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Film Reviews by G.M.

# SPEAKING CANDIDLY

## BUSMAN'S HONEYMOON (M-G-M)


 SOME time ago, Robert Montgomery declared, in a fit of fed-upness, that "any resemblance between the motion-picture industry and creative art is purely coincidental," and I have met at least one indignant Dorothy Sayers fan who was prepared to apply this dictum to the resemblance between Montgomery's new film, *Busman's Honeymoon*, and the original novel by Miss Sayers. I do not agree, but I mention it because it is typical of the criticism that any film based on a popular novel must be prepared to face. Personally, I think most people will enjoy the picture better for having read the book. I'm sure I did, and I concede first place to nobody in my devotion to the Lord Peter Wimsey stories. I've got my own preconceived ideas about what Lord Peter and Harriet Vane should look like, and how they should behave; but even if Robert Montgomery and Constance Cummings didn't quite fit those ideas, and even if the producer did decide that the Great General Public couldn't "take it" when Lord Peter and the Inspector carry on their game of matching Shakespearean quotations—even so there is still enough Dorothy Sayers left in the film to make it a good deal better-than-average murder mystery.

Bunter, the perfect valet, as played by Sir Seymour Hicks, is genuine Sayers. So are several of the other characters who surround the aristocratic amateur detective and his bride, a mystery novelist, and frustrate all their efforts to enjoy a quiet honeymoon and have done with murder and mystery for good. Hardly have the whimsical Lord Peter and his Harriet settled down to "rough it" with a case of champagne and the impeccable Bunter in the country house which is His Lordship's wedding gift to the bride than their idyll is shattered by Bunter's discovery that the cellar contains the murdered body of Noakes, the house's former tenant. Since Noakes was a most unpleasant fellow who practised usury and theft on his neighbours and relatives, there is a cloud of suspects, including the twittering Miss Twiterton, the young local constable, a handyman named Crutchley (Robert Newton), and even the vicar of the village. The film is rather less concerned with the actual mystery than with Lord Peter's waverings between his vow to sleuth no more and his professional desire to help his friend the Inspector (Leslie Banks) and be in at the death. This dilemma eats up a good deal of the footage, but produces some glib dialogue. When Lord Peter at last gives way and agrees to solve just one more crime, it is all over very quickly.

*Busman's Honeymoon* is very English in accent, atmosphere, and scenery. It may not be up to the standard of those other M-G-M pictures made in England—*A Yank at Oxford*, *The Citadel*, and *Good-bye Mr. Chips*—but there was a war on while they made this one, and Nazi bombers were sometimes not far off the studios at Denham. It says a good deal for the nerves of the com-

pany and the organisation of the studio that the atmosphere is as unruffled and polite and the production as smooth as it is.

## HIRED WIFE (Universal)

 FEW of the ingredients of *Hired Wife* are entirely new. In between playing flaxen-whiskered emperors of Mexico and Parisian householders, Brian Aherne has several times before produced exactly this brand of whimsical comedy. So has Rosalind Russell (in *His Girl Friday*, for instance). I have also seen Virginia Bruce portray this sort of blonde menace, and Robert Benchley add the same comic effects.

But stirred fairly expertly by William Seiter, these ingredients make a lively brew. Taking into account the fact that the story is just one of those Hollywood crazy plots, it goes to show, I imagine, that it is not what you say that matters; it is the way you say it.

Brian Aherne is a big cement executive with a flair for tangling himself up in some feminine indiscretion every spring. This time it is a ripe blonde mannequin, but just when success seems about to crown his efforts, as they say, business reasons dictate a hasty marriage with the nearest woman to hand, who happens to be his secretary and faithful *Girl Friday*, Rosalind Russell. Thereafter the picture is concerned almost entirely with Miss Russell's efforts to stay put as Mrs. Cement Executive and Mr. Aherne's efforts to convince his blonde mannequin that his marriage was entirely one of convenience and would be rectified just as soon as the deal could be put through.

The ending is always in sight and never in question, but it says something for the intricacies of the plot that when the time comes for the fade-out, Director Seiter has some difficulty in making it smooth and convincing.

*Hired Wife* is also notable for Mr. Benchley's snoring. He plays the friend-cum-legal adviser of the cement executive. It is a sideline part, his job being to watch over the hectic romance of the cement executive and his secretary and

add comments, play the mandolin, and snore. Benchley is a sly comic, and here his extremely personal brand of humour is given full rein.

I found quite a lot to laugh at in *Hired Wife*, and little to criticise beyond a maudlin shot of Rosalind Russell crying herself to sleep to the strains of "Liebestraum" played from a bedside radio, and the gowns worn by the lanky Miss Russell.

Though I must confess I am not exactly an authority on either point.

## WINGS OVER NEW ZEALAND

IT was only natural that the Film Unit people would be hard put to it to avoid calling their film about the Royal New Zealand Air Force *Wings Over New Zealand*. And presumably in Australia, Canada and South Africa similar impulses are being fought and succumbed to, and we shall shortly have *Wings Over Australia*, over Canada, and over South Africa.

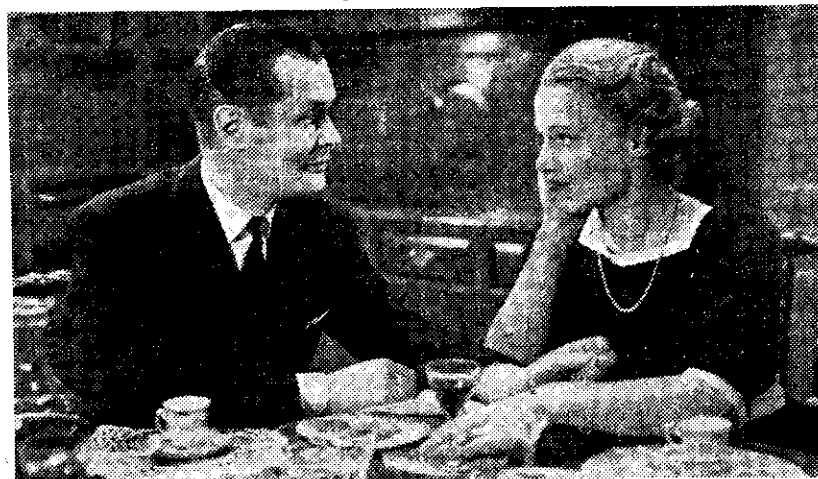
All the same, the Miramar Film Unit has done a good job with *Wings Over New Zealand*, and has produced a documentary which can be sent overseas without apology. The story, which deals with New Zealand's war effort in the air, lends itself to a good deal of spectacle, but luckily the mistake of making it nothing but a spectacle, has been avoided.

The film sets out to tell a story, and that is exactly what it does. Moreover, it tells it in terms of both men and machines, with neither monopolising the stage.

In this respect, it seems fairly clear that Miramar has learnt a lesson from some of the English documentaries shown in this country during the past few months. Human values and personality are both easily lost sight of in war time. At any rate, *Wings Over New Zealand* does not lose sight of the fact that the 'planes of the R.N.Z.A.F. are manned and serviced by New Zealanders, ordinary down-right young men whom in peace time you would meet in any city street.

There are one or two faults—the commentator's voice, for instance, is a little uneven, and one cannot be sure whether there are one or two voices doing the commentary in the early part of the film.

The photography for the most part is good. Most people are air-minded enough to get a thrill out of shots of 'planes bucketing along in formation against a background of snow-clad mountains.



LORD AND LADY WIMSEY: Robert Montgomery and Constance Cummings in "Busman's Honeymoon"