

# SPEAKING CANDIDLY

## MONSIEUR BEUCAIRE

(Paramount)

ORDINARILY, in the matter of Messrs. Hope and Crosby, I do not feel like the hero in *The Beggars' Opera* who sang "How happy I could be with either were t'other dear charmer away." That is to say, I prefer Bob accompanied by Bing, and vice versa. But I nevertheless did enjoy *Monsieur Beaucaire*, which is full of Hope but contains almost nothing else—there's precious little faith and charity, and certainly neither rhyme nor reason. There is also nothing of the original Booth Tarkington romance (which once served as a screen vehicle for Rudolph Valentino) except the title, the setting in and around the court of Louis XV, and the fact that the story has something to do with a barber. Only this time it is the barber (Bob Hope) who impersonates a Dook (Patric Knowles), whereas, if my memory serves me right, the first Beaucaire was a Duke who posed as a barber.

Still, if it comes to that, this new film is no more unfaithful to its original

than the average screen adaptation, and it gives Hope much scope for his familiar brand of poltroonish buffoonery; going hot foot after romance and adventure, but suffering from cold feet whenever he encounters opposition or the merest breath of danger. The romance comes in the quite shapely forms of a chambermaid at the Court of France (Joan Caulfield) whom the barber loves, and of the Spanish Infanta (Marjorie Reynolds) whom he doesn't love but is supposed to marry, in his guise as nobleman. The danger comes in the sinister aspect of a Spanish general (Joseph Schildkraut), who wants to assassinate the French Dook for the sake of precipitating a nice little war between France and Spain.

However, 18th Century power politics and historical accuracy need not, and should not, worry the picturegoer. They did not worry the producers of the film. Nor will he be unduly concerned by the fact that the comedy at the outset is pretty laboured, and that the gag in the tail-piece is cheap and shop-worn, because as soon as Hope becomes properly tangled up in his impersonation of Great Lover and *duelliste extraordinaire*

the fun is fast and frequently furious. It reaches its peak in a fight, amid the instruments of an 18th Century salon orchestra, which is a good parody on the usual Hollywood duel. Hope is an excellent clown and this sort of thing suits him well; but he is as comical when handling a lorgnette as when handling a sword, and a white periwig sets off to advantage his perennial expression of shrinking bravado.

## CORNERED

(RKO Radio)

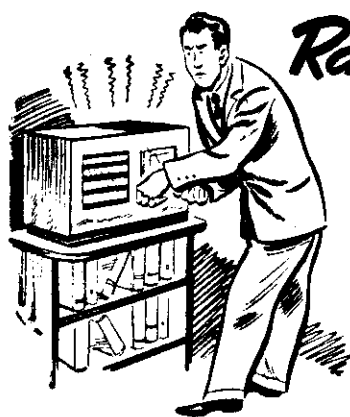
ALL the characters in *Cornered* are tough. The only difference is that some are good and tough and others are tough and bad. The good ones are led by Dick Powell in the role of a former Canadian airman and ex-prisoner-of-war who is trailing the Vichy collaborator who helped the Nazis to kill his French bride, while the bad ones consist of a bunch of fascist types, including the collaborator, who have survived the war and who seem to be thriving in South America while getting ready for another attack on democracy.

Such an air of desperate purpose pervades the film, the characters are all so obviously leading double lives, and so much of the action takes place in half light or full dark that, apart from the hero, it is extremely difficult to sort

out who is who, or even what is what in the story. The shadowy photography now so greatly favoured in thrillers may make for artistry, but it doesn't make for clarity.

This is the second shot which Dick Powell has had at this sort of melodrama (the first was in *Murder, My Sweet*), and he is pretty well on the target again. Wearing a perpetually worried look (not to be wondered at, considering the tight corners he finds himself in), he indulges in hard-drinking, threatening conversation, and various forms of violence, including murder, with as much gusto and competence as anybody, the only real difference between his behaviour and that of the assorted villains being that he is supposedly acting with the best of intentions. When he does finally get his long-sought enemy at bay he starts to beat him up and doesn't stop till he has reduced him to pulp, the sound-track assisting with some realistic thuds and the camera blurring the scene to suggest the hero's uncontrollable rage.

By such devices as these, the director, one Dmytryk, succeeds in giving the film a fairly individualistic style and in creating the impression that it is further out of the rut than it actually is. Clever performances by Walter Slezak and Luther Adler assist the star in creating a general atmosphere of intensity and menace, while certain indi-



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