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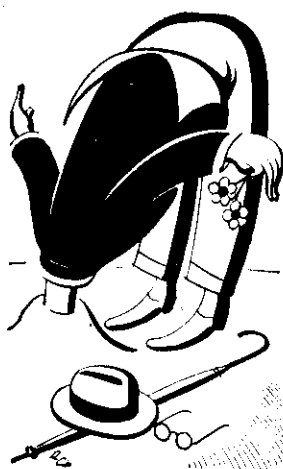
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FILM TASTES IN WARTIME

ARE YOU AN OSTRICH?

More and more films are being made with a war background. Is this what the public really wants? Miss C. A. Lejeune recently discussed this in the London "Observer." Here is her article, and a survey of our own among representative film fans

OR A REALIST?



Any film that makes you forget the war is doing real service, says the eminent critic, Miss C. A. Lejeune, in this witty article from the London "Observer," entitled "Confessions of an Aspirin-Eater." (It has to be remembered that she is much closer to the war than we are)

I AM sorry that I missed *Quiet Wedding*. They showed it to the Press one day last week, when my horizon was bounded by four bedroom walls and an aspirin bottle. A colleague saw the film for me, and his description of its charm and wit made me gnash my teeth on the thermometer (half min. clin.). Not only have I lost a chance of paying tribute to a director, Anthony Asquith, whom I hold in the highest esteem and affection, but I have missed precisely the sort of rural comedy it would have been my delight to see.

Everybody agrees that *Quiet Wedding* makes you forget the war for eighty minutes. Now that is what I call real service, and I'm afraid there is going to be less and less of it in pictures. On all sides I hear of producers bustling up with topical ideas, clipping headlines from the newspapers, snatching subjects red hot from the radio. Even in remote Hollywood they are doing it. There seems to be no end to the films that are being made about Polish patriots, British flyers, American flyers, and foreign correspondents. I don't want to be an ostrich, but are these really the films that people want to see?

Mind you, they may be. I have no data for generalising. The statisticians who used to prove that three men over forty-five and one-third of a child preferred Garbo to Donald Duck (or vice versa), have nothing to tell me about any straw vote for escapism. I certainly met a young man last week who walked out of *Bachelor Mother* because he wanted to get at grips with reality. But then I also met a woman who walked out of *The Mortal Storm* because it was "such a gloomy film."

I wonder if it comes down in the end to the eternal problem of men's taste versus women's? I know many women are annoyed at an attempt to discriminate. Few men are, which seems

to add point to the distinction. But I should say, broadly speaking, that women are not internationally minded. We read the newspapers and listen to the wireless, with an innocent personal preoccupation. Give us an editorial to read on Libya, and most of us reserve the right to let our eye stray to the advertisements or the book reviews, or to dash out in the middle to turn down the kettle. I think we feel a bit like that about our pictures too. I know I do. I can't really keep up a fine rage over a regime when I'm wondering what it is that makes the German airman's uniform look so skimpy, as if it had been cut out of father's Sunday trousers. On the other hand—have you noticed it?—almost any young extra looks his best as a storm-trooper. I think it's the boots.

I am not silly enough to insist on keeping the war out of our recreations altogether. That would be absurd and unnatural. Simply done, with grace and good humour, as it is in novels like *Cheerfulness Breaks In*, *Bewildering Cares*, and *A Footman for the Peacock*, the war-time background can be as much an escape from war-cares as the wildest form of romanticism.

But I do ask for a certain moderation from our film producers. Not quite so many swastikas. Not quite so much Gestapo. Not quite so many Narzees to end Narzees. When I go to the pictures I do like to give my mind a change of air. I don't particularly want to roar with laughter. I never was much of a one for roaring with laughter. But I like to lose myself for a couple of hours in some world that doesn't know politics from a pea-hen. Hang it all, I like pictures, and I want to enjoy them without a strain.

I like films of old times, spacious years, good talk in good company. I like films of the battles of peace-time, the battles of science, like Edison's and Pasteur's and Ehrlich's. I like films of simple homely people like *Our Town*, and of decorous decorative people, like *Pride and Prejudice*. I like a dashing, high-powered romance like *Rebecca*. I like a Western like *Stage Coach*. I like to hear Deanna Durbin sing, and I like

to watch Fred Astaire dance. I should have liked *Quiet Wedding*. I know I should have liked *Quiet Wedding*. Its very title is soothing.

I shall go and see it next week. That is one bit of fun I have already promised myself. And in the meantime, I shall go out into the street and stop the first six people I meet with the question, "Do you like your films escapist or topical?" At least, perhaps I shall. Actually, as it is now fashionable to say, I have always been a bit dubious about this form of invading the public privacy. I mean to say, how do you set about the thing? Do you come plump out with your question, without a "good morning" or an "excuse me"? Do you caution the victim that anything he says may be taken down in writing and used as evidence? Or do you work round to it gradually, insidiously, after smiling at his dog, or commenting on the weather, or asking him with diabolical subtlety: "Please can you tell me the correct time?"

FOLLOWING IT UP

A Survey Of Local Opinion

Inspired by Miss Lejeune's suggestion, two "Listener" representatives decided to go out and ask some questions about film tastes in wartime among a bunch of typical New Zealanders picked at random, including a barmaid, a soldier, a theatre usher, a housewife, a barber, two typists, and a lawyer. Here is the result of their survey, and it rather indicates that, like Miss Lejeune, most people at the moment prefer to get away from it all when they go to the movies.

FIRST port of call was an hotel bar (after all, you can always be sure of hearing opinions in a bar). The barmaid, in between serving a soldier with a bottled beer and an elderly businessman with a whisky and ginger ale, observed that she usually went to the pictures about three times a week. No, she didn't like pictures with a war flavour. She got quite enough of that

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