

TALKING OF TALKIES.

England Loses A Brilliant Actor

Robert Donat, Who Played Small Part in "Henry the Eighth," Blossoms Forth as a Star in His First American Film—"Count of Monte Cristo" a Superb Picture—A Genial Theatre Manager.

THE continual use of superlatives for describing this or that is eventually going to make the English language useless, but one feels bound to offend yet again when describing the talkie version of "The Count of Monte Cristo," which was privately screened at the Regent Theatre, Wellington, the other day. It is an almost faultless piece of cinematography—a film built with consideration for the story, for the actors, for the period, and for the audience.

And the film is notable for the fact that it brings to light a new actor who is destined to go far in the film world, Robert Donat. This young man has such charm of feature and voice that he seems destined to send many hearts fluttering before he writes finis to his career. He has appeared on the screen before, in the role of Thomas Culpepper in "The Private Life of Henry the Eighth," and he was taken across to Hollywood specially to play the part of Edmond Dantes in the present film. He is well known as a exponent of Shakespeare on the English stage, and he has toured Great Britain on several occasions with Benson's company. Altogether, this young Englishman is such an asset to films that one cannot help but feel a trifle sorry that England should have allowed him to be tempted across the Atlantic.

After Donat, praise must go to the directors for the wonderful scenes in the film, and the perfect photography. The picture opens to show a French barque tossing in a boiling sea. The wind has ripped the canvas to shreds, great angry rollers pound across the decks, the ship lurches and groans. And all this is caught so faithfully by the camera that one can but sit and marvel. There are other scenes—the Chateau d'If, that grim island fortress, viewed in full moonlight across the smooth waters of the harbour of Marseilles, the throwing of Donat's body over the rocky walls into the water, the ball at the home of the Count of Monte Cristo in Paris—and they all stand out like cameos in a film that is beautifully mounted.

The reviewer must confess that he went along in a slightly scornful mood. Everyone had read the book; everyone had seen the silent film—there was nothing about "The Count of Monte Cristo" that hadn't already been told a dozen times. After the picture had been on the screen for five minutes the critic was ready to make a very deep bow to Reliance Pictures for bringing back this classic in so delightful a guise. The story was still there, but it had been so finely treated that the most blase picture-goer in the world could not be otherwise but enthusiastic.

Napoleon is on Elba when the film opens and Louis the Eighteenth is clinging to a tottering throne. Every man in France is suspect, and when it is discovered that young Edmond

Dantes has called with his ship at Elba he is brought before the Prefect of Police. Without trial he is imprisoned on the Chateau d'If where he remains for many years. In the meantime Napoleon has escaped from Elba and France has rallied to his call. But Waterloo is waiting and the Emperor ends his days at St. Helena. In the meantime Dantes is reported dead and, after many years, his sweetheart, Mercedes, marries one of the men who has been responsible for the young man's imprisonment.

One day, after he has been in his cell eight years, Dantes hears a tapping noise. It turns out to be another prisoner who has burrowed through thirty feet of rock. The man is a philosopher and he and Dantes become close friends. He tells him the secret of the treasure of Monte Cristo. In a fall of rock the old man is killed and his body is to be thrown over the walls of the Chateau into the sea. Dantes takes his place in the shroud and so makes his escape. He is picked up by a pirate ship and eventually he is able to land on the island of Monte Cristo and take possession of the treasure. He returns to France determined to wreak vengeance on the three men who were responsible for his imprisonment.

In the role of Mercedes is Elissa Landi—not very happy in the costume of nineteenth century France, but still rather charming. William Farnum is an old favourite who makes a brief appearance in this film, and Juliette Compton is also featured. Watch for "The Count of Monte Cristo"—it's capital entertainment.

"IT'S easy enough to be pleasant to your patrons when you've got good films, but it's a different matter when you've got a bad picture and you've got to hide in your office for fear the audience comes out and starts throwing things at you," said one disgruntled theatre manager the other day. Be that as it may . . . and it must be confessed that Wellington's newest theatre, the Plaza, has had a remarkably good collection of pictures since it opened . . . the theatre's genial manager, Mr. A. W. Andrews, always greets his patrons as though he were genuinely glad they had come along. Mr. Andrews, who spent several years in the Islands, was one time associated with the theatre at Otahuhu, in Auckland. Later he went to the Rialto at Newmarket, and it was while he was there that he annexed the coveted shield given each year by the Paramount Film Corporation for good showmanship and returns.



YOUNG ENGLISHMAN WITH A FUTURE.—Robert Donat, the young actor who plays the leading role in the splendid talking picture version of "The Count of Monte Cristo." He also appeared in the role of Thomas Culpepper in "The Private Life of Henry the Eighth."