

ON THE GLACIER

BROKEN JOURNEY

(Rank)

IT seems to have become an annual custom in the film world for a number of good features to be held back until just before Christmas, so that there is a suitably confusing selection of "festive" entertainment for the holiday-maker to choose from. This must be what happened in Wellington, anyway, when new films appeared at five of the leading theatres last week-end. Even *Treasure of Sierra Madre* was transferred to a second-run (though main street) theatre after only one week. Perhaps it wasn't considered bright enough for the time of year, but then the same could be said of *Broken Journey*.

This film makes use of a well-worn dramatic device—sometimes called "the *Grand Hotel* technique"—in which an assortment of characters are gathered together in a confined space in unusual circumstances and allowed to react on one another. They can be in a submarine, a crashed aeroplane, or on a desert island—the variations are endless, and there is almost unlimited scope for good drama. *Lifeboat* will be remembered as one of the best uses of the device in recent years, though an earlier example was *Five Came Back* in which the passengers of a crashed 'plane had to contend with all the terrors of the Amazon jungle. In contrast with these two films the most notable characteristic of *Broken Journey* is the way in which everything (with one exception) is played in a minor key.

The film has the advantage, for the realist, of being based on an actual crash which took place in the Swiss Alps on November 19, 1946. As might be expected, there are 13 on board, of whom the most interesting are James Donald as the pilot, Phyllis Calvert as the air hostess, and Francis L. Sullivan in an unusual role for him—the effete opera singer who claims to be (with Caruso) the sole exponent of the "pianissimo with open throat."

The others include a patient in an iron lung, a lawyer, a film star, a displaced person returning home after several years in and out of concentration camps, the world middleweight boxing champion and his manager, a playboy, and the man from Argentina. Although they are not the kind of persons one tends to meet every day in the street, there is on the other hand nothing sinister about any of them, and the film shows how much like ordinary people they really are. They all have their weaknesses, yet the producer (Sydney Box) seems to go too far when he makes them all, basically, "decent" characters. Is human nature really like that? It is an interesting question that *Broken Journey* doesn't attempt to answer.

There are no heroics about the actual crash. The 'plane simply makes a neat belly landing on the glacier ice, and from then until the survivors are rescued various human reactions take place. The two least expected to do so sacrifice themselves for the common cause, the boxer revolts against his manager, while

BAROMETER

FAIR: "*Broken Journey*."
MAINLY FAIR: "*The Pirate*."

the pampered film star and the plausible waster show they are made of good stuff underneath. Comic relief is provided by Francis L. Sullivan, who has a single gramophone record of himself singing which he plays over and over again until someone breaks it on his head. Even the one genuine attempt to assist that he makes at last—he ruins his voice in shouting for help—is made ironically funny, as he plays it, by the fact that the party had already been seen before he called out.

The high point of the film occurs when one of the party recites over the grave of the iron-lung patient John Donne's famous sonnet

Death be not proud, though many have
called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not
so.

It is spoken quietly, simply, and without dramatics, and with the blanket-wrapped figures standing in the snow, the background of icy peaks, and the quiet voice of the speaker, this incident epitomises the spirit of the film. One small fault mars the general effect. This is the scene where the iron lung patient sacrifices his life by donating the lung's batteries to the radio so that contact can be made with the outside world. It is lingered over a shade too long for good taste, and seems to cross the critical boundary between high drama and sensationalism.

Points worth noticing are the crisp, knife-clean alpine photography and the unobtrusive background music composed by John Greenwood and played by Muir Matheson and the Philharmonia Orchestra. Phyllis Calvert is good without being brilliant, and the same could be said for everyone else in the cast.

THE PIRATE

(M.G.M.)

THIS film is a hotch-potch of lavish colour, fairly ordinary music (by Cole Porter), some whirling dervish dancing by Gene Kelly, and a lot of plain hamming by the rest of the cast. An occasional line of witty dialogue, a few psycho-analytical expressions, several routine vaudeville turns, and some old-fashioned slapstick are thrown in for good measure. Judy Garland as Manuela, an 18th Century Caribbean maiden who is betrothed to the village mayor but has all sorts of romantic notions about adventure, travel, and pirates (especially one Macoco, familiarly referred to as Mac the Black), gives a stock girlish performance. The show is really Gene Kelly's, and as Serafin, the dancer-singer-acrobat-hypnotist, he performs some amazing contortions and declaims some fantastically high-flown lines. He is adorned for the occasion with a moustache (all the time), bright-coloured tights (most of the time), and an air of braggadocio that has to be seen to be believed. He plays his part with such vitality, however, and has such a naive grace in all he does, that he gets away with a lot that is really only second-rate.

—P.J.W.

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