

# Encore Monsieur Raimu

## THE WELLDIGGER'S DAUGHTER

(Siritzky-International)

WITH several notable pictures showing simultaneously, or coming hard on one another's heels, the past fortnight has been an exacting one for those Wellingtonians who take their filmgoing seriously. There was *Green Dolphin Street*—that had to be seen to be believed, if for no other reason—then, since Balcon of Ealing is not a producer one can afford to disregard, *Frieda* could not be passed over either. On top of these *Monsieur Verdoux* and *The Baker's Wife* arrived simultaneously with a new Powell-Pressburger film, *The End of the River* (q.v.), and, as I write, a second Raimu comedy—*The Welldigger's Daughter*—has just opened. All this may be regarded as an embarrassment of riches, but just give me the riches and I'll risk the embarrassment.

*The Welldigger's Daughter* is certainly rich. It may not be so deep as a well, and being sentimental comedy

with a neatly-tailored romantic ending, it falls something short of the classic quality of *The Baker's Wife*, but in spite of that (or because of it?), and in spite of one or two other disadvantages, I will be surprised if it does not prove more successful with the average filmgoer. And I hope that normally long-suffering individual will not be frightened by the French dialogue. I saw the picture at a five o'clock shoppers' session, and the screening drew roars of appreciative laughter—though in my experience five o'clock sessions, being thinner and perhaps less intent on being amused, do not usually react strongly.

The other disadvantages are also of minor significance. The censor has used his largest pair of scissors on one sequence and produced a noticeable hiatus in the action, but with this exception he has acted with commendable liberality and intelligence. The film is certainly not suitable for juveniles, nor can it be recommended to the unco guid (particularly if they have a working knowledge of French), but those who would rather laugh good-humouredly at human frailties than weep at them will find it thoroughly delightful.

### BAROMETER

FINE: "The Welldigger's Daughter."  
FAIR TO FINE: "The End of the River."

Those who take a technical interest in films may think the photography a trifle slapdash. Even making allowance for a little fading it must be acknowledged that there is a lack of good definition, particularly in the outdoor shots. Willy, who gets credit for the work in this department, apparently did not use his filters (or whatever it is photographers do use) as intelligently as he might. But the excellences of *The Welldigger's Daughter* would survive treatment a good deal worse than second-best from the photographer.

The theme—that of the girl who loses her virtue (mislays it might be the better word), is driven from her home but rehabilitates herself by producing a lusty infant, and finally gets married and loves happily ever after—is not a new one in the French comic cinema, however novel it may appear to us. Marcel Pagnol, who wrote and directed this film, used the same plot with minor variations in half a dozen other pictures, so far as I have been able to discover, and no doubt this familiarity with the ground accounts for the *élan* with which it is covered.

As in any film in which he appears, Raimu is the main focus of attention and one can hardly fail to be delighted at the way in which exasperation at his daughter's lapse and pride in his first grandchild alternately gain ascendancy over his feelings. But this is not so much a one-man show as *The Baker's Wife*, and Raimu is well seconded by Fernandel, a first-class comedian with a face reminiscent of George Formby's. (The resemblance does not go much further than that.) As Felipe, the welldigger's simple but kind-hearted assistant, Fernandel has not only some of the funniest lines, but figures prominently in a number of those moving and compassionate little passages which the French introduce with such dexterity into the broadest of their comedies. I find it difficult to express the quality of these pieces. They are part realism and part sentiment, but something more than the sum of these components, and the faculty which produces them is both emotional and intellectual. The French call it *sensibilité*. That there is no precise English translation for the word perhaps explains why its characteristics are so seldom found in the Anglo-Saxon cinema, but fortunately one does not need to be French to respond to it. *The Welldigger's Daughter* owes a good deal of its charm to this elusive quality.

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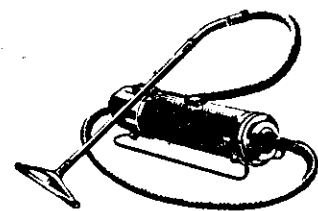
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