



A scene from "La Kermesse Héroïque." Richness of period detail is used, together with faces and gestures, to establish the film's prevailing mood

(continued from previous page)

I have, in fact, seen nothing quite to equal the texture of this film, sensuous in feeling yet crisp and clean in outline, since Laughton's *Rembrandt*. When it comes to conveying a sense of time and place against an historical background, a Hollywood film (the British sometimes do rather better) cannot touch a Continental one. This Flemish town and the people in it, though supposedly centuries old, are not plaster and lath and extra players in fancy dress: they are, for the time being, real people in a real situation.

If there is any chance now of our getting a series of French films in New Zealand—and that, I presume, depends on public support—no better example of the French school of cinema could have been chosen for a start.

(When, and if, you see "La Kermesse Héroïque," you will possibly find the title translated as "The Heroic Sex." Though inaccurate, this is not a bad stab at it: "Kermesse" is actually the French variant of the Flemish word for a special kind of fair or merry-making, which makes the title literally "The Heroic Fair." It is recorded that, when first shown in London some years ago, the film ran for more than six months to record houses.)

## POWER FROM THE RIVER

(N.Z. National Film Unit)

IT is clearly impossible for me to notice in this column every short film that comes my way, but when anything as good and as important as this appears it merits special attention. I have in the past sometimes found occasion to criticise certain aspects of the National Film Unit, and probably will again; but this time I think they have excelled themselves. "Power from the River" is quite the most ambitious and, in many ways, most successful venture of the Unit to date. Indeed, if one leaves out of account "classic" documentaries of the type of Pare Lorentz's *The River*, it is not easy to think of many factual films produced overseas which are markedly superior to this New Zealand effort. And *The River*, after all, dealt

with a theme which is universal and ageless and therefore it could employ the techniques of poetry to produce its emotional effect, whereas "Power from the River" has a straightforward story to tell about a particular emergency in a defined situation; it has an immediate and clear-cut job of work to do. That job is to present to the public, in the "educational shorthand" of the documentary method, the story of why electric power is short in the North Island and of what is being done to solve the problem. Technically, the film is of a high standard; in all except one or two scenes, where the acting is too plainly amateurish, it succeeds admirably in dramatising facts as well as recording them; the editing is brisk; the musical background heightens the effect without being obtrusive. And this film, a true documentary, has of course one big advantage; it deals with running water, and this water-motif, as I have remarked before, is a natural winner on the screen. The Waikato River is the real star of the film—and a notably photogenic one, too.

### NATIONAL FILM UNIT.

THE issue of the National Film Unit's Weekly Review for May 30 marks the 300th week of this popular reel. It contains three items, headed by a sound film of a violin solo by the famous violinist Leo Cherniavsky. Students will be interested by Cherniavsky's fingering and bowing, which are featured in the close-ups. "Axeman's Carnival" at Taumarunui shows champion New Zealand woodsmen in a wood-chopping competition; and "Oysters From Bluff" is the third item.

"I had to go home, by chance, at the very peak of the evening rush hour. It made me realise how many thousands of people are helpless fragments of humanity, herded here and pushed there, doing the same thing at the same time every day, and always the most difficult and uncomfortable time, because everyone else is doing it, too." (Richard Dimbleby, in the BBC's Overseas Service).



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