

# The Forum

## Miram's Insurance

E. S. Andrews (Wellington): As one of "nearly a quarter of a million readers" who pay fourpence a week, partly for 60-odd pages of the brightest journalism in the country and partly for the famous "Miram's Insurance against Picture Flops," I crave space to defend a profitable investment.

If I buy books or bootlaces or perambulators or anything else, I can look the goods over before any cash changes hands. Not so with the pictures. If a picture is a flop, that's just too bad—for me.

I can go on year after year paying out innumerable one-and-sixpences, spurred on by an occasional "Dead End" or "Nothing Sacred," but on the whole getting nothing but mental and

moral indigestion in return for the expense.

That is why I regard the share that Mr. Mirams gets of my weekly fourpence as a kind of social and aesthetic insurance. His critical mind stands guard between me and a host of fatuous films.

It must be quite unprecedented for a New Zealand paper to stand so uncompromisingly firm behind a member of the staff who, using his technical and literary ability in his daily work, has run foul of a powerful vested interest. I liked the "Radio Record" before; I respect it now.

The candid critics like Mr. Mirams have shown over and over again that the movie magnates do not know their own job, that only once or twice in 100 tries can they make a picture that hangs together as a smooth and finished piece. They are so obsessed with their billions of dollars, their galaxies of stars, their super-superlative ballyhoo, that they can't produce the goods: they still have to learn that it takes more than a million dollars, a handful of expensive stars, and 8000 feet of flickering colour-film to make a convincing picture.

The movie people retort that they give the great big-hearted public what it wants. But do they? They flood the theatres with banal nonsense, they soak a ready-made audience in an expensive and platitudinous display of "spectacles" and "heart-throbs" for a generation, till perception and taste are deadened, and then call the cause the effect. The truth is that the public has never been given enough good pictures to get used to them. And by good pictures I do not mean "goody-goody" or "pure" or "educational" films, but films that, no matter what aspect of life they portray, have some sort of artistic integrity and completeness.

There are only two solutions. The film business can reorganise itself to serve the community instead of doting it; or the Press, by honest, impartial and capable reviewing, can so stimulate the critical faculties of the public that audiences will demand better films, and get them. The first, if the action of Columbia Pictures is any guide, is impossible; the second, which the "Radio Record" is attempting so well, is more likely to be successful.

So here are my congratulations to Gordon Mirams and to you on your strong bid for better pictures. More power to your pens!

P.S.—Somewhere about the middle of this effusion, in honour of Mr. Mirams, readers will stand and sing "Land of Hope and Glory." Or, better still, they could play it on the gramophone.

## Good Luck!

"Filingoer" (Wellington): Until Gordon Mirams become the New Zealand "Radio Record's" film critic, I always imagined all such folk

to be insincere animals who fed a doting public on yards of boloney, fresh from the ovens of the film magnates. I pictured them as doing this work in between lighting one cigarette from the stump of another, or after coming from bluffing their way into a free show. But I found one exception in Mr. Mirams!

Until this young man came into prominence, New Zealand had never known a real film critic. Why? I suppose there were many reasons. I suppose, again, that most newspapers were too "lousy"—that's a good word, isn't it?—to spend a few pounds on employing a reliable man when a youth would do. If the "film critic" wanted some reviews he just trotted over to the office of the film company with the biggest advertising budget and behold! he had tons of film matter shoved into his hands!

Continue your good work, Mr. Mirams, and don't think that the public is surveying it with apathy. You've got the filingoers behind you in your struggle to present reviews as they should be presented. We're so tired of all these "stupendous," "colossal," "magnificent" film pages in other publications. Good luck to you. Good luck to your editor and general staff in being courageous enough to set alight to a "bonza" conflagration.

## Not Written By Money

"Truth in Journalism" (Wellington): Somebody should give you a slap on the back for having what it takes to back up your film writer, and letting your readers in on the reason.

Daily newspapers do not like falling out with the film interests: it means the loss of nearly a page of advertising every day, so the public gets its film news on the "you-give-us-a-good-ad., and we'll-give-you-a-good-writeup" idea, said writeup, incidentally, being provided by the theatre manager. That, and his ad., is his big job for the day, except when he has to come to the rescue of somebody with a weak picture, by writing a nice letter about it to the Press, or to his Wellington boss, whose "pull" is usually strong enough to have it published.

May I say how pleasant it has been to find that there is at least one journal in New Zealand which does not let money write its film news.

## Protest

"Typistes" (Wanganui): We wish to place on record our protest against the banning of your film critic, Gordon Mirams.

The reviews in the "Record" are an unbiased guide for filingoers and if Mr. Mirams is expected to write the type of "criticism" which we find in the columns of newspapers, the intelligent filingoer will have no standard by which to judge the picture he wishes to see.

Unbiased criticism of current pictures is so very rare that we feel that there would be a real loss to the "Record" if Mr. Mirams departed from his present film policy.

We wish to congratulate Mr. Mirams on his articles, which we greatly appreciate.

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