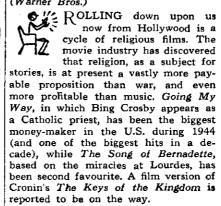
SPEAKING CANDIDLY

ONE FOOT IN HEAVEN

(Warner Bros.)



However, the push that helped to set this cycle in motion came from a Nonconformist direction about three years ago. That is when One Foot in Heaven was actually produced, although it has only just reached us. Based on Harzell Spence's biography of his father, William Spence, D.D., this is the story of a Methodist pastor whose career it follows from the day in 1904 when, as a promising young Canadian medical student, he decides to become a parson instead, to the day years later when he plays the carillon in the magnificent church which he has succeeded in getting built in Denver, Colorado.

Since the predominating domestic experience, apart from marriage and fatherhood, of such a man is to move constantly from parish to parish, the film suffers the handicap of being episodic in treatment and slightly disjointed. This is particularly the case for the first halfhour or so, when we are treated to a kaleidoscopic succession of train journeys, church functions, uncomfortable parsonages, and additions to the family. But at the time the character of Dr. Spence, as portrayed by Fredric March, is developing, until by the time both he and the film come to rest for a fairly long stay in Denver, he has attained life-size stature.

By this time also he has learnt many things, chief among them being that he has a near-perfect wife (Martha Scott); that though a Methodist minister may call his soul his own, he cannot make any such claim about his home, and that he will, in addition, often be dependent on stray marriage fees for keeping his stomach full; and that the Methodist "discipline," by which a minister regulates his own and his family's conduct, may need amending when confronted by such a modern phenomenon as the The episode in which Dr. Spence attends the screening of a William S. Hart silent melodrama for the purpose of exposing the iniquity of the movies, but is instead converted to rapturous approval of their high moral tone, is such a blatant piece of self-advertising by the cinema that if I could conscientiously condemn it I would. But I cannot. The episode is not only effective and highly amusing; it also provides sensational proof of the progress the movies have made in 30 years. Less effective, because too obviously written in for a topical purpose, is the episode on Armistice Day, 1918.

But the film is at its best in its last quarter when Dr. Spence, determined that Denver shall have a new Methodist church, is embroiled in parish politics, and runs foul of vested interests in the choir and congregation. He emerges triumphant, but only after demonstrating that in such circumstances a man of God needs also to be a soldier of the Lord. and requires, in addition to the for-bearance and humility of a saint, the

I liked One Foot in Heaven. The picture has its faults, but they are mostly the faults of the subject, not of the acting or direction. Both Fredric March and Martha Scott manage to convey a clear impression of two people who are good without being goody-good, And after so many superficial pictures, it is a pleasant change to find one which ventures a little way beneath the surface, and treats human character as something worth observing for its own sake.

wiliness of a professional diplomat.

HALF-WAY HOUSE

(B.E.F.)

THIS British picture deals also with the world of the spirit. Or more correctly, it deals with the spirit world, for its two main characters

have been dead for a year and the setting of the story is a ghostly inn in a Welsh valley which was destroyed, along with the licensee and his daughter, by enemy action 12 months before. It deals also with spirits in a more tangible form, these being consumed in large quantities by Tom Walls and several other characters who put up for a day at the supernatural hostelry. Not that the ghosts themselves are completely intangible or disembodied either. Though they throw no shadows on the grass and cast no reflections in mirrors, they dispense substantial hospitality, they work in the garden and at the sink, and one of them even bestows a platonic kiss on Esmond Knight in the course of the

As an experiment with time and metaphysics, Half-Way House owes rather less to Dunne than to Vicki Baum, who in Grand Hotel first popularised the device of bringing together a group of assorted characters on licensed premises and letting them work out their destinies. The difference here is that, though the characters are assorted enough, their destinies are already worked out for them. They consist of a cashiered officer just out of gaol (Guy Middleton), a genial black-marketeer (Alfred Drayton), a morose, drink-sod-den sea-captain (Tom Walls) and his spiritualism-obsessed French wife (Francoise Rosay), a married couple on the verge of divorce (Richard Bird and Valerie White), and their distracted small daughter (Sally Anne Howes), a famous conductor sick unto death (Esmond Knight), and a patriotic Wren and her sweetheart, a young diplomat from Eire (Phillips Histt and Pat McGrath).

All these people have not been under the same roof very long before they begin to notice certain curious details: for instance, that the calendars, the

(continued on next page)



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