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SPEAKING CANDIDLY

(Film Reviews By G.M.)

WE ARE NOT ALONE

(Warner Bros.)



ANY picture with Paul Muni in it is important, and while "We Are Not Alone" may not have the social or historical significance of previous Muni pictures, it is still important, if for nothing else because of the way Muni handles a slightly artificial story.

"We Are Not Alone" is from a novel by James Hilton, and Muni's Dr. David Newcombe is a Mr. Chipsian village doctor married to a shrewish English gentlewoman (Flora Robson). Into their life comes Leni, an Austrian girl who is befriended by the doctor and who becomes the well-loved governess of the doctor's small son.

But the year is 1914, and armies are marching. Anti-German hysteria comes to rural England, and Leni is in danger. Before she can flee, the shrewish wife is accidentally poisoned, and Leni and the doctor are charged with murdering her. In court, though he twice bites back, the amiable, absent-minded, violin-playing doctor is no match for a browbeating prosecuting counsel. He is sentenced, with Leni, to death, though not before he has ingenuously and publicly declared his love for her.

At their only meeting before their death, Leni, perplexed, cries, "They're going to kill us, David, and we haven't harmed anyone." Replies Muni, "We are not alone. Out there in Europe thousands are dying every hour who have never harmed anyone."

Muni, moustached, loose-jointed, eccentric, inconsequential yet dignified, is in the true Mr. Chips tradition, and only once, in his final tense scene with Leni, does he drop a little out of character and become the stars-to-be-our-destiny Muni of "Juarez."

Flora Robson fits completely into the long skirts and starched front of the shrewish wife, but one of the pleasantest surprises is Jane Bryan as Leni. She has a naive young loveliness rather rare in a Hollywood-nurtured lass, and if she doesn't bound ahead after this picture, we'll be mildly surprised.

High marks also to our old friend Una O'Connor for a good if slightly over-accented performance as the rat-faced, spying handmaiden to the doctor's wife. But Miss O'Connor, we should inform you, at the risk of gilding an excellently unpleasant character, proves to have a Heart of Gold.

Much of the story centres round the doctor's small problem-child son, Raymond Severn, a sensitive wisp with crooked teeth and a likeable ugliness. Some day we intend writing a treatise on screen children, if only for the purpose of inquiring whether we are normal in disliking the ones who are beautiful, and feeling our old heart go out to the unbeautiful ones.

Cecil Kellaway is there, contriving, in judge's wig and gown, still to resemble a koala bear.

(Continued on next page)