as the advertisement-writer who declared that "all entertainment, past, present, and future, will be judged by it," because after all that would leave out poor old Shakespeare, not to mention Gilbert and Sullivan and even Charlie Chaplin; and I have a feeling also that a screen version of the Bible is the only major work that would justify 16,000 feet of film. All the same, if you can view *Blimp* purely as cinema entertainment it is in the top class.

Unfortunately, that is just what I don't think you can do. You can't tell me that when they make a film like this in the middle of a war—the longest and costliest film ever made in Britain—and quite obviously enlist official co-operation for some of the scenes, the sole purpose is to amuse and entertain us. Somewhere, somehow, this film is trying hard to tell us something which its sponsors considered important.

WHATEVER *Colonel Blimp* is trying to say, however, its message is confused and contradictory. Perhaps this is just as well, since some of us might not like the message if we received it too clearly. My own impression is that the general idea was to let Blimp down very lightly; to show that, although he had to be displaced by less gentlemanly fellows for the present purposes of total war, this dear old chap, the representative of the traditional military caste, really is the salt of the British earth. For, as portrayed with keen perception and great skill by Roger Livesey, General Clive Wynne-Candy is very far from being the muddle-headed, pompous, reactionary



THE RESURRECTION OF BLIMP

THIS was the cartoon produced by David Low in the "Evening Standard" in June, 1943, on learning that British officials had held up "The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp" for export, because they thought that the film might be regarded as justifying Japan's "treacherous attack" on Pearl Harbour without a declaration of war.

old ass created as a cartoon character by David Low and supposedly used as a basis for the film. On the contrary, the screen Blimp is a genial, likeable, rather witty fellow with whom you can't help feeling a great deal of sympathy when, in the opening scenes, some young pup of an n.c.o. humiliates him by starting the "war" in a Home Guard exercise six hours ahead of schedule.

IN this mood of sympathetic understanding, the film then proceeds to show us how, in his country's service, the General acquired the walrus moustache and the pot belly about which the young soldier is so insulting. We learn that he grew the moustache to hide the duelling scar which he got when, as a subaltern with a V.C. from the Boer War, he dashed off to Berlin to answer German atrocity propaganda about British conduct in South Africa. The scenes in the Berlin restaurant where he insults the German Army, and those in which he fights the duel with a Uhlan officer (Anton Walbrook) are the highlights of the picture: the duelling sequence in particular is a magnificently handled piece of filmcraft, in which the punctiliously correct procedure of the code of honour is exaggerated only just enough to give a cutting edge of satire to the whole incident without turning it into burlesque.

The Uhlan who marks the Englishman's face becomes his close friend, even though he marries the latter's sweetheart. Their friendship runs like a theme song through the picture. It is broken by World War I, renewed after it, broken again by the Hitler regime, which the Uhlan at first passionately supports, and finally cemented again when he becomes a refugee from Hitlerism, in England during the present war.

As a secondary theme, there is the English soldier's romantic attachment over the years to the same feminine type. At first there is the English governess in Berlin who marries his German rival; then the English nurse in the last war who becomes his wife at the end of it; and finally the trimly-uniformed M.T.C. driver who, together with his batman and his German friend, comfort him in the last scene when the War Office and the BBC have turned against him. Deborah Kerr (of *Love on the Dole*) plays these three women in Blimp's life with warmth and nice discrimination, looking particularly fetching in technicolour as the girl of the final episode.

SO far, very good. If *Colonel Blimp* were just a technicoloured romance, or even just a burlesque comedy, its confusion of purpose wouldn't matter; but when the subject matter is so close to us, it has to be taken seriously. Quite apart from its probable design as a plea for more sympathetic understanding of the Blimp type, I feel that the film misses badly in several special respects even as official propaganda.

At one moment the producers are clearly acting as semi-official spokesmen in arguing against a "soft" peace with Germany. We are shown a sequence just after the last war in which the German prisoner of war is entertained by Blimp and his Blimpish colleagues and assured that Britain bears no malice and is anxious to help Germany back on her feet again; and then this is followed by a scene on a train during which the German cynically describes his reception to fellow German officers, tells them that the silly, sentimental English will be easy meat "next time," and, in fact, expresses thoroughly Nazi sentiments. But



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