

Colin Tapley Home For Christmas

(By GORDON MIRAMS)

WHEN the news came on the afternoon of Christmas Eve, just as I was about to depart on a frantic and belated search for Christmas presents, that Colin Tapley, New Zealand film star, had arrived unexpectedly in Auckland that morning and was due to reach Wellington by plane in about ten minutes, my first impulse was to curse heartily all film stars—even New Zealand ones—who were inconsiderate enough to arrive for interviews on Christmas Eve.

But this uncharitable feeling was soon lost in the excitement of rushing out to Rongotai Aerodrome by taxi, in company with Photographer Richard Andrew—like a couple of American screen reporters on the trail of a scoop—and of renewing acquaintance with one of the very few New Zealanders who have made good in Hollywood, and whom—by the way—I last saw in the flesh when we were together in "Old So-and-So's" form at Christ's College back in 1926 or thereabouts.

Old School Tie

THAT "by the way" touch is, of course, a sop to the convention that one should claim acquaintance with the great and famous in a suitably casual and off-hand manner. I trust I may be forgiven for thus dragging in mention of the fact that I was at school with Colin Tapley and that he had not forgotten it when I came upon him in the midst of a radio interview with 2ZB at Rongotai. But after we had donned the old school tie together for a few minutes, we assumed the normal roles of interviewer and victim; and right from the start he impressed me with the feeling that the glamour of Hollywood and the experience of seeing his name mentioned in the casts of many pictures had done very little to change the Colin Tapley who went to Christ's College, and who won the men's section of the Paramount Search for Beauty Contest in New Zealand.

That Search for Beauty Contest gave Tapley his chance to enter the movie game, and he is duly grateful; but I suspect that he thinks it is about time his association with it is forgotten—or taken for granted. To be reminded that he won a Search for Beauty contest is hardly the kind of thing a man like Colin Tapley would like to have thrown at his head for ever.

However, at the risk of treading on perhaps rather unpopular ground, I asked him how many of the original contest winners from all countries were still making good in Hollywood. He said that, of all the dozens who had been chosen, he and Ann Sheridan were the only ones left.

ONE usually associates plenty of fuss and publicity with the comings and goings of Hollywood film stars. But when Colin Tapley, New Zealander who has made good in the movie capital, decided to spend Christmas with his people in Dunedin, practically the first that was known of it was that he had landed in Auckland from the Monterey on Christmas Eve. He's been in Hollywood more than four years now, and has been planning to revisit the Dominion for a long time. But studio production schedules take little account of the vacation plans of film players. Hence the flying visit. . . .

"Life's very indefinite in Hollywood," said Colin Tapley, when interviewed by the "Record."

ANYWAY, Colin Tapley now has plenty of other claims to recognition apart from the Search for Beauty. Since he has been in Hollywood, under contract to Paramount, he has appeared in about 60 different roles—everything from Spaniards to Cockneys and old men. He has terminated his Paramount contract now, but he appreciates what that studio has done for him. "I've been through the mill, and it was excellent experience. They seemed to call on me to do anything—not always big parts, of course, but still, as I say, it was excellent experience."

"THERE WAS A KIND OF SAYING ROUND THE STUDIO: 'WHEN IN DOUBT, USE COLIN TAPLEY.'"

Tapley pointed out that he had had a seven years' contract, but had decided he could do better for himself now by free-lancing. Since a contract player was on salary all the time, whether he was working or not, he was not paid as highly as he would be for casual assignments. If a free-lance player liked to work hard—and it WAS hard work—he could make about four times as much as if he were under contract.

Roland Young Comedy

ALREADY Tapley has made one or two pictures as a free-lance. One of them is "Storm of Bengal," a film of

the type of "Bengal Lancer," which, incidentally, gave him one of his best-remembered and best-liked roles.

He confessed that it was his ambition to do the Roland Young type of comedy. He thought he might be able to make a success of it, but so far hadn't been given the chance to try, having had to concentrate mainly on serious roles.

When he returns to Hollywood—he's due to leave by the Mariposa on February 6—he'll go into a role in the big M-G-M production "North-west Passage," from the famous novel by Kenneth Roberts. This picture had been due to start two months ago, and then had been postponed—"Life's very indefinite in Hollywood," says Colin Tapley—and it was because of uncertainty about this picture that he had had to make up his mind in a hurry about returning to New Zealand to spend Christmas with his people in Dunedin.

The MacMurrays

THE length of his stay in the Dominion will depend largely on the starting date for "North-west Passage." It is just possible that his agent in Hollywood will inform him he can have another fortnight.

"Wasn't there a possibility of Fred MacMurray coming with you this time?" I asked.

"Yes, as a matter of fact, both Fred and his wife were hoping to come with me, but he gets only three weeks off in a year, and he was tied up with assignments and couldn't get off at the same time as me. Still, he may manage to come next year. He's very keen to try the fishing here, and the shooting. I've told him a lot about them. In fact, he says that every time I mention

them, the trout grow larger and larger.

"Gary Cooper is another star who's very keen to pay New Zealand a visit.

"Fred MacMurray and his wife were down at the boat to see me off. At the moment he's working with Madeleine Carroll on a picture called 'Cafe Society.' He's cast as a boxer, and when I left, there were three or four pugs round his house training him to fight."

There are still a good many Americans so much in ignorance about New Zealand that they more or less think of it as an island off the coast of Brazil, or something like that, said Tapley. On the other hand, in California the country has been boosted pretty well. Pan American Airways—who, he said, are very keen to extend their service to New Zealand—have done much good publicity work.

And, says Colin Tapley, with all due modesty, he thinks he has done his bit, too, in boosting the Dominion. The MacMurrays aren't the only stars who have heard his fish stories and are keen to test their validity.

"Personally, I've been looking forward to making this return visit for so long, that I began to have the feeling, before I landed in Auckland to-day, that I might be a little disappointed. You know, distance lends enchantment. But it was nothing like that. It's great to be back.

Labour Government

BY this time, we had come in from Rongotai and had arrived at 2ZB Studio, where the interview was being continued in the office of Controller C. G. Scrimgeour; and various radio personalities kept popping in and out to meet New Zealand's own film star and congratulate him on the broadcast interview he had given from the aerodrome.

Somebody asked him whether New Zealand's Labour Government had won any fame in Hollywood and if so, what was the feeling about it. Tapley said that it had created a great deal of interest. At the moment there seemed to be particular interest among Americans he had met in the question of exchange control, and it had to be confessed that their opinions were rather mixed—possibly because they didn't understand exactly what it was all about.

This was the signal for an animated discussion on the subject, principally between Tapley and the Controller, during which the visitor showed he was by no means out of touch with New Zealand affairs. But that discussion had nothing to do with this interview.



"IT'S GREAT TO BE BACK."—Colin Tapley, N.Z. screen star, makes a flying return visit after "having been through the mill" in Hollywood.