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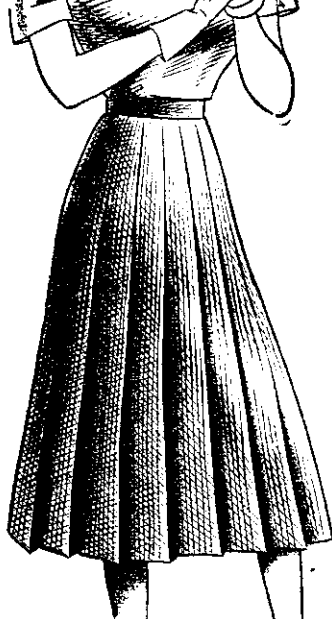
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Film Reviews, by Jno.

Ta-Pocketa-Pocketa-Pocketa

THE SECRET LIFE OF WALTER MITTY

(Goldwyn-RKO Radio)

"We're going through!" The Commander's voice was like thin ice breaking. He wore his full-dress uniform, with the heavily braided white cap pulled down rakishly over one cold grey eye. "We can't make it, sir. It's spoiling for a hurricane, if you ask me." "I'm not asking you, Lieutenant Berg," said the Commander. "Throw on the power lights! Rev her up to 8,500! We're going through!" The pounding of the cylinders increased: ta-pocketa-pocketa-pocketa-pocketa-pocketa. The Commander stared at the ice forming on the pilot-window. . . .

"Not so fast! You're driving too fast!" said Mrs. Mitty. "What are you driving so fast for?"

"Hmm?" said Walter Mitty.

FOR those who know (and love) their Thurber, it is perhaps unnecessary to emphasise that any resemblance between the original *Secret Life of Walter Mitty* and the film story is at best incidental. You can't blow a miniature up into a mural without the sacrifice of some delicacy of texture, but on the other hand looking at the film through the wrong end of one's opera-glasses won't get the story back to what it came from. Thurber's celebrated short piece runs to some 2,500 words and two characters. Samuel Goldwyn's film version covers about 10,000 feet of technicolour and involves Danny Kaye, Virginia Mayo, the Goldwyn Girls, Boris Karloff, Thurston Hall, and an assorted cast of minor comedians and sinister characters.

Since release it has also involved Mr. Goldwyn in exchanges with the critics—and with Mr. Thurber, whose version of the screen-script was apparently butchered to make a Hollywood holiday. So far as I am concerned (and though I am a devoted Thurber reader I'm not concerned very deeply) I think a good deal of this trouble and strife might have been judiciously circumnavigated by christening the film *The Secret Life of Danny Kaye*, or even (and perhaps more accurately) *The Secret Life of Samuel Goldwyn*. The original Walter was as good as lost when the screen rights were bought, for the beauty of his story lay in its brevity. Maybe Mr. Goldwyn realised this—the children of this world have a disturbing habit of being wiser in their generation than the children of light. Maybe he was just anxious to demonstrate the superiority of Hollywood, which has made a commercial success of the subconscious, over Thurber, who merely discovered it. But whatever motives—conscious or subconscious—were operating the result is well-sustained comedy. For that a good deal of the credit must go to Danny Kaye.

Like the original Walter Mitty (and for that matter, like 90 per cent. of the people who will go and laugh at him) Danny Kaye is a timid character with a

BAROMETER

FAIR TO FINE: "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty."
FAIR: "The Big Clock."

well-developed fantasy-life. Unlike Thurber's creation, however, whose fantasies were a defence-mechanism evolved to protect him from the terrors of a technological civilisation, Danny Kaye's day-dreams are revealed as a sort of occupational affliction—a by-product of his employment as reader in a pulp-magazine factory. In addition, he has a doting mother, a petulant fiancée, and a prospective mother-in-law who looks like the shape of unpleasant things to come—on their own, three excellent reasons for the cultivation of a secret life.

Like the original Mitty, of course, Danny Kaye has several secret lives, and the dream-sequences in which he lives them are the highlights of the picture. In all of them—Mitty the bucko clipper-skipper, Group-Captain Mitty, R.A.F., with his wings almost pushed off his chest by his decorations, Gaylord Mitty the poker-faced Mississippi gambler, Walter Mitty the great surgeon, *et al.*—he is accompanied by the same gorgeous creature (Virginia Mayo), who represents, I suspect, Mr. Goldwyn's contribution to the story.

When this blonde walks slap-bang into his everyday waking life and gets him involved with a bunch of Nazi agents, poor Mitty hardly knows which life to call his own or what moment is going to be his next. In the end, inevitably, he outwits the villains and wins the girl, but only at the expense of a deal of boisterous farce superimposed rather arbitrarily on an already adequate story. But by that time no one is in much of a mood to be critical.

I don't think anyone will be displeased—the Thurberites will occasionally be stirred to pleasant recollections of the original, those who like Danny Kaye for his own brand of tongue-twisting virtuosity will enjoy his two patter numbers, "I'm Anatole of Paris" and "Symphony for an Unstrung Tongue," and for the rest, who go simply to replenish their own secret lives, there is Miss Mayo and the Goldwyn Girls.

THE BIG CLOCK

(Paramount)

ONE of the things which attracts me to a Charles Laughton picture is the possibility that room has been found in the cast for his wife, Elsa Lanchester, for I am not sure but that she wears the better of the two. It is a long time now since I first saw Laughton—if memory serves, in a film version of C. S. Forester's *Payment Deferred*—and in the intervening decade and a half he has so often played the menace that Hollywood has apparently come to rely on his appearance rather than his acting to convey the essence of his villainy. That, at least, is the impression I got from *The Big Clock*—and I don't like to have my conditioned reflexes taken for granted.

The Big Clock, because of its horological motif, and for the reason that it

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