The Film World

By Trevor Lane

Hollywood Takes SHAKESPEARE Very Seriously

The girl with the tragic eyes and mouth is none other than Norma Shearer as she appears in "Romeo and Juliet," recently completed in Hollywood. "No man who has ever kissed you once will be satisfied until he has kissed you twice," says Robert (Without-Whom-No-Picture-Is-Complete) Taylor to Joan Crawford in this scene from "The Gorgeous Hussy," the film version of the famous historical romance. Franchot Tone, Melvyn Douglas and Alison Skipworth are in the cast. (These scenes, the first to be published in New Zealand of the pictures concerned, were sent direct from Hollywood to the "Radio Record.")

HOLLYWOOD is taking its Shakespeare so seriously that it doesn't even laugh at the funny bits. Nevertheless I'm looking forward to "Romeo and Juliet" in which Norma Shearer ("Oh! she is rich in beauty, Juliet is the sun") and Leslie Howard ("His name is Romeo, a Montague, the only son of your enemy") play the leading roles. This film, which is said to have cost half a million pounds, will not be released for some time yet. In the meantime England is pushing ahead with its first screen Shakespeare effort—"As You Like It," with Elisabeth Bergner in the part of Rosalind and Laurence Olivier as Orlando. Oliver Messel, the well-known Englishman, was engaged to superintend the production of "Romeo and Juliet." He was sent on a tour of Italy to gather material, and later a model of the greater part of the town of Verona at the period of the play was built, so that even the movements should be geographically correct.

Backing the Bard.

"THERE are things the cinema can do which the theatre cannot," said Mr. Oliver Messel, when discussing the Hollywood version of "Romeo and Juliet." "I think the film has been able to build up the tension between the two families, the oppressive heat of the weather and the excitement of the resultant fight in a way the stage could not have achieved." John Barrymore plays the part of Mercutio, and Basil Rathbone is Tybalt. Shakespeare is still something of a gamble on the screen—although "A Midsummer Night's Dream" made money in America it played to poor houses in most parts of the British Empire where the American accents grated on a people brought up in the Old Vic traditions. An early film version of "The Taming of the Shrew" may be dismissed without much serious consideration.

Jolly Good.

THE other evening I dropped into the State Theatre, Wellington, for an hour and ran up against one of the most entertaining films I've seen in weeks. Its name—"Private Number" —was almost unknown to me; its cast included Loretta Young, the much sought-after Robert Taylor, Basil Rathbone and Patsy Kelly. The story does