

emotion is genuine, for instance, when Mickey Rooney has to deliver a telegram to a Mexican woman announcing that her son has been killed in Manila; it is genuine, I think, when Marcus plays hymns on his accordion and a carriage-full of soldiers on the troop-train join in; on the other hand, the saccharine fairly drips off that scene where Marcus and his friend discuss the way they pray.

Easily the best parts of *The Human Comedy* are those involving four-year-old Jack Jenkins. He treats the camera as if it were not there, but the camera nevertheless has caught much of the joy and wonder of childhood in those scenes where little Ulysses stands in the sunshine waving to a passing train; where he visits the library; where he helps to raid an orchard; and where he learns the meaning of fear. This is brilliant film-making, and a good deal of the credit for it obviously belongs to Clarence Brown, the director. Those who remember a film called *Of Human Hearts* which Brown directed a good many years ago, will recognise the same warm and homely quality underlying much of the new picture.

I do not expect that you will like *The Human Comedy* unreservedly. It will be natural if some parts make you feel annoyed, and others as uncomfortable as if you had gate-crashed a purely private occasion: but on the whole, if you can look on it as you might look on some Russian or French film that gave an intimate account of national behaviour—if, in fact, you can forget to be surprised that people who speak English do not behave like Englishmen—then I think you should at least find it interesting, and probably enjoyable. It should certainly give you something to argue about.

## THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA

(Universal)



IS it from motives of delicacy, I wonder, that Universal have omitted to give any reason why Claude Rains, playing second fiddle in the Paris Opera, is so obsessed by his ambition to make a charming young member of the chorus into a prima donna that he spends all his money (unknown to her) on her musical education, starves in a garret, gets acid poured on his face, and thereafter plays bogymen all over the Opera House, frightening almost everybody to the verge of hysterics and some less fortunate members of the cast even unto death? My own guess is that the poor fellow is really supposed to be the girl's father—and you know what a potent motive father-love can be in a film story!

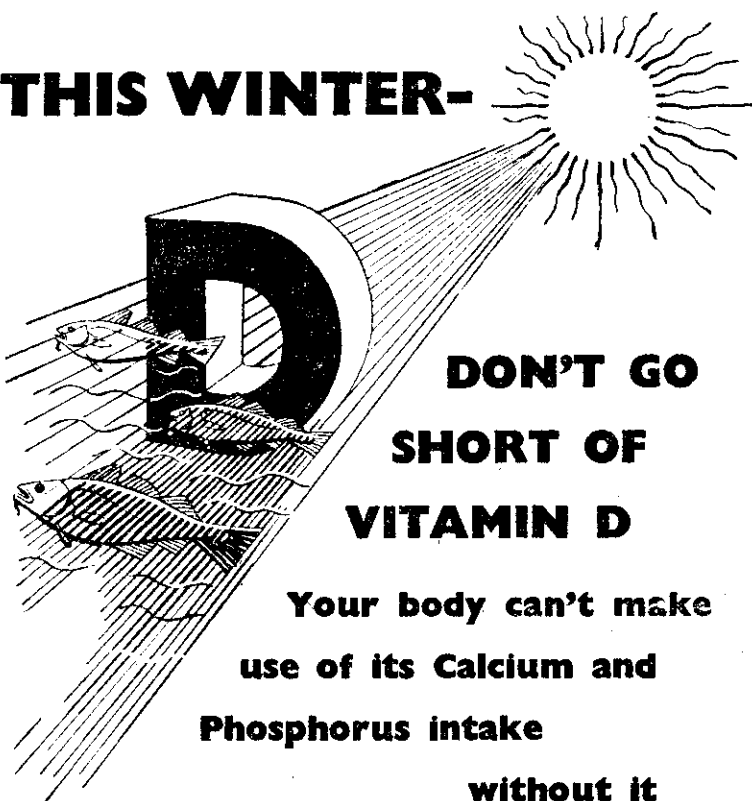
This explanation may make clearer a few of the curious happenings in *The Phantom of the Opera*. And if you are in doubt about anything else, put it down to the desire of Universal to give audiences a picture which, in the classic phrase, "has everything." "Everything" includes some stupid comedy involving Nelson Eddy and a policeman, a great deal of spectacular singing—notably by the soprano, Susanna Foster—and even more spectacular costuming, settings, and technicolour. Some of these things make for good entertainment, but any resemblance to the original Lon Chaney silent film is largely accidental.

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