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## SPEAKING CANDIDLY

### Film Reviews

By G.M.



### THE STARS LOOK DOWN

(Gaumont-British)

Films made from original scripts probably have more chance of pleasing more people than films made from best-selling novels. Trouble is that people who've enjoyed a book are always to be found complaining that the film version didn't do it justice: left out this character, forgot that incident, mucked up the ending. And so on. It's unreasonable to expect any film to be a photographic copy of printed pages, but there it is. Sometimes it works the other way; for instance, I enjoyed the film of "Rebecca" better than the novel. But this is fairly rare. So if you're a film addict, and don't want to risk disappointment, I can only suggest that you cancel your library sub.

Which brings me to "The Stars Look Down." So far as it went, I liked the film, and greatly admired its grim sincerity, but I'd have liked it more if I hadn't read the book. You'll notice I said "So far as it went"; and my complaint is that it didn't go far enough.

Cronin's story is a hard-hitting indictment of the private ownership of coal-mines in Britain and particularly of the Ramsay MacDonald Government which went into power pledged to nationalise the mines—but compromised on this pledge as well as on others. The film ends with the terrible pit disaster and the hero just about to enter politics, which is about half-way through the book—leaving the story up in the air, Ramsay MacDonald right out of the picture, and the mines still in private hands.

But forgetting all about the book, if I can, it is an artistic enough ending—because it is so hopeless—to a film that is courageously and starkly tragic throughout. This is a tale of evil triumphant. The young idealist (Michael Redgrave) who would put the world to rights—starting with the mines—is betrayed by his wife and the man he thought his friend; his Spartan mother sees her husband and her sons go from her; his father dies in a disaster which he had warned was coming but could not prevent; and the only one who flourishes is that nauseating, slick young scoundrel, Joe Gowland, who robs a till and thereafter never looks back. Joe's callous cunning is brilliantly portrayed by Emlyn Williams, who is always at his best in such roles. Margaret Lockwood is the hussy who marries and helps to drag down the young idealist; Edward Rigby is the father, and Nancy Price

the mother. There is, however, not much to choose between any of the performances. They are all part of their environment; and the settings—above ground and below—seem to be as genuine as the characters.

You won't get any fun out of "The Stars Look Down," but next time you shovel some coal on the fire you may think a bit.

### Gracie Said No To Marlene

*Gracie Fields was recently the guest of honour at a supper dance party given in Hollywood by Robert Kane, the producer.*

To meet Gracie, scores of important stars attended the same night club, taking tables in other parts of the floor. From these points of vantage, they could follow with interest the Fields party going on nearby, and when Gracie sang for her guests, the listeners included a large number of famous "droppers in," such as Norma Shearer, George Raft, Marlene Dietrich, Hedy LaMarr, Spencer Tracy, Mr. and Mrs. George Temple (Shirley was in bed!), Errol Flynn, and James Cagney.

Gracie sang to her guests, and Marlene Dietrich sent over a request for some of the famous war songs which Gracie had sung when she visited the Western Front.

Gracie declined graciously, saying, "It wouldn't be quite the thing to sing patriotic songs to a company which might include some neutral Americans or even some German sympathisers. After all, I'm in America just now. Then again, those songs were really meant for the boys, God bless 'em, and for nobody else."

### DRUMS ALONG THE MOHAWK

(20th Century Fox)

Like its own miraculous heroes, the Western film never dies. It has popped up in many different guises in the past 25 years; it has had its off-seasons; but from being merely something which amused the small boys on Saturday afternoons or filled in time on the programme for the grown-ups until the "big" picture came along, the Western film has gradually evolved until to-day it is just about the best bit of merchandise which Hollywood has to offer. All the big producers and nearly all the big stars are now dealing in Cowboys-

and-Indians stuff: even Marlene Dietrich went West in "Destry Rides Again." Just recently we've seen two variations on the same theme in "Drums Along the Mohawk" and "Geronimo." The latter was rather the better; but since "Drums Along the Mohawk" was by far the more pretentious, I'll pay it the courtesy of reviewing it first.

Those who ask little more from their Westerns than that the war-paint should be laid on thick, the war-whoops should be blood-curdling, and that scalps should be frequently lifted, have every reason to be satisfied by "Drums Along the Mohawk." For good measure, they get their war-paint and their blood all in the finest Technicolour. But those who also ask for a story to go with it may not be so satisfied. "Drums Along the Mohawk" is just a record of how the hardy pioneers stood up to several years of Indian raids during the American War of Independence; and since, even in Technicolour, one Indian raid looks very much like another, the film tends to become monotonous. What saves it, in all but a few places, are the frills with which Director John Ford has embellished his homespun material.

Claudette Colbert and Henry Fonda (who has better reason than usual for looking so worried) are adequate, but hardly more, as the young couple who go out to carve a home from the wilderness of the Mohawk Valley. Vastly more picturesque, and often more real, are many of their neighbours—Blue Back, the friendly Indian, who sends a chill up more spines than the heroine's when he suddenly walks out of the night into her cabin; Arthur Shields as the parson whose idea of praising God is to keep his powder dry; Edna May Oliver, as the Irish widow who has a way of dealing with Redskins; Jessie Ralph, as another pioneer woman who can look after herself; and a choice assortment of backwoodsmen, renegades and soldiers.

Everything runs according to schedule—and takes an hour and 40 minutes to do it. The Indians close in, the fort is defended valiantly, the powder runs low, the hero breaks out to get reinforcements, is pursued, on foot, down what seems to be the entire length of the Mohawk Valley by three painted braves, and returns at the head of Washington's troops just as the garrison is about to be put to the tomahawk.

It's Director Ford's neat touches that count most; though his touch isn't so sure as it was, for instance, in "Stage Coach" and "The Informer." He fumbles badly with the sequence in which the heroine's baby is born, and he keeps the action indoors rather too much. But out in the open, with the war-drums beating, it's good film.

### GERONIMO

(Paramount)

This film ends with as exciting a bit of rip-snorting blood and thunder as Hollywood has ground out for some weeks. "Geronimo" puts real pep into the game of Red Indians, however much its slow beginning might presage a slow progress.

Although they take some time to get there all the characters finally arrive in or near a frontier fort, round which Geronimo, Apache Indian warlord, is massing his thousands of scalping warriors. It happens to be a fact that an unpleasant person of this name did cause the U.S. Army a good deal of trouble