

# SPEAKING CANDIDLY

## TOO MANY HUSBANDS

(Columbia)

Without actually being willing to bet that Somerset Maugham *didn't* write the story of this picture, I take leave to harbour honest doubt. From what I know of Mr. Maugham—and also of Hollywood—it seems more probable that by the time his original story had gone through the Hollywood mill all they'd got left was the title and a vehicle for Jean Arthur, Melvyn Douglas, and Fred MacMurray. A very brisk-moving, jaunty, three-wheeled vehicle it is, too, with Miss Arthur's portion, as usual running rather more smoothly than the others. MacMurray is Husband No. 1, broad-shouldered and undependable, who goes off for a sailing trip and doesn't return, leaving his wife and a Court of Justice so firmly under the impression that she's a widow that she loses little time in marrying Husband No. 2, the more reliable, hard-working Melvyn Douglas, who's the best friend of Husband No. 1. Then Husband No. 1 inconveniently returns from keeping turtles company on a desert island where he's been shipwrecked—and Jean Arthur has to decide which of her two lawfully-wedded husbands she'll keep. As may be imagined, it's a theme with possibilities; and not such a fantastic one, either. The kind of thing, one can well imagine, that might happen after a war. But whereas in reality such a situation would be macabre and tragic, Columbia (we won't venture an opinion on Somerset Maugham) treats it as a slightly ribald joke. So does Jean Arthur, who just won't make up her mind which husband she wants (to do her justice it's a difficult decision) and who takes a fiendish delight in keeping them both on tenderhooks. The fun, lively most of the way, palls a trifle toward an ending which leaves one as much up in the air as our own unfinished short story last week, "Mr. Potts Takes a Walk." But whereas we do offer a guinea for finishing Mr. Potts's walk for him, Columbia leaves it entirely to your own imagination to get Jean Arthur and her husbands out of their fix.

## DAD RUDD M.P.

(Cinesound)

Once upon a time we always went to a film of the Australian home-grown variety hoping for the best but expecting the worst. After seeing "Dad Rudd, M.P.", however, it looks as if the day may not be far off when we won't always have to apologise for the fact that a film is Australian. That is not to suggest that "Dad Rudd, M.P.", is the morning star of a new movie age. Far from it. The show isn't exactly good but it isn't exactly bad, either, so we still have to fall back on reminding ourselves that it's Australian-grown. But where there's progress there's hope, and it looks as if the Australian film-makers are on the right track that leads out of the bush on to the road to Better Films—maybe even Bigger Films. Perhaps some day they'll even succeed in making films that

have nothing about them that is an anæmic copy of the worst efforts of English and American producers.

It is the film's lack of pretension that helps to make it satisfactory. Of course, it may be Cinesound's most pretentious undertaking to date—it depends how you look at it. But on the whole the film succeeds in what it attempts to do. The Rudds—Dad and Dave, Ma and Mabel, and the rest of them—need no introduction. They do the things we expect they'll do in the only way they can. And they do them well. The plot has whiskers as thick as Dad Rudd's but it has a couple of worth-while motives tagged on to it. The story hinges round the building of a dam and the importance of water conservation to the man on the land. It is from this that Dad's political aspirations and his success



**UNHAPPY FAMILY:** Jean Arthur takes breakfast with Melvyn Douglas and Fred MacMurray in "Too Many Husbands"—one too many. Hovering in the background is old Harry Davenport

arise. He has to contend with the usual villain who doesn't want the dam to be built any higher: so they both set off to run for Parliament. As usual, too, the villain has a son who is in love with Dad's daughter—and there you are. The end is in sight almost from the beginning. But they get there by way of plenty of fun, a little sentiment, a thrill or two, and a spot of romance. Altogether, "Dad Rudd, M.P.", is something a little more than usual cowshed capers, even though the crudity isn't entirely missing. Anyway, the Americans still stick to throwing a pie or two on occasions, so perhaps the Australians can be excused if they stick to a dude milking a cow as a means of getting a laugh.

If you're looking for a show that will take you away from the radio and the Daventry news, and don't want a soul-stirring drama or anything savouring of Higher Things, you'll probably enjoy "Dad Rudd, M.P."

## SHE COULDN'T SAY NO

(B.E.F.)

She couldn't but we can.

## DISPUTED PASSAGE

(Paramount)

Akim Tamiroff is a Professor in a Medical College, John Howard one of his students. The Professor remembers a young affection which was blighted, and gives all to science. Of his students he demands the same attitude, or else... Howard decides to play and becomes a brilliant scientist. Then Dorothy Lamour appears, and science is east while love is west and never the twain shall meet. Or so the Professor decides. Cunningly, he persuades the heroine into the same frame of mind. She goes west, to China, the hero follows her. When he is injured in a Japanese bombing raid, science in the shape of the Professor follows to remove a bomb splinter from his brain. Science and love by now have both gone west and all is well. The story of the book has also gone west, but no one seems to worry.

Akim Tamiroff lecturing the medical students is distinctly good, Howard is competent in his place, and Dorothy Lamour is as thoroughly artificial as the story itself.

as we've seen for some time. Only half the credit—if that—is due to Bing himself, however. Bob Hope goes romping with him to the South Seas where, in an idyllic island, they find a lovely maid to keep house for them. The maid is Dorothy Lamour (toujours Lamour!) whose job, apart from keeping house, is to sit around in a sinjang (as a change from a sarong) and be sung at. Bob Hope's job is to be a foil to Bing—and he steals at least half the picture doing it. Their game of "Pattycake" ranks with the classical Laurel and Hardy gags of "Finger-wiggle" and "Earsy-Kneesy-Nosey" as inspired idiocy.

## MY LITTLE CHICKADEE

(Universal)

There has never been much more to Mae West than hour-glass curves and "cmupnsimismtm." Some people laugh when they see her because they are laughing at themselves for the deliciously risqué inanity which prompts them to go to see her. Others laugh neither at her, nor at themselves, nor at what she says; but at what they imagine she might say without censorship, or at what their minds make her say at the suggestion of ears strained to hear it and yet always, at the last possible moment, disappointed.

In the W. C. Fields tradition of humour, which has spread beyond the boundaries of the Monroe Doctrine, there must be some foundation of reality, although this reviewer does not believe he is the funniest man on earth any more than he believes the American newspapers when they report the world's baseball championship or interview the world's champion hamburger-eater. It must be granted, however, that his nose holds in the world of comicality something like the place of Chaplin's feet, and his hat is a saga in the manner of the Chaplin walking-stick or Chamberlain umbrella.

This may all be faint praise, but readers who want to find in this review some excuse for going to see two such famous stars in combination in "My Little Chickadee" will find that it is not entirely derogatory. After all, it was something to start the world inviting all its friends to come up and see it some time. And Mr. Fields no doubt finds it invaluable to own those piggy little eyes behind that porky fat nose.

As names in capital letters these two can be what the world makes of them, and this reviewer will tolerate the verdict, admitting quite frankly that he likes neither of them. But as the stars of "My Little Chickadee" they can be little more than a sherry-glass waist and a bump on a face, for Universal have given them almost nothing on which to work their wiles. The gags are flat, the situations stale, and the recording too poor to cover the dental mumblings of Fields. Even if the gags were flat, even if the situations were as worn as a charlady's knees at 80, the pair might still have made something of the picture if there had been more gags and more situations. But there's only one joke (Mae fakes a marriage with Fields and leaves a goat in her bed for him) and only one situation of which they can make any good use (Fields farewelling Mae: "Come up and see me some time," he says).

It is worth noting that a Saturday night audience in a Wellington theatre only laughed during this picture when it thought it ought to.

The film is made from the book by Lloyd C. Douglas. It is not the sort of film against which theatre-goers should be specifically warned, but we cannot take the responsibility of encouraging them to encourage Hollywood to keep on working over this old ground. "Disputed Passage" is fair enough entertainment, but medical men on the screen are beginning to look as common as patent medicine advertisements in magazines. Frank Borzage has done nothing new with this mildewed topic.

## THE ROAD TO SINGAPORE

(Paramount)

As I seem to have mentioned before, I have an unconquerable predilection for Bing Crosby—particularly when he's acting and not singing. Time was when such a confession had to be made defiantly, but now more and more people seem to be agreeing with my opinion (not to mention Paramount's) that Bing's the boy for bright entertainment. And the Bing-Boosting Minority is likely to be less of a minority than ever after "The Road to Singapore," which is as pleasant a piece of irresponsible foolery