

AN ISLAND NIGHT'S ENTERTAINMENT

THOSE who only know the "Mov-ies" in such palatial homes as New Zealand provides may care to hear how we unsophisticated South Sea Islanders keep in touch with the screen world.

As I sit on my front steps watching the star-shadows of the coco-palms lengthen on the green until they fade away as the sun sinks, and the hills take on the wonderful afterglow of the tropics, there comes into my head a verse of Laurence Hope's which might have been written about this spot:

*The daylight is dying, the flying fox is flying,
Amber and amethyst flame in the sky;
See, the sun throws a late, lingering roseate
Kiss to the landscape to bid it good-bye.*

The glow on the hills gradually fades until only little clouds high up keep the warm tint; the chatter of hundreds of mynahs in the purau trees dies away as they settle for the night, and gradually the scent of a myriad flowers, unnoticed in the day, steals down the soft breeze and mingles with the smell of wood smoke from the neighbouring village as the evening meal is prepared. Just as I knock the ashes from my pipe preparatory to going indoors to light the lamp and settle to an evening's reading, a figure comes soft-footed across the lawn and proves to be Johnny Pokia, a native planter who is my nearest neighbour. The white vest and scarlet pareu set off his muscular figure as our bifurcated garments never could, and one wonders anew at the narrow ignorance of the missionaries who introduced and insisted on European clothing.

"Haeremai, Johnnie! Metaké?" and his wonderful teeth flash as he comes up and takes a seat on the steps.

"You goin' pickshurs to-night?"

I had forgotten that it was picture night, and had looked forward to a quiet evening. Still—

"Good picture you think, John?"

"Yes. Charlie Brown tellin' me goood pickshur. Plen-ty fight'n!"

"You going John?"

"I dummo. What you t'ink?"

The troubled look on John's face is explained. Alas, a lack of the needful has kept others from their heart's desire ere this!

"All right, I'll come. Go and get dressed and tell your boy and girl they can come too."

Johnnie's gloom vanishes as if by magic. As he turns away and as I rise to go in to change (for I, too, wear vest and pareu in my isolated home), there is a faint distant throbbing in the air which gradually draws nearer and nearer until the headlights of a big lorry appear round a point.

This brings Charlie Brown with the projector and films from his plantation home near Arorangi and the throbbing emanates from a number of his "boys" clustered on the tail of the car who beat a drumming advertisement along the route that this is picture night. Their instruments are crude—an empty kerosene tin, two or three sections of hollowed log, and a bass drum,—but the effect is surprising. First a

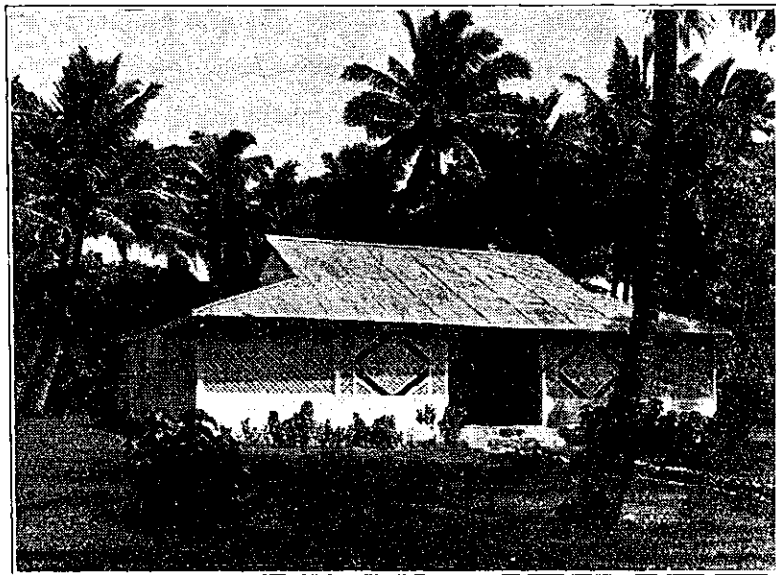
A LITTLE SCENIC COMEDY FROM THE PACIFIC PLAYGROUND

By "INBAD"

rattling roll on the tin, then the logs take it up, the tin stops and a single drummer beats time on a hollow bamboo. Suddenly the others join in with a crash in marvellous

ensure good places for themselves.

There is a young moon, just sufficient to silhouette the tall coco-palms that border the road, turning their spreading fronds to studies in black



A Planter's Bungalow in Raratonga

time and the lorry thunders past my wharé to the accompaniment of a rolling, throbbing, reverberating roar that gets into the blood as does no other instrument but the pipes.

As I go in to change I concur with the writer who said that every South Sea native appeared to have swallowed a metronome.

In a few minutes I am ready—Island toilets are not elaborate—and there comes a timid knock at the door. It is John's small girl who brings me a crown of flowers to wear. As this custom is not commercialised here as in the larger islands of Hawaii and Tahiti, it is still a sign of friendship and esteem, so I am proud to wear it. It is composed of the waxen *tiaré maori* interspersed with the scented pits of pineapple rind and red berries from the "bush," cut in spirals which dangle down at the sides.

John appears in a smart white duck suit and white canvas shoes and we start off down the sandy road, the kids racing on ahead to

and silver, and as we look up we see ever and anon the flittering shape of "mor kiri-kiri," the flying fox.

AS we come into the village we enter an arch of flamboyant trees, which are now in full bloom, and the road is carpeted with their scarlet flowers. The neat concrete houses bordering the road are almost lost in their bowers of flowering shrubs: hibiscus of all colours, roses, *tiaré maori*, and gardenia grow like weeds in the rich soil, and the houses themselves are half smothered in masses of alamanda and bougainvillea. Gradually the road is filled with natives bound for the picture house, the men in whites or blue denims; the women in flowing "Mother Hubbards" of muslin.

After a walk of nearly a mile we reach the grassy plot beside the tin shed which forms our local picture palace. We are late, but Charlie Brown does not consider the audience sufficiently large yet, so blows several loud blasts on his whistle

to warn stragglers that the show is about to commence, and the "band" strikes up anew. Curious to watch the crowd as the stirring rattle gets into their veins—many of them find it too much for them and do little impromptu shuffles as they stand talking in groups. Suddenly there is a burst of laughter and applause as a little man in white vest and dungarees with an enormous hibiscus flower over his ear leaps into the space near the drummers and goes through the knee-bending, wriggling motions of a hula. A barrow laden with fruit pasties and huge slabs of water-melon does a brisk trade with the waiting crowd.

Charlie Brown comes across to pass the time o' day, and gives us an inkling of the pictorial treat in store. He looks round, considers that the crowd is now large enough, and blows a long blast on his whistle. The drums die away after a final tattoo and we file in and take our places. The front benches are packed with a mob of chattering kiddies so John and I take our places well to the rear under the projector. Next to me is the charming wife of a neighbouring planter with her daughter who is home from her New Zealand boarding school for the holidays. In front of me is one of the real "old-timers" who came here years ago, before the mast of a wind-jammer and found the island lure too much for him. He has a little store in the village, but knows that there will be no trade while the shows lasts.

THE chief picture to-night is a Pearl White serial, "The House of Hate," and provides enough strenuous action to satisfy even the present audience. Dark Tony Moreno, always a great favourite with the natives, is the hero, and his timely rescues of the fair lady stir the excited crowd to frenzy. When he is embroiled in a "rough house" with the villain's myrmidons, the audience rises and yells encouragement.

The natives cannot, of course, read the captions, so Charlie Brown keeps up a running fire of explanation. One suspects that he does not keep much to the text, and from the chuckles and roars that greet his witty sallies, and the point-blank refusal of the lady beside me to translate some of his jokes it is to be feared that much of his talk is distinctly Rabelaisian in character.

The episode from the serial draws to an end, and the Impresario announces that there will be a further instalment next week. Follows a short interval in which we go out for a breath of fresh air.

John presents me with a big slice of water melon, which is thirst-quenching and refreshing, and takes the place of the whisky and soda of more civilised lands.

The whistle blows and we once more take our seats. The next film is a mystery picture featuring a man who has invented a cloak which renders the wearer invisible, and is tremendously popular with the crowd, who love anything that savours of "mana-mana!"

There are many thrills in the picture, but they affect the audience in a different way. Instead of the ear-shattering roar which acclaimed

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"By the Blue Lagoon"