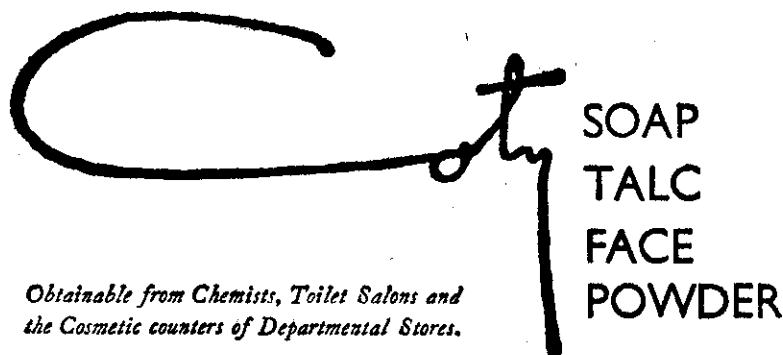


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Film Reviews by G.M.

SPEAKING CANDIDLY

IT HAPPENED TO-MORROW

(Réné Clair—United Artists.)

WHEN I saw this film on its opening night in Wellington, the theatre was a good deal more than half empty, and from all accounts the whole season was a bad one. The theatre-manager probably thinks he knows the whole reason why. I doubt if he does. As a piece of friendly advice to him and others like him, I would suggest that the next time he has a film that is made by Réné Clair, he should tell the public. In all the newspaper advertising in Wellington for *It Happened To-morrow*, the name of Réné Clair was mentioned only twice and then presumably only because of the quite accidental circumstance that the name was part of a display advertisement matrix.

Réné Clair's name might have meant nothing to most of the Dick Powell—Jack Oakie fans who did go to see the picture but I am pretty sure it would have meant a good deal to a number of people who didn't. For even the worst Réné Clair production is streets ahead of the average movie in imagination and polish, and *It Happened To-morrow* is very far indeed from being his worst. It is, in fact, very nearly the best piece of work this famous French director has done since he went to Hollywood; not quite as uproariously funny and certainly not as spectacular as *I Married a Witch*, but with the same element of ingenious fantasy, the same touch of the supernatural, and just as much spontaneous wit.

Suppose, says Clair (borrowing the idea from Lord Dunsany) that a man, a newspaper reporter, could read to-morrow evening's newspaper to-day, could know for a certainty what horses were going to win races that had not yet been run, what crimes were going to be committed, and so on? And suppose that, after enjoying for three days this remarkable gift of clairvoyance, he read in the headlines of the next day's paper the news of his own death in a shooting affray? Would he still feel he was sitting on top of the world?

That is the situation in which Dick Powell finds himself in this story, thanks to the intervention of a queer old chap with unorthodox theories about time who, it turns out later, has been dead for three days and is therefore in a privileged position when it comes to looking into the future. It is the kind of whimsical, irresponsible, slightly creepy situation that suits Clair's talents down to the ground, and the setting (in the America of the 'nineties) seems to suit them too. For the most part the film is delightfully "in period": the days of hansom cabs, gas lamps, and music-halls provide an excellent background for caricature and high-spirited fun. That gaggle of gossips in night-caps at the foot of the stairs; that chase over the roof-tops; some of the funny faces in the crowd at the race-track—at moments like these Réné Clair is signing his name to the picture.

There are, however, other moments when the comedy is, by comparison,

laboured; when something happens to block the spontaneous flow. At such times it becomes plain that Clair is still not quite at ease in the Hollywood environment; he continues to be embarrassed by the Star System and by the conventions of the American cinema. But he is settling down, and although we are not likely, while he remains under the roofs of Hollywood, to see a film comparable with *Sous Les Toits de Paris*, we can now confidently expect a good second best. But he does need the co-operation of audiences—and, I might add, of theatre-managers and publicity-writers to let them know what to expect.

EDGE OF DARKNESS

(Warner Bros.)

HAVING said nearly everything I wanted to say last week, in my review of *The North Star*, on the subject of Hollywood atrocity stories and the Cowboys and Injuns formula applied to films about Occupied Europe, I need only state that *Edge of Darkness* is exactly the prescription as before. This time it is put up in a Norwegian bottle, and contains that athletic but uncommonly wooden young man, Errol Flynn, as the infallible leader of the Norwegian cowboys, Anne Sheridan as his unlikely heroine, a particularly sadistic tribe of Nazi Indians, and an assorted band of camp-followers and Quislings.

The mixture takes two hours to consume, in alternate gulps of bloodshed and romance, with frequent pauses for simple Hollywood statements of political ideology. Guaranteed to cause a feeling of fullness and frustration in all but the most unsophisticated stomachs.

THE SULLIVANS

(20th Century-Fox)

THIS story is based on fact: that is to say, there actually were five Sullivan brothers, the sons of an Irish-American train conductor, who all joined the Navy on the same day, were allowed at their special request to serve on the same ship, and who went down together in action off the Solomons. I hope I shall not be misunderstood, and that it will not be thought I am in the least decrying their particular sacrifice, if I suggest that it was the fact that there were five of them which weighed most with 20th Century-Fox when deciding to make this film. In other words, it was mostly the mass-production quality of the Sullivans' story that caused the studio to hail them, on behalf of the American public, as "the greatest family of heroes that any Allied country has yet produced": the same quality that made Ford the world's greatest industrialist and Mrs. Dionne its most celebrated mother. But whatever you may think about cars and babies, I doubt if heroism can be reckoned in numbers.

This is not to deny the considerable appeal which *The Sullivans* has to a large body of picturegoers, even outside America. The heroism is, in fact,

(continued on next page)