

"ALL FILMS ARE NOW WAR FILMS"

At The Pictures During Air Raids

IS it my imagination, or do all films seen during these months of war tend to become war films in retrospect? asks C. A. Lejeune, in a recent issue of the London "Observer." Looking back on them to-day, films, even the films that have absorbed me at the time, seem less entities than part of the political pattern. Each one has its associations with some outside event. "Of Mice and Men" conjures up a picture of a hot London noon and the mid-day papers carrying the story of the invasion of Norway. "Swanee River" means the entrance of Italy into the war. "Virginia City" stands for the capitulation of France. "Young Tom Edison" reminds me of the first time I was woken by the sound of bombs in the night. "Gone With the Wind" has some association that I can't quite fix, but I know it is something to do with destroyers.

I can remember nothing like this since the days of one's childhood, when the impressions of books one read, and plays one saw, were sharply intermixed with the places in which one read and saw them. "The Scarlet Pimpernel" and a picnic in the heather. . . . "Holiday House" on the top of a haystack. . . . "Iolanthe" on a Welsh pier with the distant sound of water sucking. . . . "Robin Hood" one Christmas Eve by gaslight.

There is nothing deliberate about this heightened sensibility. We are not intentionally turning peace films into war films. It just happens. It would surprise the good folk in Hollywood no end, I fancy, to know how their gentlest offerings are being tinged with the colour of battle. What might surprise them less, for they are a sporting community, is

ME AND THE FILMS

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course, as soon as he stepped down one little bit his heel slipped and he sat on his hind end for the rest of the journey.

"Forget All About It"

Perhaps film directors do not read history any more than they read Dostoevski or believe that the human animal really has a brain. In any case, for every drum-banging statesman who declares that the people's right to think for themselves gives them the right to vote him into a position to think for them, there is a film director, a radio station, or a publisher shouting to high heaven that Democracy is in fact a collection of ignorant peasants placed on earth for the express purpose of paying admission charges, licence fees, or book prices.

If you read all this and get feeling about it the way I do, you are going to get pretty worried. If you can't bring yourself to cut your own throat, or jump in the nearest pond, or write a letter to the editor, or beat your wife, or circularise the Members of Parliament—go to see Inspector Hanaud and forget all about it.

the way the English public are extracting fun from the air-raid warnings in cinemas. The matching of film dialogue with sirens is quite a game, I find, among the tougher element. Filmgoers compete for the most apt phrase heard in conjunction with a warning. One young lady of my acquaintance came back delighted from an interrupted session at "The Blue Bird." "Let there be light!" said the Fairy on the screen—and there was light—house-lights, and the manager making his brief announcement. My own family yesterday reported a riotous moment in the local show of "Too Many Husbands." The words "All Clear," it seems, were thrown on the screen during a heated

argument between Melvyn Douglas and Fred MacMurray over their legal status. The house appreciated it.

So far the tin hat for air-raid stories goes to John Clements, the actor. He assures me, on his honour as an Intimate Theatre player, that this really happened when he went to see "Convoy" at the New Gallery. The manager made the usual announcement, a few people left the theatre, and the film proceeded. "Gentlemen," said Clive Brook's voice from the screen, "We are going into action against the enemy." Some time later the All Clear sounded. This time Mr. Clements heard his own film ghost announcing, "Everything's under control now."

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