


# SPEAKING CANDIDLY

## THE MIRACLE OF MORGAN'S CREEK

(Paramount)

 IN this film Writer-Director Preston Sturges comes nearer to telling a really bawdy story than most of us would have thought possible on the screen. The leading character (Betty Hutton) is a small-town girl who goes on a wild party with some American soldiers celebrating their last night of leave, finds herself pregnant as a result, hustles a stupid but devoted sweetheart (Eddie Bracken) into going through the marriage ceremony with her, and becomes an international heroine by giving birth to sextuplets. It is a curious commentary on Hollywood, on censorship, and on a good many other things (including Mr. Sturges himself) that without the Hays Office, which exists to protect picture-goers' morals, *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* would not seem either particularly bawdy or funny, and therefore not be very popular. For almost the entire development of the plot depends on the


polite fiction that, although she can remember almost nothing about it, the heroine was actually married to one of the soldiers in the course of the wild party. It does not seem to matter to the Hays Office that this, if true, makes bigamists out of the heroine and her rustic sweetheart or else means that the sextuplets were conceived out of wedlock.

This insistence on "marriage" is in line with the oft-repeated assurance that only ill-health debars the rustic lover from being in uniform himself. Yet this does not prevent his physical disability being held up to ridicule. And there are other aspects of the picture—perhaps even the central situation—which should excite pity rather than mirth. They are never given a chance to do so.

Though it tends to become long-winded, *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* is a joke all right; often a riotous one, and it is told with enormous gusto by everybody concerned. But I did not find it very palatable. I do not think that puritanism enters into this judgment at all: it is just a question of taste.

## HAPPY LAND

(20th Century-Fox)

 THIS is a simple, sentimental, well-played piece in the *Human Comedy* manner (with a few echoes of *Our Town*), which is scarcely likely to interest New Zealanders as much as the people for whom it was made—the average picture-goers of the United States. There is, however, one incidental aspect of the production which appeals to me as being more worthy of detailed notice than the film itself.

The whole story revolves round the fact that a small-town couple (Don Ameche and Frances Dee) have only one son who, having barely reached manhood, joins the navy and is killed in action. The loss is almost too much for the parents, especially the father: thinking he has nothing else to live for, he loses interest in life. The film shows how he regains that interest by being reminded that, although the boy's life was brief, it had been happy and full, and was therefore worth fighting and dying for.

Now the point that seems to me to call for special comment is that here is another Hollywood film about a one-child family. There have been so many (the currently-screening *Tender Comrade* provides another example of the

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