

have seen what I regard a more inexplicable miracle, namely a complete mental change in someone I knew."

Mr. Greene's own conversion was originally a purely intellectual one, and it was only after many years of practising Roman Catholicism and watching the effect it had on others that he acquired real faith. As a writer his works have caused a furor among pedantic theologians, who are shocked at the suicide motif that runs through so many of his works. "Of course," replies Mr. Greene, "suicide is a mortal sin. But who is to say that a person committing suicide is in a state of mortal sin just because he dies without having confessed his mortal sin?"

The novelist is a renegade in more than just his attitude towards Roman Catholic dogma. When a student at Oxford he joined the Communist Party on the promise of a free trip to Russia, only to resign a few days later when the CP discovered his motive. As a result he burst into the news a few years ago by protesting against being refused a visa to this country. "Some American foreign-service officials encouraged me to make a case out of it in order to point up the absurdities of the McCarran Act," he says lightly. He does not believe that his scathing portrait in "The Quiet American" was provoked by this incident. However, Mr. Greene, who always mistrusts altruism, does lament the lack of sophistication in American foreign policy, and attributes much of it to the university training of our officials. "For real innocence," he adds, "you need university training."

The novelist-playwright is reluctant to criticize America while a guest within its borders, but it is obvious he doesn't really enjoy it here. "I do like your literature very much," he says. "Frost, Cummings, Hemingway, and Faulkner I particularly admire, but Thomas Wolfe not at all, and Steinbeck only with reservations."

He is less fond of British moderns and admits that the dying Callifer in "The Potting Shed" stands for "a whole crowd of dull dogs" of which H. G. Wells was perhaps the most famous.

As to the question of whether or not Wells himself ever came to doubt the certainty of his rationalistic credo, as did Callifer in "The Potting Shed," Mr. Greene provides an oblique answer. "In 1939 Wells wrote me and asked me for the early sources of the doctrine of Immaculate Conception. I was busy so I sent him a quotation from Ronald Knox without identifying it. He recognized it immediately, which suggests to me that he must have had a passionate concern with Catholicism."

—HENRY HEWES.



## TV AND RADIO

### Such Popularity . . .

I WOULDN'T myself say that a statistical abstract is in itself more entertaining than a television program, but one nice manageable statistic can correct a lot of misapprehensions about all television programs.

One of the obstacles to rational discourse about any mass entertainment is the inevitable cropping up of the word "popularity." It is used with awe or contempt, depending on the bias of the user, and it represents one of the least examined concepts of our time. It is, however, statistically measured to an extent when two programs on at the same time are subjected to comparative "rating." There is no philosophical proof that anyone is enthusiastic about either program, but there is proof that more people are willing to listen to or look at one of them than the other. Unpedantically we can say, Yes, the one is more popular than the other.

But when the layman is told that a program has been popular on the air for five years, he thinks of vast numbers of people tuning it in; he thinks of those tremendous ratings of 50 to 60. He has an image before his eyes: the population of the United States dividing their attention between two or three programs and then re-dividing to observe two or three others. Then, when the word occurs in an argument, when he is told that criticism of these popular programs indicates contempt for the taste of the people, he is silenced.

The manageable statistic is this: of all the programs on television presented to the American people, only a fraction of 1 per cent attract as much as half of the available audience.

I get this from an able and carefully documented study, "Broadcasting in America," by Sidney W. Head (Houghton Mifflin), and as I know the population of the United States I know that a program with a low rating may have 5 million viewers—which doesn't make it exactly unpopular. (Several years ago "Invitation to Learning" was sixty-ninth in popularity on CBS—but it had about a million and a half listeners.) What the little figure does is, however, useful. It reminds us that millions of individuals do not care for programs which are on the air. And that you cannot justify the qualities of a program which attracts only one-tenth as many patrons as the leaders do on the ground that it is "popular."

The broadcasters are to be praised for keeping these one-tenth-popular programs on the air. If they didn't, we should have a television system satisfying only one kind of audience. The less popular program provides variety, even if it isn't much good in itself. But these fringe programs must be defended, if they need defense, on the ground that they attract an audience big enough to pay their way—not on any sacred ground that the wants of the people must be satisfied.

THE low-rating program, once we know that it isn't "popular" in the grand sense, is a help also in considering the plight of the superior program. Some weeks ago the rating of "Omnibus" dipped, and if it hadn't had Foundation support it might well have disappeared. (It has had some excellent programs since and, I believe, it is regaining lost ground.) When a program of a high order of intelligence fails to attract a reasonably large audience, the broadcasters say what the movie-makers have always said, "Excellence doesn't pay off." The 99-plus-per cent of programs which attract less than half of the available audience reminds us that commercialism doesn't always pay off either.

The fact is, simply, that the incidence of failure in programs designed for popularity is very high. A hundred separate shows were tried and withdrawn from the television channels in one year—not one of them a highbrow job. The broadcaster keeps trying: some twenty programs were thrown into the time-spot opposite Milton Berle. But when a cultural program fails the blame is placed not on the program, but on culture—and the next proposed program of the same level has to overcome the hurdle of previous failures.

It strikes me as a point in favor of the American people that so many programs attract less than enormous audiences. It also strikes me that the broadcasters might try more programs off the beaten path to attract the slightly dissatisfied—try them as consistently and with as much conviction as they now give to their commercial efforts.

—GILBERT SELDES.



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## SR GOES TO THE MOVIES

### New Talent

I'VE HEARD it said that one way for potential tycoons to make the grade in Hollywood is to start out by making a Western or a crime picture. Let the big boys take a chance on art, so the philosophy goes; no sense in getting killed right off the bat. In that interesting Hollywood examination of its own insides, "The Bad and the Beautiful," you'll remember that the young producer-and-director team started out by making "B" horror movies, and eventually wound up with Academy Awards. However, some new pattern may very well be in the making, for here on hand is "The Young Stranger," an exceedingly good movie made by three youngsters who have seen fit to break the rules. The director, the producer, and the screen-writer are all in the mid-twenties, and for each of them it is the first time around. John Frankheimer, the director, started out in TV; so did Robert Dozier, the writer. Stuart Millar, the producer, accumulated his know-how by working as an assistant to William Wyler.

"The Young Stranger" is a quiet, thoughtful study of a teen-age boy who finds it hard to communicate with his parents. The father has become a success, so-called, and is a very busy man. The mother is involved in her social whirl, brought about by her husband's success, and is busy wondering if the marriage is going to hold up under the strain. Lost in the shuffle is their relationship with the boy, and, when he gets into a bit of trouble (not altogether his fault) the first assumption of his parents is that he has turned into one of those teen-age horrors who go around mutilating theatre seats, roughing up people, and growing side-burns. He isn't.

The story keeps ringing true, and is helped by the fine performances of James McArthur (son of Helen Hayes), and of Kim Hunter and James Daly, as the parents.

\* \* \*

The Korean War continues to get its coverage in "Men in War" and "Battle Hymn," and if one were to look at these two movies in succession one might think they were about two different wars. "Men in War" was made from Van Van Praag's novel, "Day Without End," and chronicles one day's events for a platoon cut off and surrounded by the enemy and attempting to make it back to its own

lines. Robert Ryan is the platoon leader—and it should be noted what an unusually good film actor he is when he gets his chances—and Aldo Ray a sergeant with killer instincts who joins the platoon on its eerie march. For the first half the film is superb. There is remarkable camera work, magnificent realistic studies of men faced with an all but hopeless situation, and some stunning, quite harrowing suspense as one gets the idea that the platoon is surrounded by a quiet, remorseless enemy.

The second half is not quite so good, as the heroics get thicker, so to speak, finally culminating with Ryan and Ray storming and knocking out an enemy position. At that point it's standard war stuff. What puts the movie distinctly out of the ordinary is the direction, the believable way in which the men behave, the images, effective sheerly as images, and a notable music score by Elmer Bernstein. There are many first-rate acting jobs, including those by Robert Ryan and Aldo Ray, and also by Robert Keith, Phil Pine, and Vic Morrow. Philip Yordan wrote the screenplay, and Anthony Mann directed, both obviously very good men.

Universal may well have an obsession about "Magnificent Obsession," for they seem to be making that picture again under various disguises. "Battle Hymn" could easily have been called "Magnificent Obsession at War," even though the story is pretty much a true one and is based upon the experiences of Colonel Dean Hess, a Protestant minister turned Air Force flyer. While in Korea Colonel Hess was responsible for rescuing hundreds of war-orphaned children and for the establishment of an orphanage on Chejo Island. Hess organized the air-lift, in addition, that got the children there safely. "Battle Hymn" is in CinemaScope and Technicolor, which may be why the war looks prettier in the Universal version; it also has some good flying scenes, and some taut moments. It may be the script that is at fault for certain moments of obvious sentimentality. Might have been better not to go so all out for that lump in the throat, which is inherent in the material anyway. Rock Hudson plays the Colonel, and Anna Kashfi is the prettiest and most exotic little mistress of an orphanage you ever saw.

—HOLLIS ALPERT.