


SPEAKING CANDIDLY

HATTER'S CASTLE

(Paramount British)

 THIS is the fourth novel by A. J. Cronin to have found its way to the screen, but it was the first he wrote. Audiences who remember his *Stars Look Down* and *The Citadel* will look in vain here for any of the "social significance" which distinguished those works, and they may be surprised to find such a piling up of genuine vintage melodrama. Not so those who have read *Hatter's Castle* in the original. They will notice here and there a telescoping of characters and incidents, but the general atmosphere of almost unrelieved gloom and a mounting death-rate remains much the same as in the book.

I enjoyed this picture very much, which may seem a strange thing to say after what I have just written. But the story has so much the savour of the Old-time Theatrical—complete even to the scene of the seduced daughter being turned out into the storm by her enraged father—that it is impossible to


feel it subjectively or to regard it as anything much more than an exercise in juicy character-acting. The period of the melodrama is the 1870's, and in more ways than one the melodrama belongs to its period.

Robert Newton (the actor who "stole" *Major Barbara*), gives a tour de force in histrionics as the megalomaniac James Brodie, heavily underlining the character's brutality and arrogance. And Dennis, the shop assistant who precipitates Brodie's ruin (this is a composite of two characters in the novel), is as slimy a slug as you could wish to tread on: a perfect part for Emyln Williams, which he plays with all stops open. Another full-blooded character is Nancy, the barmaid, who is Brodie's mistress (excellently played by Enid Stamp-Taylor). Setting off the lushness of these figures are Brodie's unprotesting, long-suffering wife (Beatrice Varley) and daughter, Mary (Deborah Kerr), whose docile, almost negative quality is also completely "in period." Deborah Kerr will be remembered as the heroine of *Love on the Dole*. In this present role her poise and economy of

movement give a curious, but most attractive impression of inner stillness, of being isolated and immune while tragedy gathers about her.

ABOVE SUSPICION

(M-G-M)

 "OOH!" says Joan Crawford, "we're going to be spies. Just like in the movies." And just like in the movies it is when Miss Crawford and Fred MacMurray, two Yanks at Oxford, agree to combine a honeymoon in pre-war Germany with a Dangerous Assignment for the British Foreign Office—to bring back to England the formula of Germany's magnetic mine.

Sinister figures soon start to flit across their path. A sad blow to any young woman on her honeymoon, especially to one of Miss Crawford's sartorial tastes, is that she is condemned, for the purposes of the plot, to wear one awful hat throughout. But even sadder blows are to fall. A Nazi general is assassinated at a Liszt concert, thereby creating a messy situation for several people; a former Rhodes Scholar (Basil Rathbone) turns out to be a dirty dog in the Gestapo—cries of "Shame!" and "Impossible!"—and Miss Crawford gets

(Continued on next page)

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