

(continued from previous page)

and one can observe in one or two places where cuts have been made to tighten up the action and reduce the narrative to manageable length. But the acting is excellent (particularly von Stroheim's performance); there is a good deal of effective humour and one or two sequences of real excitement; and the dialogue, an unusual mixture of French, German, and English, is remarkably easy to understand (good English sub-titles help a lot, of course, but I think a succession of French films are beginning to have their effect: when the German von Stroheim speaks French slowly, as a foreigner might, one can follow him without difficulty). But above all, the good and decent intention is there: and intention is matched by performance. We have had plenty of films which glorified war and enough which stressed its horrors, but there have been almost none which came out strongly for peace, human brotherhood, and world fellowship, which put emphasis on the things that unite us rather than on those that divide us. That is why I would like to see *La Grande Illusion* given high priority on a UNESCO circulating-list (if they ever get round to that sort of thing) and sent out all over the world. Better still, every country should have a permanent copy.

## RETOUR A L'AUBE

(Pathe Cinema)



THIS, you feel, as the story opens up on a scene of a Hungarian peasant wedding, with shots of pretty girls dancing about in gay costumes, with Danielle Darrieux in the centre the prettiest of them all, with mobile photography, rhythmic editing, and a swirling background of music to give an effect of speed and light-heartedness—this, you feel, is going to be one of those pleasant, Continental musical-comedies which have great elegance of style if not very much substance. And when the scene changes to a small Hungarian railway-station where La Darrieux, now married unromantically to the safe and rather stodgy station-master, watches the big expresses roar through on their way to Budapest (clatter of rails, shriek of whistle, montage shots of scattering ducks, whirling wheels, bannered smoke against the sky), and dreams about what lies at journey's end, your first impression is strengthened.

But a surprise is in store, and I am not sure that it is altogether an agreeable one. For *Retour a L'Aube* (Return at Dawn) which started out so full of gaiety, music, and insouciance, comes finally to rest bowed down with melodrama and tragedy. The producer seems to have been inspired by an ambition to cram every emotion known to the filmgoer into this one film—possibly in order to demonstrate the versatility of Danielle Darrieux as an actress. There is no doubt that she is a very beautiful girl and that her performing range is considerable (this film was made in the days before Hollywood got hold of her and instructed us to pronounce her name as "Dare You"), but one can't help wishing, both for her sake and that of the film, that the narrative had been more adequately sign-posted. As it is, the emotional switches are so rapid that the

narrative sometimes runs off the rails. I found it difficult to know exactly when the comic motif (country girl on spree in big city) had ceased and been replaced by pathos, leading from there (with the appearance of a philandering confidence man) to melodrama, murder, mystery, frenzied tragedy, and finally the heroine's return at dawn, with a heavy load on her conscience, to her native village.

Individual portions of the film are excellent, and the whole thing is very far from being unbearable. But remembering Danielle Darrieux as she was in *Mayerling*, I doubt if she shows up to best advantage as the star of this kind of emotional quick-change act.

## THE FARMER'S DAUGHTER

(RKO Radio)



THIS film presents Loretta Young with the chance to speak with what passes for a Swedish accent, stand for Congress and get herself elected, and be wooed by Joseph Cotton. It presents Mr. Cotton with the chance to become involved in some real rough-and-tumble action, take orders from Ethel Barrymore as his mother, and, of course, woo and finally win Miss Young. It presents Charles Bickford, a good but neglected actor, with the chance to impersonate an unorthodox butler and to tutor Miss Young, chambermaid in a Congressman's household, in political opposition to her employers. It presents the producer with the chance to indulge in some leg-pulling at the expense of American politics, and particularly State elections for Congress. Since these are a rather specialised interest, the leg-pulling probably won't extend New Zealanders as much as it might if they were Americans. All the same a considerable amount of wit, ingenuity, and competent acting has obviously gone into the production of this picture, and quite enough of it emerges on the screen to make *The Farmer's Daughter* well worth your notice if you are in the mood to be amused.

### NATIONAL FILM UNIT.

H.M.S. Theseus of the Fleet Air Arm carried out some interesting operations when in New Zealand recently, and they are shown in *Weekly Review No. 320*, to be issued by the New Zealand National Film Unit on October 17. Planes taking off from the deck of the ship and from a specially marked out strip at Whenuapai are part of this interesting item. "Postage Stamps Aid Funds" shows the designer of the Health Stamp at work and some of the children at Otaki health camp enjoying holidays made possible by the sale of the stamps. Scenes at the funeral of the Hon. James O'Brien both in Wellington and Greymouth show the tribute that was paid to a man who had served his country well.

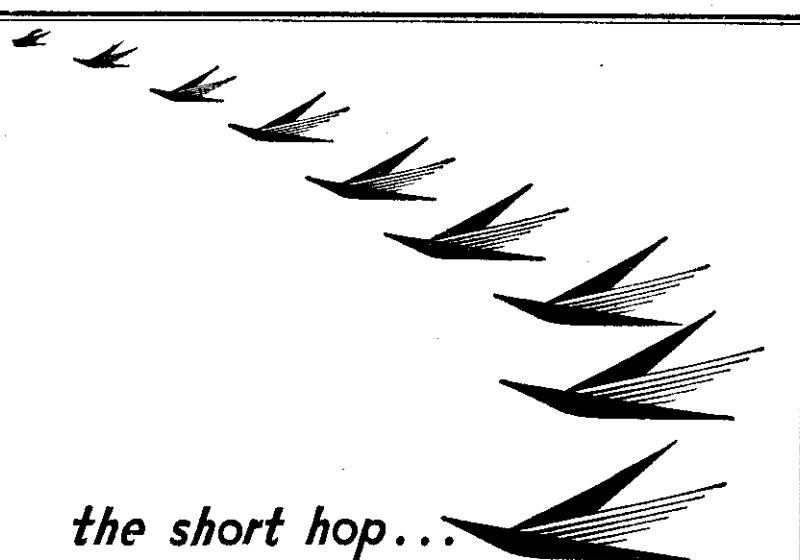
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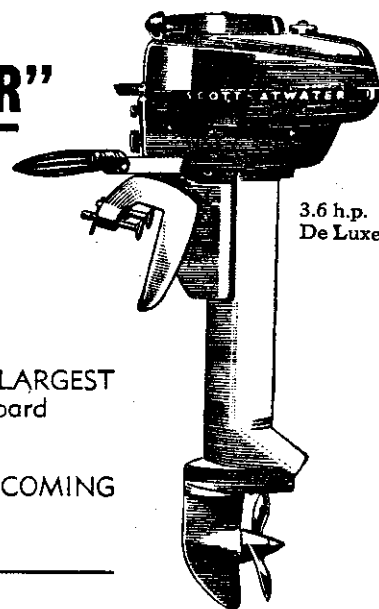
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