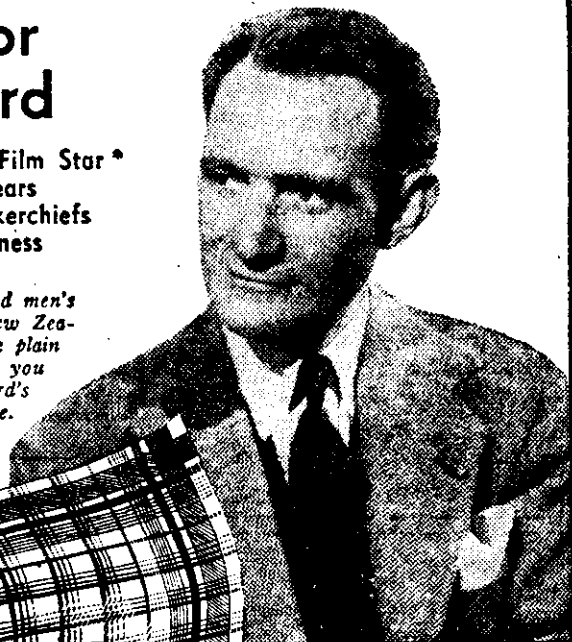


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The Films, by Jno.

Poor Unfortunate Lovers!

SARABAND

(Rank-Ealing)

THE cinema, which can be all things to all men—which can find stones in the running brooks, sermons in books, and grist in everything—and which last week presented us with its version of Bonny Prince Charlie and the Forty-Five, turns in *Saraband* to the somewhat murky Konigsmark episode as if in an attempt to show that even the House of Hanover had its romantic interlude.

In spite of Technicolor, it is not, I feel bound to record, an altogether successful experiment. In fact, if one may relapse into a colloquialism, it is neither fish, flesh, fowl, nor good red herring. The one-and-sixpennies, out for action and romance (both of them as violent as possible), will be irked by the sluggish pace of the story and bewildered by the convolutions of court intrigue. The cognoscenti will be irritated by, on the one hand, the film's fidelity to the record in small and superficial things (the Hanover Fair sequence, for example, and the expedition to the Morea); on the other by the over-sentimental picture it paints of Konigsmark and Sophie Dorothea.

Those of us who sit in the middle rows, and who are not greatly concerned with *romance* on the one hand or documentary fidelity on the other so long as the dramatic potentialities of a given situation are adequately realised, will be disappointed by the fumbling direction, the general weakness of characterisation, and the prosy and lack-lustre dialogue. In the dull Teutonic atmosphere of the court of Hanover the affair of Sophie and Konigsmark is as effectively embalmed as a tinsel charm in a suet pudding.

Of course, you can't make a silk purse out of a suet pudding, but all the same, I wondered once or twice what Hollywood would have made of it, and how it would have seized the situation. Not, I would wager, with the little finger fastidiously retracted. There would have been lustier lads and bustier lasses; the treatment would have been louder, more vulgar, and probably comic into the bargain—it might have contained a hundred howling errors, but at least it would not have suffered from the negative virtues.

As it is, a vague unease seems to pervade the whole show. The principal players seem unsure of themselves. Joan Greenwood (for whom I have a somewhat uncritical partiality) is sad and sweet to the point of insipidity. Mai Zetterling was originally cast for the part of Sophie, I understand, but her defection can scarcely have had the effect that Will Fyffe's death is said to have had on the Jacobites. There would have been more fire and action in the story if Sophie had been drawn as a Wicked Lady (and nearly as much true to history), but the character of Konigsmark should have been redrawn, too—and recast as well. Stewart Granger never once looked capable of playing

BAROMETER

OVERCAST: "Saraband."

the "scamp of a lover," as Thackeray described him, even if the script had allowed it.

One or two of the supporting players (notably Peter Bull in the part of George-Louis, which fitted him like his own skin) might have done well had they had more scope, but most of the minor crises fizzed out like dud grenades. On the other hand, the climax—the assassination of Konigsmark—was deftly done and well photographed; and probably as close to the historical truth as one could get. But it could scarcely make up for the uncertainty of the rest.

The underlying cause of that uncertainty may be found in the shooting technique used. Set-up sketches were drawn for every shot in the script, and while this no doubt saved the studio a good deal of money, I rather fancy that it stilled the cameras and interrupted the rhythm of the action.

NOTORNIS EXPEDITION

(National Film Unit)

EASILY the most interesting—and entertaining—piece of film I saw last week was *Notornis Expedition*, a ten-minute reel shot recently by D. L. Oakley, a National Film Unit cameraman, in the Takahe Valley, west of Te Anau. As a brief black-and-white record of these birds in their natural habitat, I doubt if this film could be improved upon, and it is not difficult to foresee a keen and continuing demand for prints from scientific and educational bodies in this country and overseas. One or two good panoramic shots at the opening of the reel underline the inaccessibility of the sanctuary (almost as effectively isolated as Conan Doyle's Lost World), and there are plenty of long-shots and close-ups of the birds themselves. One particularly careful piece of photography shows a hen bird, first sitting on the nest, then strutting characteristically through the snowgrass tussocks, and finally returning to the nest again. Her two eggs are photographed, other birds are seen sauntering or hurrying about the little valley, and there is an amusing glimpse of one splashing and flapping his way across a small brook. For good measure the film also shows the limestone scarp under which traces of an ancient Maori hunters' camp were discovered, and the relics—among them a pair of flax sandals—uncovered there.

Yet while I was conscious of the uniqueness of the film, and impressed by its technical quality, the general impression it left with me was of something a good deal warmer than that. It should, I think, have been subtitled "The Happy Scientist," for in a long time I have not seen anyone look so pleased with life as Dr. Falla. All that seemed lacking were a sod hut, nine bean rows and a hive for the honey bee.

"NOTORNIS Expedition" was the last of the Weekly Review features made by the National Film Unit before it started work on the Empire Games assignment. The extensive film coverage planned for the Games will tax all the Unit's resources and the Weekly Review, after an unbroken run of 437 issues, will not be screened again for six weeks.