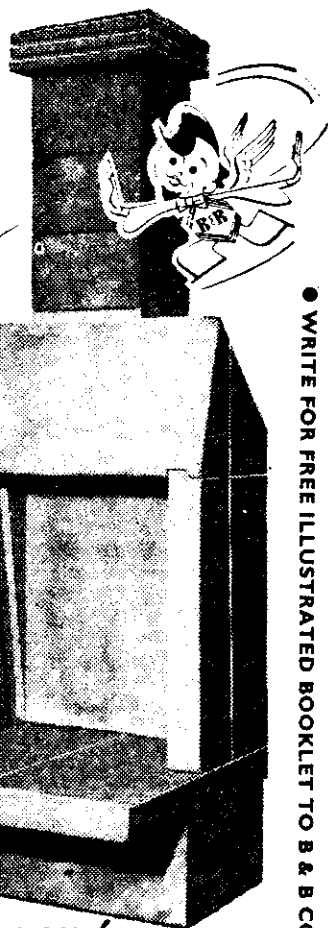
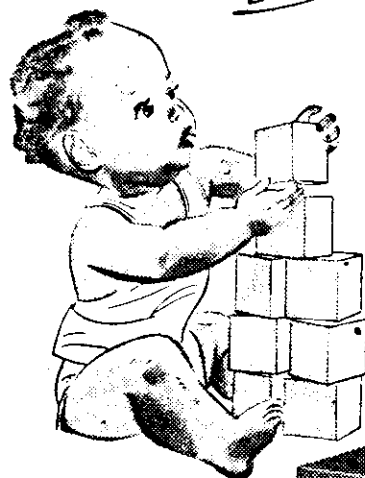


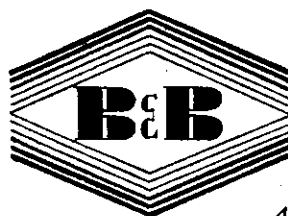
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Film Reviews, by P.J.W.

Love is So Simple

LES ENFANTS DU PARADIS

(Pathé Cinema)

BAROMETER

FINE: "Les Enfants du Paradis."
FAIR TO FINE: "The Paleface."

ALTHOUGH this picture has reputedly been described by all the best people as a masterpiece of film art it is not a highbrow picture in the commonly accepted sense of that word. Reduced to its simplest terms *Les Enfants du Paradis* is the story of a beautiful woman and the four men who love her, told against a crowded background of French life in the 1840's, in the age, as the introduction points out, of Hugo and Dumas, the hey-day of the romantic drama. The bulk of the action takes place in the theatrical circles of those times, but it also moves for considerable periods in the sinister underworld of low Paris night-life, and in the exalted society of its wealthy aristocracy. The film was discussed in these pages some time ago (*Listener* 5/12/47), but apart from a brief season in Auckland it has not been generally released, and its Wellington opening is important enough not to be overlooked.

The scene opens on the crowded, bustling gaiety of a Paris street called Le Boulevard du Crime, on one side of which stand the great theatres frequented by the rich, and on the other the music-halls, pantomimes, and vaudeville houses where the poor can buy a seat in the gallery (the "gods") for four sous. At one of these theatres—the Funambules—there works a celebrated mime named Debureau, who has a freakish, dreamy, and apparently idiot son named Baptiste. One day, from his position outside the theatre, Baptiste sees a beautiful woman in the crowd. She smiles at him, throws him a flower, and passes on, but she has awakened a great passion in his heart.

Later he meets her again at a murky midnight café to which he has been taken by a blind beggar. She is with another lover, a ruthless criminal named Lacenaire, but because for this night Lacenaire beres her, and because the boy's naive passion attracts her, she decides to leave with him. As they walk through the dark streets she tells him that her name is Garance, and that she lives with whichever man holds her fancy at the moment. "Love is so simple," she says to him. "I want to please whoever pleases me."

Baptiste gets her a part in the pantomime, and inspired by her, creates a beautiful tableau in which they both take part. But because his love for her is never more than an ideal, she is taken from him by a third man, the actor Frederick Lemaître. Later, circumstances throw her into the arms of a fourth admirer, the wealthy Comte de Monteray, with whom she goes to Scotland for several years. Time passes and Baptiste marries and has a son, becoming a great artist who packs the Funambules every night. Lemaître too becomes famous—on the other side of the street—as the greatest actor of his day, while unknown to the others Lacenaire pursues an audacious life of murder, robbery, and blackmail.

The mysterious force that links them together, becomes apparent when Gar-

ance returns to Paris. Despite a life that seems to hold all she has ever wished for, she cannot forget Baptiste, and goes nightly to watch him play in the pantomime. And as each of the lovers discovers her presence he reacts according to his changed circumstances. Lemaître, jealous of her love for Baptiste, makes use of this new emotion to give the finest performance of his career as Othello. Lacenaire, jealous in his turn of the Count's worldly superiority (he thinks it has won Garance from him), accosts him and is deeply humiliated in the verbal exchanges that follow. The Count, jealous of Lemaître's love (discovered when they go to see *Othello*), challenges him to a duel and kills him. Lacenaire, in revenge for the Count's insults, murders him at his country estate and then commits suicide.

In the meantime the two lovers come together for one night, only to be surprised in the morning by Baptiste's wife, who, in a passionate appeal for her family rights, sends Garance back into the streets from which she originally appeared. The last scene shows Baptiste pursuing her hopelessly through dancing crowds that are celebrating carnival week, and finally losing her for ever.

The film has been created on a grand scale, with dizzying crowd scenes and the suggestion of a complete new world that makes it difficult to be taken in at a single sitting. In some ways its romantic melodrama can be compared with the sweep and splendour of *Gone With the Wind*, yet all the difference of the Atlantic exists between the two. There is a maturity about the conception, the dialogue, the acting, and even the sombre philosophy hinted at in *Les Enfants du Paradis* which stamps it as the product of a more sophisticated sensibility than ours.

Two notable points about the film are the atmosphere of frustration that pervades it (even the successful criminal secretly wants to be a literary success), and the irony of much of its dialogue: "We don't act," the chief mime says, "we make our entrances on our hands." Perhaps the greatest irony occurs in a dialogue between Garance and Baptiste. "Dreams, life," she says, "it's all the same." And then she whispers, not knowing that her love will ruin half a dozen lives, "Love is so simple. . ."

The director, Marcel Carné, has handled his theme with great skill, and Jacques Prévert's script is outstanding, but it is one of the few weaknesses of the film that the photography is at times rather harsh and hard on the eyes.

THE PALEFACE

(Paramount)

SOMEONE is running guns in to the Indians, enough of them to massacre all the white people in the Territory. So what does the Governor do? He releases from gaol a notorious gun-woman, Calamity Jane (Jane Russell), and promises her a pardon if she will round up the villains before any damage is done. Hardly waiting to inspect the pardon,

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The Baha'i Faith originated in Persia in 1844. Its Founder was Baha'u-llah (meaning Glory of God).

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"Along whatever road thoughtful men look out, they see before them some guiding truth, some leading principle which Baha'u-llah gave long ago (80 years), and which men rejected." George Townsend, M.A., Canon of St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin.

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