

SPEAKING CANDIDLY

THE LAMP STILL BURNS

(Gaumont-British)

THIS would probably have been a better picture if Leslie Howard had not been killed before he had finished producing it and somebody else had not had to round it off for him. It might even have been a great one. But though it is never that it is still a good film, and it should have a wide and deserved appeal.

What this story about nurses in a London hospital (based on Monica Dickens' book *One Pair of Feet*) really lacks is unity and clear purpose. There is too much emotion and not enough straight thinking in the treatment; too much conventionality and not enough cohesion or coherence in the script. The lamp of sacrificial service still burns, no doubt about that, and sometimes very brightly, but not with a clear, unwavering flame; wayward gusts of sentimentality occasionally make it flicker, and in the finale a draught of illogical melodrama very nearly snuffs it right out. This is when the probationer heroine, who is on the mat for resisting discipline, harangues her Hospital Board on the

iniquities of the present British medical system and practically converts them then and there to Social Security. This doubtless is admirable, but one cannot help feeling that where Sir William Beveridge has failed, Probationer Clark would have little chance of success. I wondered also whether it was not so much her speech (which begins, "I urge you to agitate for these improvements") as the fact that her sweetheart has just presented the Board with a cheque for £7,000 which swayed that august body. Anyway, Probationer Clark isn't fired; she is promoted, and in the closing scene the lamp is still burning brightly because she has decided to go on nursing instead of marrying the source of the £7,000 cheque.

As the heroine, Rosamund John gives an appealing performance and there is some good supporting acting. But *The Lamp* is most successful in the side-lights it throws on the routine of nursing as a career—the human relationships, the petty tyrannies, the apparent absurdity of some of the discipline, and so on. In view of the present recruiting drive for nurses, however, it may be wise to emphasise that New Zealand

conditions are, one gathers, a good deal less austere than those depicted here.

One other point: if theatre managers mention Leslie Howard's name in their advertisements, I think they should make it clear beyond all possibility of doubt that he was the producer, not the star. To a public that is accustomed to seeing only stars mentioned in advertisements it is remarkable how misleading a name in big type can be: I overheard one or two patrons on the way out complaining that Leslie Howard wasn't in the film at all!

SEE HERE, PRIVATE HARGROVE

(M-G-M.)

I SUPPOSE one's first days in the army are much the same as one's first days at school: disconcerting and painful at the time, but amusing to look back on. This doubtless explains to some extent the success of Marion Hargrove's book *See Here, Private Hargrove* (a best-seller in the States in 1942), and its corresponding success as a film. And because the language of experience is pretty well universal, the film will also be well received here. It might be a little better received, I think, if one or two of the soldiers in Private Hargrove's training camp did not exhibit such an embarrassing tendency to become emotional on the subject of democracy and

the American Way of Life, and how it gets them, deep down inside. In the end it even gets Keenan Wynn, as that cheerful swindler and lead-singer, Private Mulvehill. And of course it also gets Private Hargrove himself (amusingly played by Robert Walker), in spite of the fact that his experience of Army life appears to consist of an almost unbroken round of kitchen fatigues inflicted on him for infractions of the rules.

Nevertheless, this is a better-than-usual war film, if only because it deals not with the actual fighting, but with the men who fight, portraying them as ordinary human beings instead of as supermen.

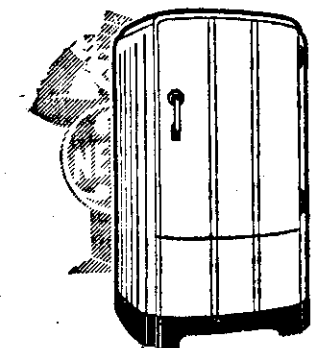
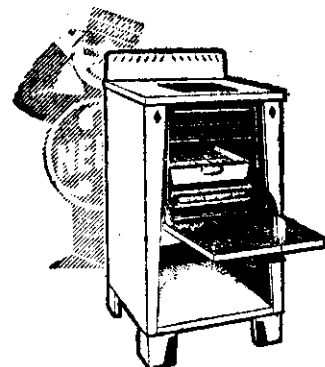
BATHING BEAUTY

(M-G-M.)

ESTHER WILLIAMS, twice national swimming champion of the U.S.A. and subsequently star of Billy Rose's Aquacade at the San Francisco World Fair in 1939, makes a pretty big splash in her first starring film. With technicolour, two dance bands (Xavier Cugat's and Harry James'), and glowing good looks to support her, Miss Williams is never completely out of her depth. The same cannot be said of Red Skelton (her co-star), or Basil Rathbone, or the script-writers who prepared a silly story about

(continued on next page)

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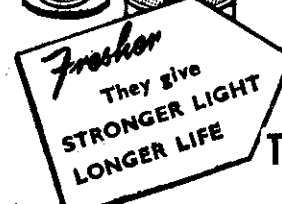


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