

Fun Among the Ruins

CASTLE IN THE AIR

(Associated British)

THE impoverished state of the British aristocracy these days is the subject of some merry spoofing in this English comedy, based on a play by Alan Melville. The story concerns the ingenious endeavours of the handsome but penniless young Earl of Locharne to sell his ancestral home to an American millionairess, and at the same time save it from being requisitioned by an officer of the Coal Board, who wants to turn it into a hostel for miners.

Locharne Castle, situated a few miles from Aberdeen, is an old pile with an overgrown moat and walls that are held together only by the ivy. The Earl (played by David Tomlinson) tries to maintain it (and himself) by taking in boarders. He also shows parties of tourists around the rooms with their family portraits, suits of armour, and, in one of them, an attractive ghost named Ermytrude (Patricia Dainton) who appears at moments of crisis to frighten away unwelcome visitors or open the doors for late-arriving guests. Among the visitors are the millionairess (Barbara Kelly), an attractive but financially shrewd blonde, and the agent of the Coal Board, a socialist civil servant (Brian Oulton) who believes that all aristocrats are decadent as well as poor. Among the "guests," as the Earl's lodgers are euphemistically called, are an elderly lady who hasn't spoken a word since her parrot died, and a matronly historian (Margaret Rutherford) who is determined to prove that the Earl is "the rightful king of Scotland" from a study of his genealogical tree.

The somewhat hilarious goings-on which the imperturbable Earl instigates within the castle walls are maintained at a fast pace throughout the picture. A grouse shoot on the moors, an afternoon of salmon poaching, a high-spirited meeting of the Jacobite society, and an amusing dinner in the banquet hall with a killed servant playing bagpipes on the balcony are some of the incidents introduced to keep the comedy from flagging. In the end the Earl succeeds in thwarting the Coal Board official and persuades the millionairess to sign a cheque for a quarter of a million dollars. He is then free to propose marriage to his pretty house manageress (Helen Cherry) and buy a couple of tickets for Cuba, where he will presumably live among the flesh-pots and forget he ever owned a castle.

There is a rather heartless flavour about this comedy, and the portrait of the socialist civil servant is savagely satirical. But all the players act their parts with faultless aplomb, and the contrivances of the plot are neatly concealed by the film's director, Henry Cass.

THE CRIMSON PIRATE

(Warner Brothers)

BURT LANCASTER and his band of cut-throats take us for a ride in "a pirate ship in pirate waters in a pirate world" in this partly comic, partly melodramatic film about life in the Mediterranean Sea during the 18th Century. The story tells how the pirate chief rescues a democratic rebel named El Libre (played by Frederick Leister) from

BAROMETER

FAIR: "Castle in the Air."
MAINLY FAIR: "The Crimson Pirate."
OVERCAST: "My Son John."

the Spanish overlords who have imprisoned him in a fortress. In the process he captures a man-of-war by getting his entire crew to feign dead from scurvy, and gets involved in some acrobatic high-jinks ashore in his attempts to escape from the King of Spain's soldiers. He also falls in love with El Libre's daughter (Eva Bartok) and by the end of the film has decided to renounce his pirate ways and to instigate a rebellion in the name of democracy.

The Crimson Pirate was directed by Robert Siodmak, who builds up the action in long sweeping sequences and gives Burt Lancaster, who used once to be a circus acrobat, a chance to show off his unusual talents with hardly a faked shot. Besides the realism of its action the film has in its favour some pleasant Technicolor photography, by Otto Heller, and the use of authentic shore settings. The cobbled villages, old stone forts, and balconied stone houses of Southern Italy, where the film was largely made, make a convincing background.

Part of this film's intention is to mock the torrid pirate romances that Hollywood usually produces. Towards the end history is turned topsy-turvy by the introduction of home-made machine guns, tanks, high-explosives, a balloon and a submarine. It's lots of fun for the younger members of the audience, but that's about all.

MY SON JOHN

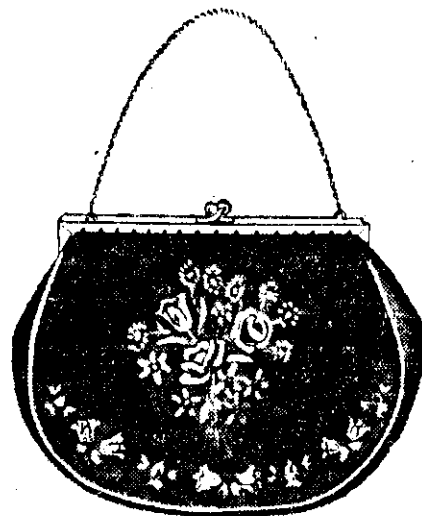
(Paramount)

THE return to the screen of Helen Hayes in such a weak vehicle as this is not an occasion to be greeted with loud cheers. She still shows moments of the assurance and personality that made her a great actress many years ago, but she gets very little help either from her script or her supporting players. The story deals with the problem of a mother in a good American family of Catholics who finds that her favourite son is mixed up with Communists in the State Department, and who has to decide where her greatest loyalty lies. The late Robert Walker is the son, Van Heflin the pursuing F.B.I. agent, and Dean Jagger the bewildered husband.

National Film Unit

THE National Film Unit's "Pictorial Parade No. 10," released during August, contains three items. "Water over the Dams" shows Lake Taupo filled to the brim by the recent torrential rains, and an enormous volume of water pouring over the Huka Falls and streaming down the spillways and dams of the power stations along the Waikato. "Electronic Highwayman" gives a close view of a highly efficient speed detector evolved by the D.S.I.R. to help in reducing dangers on the roads. "A Home by the Shore" is a short feature about the Wilson Home for Crippled Children, set in picturesque grounds on the Auckland Harbour where the children enjoy outdoor school, sea bathing and numerous remedial exercises and games.

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