

Personal

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ACADEMY CINEMA. Oxford Street.

It is a long time since I enjoyed a film so much as "La Grande Illusion" now showing at this Theatre.

It may not appeal to everyone, as the story deals with a Prisoners of War Camp in Germany, and some people may be inclined to ask if it is true to life. I do not think that a false note has been struck.

The acting is intense, but always sober, many of the incidents are extremely dramatic and, best of all, we are spared the buffoonery of would be comic relief which so often spoils a dramatic story.

Further, the actors speak their own language. French soldiers speak in French when talking amongst themselves, German soldiers in German and the English talk English. I consider this method is a great advance in technique.

It makes for reality and does away with that jarring note when one hears an obvious French or German character talking with an American accent and what is worse using American idioms.

The film starts in the French lines. Lieutenant Maréchal played by Jean Gabin, is told to take a Staff Officer, Captain de Boildieu (Pierre Fresnay) for an observation flight. Their plane is shot down and we see them being received by Captain v. Rauffenstein (Eric von Stroheim) who commands the German unit. Rauffenstein invites them to lunch. The scene changes to a camp in Germany. We are introduced to different types of officers of which the three most important are de Boildieu, professional soldier, St. Cyr, Staff Officer — Maréchal, ex-mechanic, now Lieutenant, and Rosenthal, son of wealthy Jewish parents, likewise officer on account of the war.

We are shown the monotony of a Prisoners' Camp, the quarrels which arise from enmity and the different outlook produced by the result of different character and education.

The Prisoners make a tunnel starting underneath their room by which they hope to escape.

They have planned to have a concert and on the appointed day, a notice is put up on the board. "Donaumont its gefallen." The Germans celebrate.

The French are dispirited, but decide nevertheless to continue with the concert and to invite the Camp Commandant and his Officers.

In the middle of the concert, one of the French officers hears the news "Donaumont est repris."

The concert is interrupted, and the prisoners sing the French National Hymn. The German Commandant leaves in silence.

One of the officers is condemned to solitary confinement for an attempt to escape. The solitude almost drives him crazy but one of the guard, an old Landsturm, has pity on him and leaves a musical instrument in his cell.

Finally the tunnel is ready, but on the last day, they are suddenly ordered to get ready and leave at once for another camp. This scene is most dramatic. Maréchal endeavours to warn the new-comers, who are English officers, but a Colonel to whom he manages to speak can only talk English and Maréchal can only speak French.

The scene changes to a fortress, to which de Boildieu, Maréchal and Rosenthal are sent after numerous attempts to escape.

The Commandant is Rauffenstein, now a Major, but unfit for active service as he has been severely wounded in the spine and has to wear a support.

Rauffenstein has much sympathy for de Boildieu, as they both belong to the same class, and understand each other.

All through the film we see the contrast between the different types.

Finally Maréchal makes a rope. It is decided that Maréchal and Rosenthal shall escape.

De Boildieu refuses to go with them and says that he will create a diversion which will give them time to get away.

They ask him why he will not come with them, and he replies that they would not understand his reasons.

He puts on his best uniform and at a fixed time goes out on to the battlements of the fortress. The guard thinks he is trying to escape and follows him. Rauffenstein appears and begs him to come back, saying that if he will not do so, he will be obliged to shoot.

De Boildieu refuses and Rauffenstein fires. During this time the other two escape.

The rest of the film deals with their adventures during their journey on foot to the Swiss frontier.

Rosenthal hurts his ankle and can proceed no further.

They take refuge in a cottage kept by a German peasant who has lost her husband at the war. She takes pity on them, and they stay until Rosenthal's ankle is well again.

Elsa, the peasant, has a little daughter, and they make a Crib for her at Christmas.

Maréchal falls in love with Elsa but finally they decide that they must continue their journey.

At last they arrive at the frontier, and we see them toiling along in the snow, and the German frontier guards about to shoot when the Corporal in charge shouts out. Stop — they are in Switzerland.

I have only given a rough sketch of the story, but it impressed me so much that I think I shall go and see it again. The acting is superb, and as I have already said, the shading of the different characters is deft and delicate.

Now what is La Grande Illusion! I think that everyone will answer this question according to his personal reaction to this remarkable film.

It is perhaps that, things would start again after the war, as they had been before, it commenced, that the war would change men's characters, that distinctions of class, education and environment would disappear. I leave the answer to each of you, after you have seen the film.

ck.

MRS. MACQUARRIE'S TEA PARTY.

We have recently had an increase of young Swiss women, who have found places in English households in Liverpool and neighbouring towns.

To these young girls, England is a strange country, at any rate, in the beginning and while the Consulate is always ready to help them in any way it is possible, mere men cannot provide that homely touch which is the antidote of that longing for home, which overtakes so many of us.

But the Consulate is fortunate in having the interest and friendship of Mrs. Macquarrie, and she decided to invite as many as could come to her home for afternoon tea as well as some of the ladies long resident in Liverpool or married to Swiss citizens, on the 19th January, and a very pleasant function is proved to be. But why should a lady with such a typical Highland name show such great consideration to the Swiss? Mrs. Macquarrie is a lady from Schaffhausen, married to Dr. Macquarrie, who has a practice in Bootle, a proud and independent town surrounded by Liverpool, and he was quite willing that his house should suffer this Swiss invasion.

All the ladies of the Swiss Colony of Liverpool, those who could come and those who were prevented, will be pleased that this very pleasant function took place, and who knows what will arise out of it? Other pleasant afternoon tea gatherings or even a Society of Swiss Women?

In any case, we are all indebted to Dr. and Mrs. Macquarrie for this kindly initiative.

PERSONAL.

We extend heartiest congratulations to Mr. G. E. De Brunner, a well-known member of the Swiss Colony, on the occasion of his 60th birthday anniversary.

HUMORISTISCHES.

Das Wetter. Wir machten am Sonntag morgen einen Ausflug und setzten uns in einem Landgasthof an den Mittagstisch. Meine Frau macht plötzlich einen Heidenlärm und ruft die Wirtin:

"Das isch scho na de Gipfel ... da hät's ja en Schwabechäfer i de Suppe!"

Wirtin: "Ja bimeid, dann git's aber ander Wätter!"

(Aus dem Nebenspalter.)

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