

not been allowed to materialise. He resembles altogether too much an advertisement for Rotorua and somebody's toothpaste, and his brief discourse on the soul, while possibly edifying, is just one of those things better left unsaid.

Q: I recall that you have not always been so snooty about fantasy on the screen. Why are you on this occasion?

A: It is true that I think there is a place for fantasy, and even whimsy, in the cinema—but it must be kept in its place. *High Barbaree* is a sad case as well as a bad case of misdirected enthusiasm, because the story does contain some of the ingredients of genuine romance and might, with delicacy of treatment, have qualified as a moving and persuasive allegory on the impermanence and elusiveness of dreams and ideals. Unfortunately, as it approaches its all-important climax this film has all the delicacy of a debate in the United Nations' Security Council.

A Problem of Language

LE PERE TRANQUILLE

(Les Films Corona)



DURING the past few weeks I have seen, by accident rather than intent, almost as many French films as American and British ones. In the majority of cases there have been sub-titles in English printed at the bottom of the film and, apart from a slight tendency to induce what might be described as "rocking-horse neck," this strikes me as being a satisfactory device: it gives one the gist of the dialogue and a certain feeling of satisfaction when one recognises, or thinks one recognises, various words and phrases. It is also, I imagine, a pretty good method of brushing up one's French. I have not come across any recent examples of the technique known as "dubbing," whereby English speech is actually put into the mouths of foreign players; but there are obvious difficulties in this method, and unless it has been greatly improved in the past few years, I doubt if it has, on the whole, many advantages over sub-titling.

However, one of the French features to have come my way in recent weeks, and six French documentaries, had neither sub-titles nor "dubbing"—they were "original" versions, French all the way. The feature was *Le Père Tranquille*; the documentaries ranged from a fascinating and most comprehensive film about Matisse and his painting, through a film about the ancient craft of barrel-making that was an effective blend of imaginative treatment and straight documentation, to a long-winded discourse on bees and their habits that, frankly, left my head buzzing.

It would be idle for me to pretend that, in any of these all-French films, my knowledge of the language, remaining over from school and university, was adequate for more than a few isolated sentences. Seeing such films is probably a very useful adjunct in learning French, if only because it gives one the "feel" of the language—but how one wishes those Frenchmen would slow up a bit! Incidentally, when the hero of *Le Père Tranquille* temporarily put

on the brakes for the benefit of some cross-examining Nazis, I felt almost kindly disposed towards these nasty characters because of the linguistic relief they afforded.

It is not, however, idle for me to say that I found these French films, particularly the Matisse and the feature, absorbing and even exciting. When the language is unknown, everything depends on the acting and the direction to make the action intelligible. This is the severest possible test. Yet in *Le Père Tranquille* it is remarkable how little of the story one misses, thanks to the performances of Noël-Noël and the supporting players. This is a drama of life in a small French town during the German Occupation, with Noël-Noël portraying a typical middle-aged, middle-class Frenchman who is really head of the local Resistance group, but whose apparent aloofness from the war and preoccupation with harmless pursuits has earned him the nickname of "The Imperturbable Father." Even though you may only be able to guess, at any given moment, at what they are actually talking about, this Frenchman, his wife, daughter, and son are very real people; their family life is something one can share; the atmosphere of tension which surrounds the activities of the Resistance workers is, one feels, genuine and not merely the product of melodramatic situations. As for the photography, it is superb throughout.

Clearly there is no general market in New Zealand for a film like this, lacking either sub-titles or dubbing in English. It would, in fact, be unreasonable to expect it. But equally clearly, the oft-proclaimed excellence, even the superiority, of the French cinema is no myth either.

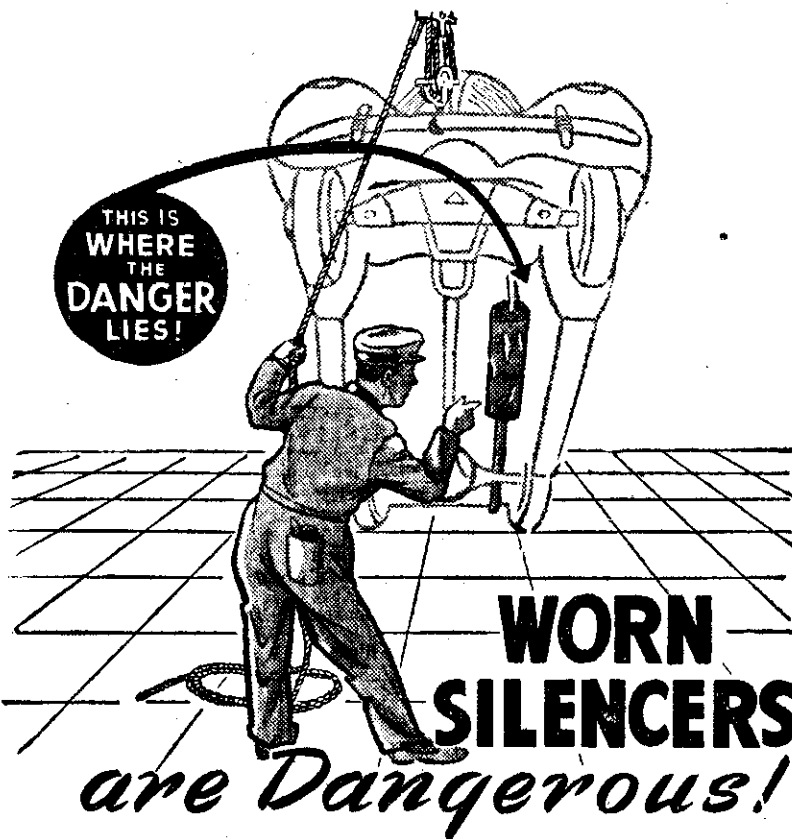
CONTEST FINAL

THE climax of the "Miss New Zealand" contest, organised by the Royal Society of St. George, as part of the Aid to Britain campaign, will be reached at the Wellington Town Hall on Wednesday, November 5, when the judges will announce the winner. To mark the occasion with entertainment as well as excitement, the organisers



MARY PRATT

have planned a comprehensive musical programme. The principal soloist will be the Dunedin contralto Mary Pratt, and items will also be given by the Chorus Gentlemen, William Clothier (baritone), Joyce Izett (soprano), Alex Lindsay (violinist), and the Wellington Girls' College Choir. The programme will be broadcast by 2YA between 8.0 and 10.0 p.m., with a half-hour break at 9.0 for the news.



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