

Faith and Good Works

COME TO THE STABLE

(20th Century-Fox)

NEWs that the French director Georges de la Grandière is to produce, with international backing, a film of the life of Christ, draws fresh attention to the enormous possibilities of a religious theme (if it is well handled) in movies. The latest venture *Come to the Stable* does not get deeply involved in anything, but is a fairly satisfying work which portrays the adventures of two nuns from France, Sisters Margaret and Scholastica (Loretta Young and Celeste Holm) who come to America to found a children's hospital. They belong to the Order of Holy Endeavour (Motto: We pray and work) and their spiritual guide is St. Jude, patron of the impossible.

With his assistance and their own single-minded faith they succeed against heavy odds. To do so they set up quarters in a stable that is used as a studio by a half-crazy painter (Elsa Lanchester), beard in his den a notorious gangster (Thomas Gomez) and persuade him to donate his land to the project,

BAROMETER

FAIR: "Come to the Stable."
FAIR: "Sorrowful Jones."

win over the support of a sceptical bishop, and get the financial assistance of their nearest neighbour, a popular song-writer played by Hugh Marlowe. Further help is provided towards the end by a reinforcement of 11 nuns and their chaplain who arrive from France to cook and weave and make pottery that is sold to raise funds.

The film is unpretentious, and strikes a nice balance of reverence and humour. Occasionally the action skates over a thin ice of sentiment, but it never quite falls into the lake. This is largely attributable to the sensitive direction of Henry Koster, who breaks down the pious nature of his subject with plenty of deft comedy and tongue-in-cheek levity at the expense of the sisters' innocent foibles. Good dramatic use is made of the contrast between the simple devoutness of the two nuns on the one hand and the tough cynicism of the crooks and bookies' touts who work for Gomez, the worldliness of the smart set who associate with Marlowe, and the



HUGH MARLOWE, CELESTE HOLM, LORETTA YOUNG

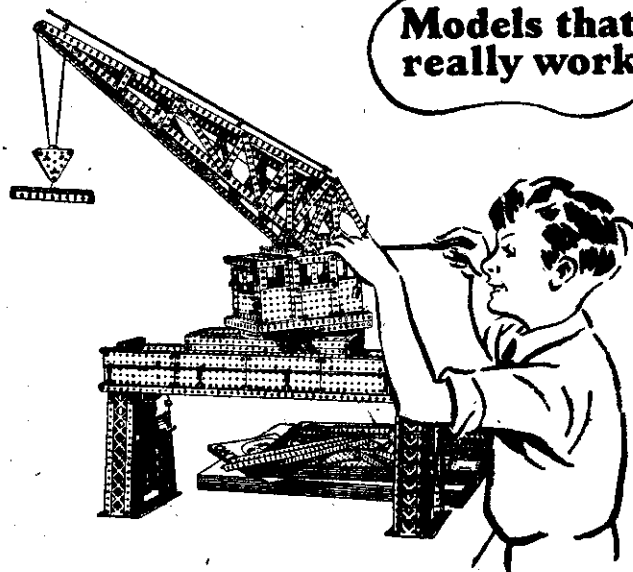
The ice is thin in places, but no one falls in the lake

practical, business-like pessimism of the bishop, on the other. Nevertheless, these contrasts are a little too studied to be completely effective by the highest standards. The funniest scenes show the two sisters hurtling around New York at 60 miles an hour in a jeep (Sister Margaret was taught to drive by the G.I.'s), and the most sentimental shows Sister

Scholastica, who was a famous tennis player before she took the veil, being beaten in a match which would have won them the last dollars needed to pay their deposit on the hospital building.

In a role that is smaller than one would wish, Elsa Lanchester is as delightful as she always is. Hugh Marlowe

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