

# LARK ASCENDING

## THE MUDLARK

(20th Century-Fox)

THERE is a nicely-emphasised fairy-tale quality in this film about a slum child who makes his way into Windsor Castle to see the Queen and innocently sets off important changes in the national affairs of old England. From its opening sequence showing the waif grovelling around in the Thames mud this picture-book atmosphere is kept up till the end. Disraeli's parliamentary oratory or his intimate discussions with the Queen convey it as much as the rich settings of the castle interior or the splendid footmen and officers of the guard. The director, Jean Negulesco, has made the most of the ragged child's wonder when he first stumbles down an ornate corridor lined with the busts of former kings. And this is amusingly contrasted with the urchin-like insouciance with which he later wanders from room to room spitting plum-



ANDREW RAY  
Urchin-like Insouciance

stones on to the royal carpet. He finally falls asleep behind the drapes in the royal dining chamber, where his snores interrupt the Queen's after-dinner anecdote.

His capture, interrogation by the police (the newspapers play up the story as an attempt on the Queen's life by a midget) and incarceration in the Tower of London are also done with humour. Smaller comic touches are provided by the Irish footman who boasts of how easily he could burn down the castle, and the frustrated attempts of a saucy maid-in-waiting to elope with an officer of the guard. The child is released at the request of Disraeli himself, who makes of the affair a *cause célèbre* to help him push through his bill for slum clearance and Poor Law reforms. Disraeli's speech in the House of Commons was a dramatic set piece to which Alec Guinness did justice, although I thought his general interpretation of the Prime Minister's personality a shade less flamboyant than the part required. It was interesting to compare his playing with that of George Arliss and John Gielgud in earlier screen interpretations, and my reaction was that he didn't give Disraeli the stature which they did.

Finlay Currie turns in a good performance as John Brown, the outspoken old Highland gillie who acts as the Queen's personal servant, and wanders about the castle with the lordly air of a grand seigneur (and in a state of semi-intoxication) in defiance of the regular servants. Andrew Ray plays the part of the orphan boy in a charming precocious sort of way. Irene Dunne made the mourning Queen Victoria seem a plain, pudding-faced, rather sentimental woman, not very intelligent, but with a certain pleasant shrewdness and sense of humour.

The delicate fiction of the film—that the little boy's adoration of Victoria persuades her to come out of the 15 years' retirement that followed Prince Albert's death—was on the whole well handled. Nevertheless, I thought the historical

BAROMETER  
FAIR: "The Mudlark."  
MAINLY FAIR: "Bitter Springs."

tone of *The Mudlark* completely phoney, and its sentiment as sweet and sugary as a chocolate marshmallow. There was no deep sympathy for the poor generated in those cleverly photographed opening scenes, nor was there much feeling for the dignity and responsibility of those who ruled an empire. Once it is realised that the story and players give no more than a caricature of history, it is worth saying that the film is enjoyable and often quite moving, especially in the sequence where the boy finally sees the Queen and by his appeal to her maternal instincts causes that astonishing volte-face in regal policy.

## BITTER SPRINGS

(Ealing Studios)

THERE is a good deal of virtue in this story of pioneer sheepfarmers in South Australia and their conflicts with a tough natural environment and hostile aborigines. *Bitter Springs* is the third film starring Chips Rafferty to be made in Australia for the J. Arthur Rank organisation. It is better than *Eureka Stockade*, but not as good as *The Overlanders*. Both of the previous films were made by Harry Watt. *Bitter Springs* was directed by Ralph Smart, who also wrote the story on which it is based. He has a better feeling for landscape than Harry Watt, and there are some good shots of the vast southern plains. But his handling of his human material is often quite crude. The best sequences involved wild life—a boy trying to catch a baby kangaroo, and a ritual kangaroo-hunt by aborigines armed with spears. The plot is routine stuff—trek across the plains during which the stock nearly perish from lack of water, arrival at the valley where a home is built, and the battle with the natives, who burn down the house but eventually become reconciled to the white man's invasion. Besides Chips Rafferty, there are Tommy Trinder and Gordon Jackson (the schoolteacher in *Whisky Galore*), and Noni Piper and Jean Blue supply the feminine interest.

## A Choral Tribute to London

A CONCERT rich in music seldom performed here will be contributed to the Auckland Music Festival at 8.0 p.m. on Tuesday, June 12, by the Dorian Singers, conducted by Harry Luscombe and with an orchestra led by Vincent Aspy. It will be broadcast from 1YC. The choir will give Auckland's first complete performance with orchestral accompaniment of Sir Hubert Parry's *Ode on the Nativity*, and of *In Honour of the City*, a fantasia by Sir George Dyson. In both cases the words are by the Fifteenth Century Scottish poet William Dunbar. This ode, says Mr. Luscombe, has all the characteristics of the composer's style—climax piled upon climax and a sublime grandeur which is thrilling for both performer and listener. The soloist will be Sybil Philipps (soprano).

"London, the Flower of Cities All," is the subject of the fantasia. It was chosen, Mr. Luscombe told *The Listener*, as an appropriate musical tribute to Britain in her festival year. Sir George

Dyson is now Director of the Royal College of Music, London, and this work was first performed in 1928.

Another modern work will be performed in New Zealand for the first time, so far as is known, when the choir sings a suite of three traditional old English songs set to the music of F. W. Wadely. Slighter in character than the two major works they are nevertheless effectively and very beautifully written.

Other items by the choir will include part songs by Sir Charles Stanford, Ernest Moeran and the contemporary English composer Gordon Jacob. Their opening item will be *Alleluia*, by Randall Thompson, who is an influential force in present-day American music. This composition is a skilful study in gradations and provides excellent opportunities for a demonstration of expressive choral singing.

As associate artist on the same programme Barbara Holm, a talented young Wellington pianist, will make her first public appearance in Auckland, where



Sparrow Pictures  
HARRY LUSCOMBE

she is now undertaking post-graduate study. She will present works by Bach, Beethoven, Rowley, Granados and Dohnanyi.

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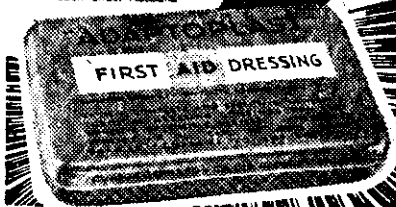
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