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Films For Minds

WE print on another page our film critic's reaction to *Major Barbara*, now about to be seen by the New Zealand public. If we add further comment here it is not so much to urge readers to be sure that they do see it, as to draw attention to the fact that the film has now broken from the circus tradition and become an intellectual stimulus. It is true that this particular film is also an intellectual irritant; and when irritation goes beyond a certain point it is not stimulating but depressing. Those who are merely annoyed by *Major Barbara* will get no more benefit from it than will those who are merely amused. But most people will be both annoyed and amused and given furiously to think.

And that, if it is not a new experience with a film, is rare enough to call for comment. It means that the film is beginning to be what the stage has been for three hundred years—an expression and a criticism of life. Shaw himself calls *Major Barbara* a parable; and it is a near enough definition of a parable to call it a story with a moral. To go further and say what the moral is—if we could agree that there is one only—would not be so easy, but that would be doing something that readers should do for themselves. For Shaw, of course, is almost the most provocative thinker, talker, and entertainer in England, and when, as in this film, he has Sybil Thorn-dike, Marie Lohr, Robert Morley, and Wendy Hiller to talk through, his extravagances are overwhelming. To attempt to say in a sentence or two what he says in approximately two hours would be both impertinent and absurd.

Our excuse for saying anything at all is the fact that all this stimulation, provocation, and entertainment is now provided by a medium that most serious people have hitherto treated with some disdain. The number of films in English capable of influencing stable minds has been so small that it is not worth while trying to recall them. But with *Major Barbara* added to *Pygmalion* it is possible to say that the film is putting away childish things and beginning to mean something to the human mind.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

Letters sent to "The Listener" for publication should be as brief as possible, and should deal with topics covered in "The Listener" itself. Correspondents must send in their names and addresses even when it is their wish that these should not be published. We cannot undertake to give reasons why all or any portion of a letter is rejected.

"COCKTAILS BEFORE TEA"

Sir,—In a recent issue of *The Listener* there appeared an article entitled "Cocktails before Tea" from the pen of "A member of the Forces," which calls for some comment. In the first place, it is surprising that in these times of national effort you should permit the publication of an article obviously intended to belittle the efforts of the Home Guard to do their part for the defence of the country. After the first three quite incomprehensible paragraphs, the author proceeded to describe the afternoon's work of a Home Guard unit. His gibe that behind the company "two youths of the district lounged against a post smoking" is unworthy, for the "two youths" happened to be in the near seventies, and



SERGEANT-PILOT A. J. WARD, V.C.: A special photograph sent to "The Listener" by his parents, Mr. and Mrs. P. Ward, of Wanganui. Sergeant Ward is the first New Zealand V.C. of the present war

although a bit shaky, both are game to fill a gap if need be. The only other person present outside the ranks was a stranger whom Kipling would possibly have described as "sort of a bloomin' parumprodit soldier and civvy too," dressed as he was half in His Majesty's uniform and half in civilian clothes.

There is one other point. The article states that "none" of the Home Guard "had ever seen anything more mechanised than a plough behind a tractor." Should the author ever pay us another visit—we extend a hearty invitation—the Returned Soldier members will be pleased to dispel his ignorance.

—HOBNAILS AND SHOTGUNS (Scargill).

Sir,—The article "Cocktails Before Tea" which appears in your issue of July 25 is misleading and mischievous.

What military experience your contributor has had I do not know. My own experience includes two and a half years overseas during the Great War. During the latter days of my service in France I carried out the duties of a platoon sergeant with reasonable efficiency. I am a member of the Scargill Home Guard and I am proud of my unit. I serve in the ranks and I am not ashamed of my comrades.

Our O.C. to whom your contributor refers as "Lieutenant the Grocer" served overseas in the Great War, was awarded the M.M., and attained the rank of first-class warrant officer while still in his early twenties. The officer who lectured on tank-hunting served in France as an officer during the Great War. To any intelligent person his lecture was both interesting and instructive. Your contributor shows his own ignorance of the subject when he accuses our officer of misnaming the ammunition demonstrated. Some weeks ago we were honoured by a visit from two qualified instructors from Burnham. After putting us through our company drill these gentlemen complimented us on our showing. Afterwards when visiting another unit, they spoke in praise of the Scargill Home Guard.

Your contributor's reference to our ignorance of anything more mechanised than a tractor and plough is insulting. Some of us had the privilege of a close-up view of the first tanks that ever went into action nearly twenty-five years ago. —6/4320 (Scargill).

These letters have been referred to the writer of the article, who makes the following reply:

I am honestly sorry if any Home Guardsman thought he was "belittled" by that article of mine you printed on July 25. I can only conclude that the persons who wished to protest against it were too personally sensitive about the general deficiencies I listed so accurately.

If they will be good enough to read it again, I hope they will notice that I began, after the first three "quite incomprehensible paragraphs," by reporting the actual facts about the difficulties under which the Home Guard has been called up to work; no uniforms, no arms, no expenses, no training equipment.

I then described how well they managed without outside support, and tried to indicate by mentioning the local storekeeper, the women of the district, and the storekeeper's lorry, how everyone in the district seemed to be rallying round to make the best of the opportunities available.

And I concluded with no fewer than 75 words which stated as plainly as I could make them that it was "astonishing" that "so many men could do so much with so little; so often yet with so little practical support."

I even reported the fact that the Home Guard in the district of which I wrote gets better support than the now defunct football club.

I hope the first correspondent is now clear that it was not my intention to belittle his unit, but to praise it; and that any small belittling I tried to do was at the expense of a Nation which permitted the citizens to offer themselves for such poor recognition.

It now seems that this disgraceful position is to be corrected. If there remains, after the reorganisation, anything in the Home Guard which seems to deserve criticism, I hope that I shall be able to make it without self-conscious victims of inefficiency taking my words to themselves in this regrettable fashion.

A point of accuracy arises from your correspondent's unreasonable attempt to belittle someone who was trying to do him the favour of bringing his grievances before a sadly unenlightened public.

The "two youths" were not standing behind the company, as "Hobnails and Shotguns" claimed. They were in front of the company, and just behind the company commander and his officers. They were leaning against a tennis net post, on the southern sideline of the southernmost tennis court, and they were smoking. I noticed the older men, and their presence added to the admiration I had, and expressed, for the excellent attendance.

As for the "parumprodit soldier," he was dressed entirely in his own personal property.

I regret that I overlooked the fact that returned soldiers would have seen tanks.

The letter from 6/4320 contains a misrepresentation of the statements in my article. This correspondent implies that I attacked a Home Guard lecturer because, for interest's sake, I stated that the Molotov Cocktail, so-called, was inaccurately named by everybody in the British Empire. Similarly, he implies that I adversely criticised a commanding officer because he happened to be a grocer. If there has been any derogation, it has come from these correspondents, who suggest that it was improper for me to tell a truth which, to anyone less snobbishly sensitive, would be accepted as praise of an officer who applied all his spare time and many of his personal resources to the betterment of his unit. The parade drill was nothing but proof that the Home Guard should not try to develop toy soldiers. So who cares if two Burnham instructors did use flattery to purchase immunity from attack by this so belligerent district?

—THE AUTHOR OF THE ARTICLE.

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

"MATER ANXIA" (Stratford): Passed on to the Health Department.

"THINKER": Complaint passed on to authorities.

CORRECTION.

By a typographical error in our issue of August 1, p. 15, D. O. W. Hall is made to say in a review of "New Zealand Notables" that Johnny Jones was "kind to persons." This should have read "kind to parsons."