



SPEAKING

RANDOM HARVEST

(M-G-M)



IN considering this Hollywood version of James Hilton's best-seller, perhaps we had better start with facts—and these reveal that *Random Harvest* now rates fifth on the list of the greatest box-office successes in screen history, only one place below the first talkie (*The Singing Fool*), and only two places below the other Greer Garson opus, *Mrs. Miniver*. You may think that, confronted by such material evidence, our little man should be standing on his seat whooping for joy. But no, that is more properly an attitude for a theatre-manager than for a critic. For it happens that our little man has read Mr. Hilton's book, and although he is prepared to show a large measure of unqualified enthusiasm, particularly for the performances of Miss Garson and the young actress Susan Peters (as Kitty), he is not prepared to overlook entirely some of the changes that have been made, or the fact that the film is so unnecessarily long that it almost made him miss his last bus home.

CANDIDLY

Or that it lacks the element of surprise which is one of the chief virtues of the book. However, he is ready to be tolerant on this point, because he realises that it would be impossible for the movie camera to keep secret the crucial point that the hero's two wives—the warm-hearted music-hall actress, Paula, whom he marries as the shell-shocked, memoryless soldier "John Smith," and the efficient Margaret, whom he weds for convenience after he has become that prince of industry and rising politician, Sir Charles Rainier, M.P.—are one and the same person.

He is not quite so tolerant about some of the M-G-M improvements to the story—that sequence about the wedding hymns; that quaint little cottage in the country which is the setting for the idyll of John Smith and his Paula, so tastefully and expensively furnished on the two-guinea cheques of free-lance journalism (No, Mr. M-G-M, it isn't as easy as all that, especially when you're just starting to write); that gate which still squeaked with exactly the same squeak after about 18 years, that branch of apple-blossom which still hung in the same place across the path, and that bowl of flowers still in the hall; that strike in the factory town which so conveniently duplicated the conditions of Armistice Night, 1918 (and incidentally revealed Sir Charles Colman as such a tolerant tycoon). And so on.

UNIMPORTANT points, you may say. But, I answer, if they are unimportant then it was unnecessary to include them in the film. The story is sufficiently romantic and sentimental in itself without such embellishments.

Still, there is a law of compensation, and to offset any failings on the production side of *Random Harvest*, there are manifest delights in the acting. Except in the music-hall sequence when she reveals a pair of legs that none of us would have suspected Mrs. Miniver of possessing, Greer Garson is called upon not merely to tug our heartstrings, but to exert a steady pull upon them. Yet her touch is deft and never irksome as we see her first trying to restore confidence and happiness to the man without a memory, and then when his memory has returned, leaving blank only his early years with her, striving oh so patiently and with such secretarial diligence and such high-minded nobility to regain his love on the old level. She even scorns to employ normal wiles to withstand competition (and, as personified by Susan Peters, this competition is pretty considerable). Certainly a remarkable woman—and almost as certainly a remarkable actress.

Ronald Colman, too, delivers his lines with emotion but never at random. Amnesia is not an easy theme (though a very popular one); however, Mr. Colman, with his long experience of melodrama, makes it as convincing as it is moving. Of course, if we accept the thesis of this type of fiction that true marriages are made in Heaven, I would still wonder why any couple so ideally

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