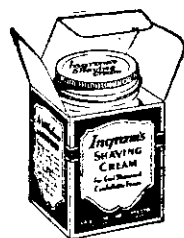


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Film Reviews, by Jno.

WAYS OF ESCAPE

JASSY

(Rank-Gainsborough)

"IF the soul stoops too ostentatiously to examine anything it never gets up again." I was reminded of Chesterton's remark (or, more precisely, memory served well enough to lead me to the right place in the bookshelf) after seeing *Jassy* at a preview the other evening. It is true that Chesterton was discussing penny dreadfuls, and *Jassy* does not exactly fall within that category—for one thing it is tuppence-technicoloured. But it shares one important characteristic with such juvenile fiction in that it is escapist entertainment, more or less pure and certainly simple.

Now I don't propose to join forces with those who condemn escapism in film or fiction. Its most vocal critics, in my experience, are those so fortunately circumstanced as to have little need for escape anyway; and it doesn't take a Freudian to discover that these are a minority in this day and age. But to accept *Jassy* at its face value requires the surrender of more intelligence than I felt I could spare. It is a wildly improbable story of the kind which one finds serialised, and flamboyantly illustrated, in American women's magazines. Indeed, I wouldn't be surprised if Norah Lofts (who wrote the original novel) had written it as serial fiction in the first place; there's an emotional climax about every quarter-of-an-hour in the film.

It is the story of a gipsy girl (Margaret Lockwood) who lived in the days of those mad, bad fellows, the Regency bucks, and as the film opens one of the latter has just lost everything—his money, his large country seat, his coach-and-four, and even his wife's jools—in a painfully unhappy throw of dice. This unlucky chance which both he and his lady accept with well-bred equanimity, inflicts a severe psychic trauma upon their son, who is, apparently, more attached to his ancestral home than to his immediate ancestors.

Jassy the gipsy, who comes into the story at this point, and falls deeply and secretly in love with the son, learns of this strange fixation and determines to get the house back for him. Considering that she is then only a dairymaid, and that the new squire is a drunken rakehell type who horsewhips his wife and drives her from home, chivvies his tenantry with a shotgun in one hand and a couple of mastiffs in the other, throws crockery at the servants, and is the complete autocratic extrovert, it would seem that *Jassy* has set herself a steep assignment. But as one American advertiser puts it, Never Underestimate the Power of a Woman. *Jassy* becomes, in quick time, first his housekeeper, then his wife (in name only, as the euphemism has it). And, of course, the price she demanded before tricking the rake into marriage was the House. Squire dies of ratbane poisoning shortly afterwards and *Jassy* and a little mute housemaid (who had actually administered the poison in an access of devotion to her mistress, but

BAROMETER

Mainly Fair: "The Assassin."
Cloudy, but Improving: "Variety Girl."
Cloudy: "Jassy."

can't say so—and apparently can't write it down either) are charged with murder. As sentence of death is about to be pronounced, the housemaid regains the power of speech for long enough to clear her mistress, then considerably dies in the witness box before she can be cross-examined. I nearly died from suppressed laughter, so I must conclude that *Jassy* is good escapism—if you approach it in the right frame of mind.

THE ASSASSIN

(Columbia)

WITH that long, lean puncher Randolph Scott in the leading role, the escape this time is to the westward, for in spite of its ominous title, *The Assassin* is simply a better-than-average horse opera. On the whole I enjoyed it, as I think anyone will who is prepared to shed a few years along with his coat and hat before sitting down. Scott plays the part of a six-gun expert who is so fast on the draw that other tough hombres are for ever trying to beat him to it, just to show how tough they are. The result of this occupational exhibitionism is a long series of accidents which reaches its climax as the film opens. Scott's best friend succumbs to the prevailing curiosity—or nearly succumbs, as the daylight is drilled through him—for not even friendship is proof against a thoroughly conditioned reflex. Of course, they don't put it that way in the West. "When your best friend tries to beat you to the draw," says the hero, "it's time to stop. I'm leaving this town and my guns for ever; I'm going back to riding the range."

Now, as every schoolboy knows, to think of riding the range without a couple of reliable shooting-irons is plumb crazy, and when the range (as it turns out) is positively sizzling with rustlers, mayhem, murder, and lynch law, it comes dangerously close to suicide. Before you can say, "Howdy, pard," Mr. Scott is about to be strung up on a hickory limb for a murder which he simply discovered. Just as the noose descends a well-wisher unties his hands (he's still on horseback) and with a whoop they're off on the first wild chase. It's a good one, and there are plenty more to follow, and a really first-class fist-fight for good measure.

I have only one criticism to record against *The Assassin*. At two points Randolph Scott soliloquises. It is true that he doesn't do it very well—he uses the editorial "we" in one brief bout of introspection, and his simple mind is so confused that his soliloquies effectively conceal his thoughts—but the precedent is a dangerous one to establish. The Western World is no place for intellectual playboys. There is a certain

(continued on next page)