

# THE PRICE OF COAL

## KAMERADTSCHAFT

(Nero-Film).

TO attempt a critical estimate of *Kameradschaft* to-day, seventeen years (and two swings of the international pendulum) after it was produced, is to discover how difficult it is to be wise after the event. The *leitmotiv* of the film—the brotherhood of man—sounds faintly through the uproar of the intervening years, and some may even find its accents insincere, but as a piece of film-making *Kameradschaft* has some superb moments. I saw it last week, at the invitation of the Wellington Film Society—and I understand that it will be seen by film society members throughout New Zealand—but I wish it could be shown to a wider audience.

*Kameradschaft* was made in 1931 by the German director G. W. Pabst and tells the story of a mine disaster in the Saar. Briefly the story is this: Running through the centre of one major coal-seam is the Franco-German frontier. On the one side are the French miners, on the other the Germans. Suddenly, on the French side of the seam, where a slow fire has been burning in some sealed-off workings, an explosion occurs and 600 men are entombed by falls of rock. German rescue teams are thereupon organised, packed into trucks, and after crashing through the dividing frontier posts help in the saving of their comrades.

The film's avowed theme of comradeship is, therefore, obvious enough, but I found Pabst's treatment of it a good deal more difficult to understand. As it stands the film seems designed primarily for German audiences of 1931, but what need is there to preach the gospel of international co-operation to a defeated nation? If Pabst sought to win over the French, why commit the egregious psychological blunder of staging his disaster on the French side of the frontier—particularly on such delicate ground as the Saar? Why, in such a film, underline the little things which divide nations—the rivalries of small boys, the frontier posts with their contrasting uniforms and their artificial barriers, the differences of dress, of language, of temperament, even of gesture? The cumulative effect of all this is to suggest that French and German miners have little more in common than the hazards of their calling.

But if I failed to discover what Grierson called Pabst's "fierce international idealism," except in a form vitiated either by conflicting motives or by intellectual doubts, I found his handling of film and sound both exciting and impressive. *Kameradschaft*, made at a time when the influence of the silent film was still strong, is primarily a visual experience—it is a *moving picture*, comprehensible through the eye alone. The German dialogue slips unnoticed in at one ear and out at the other, and even the English sub-titles are rarely necessary. A characteristic of the film which I found interesting in its effect is the slow speed of the shots and the consequent deliberate development of scenes. In particular I remember the sequence

### BAROMETER

FINE: "Kameradschaft."  
FAIR: "Stormy Waters."

which followed the explosion and which showed the French townspeople running through the streets to the mine-gates. This sequence seems to go on and on, and in its effect on the audience resembles that form of nightmare in which one tries to fly from something but remains inexorably rooted to the spot.

The sound, too, is handled with all the exciting qualities of a new medium. Great blocks of noise assail the ears as the French workings cave in and tongues of blazing gas roar through the galleries, then just as suddenly there is silence as the clouds of coal-dust blot out the anonymous bodies of the dead. The dialogue is on the whole incidental, but one word of it—the name Georges sobbed out by an aged Frenchman seeking his grandson in the very bowels of the pit—sounds as if it might have come straight from Dante. *Kameradschaft* may have been propaganda for international brotherhood—or it may have been propaganda against French control of the Saar, but what it brought home to me most forcibly was that the price of coal is paid in blood and tears as well as toil and sweat.

## STORMY WATERS

(M.G.M.-International)

THIS unpretentious little French-made film—directed by Jean Gremillon and starring Jean Gabin and Michele Morgan—is the story of a salvage-tug skipper who, though he is wedded to his work and to a pleasantly attractive wife, suddenly finds himself involved in an affair with another woman. It is from the outset a hopeless and pointless liaison—as such an affair would almost certainly be in reality—which damages the man in his own self-esteem, degrades him in the eyes of his crew, upsets the even tenor of his working life and brings him nothing in compensation. There is no attempt to glamourise the attachment, and the death of the wife simply caps a story of common human weakness with the equally commonplace tragedy of mortality. There could be no genuine happy ending.

The virtue of *Stormy Waters* is, of course, its freedom from meretricious sentimentality. In the best sense, it is a film for adult audiences. The acting of the principals is impressive and the minor characters are all drawn in the round. But why play about with ship models in tanks?

### NATIONAL FILM UNIT

WEEKLY REVIEW No. 341 to be released by the National Film Unit throughout the Dominion on March 19 contains the following items: "Big Game Fishing," featuring the Yale University Expedition's deep sea fishing at the Bay of Islands—part of the expedition's research work is done right on the spot; "Harbour Swim," held in Wellington for the Peck Shield, showing the large number of entrants swimming in this annual event, and "Otago Celebrates Centennial," which covers some of the festivities in Dunedin's big carnival week, the fireworks and procession of floats being especially interesting.

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