

PARENT AND CHILD. By Catherine Mackenzie. Sloane. \$2.95. Here is advice to the harried parent written from the point of view of an honest and effective reporter who has sought out the best professional sources and who tries to interpret the material for the lay public. Reprinted from the author's newspaper series, it suffers from a lack of continuity and cohesiveness, a fault almost inevitable in this type of collected material.

ABBE DAVID'S DIARY. Translated and Edited by Helen M. Fox. Harvard. \$5. The diary of a French naturalist and missionary who travelled extensively in China and Mongolia eighty years ago collecting specimens for the Paris Museum of Natural History. Quietly interesting.

Films

MANNY
FARBER

WHILE "The Great Gatsby" is a limp translation of Fitzgerald's novel about the tasteless twenties, magical mid-Westerners on Long Island, and the champion torch-bearing hero in American literature, it captures just enough of the original to make it worth your while and rekindle admiration for a wonderful book. Its characters are like great lumps of oatmeal maneuvering at random around each other, but it tepidly catches the wistful tragedy of a jilted soldier (Alan Ladd) who climbs the highest mountains of racketeering and becomes an untalented socialite, trying to win back his Daisy (Betty Field) from a hulking snob and libertine (Barry Sullivan). Etched in old MGM-Renaissance style Fitzgerald's panorama of the twenties takes on the heavy, washed-out, inaccurate dedication-to-the-past quality of a Radio City mural. Save for an occasional shot—the rear of a Long Island estate studded with country-club architecture and bulky town cars—that shrieks of the period, the

movie has little to offer of Fitzgerald's glory-struck but acrid perceptions of period, place, and East Egg society. The cottage scene, with an added touch of Booth Tarkington, talks and moves, as little else of the movie does, with some complication and emotional development.

Director Nugent's forte is the country-club set tinkling delicately against each other amidst stupified living-room furniture, but it only appears in the scenes at Daisy's and the Plaza, which have a timeless aura and show the leisure class at customary half-mast—summer weather, a glitter due to Betty Field's delight with her role, and tasteful, knee-waisted dresses. The crucial lack is that Gatsby, Daisy, the cynical Jordan, don't have enough charm to explain the story; in fact, they don't have much more than the weary hulks that are currently beached on Long Island. Owing to a tired director who, however, knows the book with uncommon shrewdness, and Fitzgerald's inspired dialogue combined with slow, conservative movie images this peculiarly mixed movie draws the most vociferous, uneasy audience response.

It would take a Von Stroheim to cast Fitzgerald's characters, each as fabulous as Babe Ruth, but rendered with the fragmentary touches of a Cezanne watercolor; the cast is routine for Paramount (Ladd, Da Silva, Macdonald Carey—Frank Faylen, a studio perennial, must have been sick) and inspired only in the case of Betty Field, whose uninhibited, morbid-toned art blows a movie apart. Ladd might have solved the role of Gatsby if it had consisted, as his normal role does, of shocking, constant movement, no acting, and trench coats. An electric, gaudily graceful figure in action movies, here he has to stand still and project turbulent feeling, succeeding chiefly in giving the impression of an isinglass baby-face in the process of melting. He seems to be constantly in pain; and this, occasionally, as in the touching cottage scene, coincides with Gatsby's. As a matter of fact, he gives a pretty good impression of Gatsby's depressed, non-public moments. Barry Sullivan streamlines the aging (30) football player ("if we don't look out the white race will be—will be utterly submerged. It's all scientific stuff") into a decent, restless gentleman whose

nostrils constantly seem horrified. For a dismal C Western star, Sullivan is surprisingly deft and subtle in a role that has become meaningless without the sentimentality, fears, and shockingly comic scenes with Myrtle's circle (probably dropped because they were too cinematic).

Betty Field is no more marked by Southern aristocracy than a cheese blintz, but she plays Daisy with her usual incredible daring and instinctive understanding. She hits the role (compulsive, musical voice; scared sophistication) so hard, giving Daisy a confused, ineffectual intensity, missing some of the scintillating charm, that her creation is a realistic version of the character Fitzgerald set up simply as a symbol for Gatsby to dream about. The music of the period, when it is played right, is heartbreaking, and Elisha Cook captures this nostalgia for a few minutes at Gatsby's grand piano.

Academic Broadway veteran that he is, Elliot Nugent implies in his direction that the period and terrain—so consistently primary and wondrous to Fitzgerald—are simply a backdrop. In place of the wasteland of ashes that surrounds Wilson's garage, morbidly counterpointing the story's death-ridden conclusion, there are fleeting glimpses of a humdrum dumping ground. The huge, chaotic parties are a dispiriting blur of Arthur Murray dancing, Muzak orchestrations, stock drunks with one individualized detail (the stridently sequined stage twins) in place of the dozen needed to build the atmosphere that draws New York's night life to Gatsby's door. Fitzgerald's broken story structure has been straightened so that the movie flows slowly without break through routine stage sets. In the occasional place where a contrasting shot is slashed into the "Old Man River" development, the strategy, because of its rarity, produces more excitement than the image warrants—the oculist's billboard, with the enormous spectacled eyes, steals the movie.

Correction: In R. W. Flint's review, in the last issue, of "Quest for Myth" by Richard Chase, the book was described at one point, thanks to a printer's error, as "Human and humanistic." The phrase should have read "Humian and humanistic."

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