

generally romantic hokum. The kind of thing, in fact, which would be acceptable as Christmas pantomime (when the prevailing atmosphere of goodwill makes even critics charitable), but which is more likely to induce cynicism when distance lends its customary disenchantment to the festive season. But I have no doubt that *It Happened on Fifth Avenue*, like the homeless veterans aforementioned, will make lots and lots of money. As Abraham Lincoln put it, about a hundred years ago, "People who like this sort of thing will find this the sort of thing they like."

## WAXWORKS AND METROPOLIS

FILM enthusiasts who have read and heard a good deal about the German cinema of the 1920's will soon have the opportunity of seeing two films of that period which most authorities on the cinema concede to be of particular interest and importance. They are *Waxworks* (1924), directed by Paul Leni for Viking Film, and *Metropolis* (1926), Fritz Lang's fantastic shape of things to come, made in the Ufa Studios.

What is the significant content of these two films is likely to provide material for endless argument. For most filmgoers, interest in *Waxworks* is likely to centre mainly on the men who made it: on Leni's direction, on the work of Galeen as scenarist, and on the macabre acting of Veidt, Jannings, and Werner Krauss. I found it a hard film to watch. It is often murky and indistinct—bad lighting was one of the handicaps under which Leni worked. Save for the help he got from Jannings, Veidt and Krauss, he was handicapped in almost every direction. He had little studio space and less money — what money he had barely saw out the picture—and the scale of his achievement is not simply that he made a notable film, but that he managed to make a film at all.

It did seem to me that too much attention has been paid to the "architectural" quality of the film. The spare stylized settings are certainly of interest, but it is an interest sustained more by a knowledge of Leni's difficulties. In other respects they share the now faintly comic theatricality of the acting. I would however make an exception of the Springheel Jack sequence which has retained its fantastic horror unimpaired, and is still a fine example of imaginative photography.

What left the strongest impression on me, however, was not the quality of direction, the acting, or the photography, but the morbid atmosphere of the whole film. Psychologists have, I know, written voluminously on "Caligariism" as a by-product of intellectualism in pre-Hitler Germany. In general I distrust the psychoanalysts as being too often the purveyors of humbug, but it is impossible not to agree that films like *Waxworks* (and *Metropolis*, too) are the fruit of minds which have embraced despair. *Waxworks*, which is a nightmare within a nightmare, makes that darkness visible.

*Metropolis*, for all its soaring perspectives, brilliant sets and bold photography, is, like Leni's film, preoccupied with the problem of tyranny and just as barren of any solution for it. In their physical proportions the two films

are of course at opposite ends of the scale. *Waxworks* has a horrible peep-show quality, *Metropolis* is a work of vast proportions and vaulting imagination, but the same frustration and disillusion envelop both. I do not know to what extent the German cinema prepared the German people for Nazism, but from what I have seen it does not appear to have suggested an alternative.

Prints of *Waxworks* and *Metropolis* are being circulated by the N.Z. Film Institute to its member societies and screenings will be held as follows: *Waxworks*—Auckland, September 15; Nelson, October 5; Hamilton, October 24; Wellington, November 15; Palmerston North, November 27. *Metropolis*—Wellington, August 20; Christchurch, September 30; Auckland, October 20; Palmerston North, October 30.

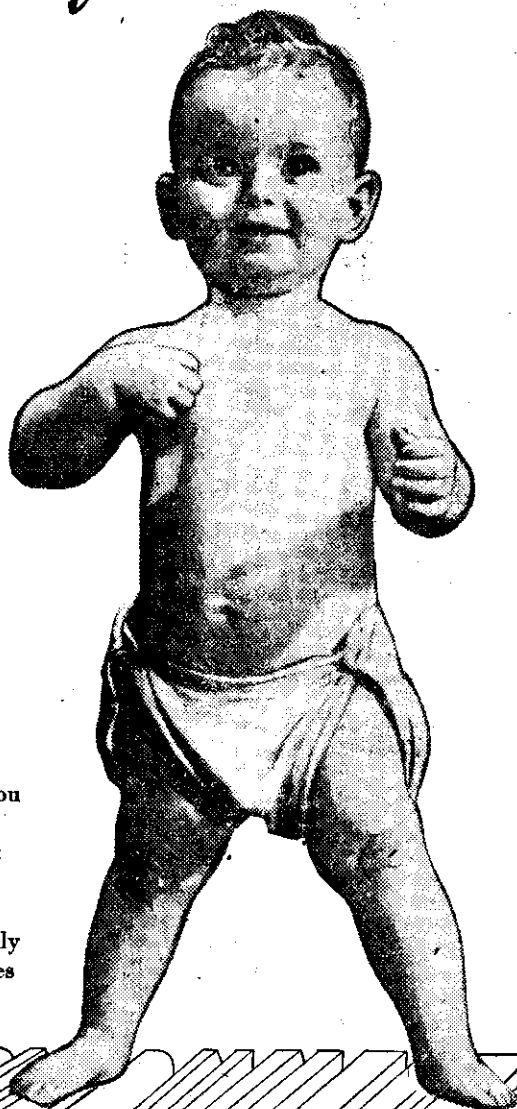
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