

A Great Day for the Irish

CAPTAIN BOYCOTT

(Rank-Individual)

It was a great day for the Irish when the crofters of County Mayo formed their United Front against Captain Boycott—and it wasn't a bad day for the cinema either. But while *Captain Boycott* is a thoroughly entertaining film, it does not succeed in its attempt to convey the desperation of the Irish peasantry in the 'eighties. There are too many characters who, while not exactly comic, are certainly humorous.

Take *Captain Boycott* himself, excellently well played (within the limitations of the script) by Cecil Parker. It is true that he was a retired infantry officer, and it seems tolerably certain that he didn't understand the Irish—but was it necessary to make him the prototype of all the blimps? I can't believe that he was in the habit of parading his farm labourers like a platoon, dressing them off by the right, reading the Orders of the Day, and then marching them off to the fields. Even if there were historical justification for that, it still would not make sense in a drama of this kind. Of course, the idea of Irishmen adopting a policy of passive resistance against an oppressor doesn't seem to make much sense either, when you come to think of it, and that is really where the film story gets properly off the rails. For there was nothing passive about the treatment meted out to the original *Captain Boycott*. When he refused to receive rents at figures fixed by the tenants (not his own tenants, but those of the Earl of Erne, for whom he acted as agent), his fences were torn down, his mail intercepted, his food-supplies interfered with, and even his life threatened; and 900 soldiers were required to protect the Ulster Orangemen who finally got in his crops. In the film the only violence offered to the *Captain* consists of interference on a racecourse, and though the

BAROMETER

Fair to Fine: "*Captain Boycott*."
Fair: "*Song of the Thin Man*."

interference was more spectacular than the normal variety ever could be the gallant *Captain* is hurt only in the pocket.

But *Boycott* is not the only character who draws laughs. Noel Purcell, as Daniel McGinty, the fire-eating schoolmaster, is a humorous figure most of the time; Alastair Sim, who plays the village priest with some dignity (but with an accent which slips out of gear once or twice), is slyly amusing, while the very British Colonel Strickland (Maurice Denham), who commands the troops sent to protect *Boycott*, and the two reporters who appear briefly to cover the affair, contribute outright comedy.

There were two players in the cast—Kathleen Ryan (who was seen in *Odd Man Out*), and Liam Redmond, as the innkeeper—who managed to portray well the suffering of the Irish people of that time. The girl personified the despair of the homeless and the defeated, the man the cold, controlled anger of those who would never admit defeat.

But if *Captain Boycott* falls short as a historical record (and after all it is based on a novel and not on a history book) it has just about everything that is necessary to make an exciting picture. There is a good deal of racing and chasing on horseback (apart from a most exciting race-meeting), three violent deaths (off-stage) and some melodious keening, sundry evictions (which suggest that it was as easy to get an Irish peasant out of his farm without a battering-ram as to get a wrinkle out of its shell without a pin), and one near-lynching. The photography is good—I remember one shot of the *Captain* in which upward lighting provides him

(continued on next page)



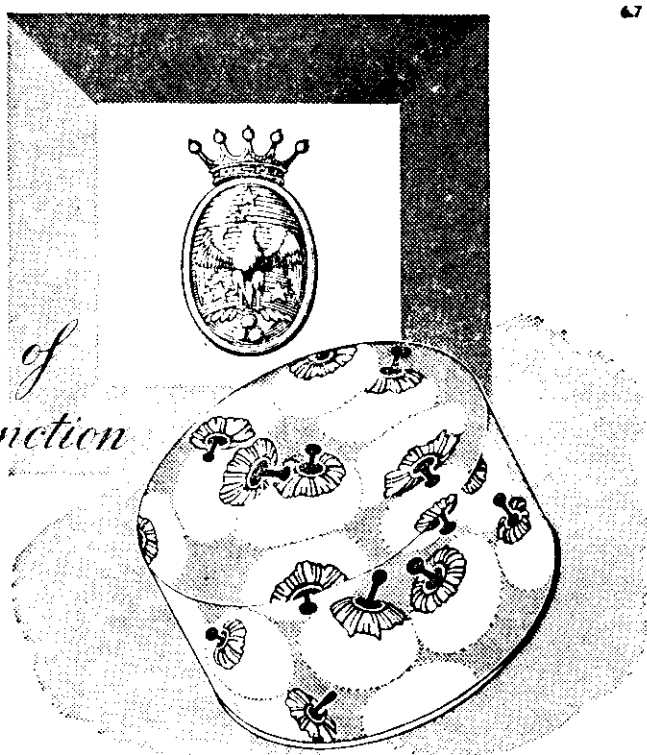
Alan Blakey photograph



ALAN POW (piano) and EDYTH ROBERTS (soprano), who will present Liza Lehmann's song cycle "*The Life of a Rose*" from IYA at 7.40 p.m. on Saturday, March 13. Edyth Roberts, who is well known to Auckland listeners, has broadcast extensively in Australia, and studied there under Roland Foster and Mary Campbell. Alan Pow, a former member of the Euterpe Trio, was accompanist at the Auckland Competitions in 1946 and 1947. He is at present accompanist for the Royal Auckland Choir and other Auckland musical organisations

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