

# SPEAKING CANDIDLY

## THE RETURN OF FRANK JAMES

(20th Century-Fox)

AS you will recall, if you saw the first picture, Jesse James had a brother named Frank, who now returns in full technicolour to take it out of the hides of those Ford boys for shooting Jesse so treacherously in the back and the last scene. Though the pace is rather more leisurely, this second instalment of the James Brothers' saga just about maintains the high standard of exciting violence set by the first; and Frank, plain or coloured, turns out to be quite as good a man as his brother when it comes to robbing a bank and pulling a gun. From an acting point of view, he is a very much better man, since Henry Fonda as Frank James now gets the limelight which, in the first picture, fell on Tyrone Power as Jesse, and Fonda is much more capable of taking advantage of it.

Like some other nations, the Americans seem to have a fondness for turning their "bad men" into national heroes. They forgot the black side of Jesse James's banditry as soon as he was dead,

glorified his daring exploits, and put a tombstone over him which commemorated only that he had been "foully murdered." What happened historically to Brother Frank I don't know; but Hollywood here sees to it that he is acquitted with honour by a jury, applauded by the public for taking vengeance on the cowardly Fords, and left well on the way to marrying a newspaper proprietor's daughter. After all this, one begins to wonder if Australia has been unnecessarily hard on Ned Kelly.

Still, it is worth noting that Hollywood is at some pains to suggest that Frank James never actually shot any men himself but merely "encouraged" their deaths, and that he robbed a bank only because he needed money to avenge his brother. The price he must pay for this whitewashed crime-sheet is that he is likely to be remembered as one of the worst marksmen in movie history. Guns are blazing all through the picture but practically nobody gets hit except by accident! You'd never think there was a war on, the way the actors waste ammunition.

After he comes out of retirement on his farm in the opening scenes to track

down his brother's murderers, and before his Hollywood apotheosis is complete, Frank James has a pretty strenuous time, what with dodging several necking parties, keeping a fatherly eye on young Jackie Cooper, and trying to prevent his decent human feelings (such as falling in love) from getting the better of his lust for revenge. I feel there is something wrong about this business of holding such a man up as a hero, but it is a well-trying and popular movie formula, and there is no doubt that Director Fritz Lang has got plenty of suspense and action out of it in *The Return of Frank James*. Lang knows the value of silence in building up a tense atmosphere; some of his best bits of man-hunting are done without a sound. He also extracts much uproarious comedy from the sequence in which Frank, on trial before a Southern judge and jury, is found not guilty of murder and robbery because the prosecuting lawyer is guilty of being a Northerner.

In addition to Fonda as the laconic, purposeful Frank, most of the leading actors ably carry on the parts which they played in *Jesse James*—John Carradine as the skulking Ford, Eddie Collins as the negro "Pinkie," and, best of all, Henry Hull as the fire-eating Southern editor ("Shoot 'em down like dogs").

## TIN PAN ALLEY

(20th Century-Fox)

THE last time we saw this picture it was called *Alexander's Ragtime Band*. In other words, Producer Darryl Zanuck has again been dipping into the U.S.A.'s musical history in order to give his studio's headline star, Alice Faye, another chance to exercise her husky voice and her tremulous lower lip on a number of old-time popular songs. By now Producer Zanuck has just about covered the whole field from early Stephen Foster to latest Irving Berlin; but on this occasion he confines himself to the few years of song-writing before and during World War I, which saw the birth of such "hits" as *K-K-K-Katy*, *Good-bye Broadway*, *Hello France*, *Over There*, and *Moonlight Bay*. To this period apparently also belongs the maudlin ditty *America, I Love You* (You're like a Sweetheart to Me) which the cast "plug" with tears in their eyes. Love for America, we are told, is "just like a little baby climbing its mother's knee"! We hope Dr. Goebbels doesn't hear that.

The biggest handicap *Tin Pan Alley* is likely to have to overcome in this country is its title, which refers to the street in New York where popular songs are born—or aborted. If stories were important in musical films, this might also be a handicap, for Zanuck has been so preoccupied with putting over his songs in an opulent style that the story of his picture is like an orphan child left out in the cold. It is the threadbare theme of ambition versus love, and the effect this conflict has on the fortunes of two Irish song publishers (Jack Oakie and John Payne) and the sister act of Alice Faye and Betty Grable. Oakie comes out tops with some notable comedy relief, Betty Grable is good to look at, Alice Faye is good to listen to (if you enjoy listening to her) and John Payne is—but out of charity I'll omit the obvious pun.

Apart from Oakie's excellent fooling, the nostalgic atmosphere conjured up by hearing old songs is *Tin Pan Alley's* greatest asset—and Zanuck knows how

## Short, Not Sweet

In London the wartime paper shortage probably helped to produce one of the tersest film reviews on record. Writing of the film "My son! My son!" a certain critic said, "My aunt! My sainted Aunt!"

to exploit it. If you like this type of show you probably won't be disappointed with the results of his labour.

## BLACK LIMELIGHT

(Associated British Pictures)

HERE is a picture which properly belongs to the pre-war period when British producers were discovering a talent, for shockers. Those were the days, it may be remembered, when it was just being realised what fine screen material there was in Edgar Wallace's novels, and when every second thriller had a homicidal maniac in some form or other.

*Black Limelight* is from the stage play seen in Australia last year and is a thriller of an unusual type. It starts off with the cheerful hypothesis that there are people who are not accountable for their actions at the full of the moon and may even go around doing a spot of murder at such times.

The body of a girl—what could be more appropriate to start off with than the village butcher's boy goggling at a body in a lonely cottage?—is found under circumstances that point directly to one Peter Charrington being the guilty person.

Unfortunately for Mr. Charrington, the girl has been his mistress, and things look pretty black for him. On top of that, a nasty-minded Scotland Yard inspector is trying hard to fasten about five other murders on to him as well. All these murders were committed at the full of the moon, and the presumption is that Mr. Charrington is a moon maniac.

Mr. Charrington, however, has a staunch and enterprising wife, and not only does she circumvent the minions of Scotland Yard, but she risks her life to expose the real killer. As can be imagined, it is all done to the accompaniment of much atmosphere, suspense, and protracted climaxes.

Peter Charrington is played by Raymond Massey, who since the making of the picture has been doing much more serious work portraying Abe Lincoln of Illinois to the United States. He acts well ("emaciates," I believe, is the term used of his particular style of acting) but he is overshadowed by Joan Marion as the plucky wife. Walter Hudd does a nice job as the killer, and incidental domestics and policemen are drawn in detail.

One test of a thriller-cum-crime detection story is how well the identity of the criminal is concealed. I am afraid that the moment Mr. Hudd appeared my companion ejaculated "Hedunit. He's crazy as a bat."

Paul L. Stein's direction pays careful attention to such dodges as sinister shadows moving across lawns, movements in hedges, and suddenly-drawn curtains.

A good little thriller, which it is possible the Hays office wouldn't have let Hollywood produce.

# I'M FEELING FINE Mr. BLACK!



Yes, Mr. Black, I'm feeling fine! And you can too. Where'd the country be, Mr. Black, if we all let our health "go to ribbons"? Do as I'm doing — and as thousands of other men are doing. Turn to that grand old health-builder, Clements Tonic. Give your body, brain and nerves the benefit of Phosphates, Iron, Calcium and Quinine, and you'll be a new man in a week or so. Clements Tonic will put new life, new confidence into you, and give you "nerves of steel."

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