

WE'RE DOUBTFUL

Warner Baxter In
"Kidnapped"

ONE of the most extraordinary pieces of casting ever achieved in Hollywood seems to be the decision of 20th Century-Fox to let Warner Baxter play the leading role of Alan Breck in a film of R. L. Stevenson's "Kidnapped."

Freddie Bartholomew is to portray Breck's little friend, David Balfour. If he can forget to be such a little gentleman, Freddie may make a big success of his part. So, of course, may Warner Baxter of his—but the odds appear to be against it. Baxter has hardly the voice for a Scotsman nor the figure for kilts.

Stevenson's story is also to be "improved" by the addition of a romantic sequence for which purpose a newcomer named Arleen Whelan has been signed up.

The "British Film Weekly" is pessimistic about "Kidnapped." Says the editor: "If I read the signs right, they might just as well turn Robert Louis Stevenson's story into a Western and have done with it."

ingly toward him. For one horrid moment I had the feeling he was going to kiss the boy good-night. But he only sneaks his blanket!

Robbers' Roost

"BAD Man of Brimstone" is not much better, but certainly no worse than dozens of other pictures with the same type of theme and setting. In spite of its pretentious production, its 14-carat cast, this remains a Western at heart, with all the bluster and speed and gun-play of the typical cowboy melodrama. Being a Western is nothing for a film to be ashamed of—especially as it's some time since we've seen a really big one. All I suggest is that you'll be wise not to expect too much.

Without the father-love, Wallace Beery played much the same part in "Viva Villa" as he plays in "Bad Man of Brimstone," only it was more striking then because it was novel. He's a brilliant exponent of what the Americans call the art of "mugging" (pulling faces); and all the familiar Beery tricks of arousing scorn and sympathy are taken out for an airing among the hills and valleys of old Utah, where he rules an outlaws' roost and twists all honest settlers round his trigger-finger.

Beery makes such a loutish, conscienceless killer in the early part of the picture that he has a hard task later on winning as much of the audience's sympathy as it is intended he should.

Don't Be Misled

WHEN I say that, however, perhaps I am forgetting that "Bad Man of Brimstone" is just a large-scale Western (and a pretty good one, at that). Perhaps I have been misled by the presence of Virginia Bruce, Lewis

Stone, Bruce Cabot, Joseph Calleia, and other notables, and by the sepia photography, and, above all, by the M-G-M. trademark, to look for psychological subtleties in the story.

There's good, lusty comedy in this picture (mark those scenes where the young hero gives the Bad Man a sound trouncing and the latter's soft, fatherly heart won't let him shoot back); there's also a virile performance by a newcomer named Dennis O'Keefe (he reminded me rather of Wayne Morris in "Kid Galahad"); there's buckets of bloodshed; and I liked Virginia Bruce better in the gingham of the border better than I ever have in the silks and satins of social sophistication.

In short, provided you don't seek for art where only hokum exists, you should spend an entertaining evening with Bad Man Beery and the Boys of Brimstone.

["The Bad Man of Brimstone," M.G.M. Directed by J. Walter Ruben, starring Wallace Beery, Virginia Bruce. First release: April 1, Auckland.]

Anna May Returns

IN Paramount's "Daughter of Shanghai," Anna May Wong goes through enough hair-raising experiences to make even a well-bred Chinese lose her air of imperturbability, and in several scenes she is shown looking positively dishevelled. But that's what comes of getting involved with a lot of dirty Western crooks who are smuggling aliens into Uncle Sam's territory.

Miss Wong is shot at, fought over by coarse sailors, and dropped out of an aeroplane while tracking down the meanies who have killed her father. She even goes to a thoroughly unpleasant island in the Caribbean and exposes her sinuous limbs to lewd eyes while posing as a cabaret entertainer. And all the while, the arch-rascal (it's a woman, only I don't know the feminine for rascal) was right back there at home in 'Frisco, and Miss Wong had once drunk tea with her.

Miss Wong is assisted in her mission by a Chinese G-Man called Kim Lee. His name off the screen is Phillip Ahm. It must be nice being this kind of Chinese actor—you just maintain a perfectly wooden expression so that no-

Sabu, the Indian boy star of "Elephant Boy," will be seen again fairly soon in Korda's "Mutiny on the Mountains," a technicolour version of A. E. W. Mason's novel, "The Drum."

body can tell whether you are acting or not. The chief villains are Charles Bickford, Anthony Quinn, C. Carroll Naish, and Henry Kolker, and they make a very choice batch of blood-curdlers.

Me, I liked it; but then I'm just a low-brow when it comes to this kind of thriller.

["Daughter of Shanghai," Paramount. Directed by Robert Florey. Starring Anna May Wong. Release date indefinite.]

Departed Glory

IT'S because I expect gangsters to go round spilling buckets of blood to the tune of police sirens that I was just a trifle disappointed in "The Last Gangster." Such a prejudice is quite unreasonable, and I do not wish to stress it at the risk of putting you off seeing this unusual M-G-M production starring Edward G. Robinson. What "The Last Gangster" lacks in action it just about makes up by the excellence of Robinson's character study. He here writes "Finis" with a flourish to the career of screen ruthlessness which he so notably began in "Little Caesar."

"The Last Gangster" is an essay in morbid psychology, revealing the mind of a gang Napoleon who has met his Waterloo. When Joe Krozac is sentenced at last to a long term on Alcatraz Island, toughest jail in all America, he will not accept the fact that the rule of the old type of gang law, in which the authorities could be bribed and intimidated, is temporarily over.

He has married a foreign wife, not because he loves her (at the time she thinks he does) but because he wants a son he can bring up in his own wicked ways.

A False Note

WHILE in Alcatraz, Joe Krozac's son is born, but his wife has learned that her admired husband is nothing but a murderous megalomaniac. She disappears with the boy and later marries a newspaper man (James Stewart). On his release, Krozac is still dominated by illusions of his vanished greatness and by the desire for revenge on his wife and her new husband. This precipitates the climax, in which prac-

