


# SPEAKING CANDIDLY

## LASSIE COME HOME

(M-G-M)

 IF box-office success is the test, it is likely that we are in for a cycle of animal pictures starring Roddy MacDowall and a succession of dumb friends. But if they are all as genial and colourful and as innocuously sentimental as *My Friend Flicka* and now *Lassie Come Home* (from the story by the late Eric Knight), then I can contemplate with equanimity and even with pleasure the prospect of seeing the saga of Timmy the office cat, who refused to be bombed out, or of Leonard the llama from the London Zoo, who joined the Land Army. I shall certainly take the children to see them.

Lassie, the more-than-human collie bitch, does no war work: she belongs to an era when unemployment and the dole were the chief enemies of the British people. As a result, she is sold for 15 guineas by a Yorkshire couple (Donald Crisp and Elsa Lanchester) to the rich Duke of Rutling (Nigel Bruce), even though this breaks the heart of their young son (Roddy MacDowall). Lassie is also heart-broken, and refuses to recognise the sale. When taken to Scotland by the duke she heads for home again to the accompaniment of rain, thunder and M-G-M's celestial choir, swims the Tweed, joins forces with a travelling tinker, and, after many doggy adventures, gets back to the humble cottage on the Yorkshire moors in time for the happy ending.

"Dogs are really more intelligent than humans," philosophises Edmund Gwenn, the tinker, "because they seem to know what we are thinking, but we don't know what goes on inside their heads." And the uncanny performance by the canine star of this picture would appear to bear out the theory, particularly as it is, I suspect, a female impersonation. The colour is not as good as in *Flicka* (for one thing the human characters all suffer from badly sunburnt necks), but it enhances the attraction of a film that I can heartily recommend as "family entertainment."

## ANDY HARDY'S BLONDE TROUBLE

(M-G-M)


 IN which Andy Hardy (Mickey Rooney) takes another two steps forward and one step back in the prolonged process of growing up. He is now at college — Wainwright College, the alma mater of his dear old judicial dad (Lewis Stone). This is a little more a seat of higher learning than most similar Hollywood institutions; several students are actually seen poring over their books; but the majority are still pre-occupied with the art of campus flirtation (technically known as "smooching"). Andy is a great advocate of smooching, and tries assiduously to practise it from the moment he encounters three smoochable blondes on the train journey to Wainwright. One of them (Bonita Granville) is a very grown-up young woman, who lectures him on the juvenile nature of the smooch, and advises

him to try to be his age. But the other two blondes are, on the surface anyway, eminently smoochworthy. Unfortunately, they are identical twins (Lynn and Lee Wilde), and although one of them is as smooch-conscious as young Andy himself, the other is, in her own words, the "conservative type." The fact that Andy cannot, at any given moment, tell which is which, and does not indeed realise for some time that there are two of them, involves him in much callow embarrassment, and lands him in trouble with his Dean (Herbert Marshall).

Several attitudes are possible towards Andy Hardy. You may think that he is bumptious and abominate all his works; you may think that he is bumptious, but still tolerate him because he often manages to be amusing and sometimes true to life; or you may think he is not bumptious at all, but a very agreeable young man. My own inclination has for a long time been towards the second, or middle-of-the-road attitude. *Andy Hardy's Blonde Trouble* gives me no reason to change it.

## SHOW BUSINESS

(RKO Radio)

 THE most attractive features of this Eddie Cantor film are its nostalgic melodies, its broad comedy, and its general air of intimacy. Unlike most musical pictures, it avoids spectacle for the sake of spectacle, and its payroll for chorus girls must have been one of the smallest on record. The old-time vaudeville show; just a few hard-working troupers on the stage at a time; an audience which is quick to applaud or to jeer — in these respects the film achieves an authentic atmosphere. And instead of "creating" new tunes, it is for the most part content to employ the songs which became temporarily popular in the second and third decades of this century, many of them in shows connected with the name of Eddie Cantor. His style of comedy is no longer a novelty; nevertheless he is still a very talented clown who knows how to get the best out of a comic line or a piece of funny business.

It is a pity, however, that somebody like Cantor who knows so much about show business did not know better than to use a chunk of sentimental flapdoodle for the plot. Or perhaps it is just because Cantor is an old-fashioned showman that he could not, or would not, avoid such hoary clichés as the wife who thinks she is wronged, the dead baby, the never-darken-my-doorstep-again speech, the heart-broken husband who goes off to the wars and later to the dogs, and the big reconciliation act in the finale. This sort of thing may have moved audiences to tears and applause 15 years or so ago, but I cannot help thinking that it is more likely to arouse derision nowadays. It is a pity that we have grown so polite, that the cinema is so impersonal, and that eggs and tomatoes are so precious; a few of them thrown at the screen at such moments, after the fashion of our more robust forebears, might have a tonic effect on film producers.

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