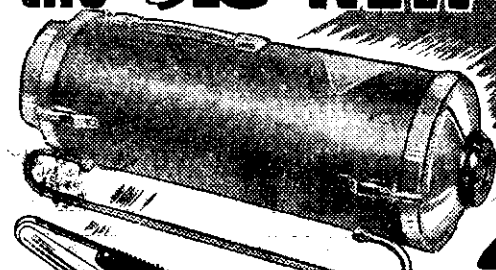


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## The "New HAYWIN" VACUUM CLEANER

## Film Reviews, by Jno.

### A BREATH OF FRESH AIR

#### BUSH CHRISTMAS

(Rank-Ralph Smart)

AS the exception most clearly points to the rule, so the appearance of *Bush Christmas* reminds one of the curious apathy of the western film industry towards juvenile entertainment. Except behind the iron curtain (where the entertainment and indoctrination of the child is undertaken with becoming seriousness) there is, for all practical purposes, no children's cinema at all.

*Bush Christmas* is mainly important, I think, as an indication of what we are missing. With the motives which led to its production one need not at this stage be concerned. I have no doubt that the good old profit motive was one of them, but it is also quite obvious that a great deal of honest enthusiasm went into the task. Admittedly, it is possible that my enjoyment of *Bush Christmas* may have been in part reaction. Continuous exposure to the average commercial film tends to induce a numb cynicism which leaves one more unquestioning and appreciative when confronted with something as simple and straightforward as this. After long nights of schizophrenia, paranoia, and the hundred and one other forms of emotional maladjustment which the adult cinema so sedulously cultivates, *Bush Christmas* is like a breath of fresh country air.

It is the story of how five youngsters—Helen, Snow, and John, children of an Australian outback farmer, Mike, an English evacuee who lives with them, and Neza, a cheerful little aboriginal—track down and outwit three horse-thieves in the depths of the Warregals, a wild range of bush-clad mountains some distance from their home. For five small children that is rather an ambitious undertaking, and I was reminded of the opinion of a New Zealand authority on children's fiction who condemned "the adventure story in which callow and inexperienced youth outwits maturity and experience . . . because it pretends to mirror actuality and is often accepted by children as doing so."

*Bush Christmas*, however, does not altogether fall into this error. The children do play an important part in the capture of the thieves, but they get themselves thoroughly lost in the bush while doing so, cause an unconscionable amount of worry to their parents, are themselves caught by the bad men in rather ignominious fashion, and only rescued when the adult representatives of law and order arrive on the scene. In these respects the film is realistic enough in its treatment.

Viewed simply as entertainment for young people *Bush Christmas* is well done. Ralph Smart, who wrote the story, produced and directed the picture, obviously knows just what children love and has skilfully worked into the film such juvenile enthusiasms as camping out, horseback riding, trail-blazing, tracking, and swimming, in addition to the main cowboys-and-Indians theme. The photography is good, and

#### BAROMETER

Fair to Fine: "Bush Christmas."  
Mainly Fair: "If Winter Comes."  
Overcast: "The Exile."

has that clear outdoor limpidity which seems characteristic both of Australia and New Zealand, and the background music has at times a joyous and exciting rhythm. The settings are, of course, the genuine article. The ranges are really ranges, the bush is dinkum—only the bad men, headed by Chips Rafferty, seem a trifle unreal, unless one can regard the horse-thieves simply as hard-case Aussies playing an elaborate (and profitable) practical joke on the law-abiding community.

Of the children, little Neza the aboriginal was the one who delighted me most, though I sensed in his part faint intimations of the White Australia Policy. Once the children become properly lost in the bush he gains in relative importance, but a comic scene in which he eats fried snake with relish and tops it off with a handful of wriggling white witchetty grubs tends to emphasise the apartness of the aboriginal and could, I thought, have been better left out. But so far as I could see that was the only flaw in an attractive picture which I am sure will delight most children. I enjoyed it myself and the fellow behind me, who breathed excitedly down my neck during most of the screening, apparently enjoyed it too. One's age doesn't matter much.

#### IF WINTER COMES

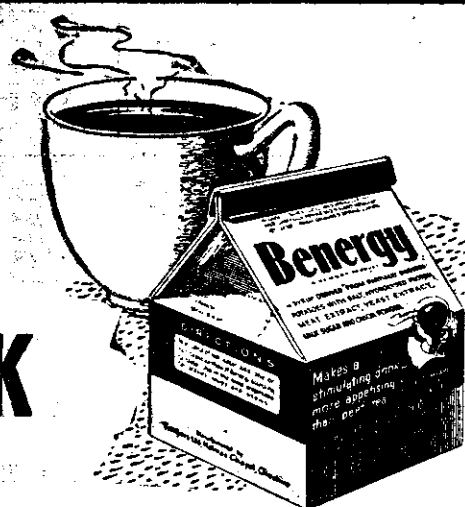
(M.G.M.)

IT is a long time since A. S. M. Hutchinson wrote his best-seller, and very nearly as long since I read it. Indeed, apart from the haziest recollections which mostly concerned such minutiae as the High and Low Jinks joke, and Mark Sabre's propensity for freewheel cycling, I could recall scarcely anything of the story. No doubt, in the main, that was the fault of an erratic and unselective memory, rather than the indication of a lack of substance in the story. And yet the picture left me wondering why the novel was so popular when it first appeared. In attempting to bring the story up to date by setting it in the early stages of the late war, M.G.M. have, I think, merely managed to emphasise that it has not worn well; that it is in fact hopelessly out of date. There is too much sentimentality and too little cold realism for to-day's intelligent reader and what was once accepted unquestioningly as evidence of self-sacrificing rectitude may seem, to a generation disillusioned by two world wars and one world depression, suspiciously like soft-headedness.

What merit the film has is due to finished (but never very inspired) acting by the principals in the cast. Walter Pidgeon, who is bothered once or twice by slight Americanisms of pronunciation, is a tweedy but rather two-dimensional Mark Sabre, while Deborah Kerr, as his one-time sweetheart, has a hard though not altogether unsuccessful struggle with a part which the script does its best to keep banal. Angela Lansbury, as Sabre's wife, managed to distill a good deal of



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