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- (1) If you are provided with goggles, wear them.
- (2) Try to work with the light on the job and not on eye level.
- (3) Get as much fresh air as you can.
- (4) If you get a foreign body in your eye, report at once to the First Aid department. Don't rub the eye.
- (5) Bathe your eyes night and morning with an approved medicated lotion. Optrex is used by thousands of workers. It helps keep the eyes healthy and comfortable.
- (6) If headaches persist and your eyes continue to ache, water or irritate, consult a Qualified Practitioner.

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BOOKS

FILMS AND PEOPLE IN NEW ZEALAND

SPEAKING CANDIDLY: Films and People in New Zealand, by Gordon Mirams. Paul's Book Arcade, Hamilton.

(Reviewed by J. C. Beaglehole)

THIS is a book, ladies and gentlemen, which, really, it should be unnecessary to re-view in *The Listener*. For in *The Listener* G.M. is accustomed to speak for himself, and you know what he sounds like. On the other hand, this is a book, and not a series of re-printed articles; this is the critic's background and philosophy as well as his criticism: so maybe there is justification for the review after all.

Let it be said, then, that G.M.'s first book is a good book, presented if not in glorious technicolour yet in the no less exciting garb of sound sense and pointed prose. And let it be said, too, before we go any further, that the production does credit to the firm that goes by the gently old-fashioned name of Paul's Book Arcade, whose first published book it also appears to be. Its exceedingly neat, unpretentious, but far from inelegant design may be recommended to the attention of most other publishers in New Zealand. War-time publishing in New Zealand has been a worrying business, and the period of worry is not over yet. Times being as they are, the price of the book is not high. The 30 illustrations are well chosen and well reproduced. So as you flock to buy it, ladies and gentlemen, a stand-up clap for the publisher.

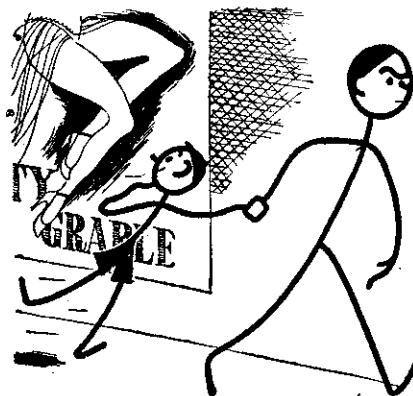
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WHAT then are we to say in expansion of the simple statement that the book is a good book? G.M. writes a diverting, racy prose; he is no ponderous pundit, though he turns a pretty pun; he is so racy that now and again he plays fast and loose with his words; e.g. "enormity," "prototypes" — and to say that film-makers have done something or other "so often that it has become a congenital habit" seems to be getting into an area of inheritance that may well baffle scientific investigation. But these are trifles; they do not diminish the positive amount of knowledge, experience, intelligence and—yes, courage — which G.M. has put into his thought and his writing. It is easy, in discussing films as in discussing people or poetry, to throw off a casual, half-baked judgment, to pronounce emotional approval or go up in a blaze of indignation, or to register simple tired disgust; we all constantly do these things. Where G.M. has the advantage of us is that, regarding films as a subject for consistent thought and a considered verdict, he does think through them; he has a background to his thinking and standards of judgment, his emotion grows from solid ground, his disgust is a reasoned disgust, his indignation (if he has not got through to the further side of indignation) is no indiscriminate bush-fire. It is this that makes his weekly criticisms worth reading; it is this that makes his book worth reading—particularly worth reading, one is led to think, by those persons who

think he is a phoney critic, a blind guide, and a disgrace to *The Listener*, but who can't help reading his articles all the same.

* * *

IN a way the book is a sociological study. Sorry, ladies and gentlemen, if you are just interested in pictures and not in society—not even society in New Zealand. It is about people as well as films, the influence of films on people, and the influence (including the potential influence) of people on films. It thus has a number of valuable things to say about the film as a social phenomenon; about the film as education, about our own Film Unit, about pictures and children, about censorship, about a possible socialisation of control over the movies; things which are certainly worth pondering. Curiously enough, in this connection, it is just in the chapter called "What the Movies Do To Us," where G.M. might be expected to go to the heart of his subject, that he is least satisfactory; for he takes a good deal of his material from the survey of the American Dr. Rosten, and it is not apparent that what the movies do to the U.S. is precisely what they do to Us. It may be, but the case is not proved. We have not yet the statistical basis for exact work in this branch of New Zealand sociology. But one might legitimately be surprised if it turned out that the market in gents'



"What is the precise significance of the legs of Miss Grable for New Zealand?"

underwear in New Zealand experienced the crisis it did in America when it was found that Clark Gable didn't wear a singlet. Yet *It Happened One Night* did undoubtedly entertain a good deal of this country. What is the precise significance of the legs of Miss Grable for New Zealand? It may be much, it may be little; but generalisation from America probably won't help us much in answering the question. We are both—U.S.A. and New Zealand — bits of Western civilisation, but Western civilisation is an extraordinarily complex thing. Shirley Temple curls are alleged to exist among us, and very youthful perms—but how many per thousand population? One is liable suddenly to be invited in one's own house to "stick 'em up"; but is that evidence of anything deep-seated



or a purely superficial sign of ebullience of feeling? Again it is difficult to give a dogmatic answer. Perhaps, indeed, the radio and not the film is responsible.

When, indeed, G.M. comes to deal with the effect of films on children in the context of censorship (censorship for whatever reason) he rather seems to scout the theory of profound influence. The author of one of our Centennial Surveys said that New Zealand has always been a Puritan country, established in the fear of God and pretty solidly based on the Bible. Have we yet enough evidence to mark the movies as a real rival to that Puritanism and that fear and that Book—that is, admitting the validity of that generalisation, which itself might be argued over. And talking of generalisation, is it really true, as G.M. holds, that "wherever Western European culture has been influenced by Christianity, particularly Protestant Christianity, the tone of society has tended to be ascetic, whereas Jewish culture is basically sensuous"? (This quotation is not to be seized on excitedly outside its context, pp 56-9.) There may be some truth in it, but for the essential individual G.M. a better and more revealing remark, on a quite dissimilar subject, is "Paradoxically it has always seemed to me that the robust vulgarity of Mae West and her Hollywood sisters is a good deal closer to the true nature of British humour than the covert sexiness, derived from pseudo-Continental models, of so many British farces, particularly those of the Tom Walls era." There you have a really critical mind functioning.

* * *

IT might be a good thing here to give a list of the other topics discussed by G.M., but after all a review can't be an index, a preview, or a trailer. A few of those topics have been mentioned already. As the book is a critic's book, it should perhaps be announced, in view of our constant New Zealand demand, that the Criticism is frequently Constructive. To ask G.M. to refrain from hurling bricks would be inhuman. He does indulge in that stimulating exercise; but he also gives us some very welcome straight description, as of the actual working of the movie industry in New Zealand; and then he carefully lays a few constructive bricks in place himself. They should be noted. For example, the brick of possible municipal or other subsidising of pictures that wouldn't otherwise be shown. (Are we going to be shown *Henry V*?) The brick of social control of a social commodity. The brick of the New Zealand documentary. And other valuable pieces of masonry.

(continued on next page)