

SPEAKING CANDIDLY

Film Reviews

By G.M.



JAMAICA INN

(Paramount-British)

Those two great artists, Charles Laughton and Alfred Hitchcock, as star and director respectively, obviously had the time of their lives making *Jamaica Inn*. The result may not be a world-shattering event (who wants any more world-shattering events, anyway?) but it is certainly grand entertainment. I enjoyed it more than I have enjoyed anything for months; as much, I think, as I once enjoyed the serials in "Chums" or the latest shocker about Sexton Blake. The comparison is not as wild as you might think. *Jamaica Inn* has all the lurid thrills of an old-fashioned serial, piled up gloriously one on top of another. One would not even have been surprised to come across the heroine tied to the saw-bench in the Old Mill (Ah, ha, me proud beauty!). At the same time, there are those clever twists of direction and characterisation which make all the difference — the difference, if you like, between a bludgeon and a rapier.

One expects something pretty outstanding from men like Laughton, Hitchcock, Erich Pommer (the associate-producer), Leslie Banks, Emlyn Williams and Marie Ney; but it is only proper to mention that one hardly expects anything quite like *Jamaica Inn*. What fun they all had with this version (freely adapted) of Daphne Du Maurier's tale of wreckers on the Cornish coast one hundred years ago — stabbing, hanging, drowning and cursing one another, with a heroine for whom a fate worse than death lurks round every corner, with Laughton leering most evilly under his periwig and talking with plums in his mouth, and with Messrs. Banks and Williams running him close in villainy. They're all there, wreckers, murderers, seducers, bullies, madmen — as pretty a crew as ever kept the night-light burning. How can the sweet young heroine and the handsome hero, who's a King's Officer in disguise, escape from their foul clutches? How can they? You go and see.

And while you're at it, keep an eye open for the famous "Hitchcock touches." They're there, though not so plentiful nor obvious as usual — those superb little tricks of direction and photography that suddenly make the mouth go dry with suspense (though maybe in my

case it's partly too much smoking). And above all, watch for Maureen O'Hara, the newcomer who plays the heroine. Not that you're likely to overlook her. She's a grave young beauty with a faint Irish brogue and some quality about her that compels attention.

In the original story, the "Master Mind of Evil" was a parson. Perhaps out of deference to the clergy, perhaps because Mr. Arliss got in first with his film of the parsonic smuggler Dr. Syn, the Master Mind of *Jamaica Inn* has been changed to the village squire. But what's the odds? It's great fun and grand adventure, anyway.

WHEN TO-MORROW COMES

(Universal)

Like *In Name Only* (reviewed recently), this is another — and rather less successful — attempt to ring the changes on the two-women-one-man theme. But the novelty of its opening rather outweighs the familiarity of its ending. Conservative Hollywood has dared (why it should be considered "daring" Hollywood alone knows) to escape momentarily from escapist themes and set a romance in the midst of Labour troubles in America, with a heroine (Irene Dunne) who mounts a platform, harangues a meeting on the solidarity of the working class, and leads a waitresses' strike. But the daring soon evaporates, and so does the heroine's interest in social problems. She remembers only that she is a Woman in Love when she meets the handsome Philip André Pierre Chegal (Charles Boyer), whom she thinks at first is an out-of-work pianist. He is a pianist indeed, but a great one — and married. At this stage the plot might have become hopelessly swamped in sentiment, were it not swamped instead by a hurricane which almost equals, for violence and wetness, that more famous one created by Sam Goldwyn for the benefit of Dorothy Lamour.

After a hectic week-end of stormy weather, stormy passions and frustrated hopes at the great pianist's Long Island mansion and in a church where hero and heroine are marooned for a night without benefit — or need — of clergy (for Hollywood is never too daring), the story gently washes the unhappy lovers toward an inconclusive finale which leaves the hero still married to a



CHARLES LAUGHTON, thoroughly enjoying himself, threatens Maureen O'Hara with death, or worse, in a scene from Paramount's "Jamaica Inn," directed in England by Alfred Hitchcock. It is reviewed on this page

mad wife, but still in love with the other woman. The best consolation offered to the disconsolate heroine and to soft-hearted members of the audience is the implication that things may be brighter "when to-morrow comes."

It might be suggested that an actor like Charles Boyer is worthy of something better than this rather morbid piece of fiction; but personally I always find him well worth watching, whatever the occasion. It might also be suggested that he is worthy of a more suitable co-star than Irene Dunne; and with that I have no quarrel, though to give Miss Dunne her due, she does her best.

Yet if it came to awarding a prize for acting in *When To-morrow Comes*, I'd even pass by Boyer and give it to the actress who plays his pitiful, unbalanced wife. But I regret to say that I don't even know her name yet.

UN CARNET DE BAL

(Studios Francais 1.)

When *Mayerling* was reviewed in *The Listener* it was suggested that the Entente Cordiale, plus a shortage of American and English product, might give French films a well-deserved chance to break into the New Zealand market. That prediction looks like being fulfilled. Picturegoers who enjoyed *Mayerling* and *The Cheat* will soon have a chance of seeing, in *Un Carnet de Bal*, another aspect of French production. That students of the cinema will be enthusiastic about its technical qualities, its magnificent acting, and the vitality of its direction is certain; but that it will be as generally popular as the other two pictures just mentioned is rather more doubtful.

I had better be frank and admit that I did not see *Un Carnet de Bal* in ideal circumstances. The screen at the theatre was bisected throughout by a feather in the hat of a woman in front, and, not being a French scholar, but nevertheless polite, I almost dislocated my neck trying to read the English captions at the bottom of the screen. Yet even allowing for such local problems, which are not likely to be repeated, there are many parts of *Un Carnet de*

Bal well worth going a long way out of one's way to see. The story is no story in the Hollywood sense, but rather a dramatic tapestry expertly woven round the experiences of a rich widow (Marie Bell), who, finding a programme of her first ball, sets out to recapture her lost youth, if she can, by tracking down the men who, as callow gallants, had written their names in that programme 20 years before.

It is a bitter-sweet journey of disillusionment. The first, she finds, had died by his own hand for love of her, and, dying, had stayed young and alive forever in the mind of his grief-mad mother; the second, who wrote hot verses to her beauty, had become a cheap crook; a third, an older man, has sought peace and forgetfulness of her unconscious cruelty behind the walls of a monastery. There was a fourth who vowed that with her as his inspiration he would become president of France. When she finds him, he is mayor of a small town, about to marry his cook. But for him, at least, optimism remains unquenched.

The fifth had been a jolly dog, the life of any party. He has become the local barber, as sure of himself as ever; but for the widow his jollity is as flat as last night's champagne.

With the sixth name, the trail leads her to the waterfront of Marseilles, where, in a rickety tenement, she finds the once promising young doctor — one-eyed, epileptic, a very wreck of a man. To emphasise how awry his life has gone, the cameras are deliberately tilted throughout the scene.

Disillusioned, the woman who went in search of yesterday returns to to-day, and finds consolation where least expected.

For all its many brilliant cameos of acting, of which none is finer than that of Raimu as the mayor, *Un Carnet de Bal* is a director's picture, and Julien Duvivier had the necessary imagination for his task of weaving tragedy, humour and pathos into the picture's pattern and keeping the thread unbroken. And in the scene of the epileptic fit he carries the celebrated French flair for realism to such a point that picturegoers with queasy stomachs may have a nasty moment. But the film is worth it.