

UNREAL DISASTER

TITANIC

(20th Century-Fox)

THE sinking of the luxury liner R.M.S. Titanic on its maiden voyage from Southampton to New York in 1912, with the loss of 1513 lives, was one of the greatest modern disasters of the sea. This film version handles the affair with the strictest attention to the historical facts, but it is concerned less with trying to dramatise the tragedy than with using it as a background to a slick story about the marital problems of two of the passengers—a wealthy dandy played with his usual waspish certainty by Clifton Webb, and his self-pitying wife (Barbara Stanwyck). Among the other passengers involved are a drunken, unfrocked priest returning home in disgrace from Rome, portrayed by Richard Basehart, a rich widow (Thelma Ritter), the dandy's daughter (Audrey Dalton), and her boy friend (Robert Wagner). The role of the Titanic's bearded captain is taken by Brian Aherne.

The dramatic opening shot of *Titanic*, showing an iceberg breaking off the end of a glacier with a terrifying rumble, suggests that the film will contain some good photography of Atlantic storms and the struggle of men against the sea. But nothing like this develops. The best sequence, showing the actual sinking after the liner strikes an iceberg in the middle of a calm, cold night, with the sea like a mill-pond, is well contrived. The camera cuts from shots of the passengers making their way to the lifeboats to the scene on the bridge where the captain realises there aren't enough lifeboats to go round, to the coal-blackened stokers shovelling to the end in a vast stokehold. Yet despite all the skill of the director, Jean Negulesco, there is something unreal and artificial about even this key sequence.

One of the main criticisms to be made of *Titanic* is that the action drags along at a snail-like speed. This may have been done deliberately to suggest the spacious, leisurely life on board of the Astors and Guggenheims and other

BAROMETER

MAINLY FAIR: *"Titanic."*
OVERCAST: *"The Green Glove."*

diamond-studded aristocrats of the First Class, where the story is concentrated. But the real story of the Titanic is scarcely dealt with. A few scenes are cut in of the chart-room, where iceberg reports received earlier in the voyage are plotted, or of the captain being suavely reminded by an agent of the company at Cherbourg that the ship is expected to make a record run on its maiden voyage. But the true salt of the drama is glossed over by the producer and script-writer, Charles Brackett, in favour of an empty domestic squabble which would have looked just as pointless on dry land.

The authenticity of the atmosphere of a British Atlantic liner is strictly maintained down to the last accent of the cabin stewards. A former captain of the Queen Elizabeth is said to have been employed by the film's makers for exactly that purpose. But the four-funnelled model which is used to represent the Titanic, in long shot, as she ploughs her way through a glassy ocean, is very clearly nothing but a model.

THE GREEN GLOVE

(United Artists)

THE theft of a jewel-studded gauntlet from the altar of a church in the south of France is the reason for this melodramatic chase, with Glenn Ford, a former American paratrooper, as the pursued, and George Macready, a greedy art-dealer, the pursuer. Also on hand are Sir Cedric Hardwicke as the village priest, and Geraldine Brooks as an American girl who becomes accidentally involved in the affair. Because of the flashback technique used there is a good deal of confusion throughout the film as to what is really going on. When the gauntlet is miraculously restored to its proper place by a modest Glenn Ford, who fades promptly from the scene so that the priest and villagers can't overwhelm him with their gratitude, we are left wondering whether all the mystery was worth concocting in the first place.

National Film Unit

PICTORIAL PARADE No.

11, released this month, features a visit to Christchurch International Airport to see the Australian-built Canberra jets which recently made their first visit to New Zealand on a trial for the London to Christchurch Air Race on October 8. There are also shots of the Indian Trade Commissioner presenting the elephant Bhavani to the children of New Zealand on behalf of the All-India Women's Conference, in recognition of the children's work in collecting money for Corso supplies to India. The third section of the film, "Untried Rapids," shows the New Zealand Canoeing Association pioneering the Middle Waikato near Orakei Korako, where only one rubber dinghy comes unscathed through the Whakaheke Rapids.



CLIFTON WEBB

On a flat sea, an empty squabble

N.Z. LISTENER, SEPTEMBER 18, 1953.

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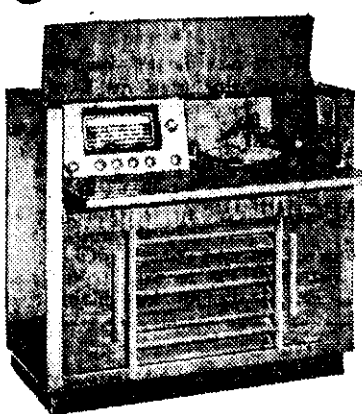
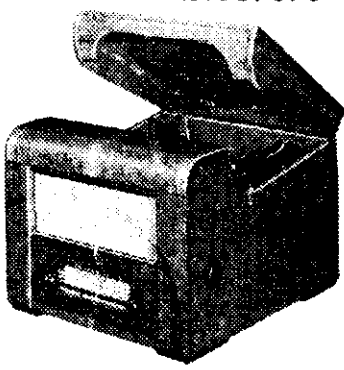


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