

# Ye Olde New Zealand

## THE SEEKERS

(Rank-Fanfare)

JUST six years ago, when we were still reeling under the impact of Hollywood's *Green Dolphin Street*, I consoled myself with the reflection that one of the minor compensations for being involved in a spectacular (but not fatal) accident was the simple pleasure of reading about it in the newspapers and swapping experiences with others likewise involved. At that level, Miss Goudge's epic (which presented Lana Turner as one of our pioneer settlers and the inventor of sheepfarming) was a howling success—for seeing ourselves as others see us is not invariably the chastening experience moralists would like to believe.

*The Seekers* (which is also a tale of Olde New Zealand) will, I imagine, attract the New Zealand filmgoer for somewhat similar reasons—but I doubt if it will provide any of us with quite so much innocent fun. It is, in fact, neither good enough nor bad enough to make a strong impression. It has its quota of howlers, its inaccuracies and anachronisms, but (with the possible exception of Miss Laya Raki) they are neither so obtrusive nor so comically ludicrous as Hollywood's. There is, in

### BAROMETER

OVERCAST: "The Seekers."  
MAINLY FAIR: "Rob Roy, the Highland Rogue."  
MAINLY FAIR: "The War of the Worlds."

short, no spectacular crash this time; only the sensation of a gradual let-down.

And who let down whom? Ultimately, of course, the responsibility rests on the producer (George H. Brown). I should not have thought it impossible to produce a film good enough as historical drama to enjoy a *succes d'estime*, yet simple enough in its fictional terms to achieve a box-office success also—both here and elsewhere—but so far as these two objectives can be detected in *The Seekers* they appear to be mutually exclusive. The director (Ken Annakin) seems to have fallen between the same two stools as the producer. His foregrounds are always just a little too full of local colour—geysers or boiling mud, Maori artifacts or tattooed faces; his backgrounds range from splendid natural panoramas to stiffly obvious studio sets. And in between foreground and background nothing profound or moving ever happens. For the story is a weak and thin affair, a half-hearted attempt to apply to the New Zealand of 1820

or thereabouts the hackneyed situations of the Hollywood frontier thriller—and even some of the dialogue: "New Zealand is a wide place; a man has room to breathe there," says Jack Hawkins, turning his back on the Old Country.

Even the cast appeared to be ill at ease. Hawkins seemed thoroughly uncomfortable as an errant husband (that was intended, of course, but I'm sure his discomfort wasn't all simulated). Glynis Johns was completely miscast—it takes all kinds to make a new world, but anyone less like a pioneer's wife would be hard to imagine; and Inia Te Wiata's acting, even his movements, suggested grand opera more than anything else. The only member of the cast who seemed untroubled by inner misgivings was Laya Raki. This young woman is almost a stock situation in herself. With her glossy black hair and well-upholstered figure I can easily imagine her as an archetype of Primitive Woman—the Nubile Savage. She could be Ayesha, or Kapiolani, or Pocahontas—and if Mr. de Mille gets her in his sights she probably will be.

### KOTOKU

(National Film Unit)

THE Film Unit has produced many splendid short features but none (with the possible exception of *Notornis Country*) that gave me more pleasure to watch than this one—now showing with *The Seekers*. If you are (like me) interested in forest, mountain and wild life you will find this film record of the white herons of Okarito superb enter-

tainment. The camera has caught the adult birds in flight and at rest, fishing in the swamps and lagoons, and feeding their nestlings. This is obviously a film made by men who brought patience and enthusiasm as well as skill to their task. You may find it reminding you of the bayou sequences in *Louisiana Story*. That should be guarantee enough of its quality.

## ROB ROY, THE HIGHLAND ROGUE

(Disney-RKO)

IF New Zealanders are likely to be disconcerted by Pinewood's version of early New Zealand, Caledonians (who take themselves even more seriously) will be downright affronted by Mr. Disney's treatment of one of the legendary heroes of the Highlands. The Rob Roy of the film (played by Richard Todd, a shilpit wee cateran in a ginger whisker) is no more than a comic-book caricature of the wild MacGregor Scott wrote about. Indeed, there is no connection whatever (save a remote point of origin) between the Waverley novel and Mr. Disney's opus. If you will examine the title of the film again you will observe that it is concerned with Rob Roy *the Highland Rogue*—and if you find a roguish quality in the picture you can't complain that you haven't been warned. There is much discomfiting of Sassenachs—mainly the mercenaries of the Duke of Montrose; there is pleasant Technicolor, and some fine scenery shot in the Trossachs (but nary

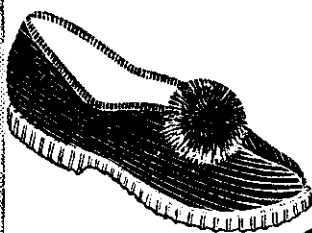
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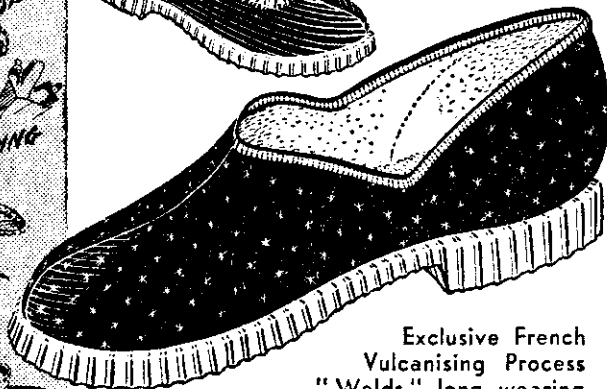
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