

Those FILM Audiences

By MAITLAND DAVIDSON

Our film critic here discusses those irritating people who make obvious remarks about the film during its performance; he advocates their compulsory suppression.

I WAS being a happy little screen fan the other night—front row of the circle, which is my favourite place, and one of the advantages of being an alleged critic is that you quite often get there—when a slight local disturbance arose to ruffle the prevailing anticyclone of atmospheric calm. It arrived in the shape of an Informative Voice from the row behind—I did not venture to look round, but assembled around it in imagination a thick and important moustache, heavy gold watch-chain and rounded waistcoat ruthlessly done up to the last button—which proceeded to act as an honorary *Bædeker* or *Child's Guide to Knowledge*.

I hasten to add that the Voice was entirely correct in its observations. When it intimated to us that a tram was passing, sure enough there was a tram on the film. "Children going to school"—yes, they were undoubtedly visible, complete with satchels. Obviously the veracity of the Unknown could not be impugned, nor would a mere direct "Shush!" probably have availed to improve the situation.

A TIMELY INTERVENTION.

I WAS therefore profoundly grateful for the intervention of two young men on my immediate right who, realising that imitation is not always the sincerest flattery, by a brief but rapid series of rival interjections such as "Look, that's a postman," or "See, there's a horse," speedily



Lady Rowena looks down from her window in "When Knights Were Bold."

reduced the instructive one to a defeated silence. And then we all settled down to peace once more.

That is, as all film fans know, a kind of *contretemps* that frequently occurs in picture theatres. It is not unknown, of course, in performances of stage plays. But there, in the first place, you have a spoken dialogue to drown all but the most insistent whispers, and furthermore, it is agreed by the majority that all talk except from behind the footlights is at least officially *taboo*.

Whereas, at the cinema, where every sound breaks into the prevailing silence, quite a number of people have the odd



"When Knights Were Bold," with its mediæval setting, lends itself to screen production and promises to be a success.

idea that they can give their very elementary conversational efforts free rein.

COMPULSORY SILENCE.

AS a matter of fact, films in some ways demand more continuous and concentrated attention than plays, for the very reason that all the work has to be done intensively through the eye. Talkers do not interrupt the actors, certainly, but they are twice as much a nuisance to other members of the audience.

I should like to impose on them a ban at least as solemn and authoritative as that enforced in the Silence Rooms of old-and-exclusive clubs or the reading room of a great museum. Or let them go to the "talkies," where the stentorian, resonant and metallic accents issuing from the screen will surely soon reduce them, too, to a shamed silence.

On the other hand, there are some points about our fellow-members of the audience that we cinema-goers can most distinctly congratulate ourselves on, as compared with the theatre variety. For one thing, there are none of those extremely irritating, if well-meant, bursts of applause which so often break into the action of the play, and possibly spoil the effect of a tense moment.

A MISTAKE STARS MAKE.

I NOTE, by the way, a growing tendency for the stars of a film which is being given at a big house to appear on the stage in person at the end of the show. It is a mistake. Film stars are, many of them, most delightful people, but they are liable to lose much of their glamour when divorced from their photographic activities on the screen, their picturesque settings, and their "film faces."

They may possibly look just as beautiful or handsome off the screen as on—I can think of one at least, Miss Eve Gray, who is more attractive off—but the appearance of your hero or heroine in mufti against a background of tall, dark curtains after an exciting drama must always be in the nature of an anti-climax. I think curtain calls on the stage, too, are a pity, but at least the chief characters are still in the costume of the play and with its scenery behind them to keep alive the spark of that illusion.



Geoffrey Moss's famous novel, "Sweet Pepper," makes an astonishing film. Eve Gray and Warwick Ward take the principal parts.