

SPEAKING CANDIDLY

THE LAST CHANCE

(M-G-M International)



THIS film has already been reviewed here in full, by a contributor who attended a preview to which *The Listener* was not invited. Now that I have seen it at an ordinary screening I mention it again in order to get things right for the record; to endorse all that was said before about this noble, exciting, and inspiring Swiss film, and to give the Little Man a chance to register his enthusiastic approval. While he is at it he would like to present an A.C.F. (Award for Conspicuous Fatuity) to whoever was responsible for putting the show on in Wellington at very nearly the most unsuitable theatre in the city. This is, in fact, an almost exactly parallel case with *Thunder Rock*, so that one might be excused for beginning to suspect somebody in the film business here of deliberate infanticide: of strangling the cinema's brightest brain-children for some obscure commercial reason. It speaks volumes for the intrinsic merit

of *The Last Chance* that even an audience composed largely of callow youths out for an evening's fun at their favourite thriller-and-leg house, received this simple, lovely, humane, and thoughtful foreign film with considerably less restiveness than, looking at them in the interval and judging by their reaction to the supports, one might reasonably have anticipated. This clearly wasn't the kind of entertainment that many of them were expecting or had paid their money to see; yet they were, I think, impressed in spite of themselves.

It is, however, an unfair handicap for any picture. A film like *The Last Chance* needs every chance, and I am afraid hasn't received it, in Wellington at least. But, of course, the real objection to this sort of presentation is that when such a film, under such conditions, fails to make the grade at the box-office, some of the film people are only too likely to use the result in support of their argument that "the public as a whole doesn't want this sort of thing." They are smugly confirmed in their delusion that the taste of all picturegoers is the same as their own.

THE CORN IS GREEN

(Warner Bros.)



HERE is another top-grade film, one of several in the past few months—a fact which suggests either that the movies are getting better or that I am growing more tolerant. I suspect the former. Anyway, here is something else you can get your teeth into. It is a version of the play by Emyln Williams about an English spinster, of independent mind and rare courage, who starts a school in a Welsh mining-village in the year 1895 and triumphs over many difficulties, not only in bringing some education to the rank and file but above all in nurturing the streak of genius which she discovers in an uncouth, unbiddable pit-boy. In spite of a few false notes of atmosphere, a little excess sentiment, and an unnecessarily contrived finale, I would think that this is probably a fairly close translation of the original Williams play, for the film has real social content (for example, its exposure of illiteracy in the village and of child-labour in the mines, as well as its emphasis on the civilising power of education); it has good dialogue, genuine warmth of emotion, and well-drawn, well-rounded characters.

THERE are so many positive virtues that one need not linger long over the few defects in *How Green Was My*

Corn—sorry, wrong cue! But the association of ideas is, in fact, natural and it illustrates one of the defects: a tendency which Hollywood has to sentimentalise the Welsh atmosphere; to make rather too much, for instance, of the fact that the Welsh like to sing. When you look into it, too, you notice that the plot dovetails a trifle too theatrically: the Squire's hard heart softens just when the heroine wants it to, and is remoulded exactly to suit her plans; the return of the erring but unrepentant Bessie Watty with her illegitimate baby coincides so neatly with the arrival of the news that Morgan Evans, the former pit-boy who is the child's father, has passed his examination for Oxford that you might think the situation was planned exactly this way for dramatic effect (as of course it was). But above all, the schoolmistress's heroic final decision is unconvincing and unnecessary—not her offer to adopt the child, but her decision that she and Morgan, the pupil on whom she has expended so much devoted energy, must never see one another again. A playwright can go too far for the sake of an effective curtain.

YET these, as I have said, are relatively minor faults. The relationship between teacher and pupil is often a fine

(continued on next page)

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