

The Film and Society

BLANCHE FURY

(Rank-Cineguild)

BEFORE embarking on an examination of the latest technicoloured extravaganza to assail these tired old eyes, I should perhaps explain that the phrase which appears at the head of this review (and it had to appear there sooner or later) is not to be read solely in what I may call its pre-Raphaelite connotation.

For at the moment, still tingling from the emotional impact of *Blanche Fury*, I am interested not only in the Society which sits in the dark along with me, but in that other Society—relatively high in station and low in morals—which we see so often displayed in all its picturesque barbarity in films of this type.

Like *Tap Roots* (noticed briefly on this page last week), like *Forever Amber* and *Jassy*, of equally refulgent memory, *Blanche Fury* belongs to that social milieu so avidly explored by some popular novelists and profit-motivated film producers—the world of rascals, rakes, and reckless women. The last are almost invariably the focus and centre of the action. The American variety are known as hussies, the English are usually described in more genteel fashion as Wicked Ladies, but the two have well-developed points of resemblance. They may be found anywhere between the period of the Restoration ("That age, never to be recalled without a blush," as Macaulay put it) and the later Gaslight Era; they may be born in the purple, on the wrong side of the tracks, or even on the wrong side of the blanket; but they are all women of inflexible will and uncompromising determination, all of violent temperament, and all capable of wearing the most exotic gowns while at the same time subtly conveying the impression that they are not wearing them at all.

Blanche Fury (Valerie Hobson) is a wicked lady of the early Victorian period. To do her justice, it is not immediately apparent that she is wicked. When she arrives at Clare Hall, the stately mansion of old Uncle Simon Fury, to act as governess to his widower son's small daughter she is all sweetness, tenderness and light. Before long, however, it is obvious that she is a scheming woman, and the objective towards which she schemes is the Social Security which will be hers as the wife of the widower and the mistress of Clare Hall. Hardly has she achieved this when she becomes the mistress of the estate manager—the illegitimate son of the former owner of the property—and in order to have more freedom to pursue this passionate liaison she contrives at the murder of both Uncle Simon and her husband. Being an outdoors type, the estate manager (Stewart Granger) does this job very neatly, bringing the two down with a quick right and left from a double-barrelled shotgun. But what Mrs. Fury does not realise at the time is that her lover is motivated by other considerations

BAROMETER

Overcast: "Blanche Fury."
Dull: "Green Fingers."

than common or garden carnality. Disappointed in his attempts to prove his legitimacy, and through it his right to the Clare Hall acres, he is simply intent on eliminating the legal owners in the hope of marrying into what he considers his own. When he attempts to contrive a fatal accident for the small daughter, Mrs. Fury denounces him to the police. He is tried, condemned and hanged; the day he dies the small daughter meets with the fatal accident he had planned for her, Mrs. Fury dies bearing his child and the film too expires in a swirl of subjective colour-photography.

I was mildly chided recently by one correspondent for condemning the bad taste of a film without drawing adequate attention to one or two incidental excellences, so I should perhaps mention here that the photography of *Blanche Fury* is uniformly splendid. The interior scenes, too, have obviously been constructed with skill and good taste, and on the few occasions on which Miss Hobson was required to behave like a reasonable (and reasoning) human being she acted well. But it must be painfully obvious to any intelligent film-goer that this kind of film is not intended to appeal to the intelligence. Sensuous colour, suggestive camera-work, voluptuous wardrobes, and the pattern of unbridled emotions are simply the paraphernalia of gratification.

And what of the Society for which this gratification is provided? Is it that non-human audience of which Archibald MacLeish wrote, "It is a beast that waits in darkness . . . a beast that hungers as the panther hungers . . . a beast of one desire, and that desire is to feel?" In all of us the ape and tiger are an unconscionable time in dying. Films like these surely don't hasten the process.

GREEN FINGERS

(Anglo-American Film Corp.)

I HAD always imagined that a person with green fingers was one who could make two blades of grass grow where I couldn't make one grow before, but if this film is to be believed the phrase is also descriptive of those who have a natural bent for osteopathy. I should add, however, that I found the film very difficult to believe in any respect. In spite of the efforts of Felix Aylmer, Nova Pilbeam, and Robert Beatty, it is ineffably dull. As a piece of special pleading for osteopathy, I doubt its value, and though I must hasten to add that I know nothing whatever of this branch of manipulative surgery, I was rather taken aback to hear one of the characters say deprecatingly, "We can't cure cancer in its later stages." Most osteopaths (not to mention the B.M.A.) would, I am sure, condemn such a piece of dialogue as most mischievous in its implication.

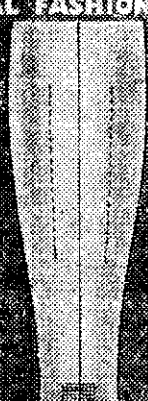
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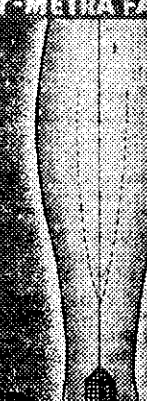
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