

WIDE OPEN SPACES

RED RIVER

(United Artists)

IT would appear that, like the late Herr Spengler, I was a trifle premature in announcing the Decline of the West. I know that among director-producers Howard Hawks is in a class by himself, and I am aware that one *Red River* does not make a *Risorgimento*, but it would be foolish to disregard the possible effects of so robust an affirmation of the old virtues and verities. At the very least one may hope that it will inspire other writers and producers of ability and integrity to rescue the Western film from the degeneracy with which it has recently been threatened.

I don't mean to suggest that *Red River* is an immaculate production—there were one or two passages which made me groan aloud, not simply at their intrinsic fatuity but at the damage which they did to a good, simple, straightforward story—but it moves, it progresses, it deals in the main with real people, and it is conceived in the grand tradition. Of course, the primary advantage which *Red River* enjoys is that of a good story. It tells of the first great cattle-drive along the thousand-mile Chisholm Trail from Texas to the railhead at Abilene in Kansas, of the difficulties and dangers encountered by the cattlemen, and of the conflicts which developed on the way. It is therefore a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end—and in my simple old-fashioned way I prefer that kind to the stream-of-unconsciousness variety which the modern cinema so frequently inflicts upon us.

Even without any excursions into the field of human conflicts the long wandering through the wilderness of nine thousand cattle and a handful of cow-punchers would have provided drama and spectacle enough to satisfy most filmgoers. Space and movement, so exclusively the qualities of the film-camera, are here handled on a majestic scale. The great herd (Howard Hawks seems to have assembled at least 9,000 beasts)

BAROMETER

FAIR TO FINE: "Red River."
MAINLY FAIR: "Vice Versa."
OVERCAST: "On Our Merry Way."

moves like a tide across a range which seems at times to stretch to the world's edge. I do not recall any recent film which so continuously conveyed the same impression of illimitable distances and empty, untouched lands, or of such deliberate movement towards an inevitable end. For excitement there were the hazards of the way—heat and cold, dust and drenching rain, the nervous tension of tired beasts and tired men, and (inevitably) the sudden terror of a night stampede, the latter supremely well photographed.

With such a fine background, it was a pity that the human story did not develop satisfactorily. It began well, and remained strong and believable so long as it concerned the cattlemen (and that was most of the way) but interest slumped badly when a woman and a troop of studio Indians came into the picture. After the stampede, the Injuns were simply an anticlimax. The woman (Joanne Dru), imported to resolve the real conflict which had built up between the two principal characters, a ruthless rancher and his adopted son (very capably played by John Wayne and Montgomery Clift) simply reduced it to banality and bathos.

And yet, in spite of these imperfections, which quite spoiled the film's ending, and in spite of occasional unintelligibility in the dialogue—the Texas drawl sometimes defeats the Unamerican ear—*Red River* is a film which I would not like to have missed, and which I do not hesitate to recommend.

VICE VERSA

(Rank-United Artists)

FILMGOERS up to the age of 14 or

15, and those members of other age-groups who enjoy such imaginative classics as *Alf's Button* and the more fantastical stories which once enlivened the pages of the *Magnet* and the *Gem*, should find this adaptation of F. Anstey's Victorian comedy tophole fun. Those who prefer their humour to be a little less adolescent will probably find themselves (like me) dozing off occasionally. There is a leaven of genuinely good fun in the film, some bright lines, and two scenes which could almost be called Gilbertian, but I can't imagine what led Peter Ustinov—reputedly one of the brighter young men of the British cinema—to spend his talent on this venerable antique.

ON OUR MERRY WAY

(United Artists)

BURGESS MEREDITH, Paulette Goddard, James Stewart, Henry Fonda, Dorothy Lamour, Fred MacMurray, William Demarest, Hugh Herbert, and others, in a three-ply comedy about a roving reporter and what he finds to report. It's funny in patches (Dorothy Lamour turns on the most amusing act), but the patches are too small and too far apart.



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