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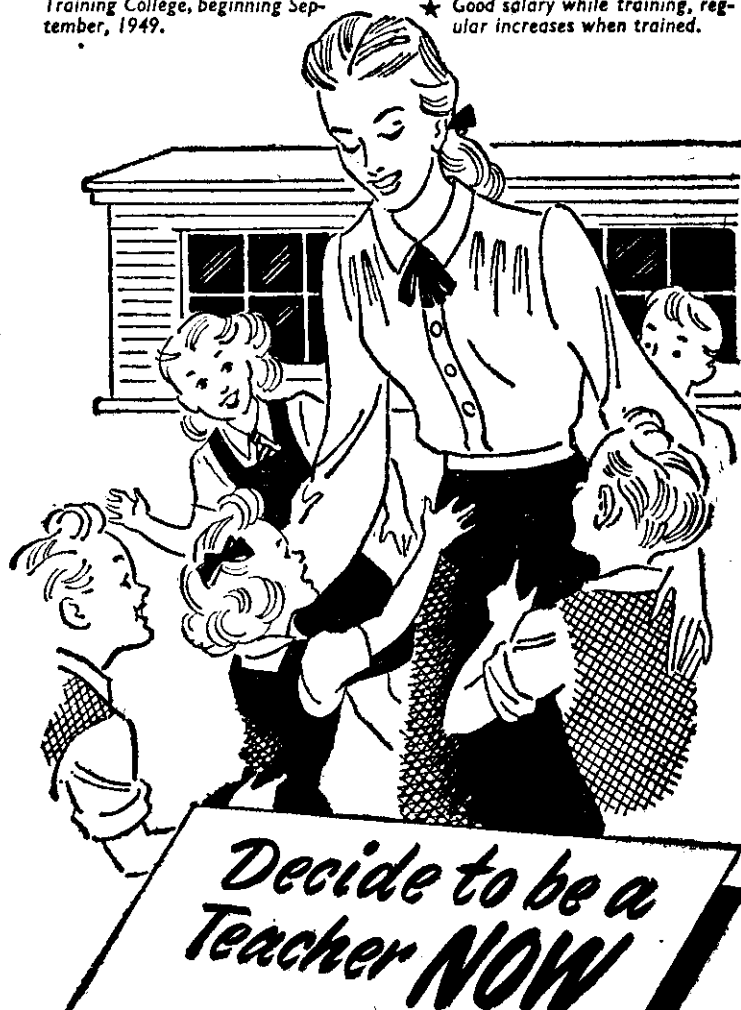
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## **SPEAKING CANDIDLY** Films and People in New Zealand

by Gordon Mirams

("G.M." the N.Z. Listener's former film reviewer.)

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Film Reviews, by P.J.W.

## RAIN IN THE WEST

### BLOOD ON THE MOON

(RKO-Radio)

HERE is another Western picture in which the director, in this case Robert Wise, has tried hard to turn out something resembling a work of art. Wise's attempt doesn't achieve the artistic stature of *Stagecoach*, nor even the spectacular effects of *Red River*, mainly because he doesn't aim as high as that. *Blood on the Moon* is, indeed, quite conventional in many ways, and it makes numerous concessions to the box-office requirements of romance, heroism, adventure, and so on. But there is sufficient realism about it (to use a much-maligned word) to make it a picture worth seeing.

In the first place there is some attempt at character-drawing. Robert Mitchum, the hero, is a failure, a cow puncher who tried to run a small ranch down in Texas, made a mess of it, lost all his cattle, and decided to work for a friend whom he knew was engaged in some shady business up country. He discovers that his friend (Robert Preston) is actually trying to swindle a prosperous cattleman who grazes his herds on Reservation land and sells them for beef to the Indians. When the beef contract is cancelled (with the connivance of a crooked Government agent) Preston tries to force the rancher off the Reservation and then make him sell him the cattle at heavy loss. Preston is portrayed as a likeable but weak character, who is led astray by his greed. The Government agent (Frank Faylen) is also less villainous than weak, cowardly, and over-fond of the bottle, while the two gunmen whom Preston engages turn out to be not tough guys, but vicious little bullies who prefer to kill in cold blood rather than to fight it out in open combat.

The second point about *Blood on the Moon* is the way the West is stripped of much of its usual romance. The opening scene is an unusually good one, showing a lone horseman stumbling through the night in teeming rain, with nowhere to shelter except in a little scrub-filled gully. Later on in the picture it snows hard (the whole action takes place in winter) and there are some good shots of the cowboys camping out in the fir trees in a blizzard. Nevertheless, this deglamourising of the background is made up for by some excellent shots of high-country scenery, and there is also a well-filmed cattle stampede (apparently a must sequence for all Westerns these days).

Careful attention is paid to the small but significant details of everyday existence—the making of a cup of coffee, the drying of a man's boots by his camp-fire—and even the hero goes unshaven for most of the film's length. Finally, the gunplay is kept to a minimum, so that when it does come, as when Mitchum stalks three opponents (including his erstwhile pal, Preston) amongst the firs by the light of a wintry moon, it gains considerably in effectiveness. Barbara Bel Geddes, the rancher's daughter who falls in love with Robert Mitchum, gives a good performance as a rather intense but convincing cow-girl, while Walter Brennan is equally good as a grizzled, bitter, but

### BAROMETER

FAIR: "Blood on the Moon."  
FAIR: "Black Diamond."

essentially kind-hearted old homesteader who helps young love and justice to their pre-ordained ends.

### BLACK DIAMOND

(Exclusive Films)

THE high standard of acting maintained in this French film by a cast recruited largely from the legitimate stage makes it a little more interesting than *Fièvres*, which came from the same producer, Jean Delannoy. A very fine performance is given by Charles Vanel, of the Comédie Française, in the part of a prosperous banker whose life is ruined because of an imagined infidelity of his wife's. She is killed at the beginning of the film in a motor accident, and a package of letters is found in her purse with instructions that they be destroyed in case of death. Like a good husband Vanel throws them on the fire unopened, but he can't help reading certain words that show as the pages curl up in the flames. He imagines, naturally enough, that they are from his wife's lover, and he receives a terrible shock when he sees a reference to "our" daughter.

Can it be that their beautiful child, the only person he cares for now that his wife is dead, is not really his at all? In revulsion he turns away from his daughter, and sends her to a convent. But the child still loves him, and when she escapes from the convent one night and sees her father embracing her former governess, who has become his mistress, she is so shocked that she decides to take the veil. Towards the end of the picture a middle-aged woman—an old friend of Vanel's wife who has been abroad—calls to ask for certain letters she had entrusted to his wife before she went away. When Vanel realises that he has been duped by circumstances and that the child is really his own, he suffers a stroke that turns his hair grey. Finally father and daughter are reunited and the film ends with the outbreak of war in 1939 and everyone going off to do their bit *pour la patrie*.

This melodramatic plot doesn't, however, detract from the quality of the film as a whole, and once again certain Gallic characteristics—the dramatic use of irony and the prominence of the religious motif—stand out. One shouldn't overlook the skilful performance of Gaby Morlay in the unsympathetic role of the governess. Two sisters take the part of the daughter—Helen Garletti as the precocious eight-year-old at the beginning of the picture, and Louise Garletti as the beautiful young girl who wins back her father's love and finally ejects the governess from their life. She does not, incidentally, carry out her intention of becoming a nun.

### NATIONAL FILM UNIT

MISS NEW ZEALAND 1949 is interviewed in the National Film Unit's Weekly Review No. 408, which will be released on July 1. Scenes at the Wellington Town Hall when the winner was announced are included, and the reel also contains the item "Youth Leadership," showing young leaders in demonstrations of their work at Christchurch. Four news-clips deal with the opening of a tyre factory in Wellington, flood control in the Wairarapa, the arrival of child migrants from England, and winter swimmers competing for the Davenport Cup.

N.Z. LISTENER, JULY 1, 1949.