



Film Review, by G.M.

SPEAKING CANDIDLY

THE SEARCHING WIND

(Paramount)



THIS screen version of Lillian Hellman's play reminds one of the man who gets up to speak at a public meeting with something on his mind but neither enough words nor the right words on his tongue. The film certainly has something on its mind, and that is sufficiently unusual in a film to be worthy of praise as well as comment; but unfortunately its desire to speak is not matched by its ability to do so. Consequently the "message" only just manages to get across; the delivery is fumbled, muffled, practically inarticulate.

The "message" of *The Searching Wind* so far as I can understand it (and even on a simple issue like this it is by no means clear) is that a lot of dithering, well-meaning, but incompetent diplomats got the world into the war just ended and that if we don't look out we shall be landed in another. Miss Hellman, the writer of the play, appears to be particularly angry about "appeasement" and so far as she is able, or Hollywood will let her, gets in some rather telling jabs at those people—particularly international bankers, members of the social élite, compromising statesman, and so forth, who thought that Mussolini, when he appeared in 1923, was either the good strong man needed to pull Italy together or that he need not be taken seriously, and that Hitler in 1928 also had much to commend him, and who did nothing about the dictators, except encourage them, until it was too late. I am all in favour of honest anger of this sort, but I do wish that some of these people who attack "appeasement" would make it plain that what made such behaviour utterly damnable was the fact that the sacrifice it entailed was not, at first anyway, self-sacrifice but simply the sacrifice of others in order to avoid self-sacrifice.

THE SEARCHING WIND is not nearly searching enough to uncover such a distinction as that; it blows gustily, erratically, and rather exhaustingly, from a point a little left of centre, through half the chancelleries of Europe in the period between the two Great Wars, following the career of an American ambassador (Robert Young), who is intelligent, amiable, and easy-going, so anxious to do "the right thing" that he frequently does the wrong one, and as wanting in real firmness in his private life as in his public one. So almost against his best intentions he becomes a prop of the status quo, which in effect means an appeaser of the dictators; this lack of decision being paralleled in his domestic set-up by his marriage to a society girl with an admiration of Fascists (Ann Richards) instead of to a woman journalist of the militant but rather vague Left (Sylvia Sidney) whom he really loves but whose philosophy he finds disturbing to his complacent outlook.

The playwright, in fact, has used an eternal triangle as the forum from which to deliver her political sermon. This is

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