

(continued from previous page)

failure. But surely it is not unreasonable to believe that there were a few Civil Affairs Officers as enlightened and humane as Major Joppolo (one certainly likes to think so). In any case, although the General is kept far too much in the background, the picture is a very long way from being just a sentimental white-washing of AMGOT and the military authorities. On the contrary, it is military red tape that continually keeps tripping the Major up, to such an extent that he eventually defies an order; it is military stupidity that shuts the water-carts out of the town and so precipitates a crisis; it is the Navy and not the Army which comes to the rescue and produces the Bell; and the characters of the American military police are, interestingly enough, treated with something a good deal less than respect. Next to the General, they are the most objectionable people in the story; much more objectionable than the defeated Italians who are, in fact, regarded with sympathy. Whether this attitude is right or wrong (and I shall not argue the point), it is, for an American film produced so soon after victory, a courageous and hopeful attitude.

THE film, indeed, is throughout a curious mixture of the mediocre and the worthwhile; sequences illuminated by real perception follow close on passages of sentimental nonsense. Take the case of the heroine; this is Gene Tierney and her blonde hair is, as it happens, in character, but her voice and her well-scrubbed, cosmetically-perfect appearance aren't. Yet the producers have resisted the obvious temptation to make the romance a simple boy-meets-girl affair; the relationship between the lonely, married Joppolo and the lonely Italian girl is strikingly adult in its conception and handling. Again, the film's salesmanship for democracy and the American-way-of-life is occasionally irritatingly naive and patronising, with its emphasis on the washing-machine as the greatest blessing of the said way-of-life. Yet there are other times when the film is saying things that are well worth hearing, or showing things that are well worth seeing. For instance, I found extremely moving the scene where the returning Italian prisoners-of-war meet their women.

BUT the greatest of these contradictions of treatment lies in the presentation of the Italian types. Many of the townfolk are mere burlesques; comic-opera buffoons who gibber and caper more in the manner of organ-grinders' monkeys than of men. As against this, you have the thoroughly mature and sympathetic conception of another type of Italian embodied in that description by the returned soldier of the way in which Tina's sweetheart met his death. This incident is irrelevant to the main development of the story, and Hollywood might easily have omitted it; that it wasn't omitted is certainly to the director's credit.

There is similar unevenness in the acting. Side by side with the buffoonery of many of the players go the good, solid performances of John Hodiak as Joppolo and of William Bendix as Sergt. Borth (Bendix perhaps rather overdoes his big scene, where he breaks down and weeps over the Major's dismissal, but I found it convincing enough).

A Bell for Adano is, in fact, less a successful film than a very worthy attempt at one. The job which the producers undertook, like the job which confronted Major Joppolo, was perhaps a little too big for them, but I am glad to be able to commend the film to your notice in the hope that you will be able to look past the mistakes and find the substantial core of real merit.

THE VALLEY OF DECISION

(M-G-M)



I FIND that I have left myself little space in which to say anything about this film, but that is perhaps as it should be, since it is so extraordinarily generous towards itself in the matter of length. Indeed I suggest that it might have been more correctly titled *The Valley of Indecision*, because the director was clearly unable to decide how and when to end it.

But this, I am aware, is not likely to be the popular verdict. I came away from the theatre with the feeling that in making *The Valley of Decision*, the director must have kept both eyes glued all the time on the box-office. For that matter, I went into the theatre with much the same feeling, having had to fight my way through the crowds in the foyer, who were either trying to buy tickets for that performance or booking seats for subsequent ones. This film is, in brief, what is known in the trade as "a box-office natural"—a tribute to, and perhaps a justification of, the Hollywood Star System and all that system involves. Everything about *The Valley of Decision* is designed to return handsome dividends—the stellar "team" of Greer Garson and Gregory Peck (Miss Garson capable, charming, vivacious as ever, with an Irish brogue and an aura of that very special kind of womanliness which excites admiration but not jealousy; and Mr. Peck capturing hearts with that profile of his, which reminds you of Abraham Lincoln one moment and Gary Cooper the next); the hand-picked supporting cast, which includes Gladys Cooper, Marsha Hunt, Donald Crisp, and Lionel Barrymore (Mr. Barrymore "mugging" atrociously, chewing his dialogue and spitting it out as if it left a nasty taste in his mouth); a story which is oh so touching and oh so improbable, about a servant girl in love in the first reel with the son of the master, a rich mill-owner, but too noble, or too loyal, or too sentimental to marry him until after hours have apparently elapsed ("There's blood on the bridge," she said, and that takes time to eradicate); and finally, direction which is glossy and slick—but lifeless.

I don't want you to think that *The Valley of Decision* is not entertaining. It often is. There is nothing actually pernicious about it, either, as there was about *Mrs. Parkington*. Millions will love it, will ask no better value from the cinema. Frankly I don't believe there's a single real person in the whole story, and not more than one or two real situations, but if you judge a film by immediate results, this one is an unqualified success, because it certainly achieves its main purpose; that is, to make a lot of money for M-G-M.

INFORMATION RECEIVED

In reply to our inquiry several readers have written to say that the Chopin prelude played in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was the 24th, in D Minor, Opus 28. Thanks.

NATIONAL FILM UNIT

Napier, playground of the North Island, was the scene recently of the first National Swimming Championships to be held in six years, and the competitions and entertainments, including skating on the promenade, are featured in the National Film Unit's Weekly Review, No. 238, released on March 22. Other items include a visit to Waitangi and Russell where a new Kauri flagpole is being made to replace the old one erected in 1840 when the Treaty of Waitangi was signed. Power Spray Dipping, one of the newer ideas for sheep farmers, completes the review.

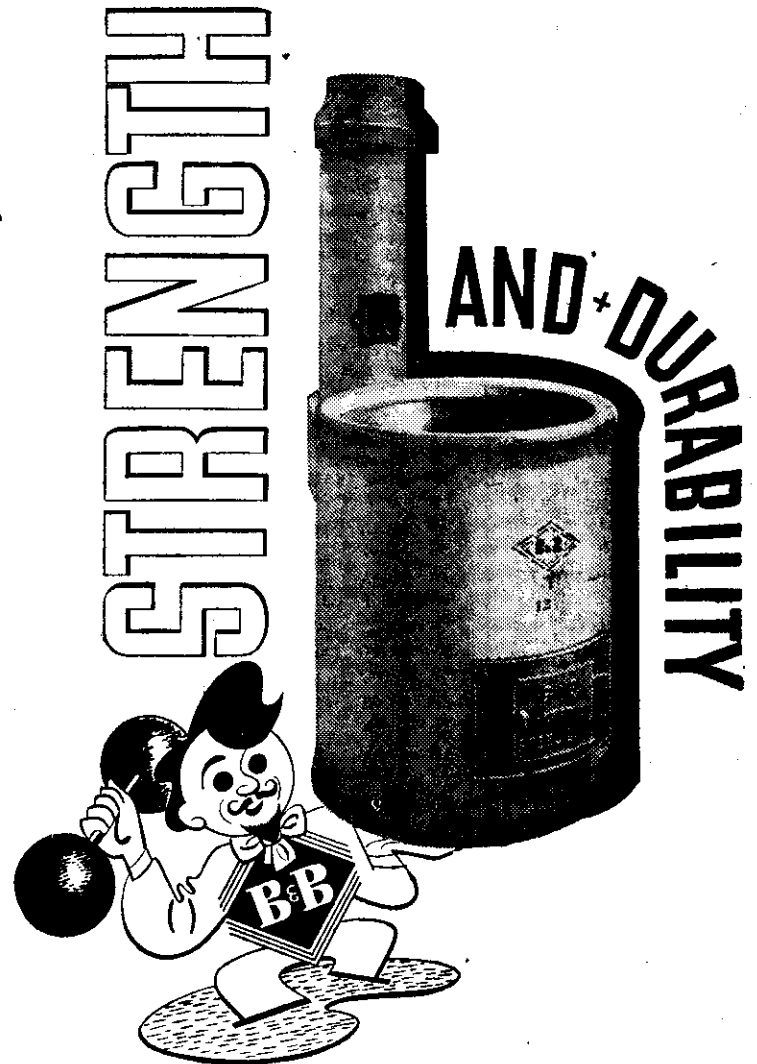
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GEO. McCULLOUGH, Headmaster.

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