

NEW WINE IN OLD BOTTLES

Three Remakes Of Famous Films

Either Hollywood is hard up for new themes—it usually is—or else it realises that, just as people enjoy reading good books more than once, so they are likely to enjoy seeing famous old films remade. Probably both reasons operated to produce the new versions of three former successes which are reviewed on this page:

THE MARK OF ZORRO

(Twentieth Century-Fox)

THOUSANDS of filmgoers remember "The Mark of Zorro" as one of the best appearances of that swashbuckling knight of the silent screen, Douglas Fairbanks, and many of them must have felt some misgivings when it was announced that Twentieth Century-Fox would remake the story with Tyrone Power as the Terror of Old California. For Tyrone Power, whatever his effect on the ladies, has not previously been renowned as a fighting man calculated to strike terror into the hearts of corrupt Californians. As one of those who looked on "The Mark of Zorro" as one of the bright cinematic spots of their boyhood, I must confess that I went to see the new version more or less expecting that it would arouse nothing but nostalgic regrets for the late lamented Fairbanks and sentimental yearnings for the years that the locust and the talkies have eaten. However, I needn't have worried. The new "Zorro" is fresh and vigorous enough to make one forget the old. Surprisingly, too, Tyrone Power's performance seems just about all that it should be. It is one of the few occasions on which he has done any real acting. Perhaps that is because the character of Zorro never really existed, whereas it has often been Power's misfortune in the past to have to portray characters who did, such as Ferdinand de Lesseps and Count Axel Fersen. Perhaps it is because Zorro was purely imaginary that Power is able to make him seem real enough. Indeed, for a story that is pure fiction, and somewhat lurid fiction at that, there is a notable amount of realism in "The Mark of Zorro."

For instance, the swordplay which occupies such a lot of footage is a good deal more than the indiscriminate banging together of swords which, in the movies and on the stage, so often passes for fencing. Tyrone Power and Basil Rathbone fence for the gallery, but they do fence.

For those younger readers who started going to the movies only about 10 years ago and so missed the original "Zorro," and for those older ones who could have gone earlier but wouldn't then condescend to, it should be explained that Zorro was a gallant gentleman of some vague period in Californian history, who borrowed his technique largely from Robin Hood and the Scarlet Pimpernel (and, of course, Douglas Fairbanks). After an education in Spain, which seems to consist of learning how to handle swords, horses and women, this gay young caballero returns to California to find that his noble, altruistic father has

retired from the position of Governor, and that in his place is a miserable rascal who is grinding the faces of the peons in the dust for his own profit, egged on by the even blacker-souled Captain Basil Rathbone and an expensive wife. The hero sets out to put things right. From Robin Hood he borrows the practice of robbing the rich to give to the poor; from the Scarlet Pimpernel the device of posing as an ineffectual fop so that nobody will suspect him. From Douglas Fairbanks (or the author of the story), he inherits the practice of marking all the victims of his righteous sword with a "Z"-shaped slash. There is a pure young maid of high degree, the wicked Governor's niece (Linda Darnell), who loathes and then adores the masked avenger; and there is Eugene Pallette as a militant priest, who plays Friar Tuck to Power's Robin Hood. The hero keeps dashing about with his smoothing iron and escaping out of tight corners until his activities culminate in an uprising of the peons and the caballeros which results in Zorro's father being reinstated as Governor, and Zorro's sword being stuck up in the ceiling out of harm's way, as a sign that he has given up knight-errantry and is going to raise a family. Those who recall this gesture of resignation in the early film may also recall that the sword was later taken down by the son of Zorro in a sequel; so perhaps we may look for the same thing to happen again. I hope so.

Best Shot: The look of surprise and agony on Rathbone's face when Zorro's sword goes through him and he realises he is a dead man.

THE SEA HAWK

(Warner Bros.)

IF you go to "The Sea Hawk" expecting it to resemble the book by Rafael Sabatini or the silent film version (which starred, I think, Milton Sills), it is possible that you will experience some slight disappointment. Admittedly there are points of similarity: the period in both book and talkie is Elizabethan, and adventure on the high seas is the theme. But if I remember rightly, Sabatini's tale is mostly about the Barbary pirates, whereas in the new film there isn't a Moslem or a minaret in sight. Instead, we have a pseudo-historical frolic in the style of "Fire Over England," featuring Elizabeth and her Sea Dogs versus wily King Philip and the might of Spain, with Captain Errol Flynn starred as the man who saved his country almost single-handed from the Armada.

I have a feeling that Adolf Hitler was indirectly responsible for this change of

venue. Hollywood retained Sabatini's title but scrapped the Barbary corsairs as being out of date, and took advantage of the current situation to write a completely new story drawing a topical parallel with another occasion when little England braved invasion and scattered her enemies to the winds. And unless you are wedded to your Sabatini you are not likely to object very much to the change. You may even think it is for the better. Just to avoid misrepresentation, though, I think they should have called the film something other than "The Sea Hawk."

Call it what you like, it is wholehearted romantic fiction, done in the grand manner, in which crowd scenes of English boarding-parties milling about on the decks of Spanish galleys are intermingled with individual shots of soldiers and sailors (mostly Spanish) meeting violent deaths in a variety of forms. From the palace where King Philip strikes a totalitarian pose and predicts world domination, we are taken to the spacious English court where Elizabeth wrangles with her advisers and contemporary Fifth Columnists, and tries to smooth out ruffled Spanish dignity and at the same time not discourage her Sea Dogs from plundering Spanish ships on the quiet; from there we set sail for the Spanish Main with Captain Errol Flynn and the Queen's unofficial blessing to pilfer the gold of Panama; thence, betrayed by fate and the Fifth Column, to groan and sweat on a galley-slave's bench alongside Captain Flynn and the survivors of his crew; and from there, learning that the Armada is "skeduled" to sail almost the next day, we escape with the gallant Captain and arrive back in England just in time to chase the Queen's chief minister and principal Fifth Columnist up and down the palace and run him through at the very door of her boudoir, thereby convincing her of England's danger and the need for a fleet. Finally to Tilbury with Her Most Grateful and Gracious Majesty, to see Captain Flynn knighted and reunited with the Spanish Ambassador's beautiful niece (see "Mark of Zorro" above), who loathes and then adores the gallant captain, and to hear Queen Elizabeth make a stirring but historically inaccurate speech. I say "historically inaccurate" because it maintains the polite

fiction that Elizabeth was the Mother of the British Navy, whereas most schoolboys know that she starved her ships for money and sent them out to beat the Armada without enough ammunition for the job.

However, if one started seriously bothering about historical inaccuracies in this or the average Hollywood costume picture, one would hardly know where to stop. Earlier I called "The Sea Hawk" a "frolic," and that seems the best description for its spirit of swashbuckling, spectacular pageantry. Errol Flynn continues to impress me as a rather wooden young man trying very hard to impress me—and everybody else—that he is a great actor; but from the way he draws the crowds I have no doubt that that is a minority opinion. Flora Robson, who really can act, doesn't bother too much, and portrays Queen Elizabeth exactly as Queen Elizabeth is always popularly expected to be portrayed. Alan Hale is satisfactorily bluff and bloodthirsty as Flynn's chief lieutenant, and Claude Rains as the Spanish Ambassador does a grandee bit of acting. But the boys who deserve most credit are the cameramen, who get some very fine effects with sea, sky and canvas.

'TIL WE MEET AGAIN

(Warner Bros.)

HERE again we have new wine in an old bottle. "Til We Meet Again" (Merle Oberon, George Brent) is a remake of "One-Way Passage" which starred Bill Powell (before he became slim enough to feature on the right side of the law) and Kay Francis. I didn't sample the original vintage, but this sin of omission on my part did not affect my enjoyment of the new. On the other hand, the fact that I had seen "Dark Victory" did. Both, I suppose, were regaled by their producers as tragedies: the two plots were strikingly similar—a similarity made more pointed by the fact that Brent was the male lead in both films, while Geraldine Fitzgerald played in "Til We Meet Again" a role almost identical with that which she had allotted to her in "Dark Victory." But "Dark Victory" was by far the more tragic story. Some might feel that—

(Continued on next page)



CABIN PARTY: Alan Hale, Claude Rains, Brenda Marshall, Una O'Connor and Errol Flynn in "The Sea Hawk"