

long-winded and rhetorical, the commentator is occasionally a trifle tactless. But as an historical document, the film is full of interest.

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WITH the exception of that just mentioned, all the documentaries I have reviewed are British-made. The film that follows, however, is from a Hollywood studio. The British, I think, are still leading in the documentary technique which they pioneered; but when you place a film like *The House on 92nd Street* alongside *The Fighting Lady* (reviewed last year) and one or two other outstanding specimens, such as *The River*, it becomes clear that the Americans, when they like to try, can use the "realistic" method just about as effectively as anybody.

THE HOUSE ON 92nd STREET

(20th Century-Fox)

THIS full-length feature is, strictly speaking, only semi-documentary. It does for America's Federal Bureau of Investigation what *San Demetrio*, London did for Britain's Merchant Navy, and does it in the same way. That is to say, it combines the reportorial and narrative forms of film story-telling, using factual material almost exclusively, but presenting it with the aid of some professional actors, some studio re-enactments of actual events, and a few dramatic embellishments. This is the story of how the FBI counter-acted German agents and saboteurs in the U.S. before and during the war, and in particular of how it prevented the secret of the atomic bomb from falling into enemy hands. When one considers what possibilities for melodramatic exploitation that theme offers to a Hollywood producer, one must feel grateful to 20th Century-Fox for allowing Louis de Rochmont to handle the subject with such restraint and integrity. Just how much is fact and how much is fiction it is difficult to say exactly; for instance, was William Dietrich, the young FBI agent who went to the Nazi-spy-school in Hamburg and, on graduation, returned to America as a German spy but worked all the time for the FBI—was this daring young man a real person? However, my general impression is that the film is largely authentic; an impression strengthened by the clever use throughout of genuine FBI photographic records and data from official files. It is remarkable indeed, just how many of its secrets the FBI has permitted to be revealed (e.g. the X-ray mirror). The American official services have never been backward in collaborating with Hollywood, in order to combine instruction with entertainment, but this must just about constitute a record. It is difficult to imagine Britain's C.I.D., for example, behaving in comparable fashion!

I can heartily recommend *The House on 92nd Street*, not merely as an interesting and successful specimen of an unusual method of screen story-telling, but also as a thrilling and suspenseful entertainment. In previous efforts to be topical, Hollywood has often succeeded only in being silly; on this occasion, however, it has given us an up-to-the-minute real-life spy story that is far more exciting than a purely fictional

version could ever be. It is encouraging to notice that the public apparently approves the venture, for the film ran two weeks in Wellington, to big audiences.

NATIONAL FILM UNIT

WEEKLY REVIEW No. 230 from the National Film Unit, released on January 25, features the Y.W.C.A. camp at Lake Wanaka. The picture shows how the camp was run, and how some of the girls discovered talents that they did not know they had. Also in this Review, "Ice Cream Manufacture," "Motor-bike Hill Climb," and "Otranto Arrival."

A CONCISE DICTIONARY OF GARDENING, 11/6, postage 4d. This is a book worthy of any gardener's bookshelf, with a comprehensive set of illustrations and authoritative information set out in a clear and simple manner.

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TO START YOU TALKING—An Experiment in Broadcasting, 6/9, postage 2d. A complete record was kept and edited for broadcasting of free discussions on controversial subjects by young people in all sorts of occupations. Much light is shed on the "behaviour-patterns of the young people of to-day."

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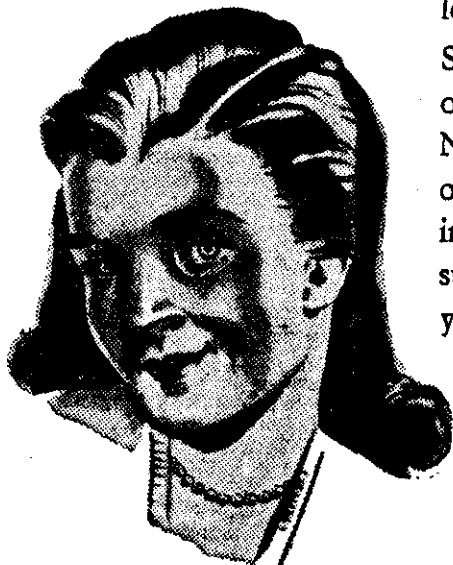
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