

Brutality On The Screen

THREE LETTERS ABOUT FILMS

To The Editor,

Sir,—I can see from two letters in your issue of August 13 that there is going to be a battle royal right away over your film critic "G.M.," and I am hastening to get in a few preliminary shots.

In my opinion, "G.M." is the *only* film critic in this country. A film critic, I should say, is a person who criticises films, and "G.M." does just that. Can George Bell point to anybody else who even attempts to give criticism that is not tied up with newspaper advertising? Only in an independent paper can truth about films be given, and the strong meat "G.M." dishes up is certainly to my taste. His remarks are always penetrating and thoughtful; he does not limit himself to straight criticism, but discusses reasonably the social implication of a film; and he is obviously interested in raising the standard of screen plays in plot and technique.

Does it never occur to George Bell and others who dislike "G.M.'s" comments that all the films which are now regarded as landmarks in the industry were given high awards in *The Listener*? I need only mention titles like *Citizen Kane*, *Tortilla Flat*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Moontide*, and *Fantasia*, to make my point.

As for the palpably absurd statement by George Bell that "a good picture is one that pleases the public," does he suggest that a film such as *A Yank at*

Eton, which was bad in every way, should be given immortality because it ran several weeks in Wellington? Or that *Tobacco Road* was not a good film because it remained unappreciated by Wellington audiences during its run of one week? The obvious answer to Mr. Bell's remark is that the public is not any sort of judge of anything artistic, and this is especially true with movies. Any tripey film that can stagger through a few thousand feet is now sure of a lengthy run in this country largely because of a film shortage, but also because the discrimination of film-goers has almost disappeared. In short, we go to be amused, not to think. And so the public needs intelligent critics to interpret films for it.

DENNIS HARTLEY (Wellington).

Sir,—May I place myself on "G.M.'s" side, and say that I was shocked to read George Bell's letter about his enjoying scenes of slaughter on the screen. I had hoped that we New Zealanders were preserving our sense of balance better than that.

There is no use getting sentimental over our enemies—this war is a tragic mistake, but the Nazi doctrines must be eliminated. This doesn't alter the fact that the Germans are still human beings. Unless we can preserve our balance and keep the hope alive that one day we may all believe in the brotherhood of man, then this tragedy of war will go on repeating itself.

I should like to know if our returned soldiers rejoice in this kind of film. I rather think they would deplore it. Too often have they participated in scenes when the slaughter was being inflicted on them. And we would not like to think of German audiences cheering at the agony of our boys.

SOLDIER'S WIFE (Carterton).

Sir,—I have often intended to write in commendation of "G.M.'s" brilliant film reviews, but it has taken George Bell's childish attack to rally me to "G.M.'s" defence. I have always agreed with "G.M." on major issues such as *49th Parallel* and *Mrs. Miniver*, but even when I have disagreed, I have found his criticisms stimulating and rational. The thought of an adult breaking into enthusiastic whoops at scenes of human destruction strikes me as pathetic. One expects children at a matinee to express their approbation of the "goodies" triumph over the "bad-dies" by shouts and laughs, but when an adult audience commences such an infantile demonstration, it raises serious doubts in my mind as to the intellectual plane of the mirthful onlookers. No man who has gone through war and seen his pals blasted to death, is likely to be amused at spectacles of bloody massacre. How would a member of the audience who had lost someone in the present conflict feel when he heard some moron breaking in with peals of laughter at such scenes? If George Bell cannot restrain his enthusiasm, it would be better for the feelings of other members of the audience if he reserved his bellicose demonstrations for a football game.

LLOYD BROWN (Balmoral).

[We have received letters in support of "G.M." from Joan J. Kay (Dunedin), Joan M. Drury (Wellington), and others.—Ed.]

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