

## The Mobile Cinema Van in the Villages

*(Contributed by an African)*

IN four and a half years, four mobile cinema vans of the Department of Information have trekked round and round six areas: the Eastern, Central and Western Provinces of the Gold Coast Colony proper, Ashanti, the Northern Territories, and British Mandated Togoland. Each of these territories, though they differ in area, has a population so distributed, that one cinema unit can cover it every four or five months.

Now those of you who live in a town like Accra are accustomed to cinema shows. You pay your money, you sit down and relax, and the show begins. The operator has no more arranging to do than to fit the film into the projecting apparatus, and press a switch. But a cinema show out in the "bush" is quite a different matter.

Do you know what happens in the villages, when the van arrives?

Here is an account of what happens in, shall we say, a Fanti village.

The cinema van arrives in the village, and this time it is towing a palm-nut cracking machine. It is followed by the Post Office mobile savings bank. Word is quickly sent round the village that the cinema van has come again, but this time with another van. The villagers ask each other all sorts of questions in their surprise. "What is the use of this other lorry? Red all over. Oh, is that a policeman? Has this policeman come to arrest us?" I should explain here that a policeman always travels with the Post Office savings bank van.

The operators in charge of the two units then go with one of the elders to the Ahenfie. The Chief, who has been previously informed by the District Commissioner that the cinema van will be coming to his village, is waiting to receive them. Soon the Ahenfie is overcrowded with the villagers who have come to hear what is in store for them. They are told that the red lorry has come on a savings campaign, and the cracker behind the cinema van is on a palm-kernel drive.

Although a free cinema show will be given, all will be encouraged to start practising thrift, and to help the war effort (and, of course, their own purses) by bringing along their palm nuts to be cracked.

The Chief and his elders are next asked whether they would like to inspect the mobile savings bank and the cinema van. The staff of each van makes the Chief and his elders understand that the police constable has come to watch the money that has been saved. "Is this a telephone?" the Chief whispers in awe, hardly daring to touch the instrument. "I have never seen a telephone in my life," he continues.

For some time then, the people crowd round the mobile savings bank, and many are persuaded to make investments. No less popular is the cracking machine. The next surprise for the people comes at 4.45 in the afternoon. A wireless set is placed near the cinema van.



*A cinema van on a ferry*

A large crowd gathers round it, waiting to see what will happen. "This is Accra calling," says a voice from the wireless set. The announcer starts to speak in Hausa. "Heh! Mama Isaaka, will you go to the Zongo and inform the people to come to this place?" The news in Twi follows. Then the news in Ewe. And, of course, when Albert, Sam and John Quansah begin their little programme, the excitement becomes intense. "That is Fanti, my mother tongue. Oh! one set speaking so many languages. What good music in Fanti! Let's learn this song, so that the Konkoma Silver Star may learn from us." "Hitler regwan ko, ko, ko, regwan ko." (Hitler is running away.) "The war news is encouraging. I wonder if we shall finish this war before December."

Gradually it becomes dark. The cinema performance will soon begin. The screen is fixed. Regimental marches are played and the amplifier makes them echo through the village. When the music stops, a speech is made by the interpreter on the urgent need for the people to practise saving. And then the cinema operator starts his part of the show. Newsreel films are seen, and there is a series of pictures about the palm-kernel drive in the Gold Coast. They were filmed by the Cinema Officer of the Gold Coast.

And no village audience is satisfied until, at the end, they see some comic film, such as *Charlie the Rascal*. I often wonder if Charlie Chaplin knows how many ardent fans he has in the Gold Coast.

The performance is over at last. The young boys and girls begin to talk about what they have seen on the screen. It is good to listen to



*A typical village audience watching a film show*

them. "Kofi! What did you see?" "Oh, I saw the big white man from that place—Australia—making the Japanese run." "I also liked to see the soldiers making bridges in that other place—Burma." Another boy said, "It was exciting to see what the people did in England when they thought their enemies might try and come there early in the war." A young girl joined in, saying, "Did you see Nurse Ademola?" "I wish I could go to England to be trained as a nurse. Then I could be a nursing sister in the Gold Coast one day." An elderly person talks about the picture showing farmers in the Keta district cracking palm kernels. Another says, "We must write more letters to our soldiers in Burma to show them we have not forgotten them."

Gradually the hubbub dies down, and the village becomes quiet once more as the people go back to their homes to sleep.

The next day, the Chief summons a general meeting. The meeting takes place near the mobile savings bank. The Chief opens a new account by saving a pound. The Registrar, who is literate, follows the example of the Chief, and he deposits no less than eleven pounds. Then comes an old woman, with her mite, which she has kept in an earthenware pot for years. She is a little nervous at first, and clings to her treasure for just a bit longer. With reassurances from the clerk in charge, she hands over ten shillings to open an account. The school children follow, and they buy savings stamps. The villagers promise to try to save, but make the excuse that they are too far away from a postal agency with savings bank facilities. But the clerk points out to them that a walk of

two miles is worth it, if they are able to save for the future when they get to the other end.

The next morning, in accordance with native custom, the two units go to the Ahenfie to say good-bye to the Chief of the village. The latter sends for his elders. The Chief makes a short speech. He says something like this: "I shall be thankful if you will convey my greetings to Government. My subjects have enjoyed your films, and a great lesson has been learnt. Where are the pro-Nazis in the Gold Coast? There are no pro-Nazis these days. While many extol the works of the British people, there are but a very few who are labouring to decry them. Last year, we saw a film which showed an English tailor and his wife working in their garden. Among ourselves we argued, 'How can one do such work with a necktie and dressed in woollen suits?' We came to know that it is the custom of English people. Their little daughter was helping them, and now the children in this village are helping their mothers on the farms. The English girl's name was Rose, and 'Rose,' popularly known in this village as 'Akoda Boni,' has taught the children how to help their mothers on their farms. This girl 'Rose' will never be forgotten in this village. Can you come along with that picture on your next tour? This year, we saw two important pictures—'Rubber' and 'Timber.' We shall continue helping the war effort.

"On behalf of my subjects, we shall be pleased to have two days' performances on your next tour. We hope to see you in three months' time. In conclusion, we are sorry for giving you poor accommodation, but by next year, we shall try to arrange better accommodation for you. Thank you for coming." As the Chief ends, there is applause from the rest of the people.

The interpreter of the cinema van speaks on behalf of the two units. He thanks the Chief for receiving them and for giving them hospitality. He asks the Chief and his subjects to continue working on their farms, for victory will soon be ours. He reminds the people to continue tapping the rubber and to crack more palm nuts, now that they have seen how important that work is.

The two units then prepare to leave for the next village. The children and grown-ups gather near the vans to say good-bye. Handkerchiefs are waved. "Good-bye, bye-bye!" And another village cinema show is over.

#### ANY QUESTIONS?

In our next issue we propose to start a question and answer column. We receive some very interesting queries from officers in the field, and many of those engaged in cinema work would benefit from the answers.

If you have any difficulty, write it in the form of a question to the Editor, *Colonial Cinema*. Besides answering the query by the earliest possible mail we shall publish any question and answer which are likely to be useful to other readers.