MR. CAPRA GIRDS (MILDLY) AT THE GOVERNMENT
By DOUGLAS W. CHURCHILL

HOLLYWOOD.

FRANK CAPRA'S annual inspection of America's social-consciousness is under way at Columbia, where youthful James Stewart is confounding and exposing the nation's greatest minds in "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington." As representative of the Rangers (the Boy Scouts of America) objected to having any part in Mr. Capra's reform movement and inspired by the love of a good woman, Jean Arthur, Stewart is winning the admiration of the common people by exposing Claude Rains, the senatorial tool of that iniquitous representative of big business, Edward Arnold. To realists, "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington" may seem to be the ultimate in a merger of the Cinderella and Horatio Alger motifs; Capra prefers to characterize the story as a plea for honest government.

All kinds of problems have confronted Capra since he decided to clean things up down in Washington. Originally it was intended to use Gary Cooper as a Senator from Montana and call the picture "Mr. Deeds Goes to Washington." Unable to secure Cooper, Stewart was borrowed from MGM, Mr. Deeds became Mr. Smith and Montana was changed to an unnamed Commonwealth. The plot provided for the appointment of Stewart, Scout Master, to the Senate to fill the unexpired term of a deceased politician; the Scouts were then to whomp it up over the honor paid their leader. The organization's heads very pointedly told Columbia that Scouts never take any part in politics, and this intervention resulted in the formation of the Rangers.

After Capra had satisfied the Scouts, he was compelled to cope with James B. Preston, former superintendent of the Senate press gallery, who was brought to Hollywood as technical adviser. Preston, who looks like Neville Chamberlain and portrayed him at a recent Gridiron banquet, at the outset was like all technical advisers: he thought the movies should conform to fact. Bowing to the first law of the cinema—that the medium must not offend any one, ever—he conceded that the Vice President could abandon recognition of members on the floor by States and, instead, could say, "Mr. Smith, the Senator." He had no solution for the problem of identifying the characters with a political party, so the dialogue will avoid use of the words Republican and Democrat. However, wisecracks in the audience will know the political stripe of the villain because the Democrats sit on the right side of the Senate chamber and the Republicans on the left. Capra was afraid that this seating arrangement might impel a national crisis, for the inference would be that the Republicans are Leftists. Preston thought not, though.

Guided by photographs and measurements and the alert eye of Preston, Lionel Banks, Columbia's art director, has copied the Senate Chamber exactly. The body's desks have never been duplicated and the studio had to have them built. The busts of Vice Presidents which are set in niches around the chamber do not entirely conform to fact. An unnecessary expense would have been incurred to reproduce each one, so a group of six were selected to appear in close shots and casts of these same half-dozen were made to fill the other niches for the long shots.

Elsa Maxwell is giving more than casual thought to the party she must stage in "Elsa Maxwell's Hotel for Women," which is before the Twentieth Century-Fox cameras. She realizes that her reputation is at stake with the movie audiences and that the celebration on the screen must be as startling as it is unique in order to retain the customers' faith. She came to Hollywood to serve as technical adviser on the film, which was then known as "Hotel for Women," but after screen tests were made, Darryl Zanuck gave orders to build the picture around her and incorporate her name in the title. So a part was written in which she serves in the story as a kind of dea ex machina to Linda Darnell, Fox's current Cinderella girl, who has replaced Arleen Whelan as the studio's favorite novitiate, and the party she gives for Miss Darnell is the object of her concern.

Miss Maxwell says that her principal complaint about Hollywood is that she is a highly organized person in a highly disorganized industry. Such things as being awakened at 6:30, reporting at the studio at 8 and not being needed until 11 irritate her. She says that disorganization has affected her so greatly that when the picture is finished she will have to go to Europe for a rest. Otherwise she is quite enthusiastic about the screen.

"You know, money means nothing to me," she says, "With me it's a matter of loyalty. That is why I'm so happy here. They have won my loyalty. It makes all the difference in the world to work with gentlemen, and the men at Fox are gentlemen. If I am a success and remain in pictures, I shall work for no one but Fox."

She describes Zanuck as a wizard, the Marconi of the films who is head and shoulders above any other genius in Hollywood. "I love Mr. Zanuck," she says simply. She says she loves Gregory Ratoff, her director, too.

Miss Maxwell believes that she is able to cope with Hollywood because of her sense of humor. She says she makes a practice of taking serious things lightly and frivolous things seriously. Before she leaves town she hopes to give a party that will quite outshine anything Hollywood has known. She is troubled by the fact that the citizens, while delightful, are so conservative.

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Alan Mowbray is quite concerned about the health of Bobby Breen. He is appearing with the young singing star in "Way Down South," Sol Lesser's current discussion of culture on the plantations. After working with Bobby for three or four days, Mowbray went to Bernard Vorhaus, the director, and said, "You'd better get those electricians to change their terminology. They keep yelling, 'Kill that junior.'" Then, fixing an eye on Bobby, he continued, "One of them might misunderstand."

"Way Down South" will be one of Master Breen's more pretentious offerings. It has to do with the slave days on the old Breen plantation, a wicked lawyer, a faithful servant and glamour in the form of Steffi Duna. Clarence Muse and Langston Hughes, Negro composers of considerable note, have arranged eleven spirituals to be sung by the Hall Johnson Choir, as well as some original music which Bobby will sing. Much of the action takes place in the slave quarters at the edge of the sugar cane. For an authentic touch, the studio had several tons of cane shipped from Louisiana, but when it arrived at the California border it was found that agricultural restrictions prohibited bringing it in. Desperate because of the time element, they discovered that sugar cane is grown in quantities near Bakersfield, about 100 miles from Hollywood. [
CAPRA CUTS A CAPER
By FRANK S. NUGENT
CAPRA'S CAPITOL OFFENSE

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I
t begins to look as though we were premature last Sunday in proposing a lead to demon-.
strate the sad fact that Mr. Capra's "Mr. Smith" has come to Washington, and to the Senate, the entire Congress for that matter, is controlled by crooked politicians? What folly can one have in such a nation as a promoter of democracy's cause when genuine good in the situation, though, Mr. Capra has been irreverent. Quite possibly he declines to be overawed by the film's depiction of a group of Senators, in indignation because a comedy suggests, among the warring nations. How will the people of our countries feel toward the motion picture industry, "is presented with the spirit of the government Mr. Capra's sense of humor, although we have not given up all hope for it yet. There is delicious humor in the very homeliness of Mr. Harriman's implication that Mr. Capra will be the responsible man if the United States fails to stop the war. And there is bitter humor in the notion of a group of Senators, indignantly because a comedy suggests that Senators are not always nobly motivated, concerning Hollywood of its error by applaudingly working for the passage of punitive legislation. We find it a matter of humorous reflection, too, that the National Commission on the film industry, which members now are annoyed by the film's depiction of newspaper men, have reviewed the picture's Washington premise and threw a most enjoyable oocktail party after it. Will any source support the former? Mr. Tamiroff certainly. His picture opens well, with Alan Tamiroff in a Midwestern spear who curiously challenges his medical students to find a soul in the human anatomy. And just what are the objections to "Mr. Smith"? That there aren't some? That there aren't any more? That one remembers that the motion picture industry, "is presenting with vigor and clarity. But as a physician, Mr. Tamiroff. Could it, Dr. Doug-

Harrison's column in The Washing-

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