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Film Reviews, by Jno.

PILGRIMS' PROGRESS

A CANTERBURY TALE

(Eagle-Lion)

IF Michael Powell, who wrote the story for this film, had kept his wits about him—if he had confined himself to the sound, central theme instead of adding to it a silly little mystery which is about as welcome as a fly-paper in a First Folio—*A Canterbury Tale* might have been the picture of the year for me. As it is, though the film fails to make the first grade, it is one that will be remembered for many minor excellencies. Mainly, I think it will be remembered for the American member of the cast, Sgt. John Sweet, who takes the part of an American sergeant and acts as naturally as he breathes, but the film is memorable, too, for the skill shown by the director (Emeric Pressburger) who seems to have had a deeper insight into the spiritual implications of the main theme than Michael Powell, and who has used his cast and his cameras with both sensibility and wit. The photography is particularly fine and a good deal of this excellence is due to the amount of work done away from sets and sound-stages. In fact, one gets the impression that the whole studio went to Canterbury and made the film on the way. What they made is, in the main, good, and should not be missed. *A Canterbury Tale* was filmed, as far as I can find out, about 1944, and, as the Americans would say, was made "on a shoestring." I have seen many pictures which cost a lot more and were worth less—q.v., as the lexicographers succinctly put it.

DOWN TO EARTH

(Columbia)

THIS is a show, says Larry Parks at a critical moment in it, for people who like jive and hot dogs and baseball. And coming from one who cannot be expected to take a wholly objective view that is a surprisingly honest assessment of the film's quality. If anything, it errs on the conservative side. *Down to Earth* will, I am sure, appeal to a number of people who have not yet had the chance to develop these outward and visible stigmata of the American way of life. It will appeal to those who like musical shows (I use the adjective in the technical sense) conceived in the grand manner, but born only after every imaginable complication; it will please those who measure their uplift in terms of the elevations of the chorus; and it may even delight those who enjoy that peculiar brand of pixilated whimsy which is the New Mythology.

As the film opens, Terpsichore, who has been leaning out from the gold bar of heaven after the fashion of Mr. Rossetti's damozel, is scandalised to discover that Mr. Parks is rehearsing a Broadway show called *Swinging the Muses*. She vows that she will go slumming and teach Mr. Parks a lesson, but getting out of heaven is as difficult as getting out of any place these days, what with declarations, exit permits, priorities, and so forth. However, she manages it, and the *deus ex machina* who resolves all the difficulties (the *deus ex flying machina*, to be more specific) is none other than our old friend Mr. Jordan. A little changed in feature, to be sure,

BAROMETER

Mainly Fair to Fine: "A Canterbury Tale."

Overcast, with bright intervals: "Down to Earth."

Dull and Wet: "Latin Quarter."

but then it's a few years since we saw him last, and fortunately there's that other celestial Thomas Cook's man, E. Everett Horton, to help in the identification.

From there on the story marches forward and backward with all the resolution of the Grand Old Duke of York. Terps takes over the show and nearly wrecks it by removing the jive. Mr. Parks reasserts himself, the jive is re-injected and the show is a smash-hit. Then just as Mr. Parks and his divine leading lady are about to fall into one another's arms, in comes Mr. Jordan and calls her home. She pleads with him—blood is thicker than ichor—but to no purpose. However, by taking a leaf out of one of Mr. Dunne's books, the resourceful Mr. Jordan manages to contrive a happy ending.

Rita Hayworth (who seems to have fleshed up a bit) won't be everyone's idea of Terpsichore, and a balletomane might find her a trifle heavy-footed at times. On the whole, *Down to Earth* scarcely justifies the dollars obviously spent on it, but both James Gleason and Edward Everett Horton work hard and raise laughs, and there are one or two songs which I fear will be tiresomely familiar before they are forgotten.

LATIN QUARTER

(British National)

JOAN GREENWOOD, who can (and does) act well, makes a brief appearance in this film in a ballet-school sequence more than accidentally reminiscent of *Degas*. This sequence is, on the whole, directed with some understanding of screen technique but it does little to redeem an otherwise shockingly poor picture. The plot flounders hopelessly in a morass of melodrama, the standard of acting (with the one exception mentioned) is unadulterated *Old-time Theatre*, and of the dialogue it will be enough to say that it drew several gusts of sardonic laughter from a long-suffering audience. The censor, whose duties are fairly narrowly defined, has recommended *Latin Quarter* as suitable for adults only. I could not conscientiously recommend it to anyone.

NATIONAL FILM UNIT

WEEKLY REVIEW No. 331, issued by the National Film Unit for the week beginning January 2, contains the following items: "Whitebait," showing the various methods used in catching this delicacy, and its transport from places far from the beaten track; "Turakina Deviation," in which a new section of the railway is opened at Turakina, making the journey to Wanganui some miles shorter; "Floral Carpet," a carpet of real flowers exhibited to aid Kindergarten funds; "Starch Factory"—how starch is made in a New Zealand factory; and "Sheep for South America," showing stud sheep being put aboard ship for transport to South America.