

(continued from previous page)

title, moves into a mansion, bears a son, loses her husband in the First World War, and her son in the second, but grows to love and understand her adopted country.

That brief survey covers a lot of time and a good deal of ground. Some of the ground is picturesque and some of the time is well spent, particularly by Irene Dunne, who gives a patient, well-meant, and often appealing performance, and by Sir Aubrey Smith, Gladys Cooper, and Frank Morgan in lesser parts (but not by Roddy McDowall, who is altogether too much of a prig as the son). Yet the general impression conveyed to us through the eyes of the American heroine is a maudlin and highly class-conscious one; titled ladies and gentlemen, ancestors, nannies, butlers, and kow-towing tenantry crowd the "English" scene. Allied with this is the impression that all this historic privilege and splendour was only saved from extinction because the Americans decided to come into both wars. And the "message" of the film—that "this time the peace must stick"—doesn't somehow manage to carry much genuine conviction.

I know that some people—and I don't only mean the thousands who will unconcernedly revel in the show—will think that it is unfair to comment like this on a film that is intended as a sincere and generous gesture by Hollywood on behalf of Anglo-American understanding and co-operation. But I wonder just how altruistic the gesture really was. For, no doubt about it, this film is making a fortune. It is so hard to be sure of motives when the fundamental one is profit.

THE GREAT MOMENT

(Paramount)

"OF all things in Nature, great men alone reverse the law of perspective by growing smaller the closer one approaches to look at them." That quotation, which I hope I took down correctly in the dark, comes in the foreword to Preston Sturges' cine-biography of Dr. W. G. T. Morton, the Boston dentist who discovered the use of sulphuric ether as an anaesthetic in 1846. I don't know whether Preston Sturges said it first, but it seems to me worth saying, and it makes a promising opening to a promising subject. Unfortunately the promise is not quite kept. As Sturges takes us closer to Morton he not only becomes smaller; he also becomes ridiculous and unlikable. I believe the trouble here is fundamentally the same as in *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek*: Sturges has too much head and not enough heart for what is, strictly speaking, a poignant subject. Here he gives us a grim enough impression of the tortures endured by humanity on the operating table and in the dentist's chair before the discovery of anaesthesia, but he does not really convey much pity for those unfortunate. He cannot resist the temptation to play the fool. Light relief is certainly called for with such a theme, and legitimate opportunities for it are there, but some of the slapstick antics in *The Great Moment* are more suited to a Marx Brothers film than this.

Still the general method of treating the story is interesting and effective. In the first ten minutes Sturges disposes of all the bitterness and frustration which Dr. Morton (Joel McCrea) suffered following his discovery—he could not

THE LISTENER CROSSWORD

(Solution to No. 248)



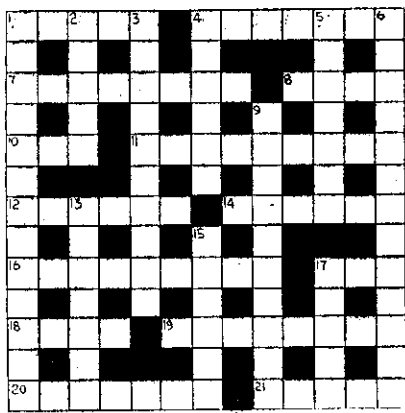
Clues Across

1. This Slav can easily be made into an actor.
4. Even when she's dull, she's entertaining.
7. Bruin in confusion before a monarch.
8. "Her name is Mary" . . . ? Not exactly, but it could be.
10. Dandy.
11. Made invalid by means of a fluid line.
12. Proverbially good news (2, 4).
14. Counterfeit note.
16. One of Old Uncle Tom Cobleigh's companions.
17. Aural part of 20 across.
18. When friends suffer a reverse, it's a bit of a blow.
19. Slakes.
20. Any deer? (anag.)
21. You don't use them when you make meringues.

Clues Down

1. Is this film the negro counterpart of "Castles in the Air"?
2. Patent form of trope.
3. Engaging characteristic of a kleptomaniac.
4. Four inches over a French article.
5. Abode of the blest after death, in Greek mythology.
6. These ornamental plants should pass any test with flying colours.
9. Any milk set? (anag.)
13. Extinction of individuality and absorption into the supreme spirit, in Buddhism.
15. Esteemed.
17. She may be found in the river of forgetfulness.

(No. 249: Constructed by R.W.C.)



secure a patent, was denounced as a plagiarist by other scientists, and died in poverty, but with humanity very heavily in his debt. This approach leaves the director free to concentrate on Morton's struggles as a student, his marriage, his experiments (often on himself), and his short-lived success. And Sturges does partly atone for his callousness by putting some real feeling into the finale—the "great moment" when Morton throws away the chances of a fortune by revealing the secret of his discovery so that the medical profession everywhere may freely use it.



17/6.

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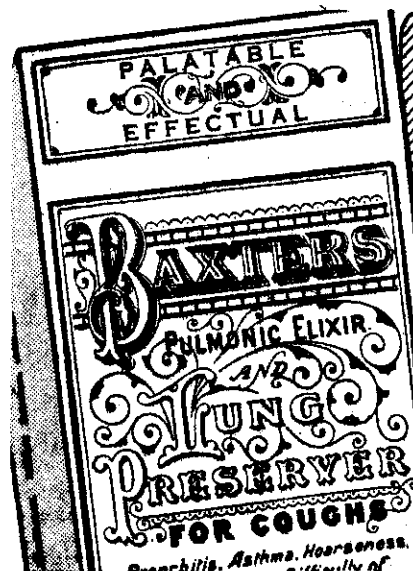
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