

ler's Berlin: but good acting and more than usually intelligent dialogue cannot wholly compensate for the loss of topicality.

## A MEDAL FOR BENNY

(Paramount)



THE second half of this film is the better half. At a guess I would think that this latter part is mainly the work of John Steinbeck, whereas his collaborator on the script, John Wagner, possibly had the chief say in writing the first half. The Steinbeck influence is, of course, apparent throughout the film in the choice of settings and characters: a community of cheerfully lazy and improvident *paisanos* of mixed Spanish and Indian blood living in shanties on the outskirts of a go-getting Californian town.

Quite obviously Mr. Steinbeck approves of people like this, and with some reason, for they are a likeable and even lovable lot—particularly the old man (J. Carrol Naish), who is the father of Benny, a soldier in the Pacific. When he went away, Benny also left behind him a reputation as a good-for-nothing, and a fiancée (Dorothy Lamour), who tries to remain faithful in spite of the reputation and the ardent wooing of a handsome, feckless fisherman (Arturo de Cordova). These are authentic Steinbeck types, but the early treatment of them clearly owes a good deal to Hollywood, the emphasis being strongly on the boy-girl angle, with Dorothy Lamour alternately fiery and icy in her response to Mr. Cordova's attentions. But round about half way, Steinbeck takes firmer control of the story and turns it from a vaguely sentimental romance into a biting satire directed against a certain type of businessman and the commercial exploitation of hero-worship. Word comes that Benny (who does not appear in the film at all, but dominates the action) has been posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honour for killing 100 Japs. With the eyes of the nation turned on Benny's home town, the members of the local Chamber of Commerce set about shamelessly exploiting the situation in the interests of public prestige and private profit. Benny's father becomes the peg for their civic salesmanship: he must be prised out of his setting of happy-go-lucky poverty and presented to the world as a substantial citizen. But the go-getting schemers of the Chamber of Commerce over-reach themselves: when the great day for the presentation of the medal arrives, the old man is back in shanty-town, and the general who has come on the President's behalf must go there to find him (as, of course, he does quite willingly).

The businessmen are ruthlessly portrayed by Frank McHugh, Grant Mitchell, and Charles Dingle; and though the brand of social dishonesty which they represent has been pilloried before, it has seldom been treated by Hollywood with such honest anger and withering scorn as it encounters here. In spite of this sting in its tail, however, *A Medal for Benny* is a little unsure of its purpose: it wavers between sentiment and satire, between romance and realism. But the film has one fixed point of pure excellence—the performance of J. Carrol Naish as the old *paisano*. For years a modest portrayer of "bit" parts, Mr. Naish is clearly one of the screen's most accomplished actors.

## GUEST WIFE

(United Artists)



THE title here is at least more informative than most. It indicates, correctly, a marital mix-up, and all one really needs to say by way of elaboration is that Claudette Colbert is the wife, "loaned" by her husband, a good-natured sap (Richard Foran, once known, before he entered society dramas, as plain Dick Foran, a singing cowboy) to his best friend, a conceited foreign correspondent (Don Ameche) in order that the newspaperman may be able to sustain the deception of his boss, who has been led to believe that his star employee is happily married.

Claudette Colbert has a way of making the best of a feather-weight situation; and thanks to her alone the film is sometimes amusing. But in this day and age a bedroom farce needs some particularly clever twist in the plot, or some specially brilliant quality in the direction, to make it something more than just another bedroom farce. Mere competence, such as is found in *Guest Wife*, is not enough.

## NATIONAL FILM UNIT

The National Film Unit's Weekly Review, No. 237, covers the arrival of the flying-boat Hythe, bringing the first British delegates to the Civil Air Conference, and the peat fires that have broken out again in the Waikato district and are raging as never before. Another interesting item shows the experiments being made at Ruakura Animal Research Station in the use of a power spray for dipping sheep, but the highlight of the reel is a documentary sequence dealing with the search for gold in Central Otago. There are scenes of the panning for gold by old prospectors, modern sluicing, and dredging on the Clutha river—with one of the biggest dredges in the world in operation.



You can shear a sheep by hand and make a good job of it. But what a slow and costly process it is compared with the use of modern machines. In the same way you can leave to your family full management of your estate and the attendant worries about investments, mortgages, payment of death duties and other charges—all in addition to their daily farm routine. But then again you can let the modern, efficient, helpful service of the Public Trust Office lift all these troubles and exacting details from their shoulders.

The experience of over 70 years in the administration of Farm Estates is an assurance of personal and efficient protection and advice.

# The PUBLIC TRUSTEE

# E

XPERIENCE has confirmed the particular woman in her choice of TRUFITS. Their style and quality are obvious, but experience only can demonstrate the pleasure that comes from the caressing comfort and support due to correct fitting for ARCH, WIDTH and LENGTH.



MATCHLESS

# Trufit

MULTIPLE FITTINGS

ML.494