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THE HEALTH CRUSADE

Film Reviews by G.M.

# THE GRAPES OF WRATH

(20th Century Fox)

HOLLYWOOD begins to show signs of realising that gold is not all that glitters. Used with a technical brilliance that often seems perfect, the camera has created a world of people who move on screens and of people who look at them. Accidentally, it has occasionally picked upon a segment of real life. When it has, some have noticed; most have not. The screen has been our dream-world and we have slumbered peacefully through all the attractive myths it has raised before us.

But lately, it seems, Hollywood has been admiring with envy the best-seller sales figures of books like those written by John Steinbeck. Steinbeck has his ear to the ground. He has sensed the movements in it, heard the rustlings, and felt its upheavings as something buried strives to break the crust. And the books he has written about his findings have been read.

Very well, Hollywood has said, if people read these books they will go to see them in pictures. Presto! Here are the pictures!

Anyone who wishes, out of admiration for the work of John Ford, as director of "The Grapes of Wrath," to suggest that Hollywood has a conscience after all, will please observe the introductory captions to the picture. In the art and literature of America during the last twenty years it has been impossible to escape a realisation of trouble boiling beneath the surface. Hollywood is just learning about it. In fact, Hollywood has learned so little about it that the plight of the dust-bowl "Okies" seems to them to be the result of "natural calamities and economic forces over which there is no control." No doubt the New Deal has been regarded as a similarly God-sent trial.

And Hollywood has missed in the end of the picture just as it has misfired at the beginning. Steinbeck ended his book with a last careful touch of hopeless tragedy. This was too much for Hollywood. "The Grapes of Wrath" ends with a splendidly photographed attempt to suggest that happiness for the straying family is just around the corner where the golden lights glow. It is an artful piece of work, and will satisfy anyone who has not read the book; but for those who know Steinbeck it will ring pretty hollow.

So much for Hollywood. The picture itself, between those false ends, is a magnificent justification of the camera as a documentary force.

Until the end, the book has been followed closely. Readers who remember it well (and who does not?) will be able to study as the picture unfolds exactly how it has been concentrated into the running time—which is well over the usual limit. It is clever condensation.

The photography is in tune with the mood of the picture and the people in it.



"OKIES": Eddie Quilian, Dorris Bowdon, John Carradine and Henry Fonda in the 20th Century-Fox film "The Grapes of Wrath"

The people are in tune with the mood of the book.

It is a great picture, in spite of Hollywood.

These farmers in the Oklahoma Dust-bowl have been driven from farms stripped of richness by the greedy cotton plant. It is "uneconomic" for them to carry on as share-croppers. Their mortgages are foreclosed, caterpillar tractors push past and through their homes. Attracted by posters offering

night. They hate and they are hated. That is all the story.

To offset Hollywood's incurable passion for heroes and headlines, I do not trouble with the names of the cast. Director Ford has selected his types well and used them carefully. The Hays Office has kept out much of Steinbeck's folksy language. The people who speak it remain.

With the sound of guns and the sighs of refugee-ridden Europe now so loud in our ears, it may seem that this picture of a small part of the world is irrelevant. Steinbeck did not mean it to be so. He pictured just one group of people suffering for the privilege of standing upright on two legs; but he spoke for all suffering humanity. And in case there are any who still feel any doubts that the picture can show them anything, it can be said that "The Grapes of Wrath" could, and should, be shown with equal effect in church or doss-house—minus, of course, the beginning and the end.

## FOUR WIVES

(Warners)

In "Four Daughters" the director managed very cleverly to keep audiences interested while four apparently normal, small-town girls known as the Lemp sisters dealt with the problem, each in her own way, of getting married. It seemed real enough at the time and it was certainly entertaining. But there had to be a sequel. "Four Wives" deals with the matrimonial careers of the Lemp girls (Priscilla, Lola and Rosemary Lane, and Gale Page) and after seeing it one comes to the reluctant conclusion that married women are not half as interesting — on the screen anyway—as maidens. There just isn't enough dramatic or comedy

(Continued on next page)

## PAT ON BACK

"G.M."  
(Film Reviewer),

Dear Sir,

I wish to tell you how excellent I think your write-ups on the good things to come in the film world are.

Your angle on each one is particularly interesting, and I consider them by far the best in the Dominion.

Especially, I want to commend you for your splendid and common-sense way of dealing with the venerable disease question arising in the picture "Dr. Ehrlich." Your review will do as much good as a hundred women's conference remits to Parliament.

Yours, etc.,

"L.K.M." (Christchurch).

work, they load up their "jalopies" and rumble west to California. Here they find that the owners of the fruit orchards have taken advantage of the surfeit of labour to cut wages. They starve and their children with them. The law becomes for them a baton in the hands of a bully. Justice is changed to a blow on the head or swift fire and murder in the