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FILM REVIEWS, BY JNO.

Highland Fun and Games

LAXDALE HALL

(Group 3-A.B.F.D.)

I NEVER taught my grandmother to suck eggs (I'm sure the dear old soul would have been quite taken aback if I had even broached the subject), and I have usually felt similarly diffident about telling film exhibitors how to run their affairs. But that has not prevented me feeling exasperated at the way in which some worthwhile films are allowed to drift around from one minor movie-house to another when a little elementary promotion would ensure them a profitable run on Main Street.

It's no time since I was making this complaint about *Fanfan the Tulip* (Listener, March 23). Now I have to make it again about *Laxdale Hall*, which had a record run at an Auckland suburban house near the end of last year and is now getting the suburban treatment in Wellington. If it should come to your neighbourhood cinema, and if you are not averse to a little Highland fun and games, don't let an unpromising title put you off. I would even suggest that, other things being unequal (as they not infrequently are for filmgoers) it is worth a trip across the frontier into a neighbouring suburb.

Laxdale Hall, which was adapted from Eric Linklater's novel by Alfred Shaughnessy and John Eldridge (and directed by Eldridge), is admittedly not quite in the same class as *Whisky Galore* or *The Maggie*, but there is enough resemblance to reinforce its own fun with other hilarious recollections. *Laxdale* is a small clachan on the sea coast of the Western Highlands, where everyone lives

BAROMETER

FAIR: "Laxdale Hall."

FAIR: "Footsteps in the Fog."

OVERCAST: "What Every Woman Wants."

the simple life very happily and no one except the district midwife works unduly hard. But though easy-going, the inhabitants are not to be put upon, and when the five local motorists refuse to pay their Road Fund licences (on the score that they haven't a road worth the name to drive on), it causes a mild flutter in Whitehall. A Parliamentary delegation with Raymond Huntley as its self-satisfied leader, is sent to deal with this outbreak of anarchy, and it is the far from quiet weekend of their stay in Laxdale that forms the subject of the film. The unfortunate Mr. Pettigrew, M.P., hasn't a chance against the simple Highlanders. He gets drenched to the skin at an alfresco performance of *Macbeth*, put on for his benefit in the middle of a typically Highland rain-storm, he is made the target of a fire-and-brimstone sermon, and in the end, irretrievably compromises himself by getting arrested in the company of a band of salmon-poachers from Glasgow. *Laxdale Hall* is, in short, good clean fun. Even if the background hadn't looked authentic, the quality of the weather would suggest that it was filmed in the highlands. In general, too, the accents are good, the players (notably Raymond Huntley and Ronald Squire) are at the top of their form, and when allowance is made for the mild carica-

(continued on next page)

BELOW THE SIERRA

*THE brown tower broken on the cliff.
The shining black hoof of the goat.
The hillside terraced with random stone
Where hoarded water feeds the olive.
A shepherd in a ragged coat
On the harsh skyline stands alone.*

*An old church and two crooked streets,
A guesthouse solid as a farm,
A whitewashed room floored with blue tile,
Red blankets and coarse sundried sheets
And the cool darkness lying calm
Outside the window, mile on mile.*

*The tattered piper stands and blows
A kind of fanfare or salute
Upon his pipe of polished cane;
Then, changing key, the music flows
Like water from that pastoral flute
Through sleepy valleys of the brain.*

*Above the shadow of the hills
Iberian stars are mildly bright,
The new moon lifts out of a cloud,
And the long hollow valley fills
With milk of phosphorescent light
And the piper's music sweet and loud.*

*The agile melancholy tune
Winds and unwinds its varying stream
Inside and outside of the mind.
The sense dissolves. Somewhere the moon
Is slowly sinking in a dream
Where travellers set out to find*

*Some antique scene of living rock,
Of horsemen tall on the hillside,
Of armoured ghosts upon the march
And gods in trees. The minstrel cock
Strikes up; galactic darkness rides
Under the sky's triumphal arch.*

—M. K. Joseph