


# SPEAKING CANDIDLY

## NORTH WEST MOUNTED POLICE

(Paramount)

 THIS is the film to the press review of which Paramount did not see fit to invite *The Listener*. If they were afraid of what I might say (and it seems they were) they had less confidence in their own product than I have, now that I have seen the show at a public screening. I can heartily endorse the sentiments of C. A. Lejeune in *The Observer* that *North West Mounted Police* is a fine, fruity melodrama which should keep the cash-register in the box-office ringing a merry tune. I think that Producer Cecil B. De Mille has, with this one, come nearer a true recipe for popular entertainment than for a very long time.

It was a particularly shrewd bit of scenario-writing to devise a plot which not only gives Preston Foster and others the chance to uphold the honour of the Mounties and be extremely British and Imperial, but which also allows Gary Cooper to come very fully into the picture while remaining a dyed-in-the-wool Yankee, a Texas Ranger who ranges into Canada to prove that the Mounties aren't the only people who can get their man and who stays quite long enough to help the boys in red clean up the insurrection of Louis Riel and his half-breeds in 1885. Even the fact that there is only one heroine (Madeleine Carroll) for both Messrs Foster and Cooper to love with all their manly hearts doesn't spoil Mr. De Mille's hands-across-the-

Canadian-frontier theme; for when Mounty Foster rides off the screen with the English girl and Ranger Cooper rides off with the wicked villain, nobody in the audience is likely to be disappointed. It is one of the happiest solutions of the eternal triangle problem that I have encountered. Even Cooper takes it very well, hiding his disappointment with one of his famous nonchalant smiles and a philosophic quip in a charming Texan drawl.

Mr. De Mille has also shown ingenuity and diplomacy in handling the half-breed and Indian problem. Louis Riel, for all he tried to disrupt the British Empire, is shown merely as a misguided dreamer who hated bloodshed but was led astray by wicked men; and the heap big chief of the Blackfeet Indians has enough sense to renew allegiance to the Great White Queen Across the Water before his braves have actually gone into revolt (they make a pretty exciting pretence of it, however, and only the valour of the Paramounts wins the day). Thus the audience is left free to vent all its hatred on George Bancroft, a bloody-minded, no-account half-breed with a beard, who mows down Paramounts with a gattling-gun until justice catches up with him.


This is one of those pictures with a cast of thousands (yes, really), so you can't expect me to go right through the list, but I would like to say a special word for Lynne Overman, with red hair, red tam o'Shanter and a thick Scots accent; for Akim Tamiroff, a half-breed with a beard—and red underpants—but with taking ways in spite of his being on the wrong side; for Paulette Goddard, a half-Indian wildcat whose ways are also taking; and for Robert Preston, a Mounty who rather lets the British Empire down by deserting his post to wed the wildcat. And just a collective word

of praise for all the half-blooded half-breeds, full-blooded Indians, and red-blooded troopers whose red-bloodedness is so plainly seen when they are shot (as they frequently are). For the film, of course, is in colour. Not that you're likely to overlook the fact. Mr. De Mille starts with a full palette (mostly red), and the woods and rivers of Canada, and the red coats and blood of the Paramounts never let him down.

It's all perhaps a trifle over-long and over-gaudy, and the dialogue smacks a bit of the Old-Time Theatre; but I don't think you'll worry much about that. I didn't—but then perhaps I'm not so hard to please as Paramount seem to think.

## DULCY

(M-G-M)

 *DULCY* presents once again the new, rejuvenated, pepped-up Ann Sothern, who, when her possibilities as a romantic blonde heroine had just about been used up, discovered a sudden flair for daffy comedy. Joan Blondell has had a similar experience but that does not detract from the sustained liveliness of Miss Sothern's comedy.

This time she is the impulsive, eccentric sister of a serious young man who is in the middle of a serious young romance. He is working hard to impress his prospective father-in-law, who, unfortunately, after suffering the attentions of the madcap Dulcy, becomes convinced there is a streak of insanity in the family. For admittedly normal young women do not hire paroled criminals as servants, adopt small Chinese boys on the spur of the moment, nor dash round lakes in speedboats upsetting every small craft in sight.

But Dulcy has also adopted an inventor with a new kerosene aero engine, and it is her determination to sell this to the prospective father-in-law, who happens to be an aeroplane manufacturer, which causes most trouble of all. In this she is abetted by a harmless lunatic who drops in one day and finds the household most congenial. This gentleman, who suffers from illusions of grandeur, buys an option over the engine and sells out at a handsome profit to the aeroplane manufacturer, thereby proving that what every business requires these days is a lunatic as managing director.


The cast is a well tried one, and suited to the strenuous story. The prospective father and mother-in-law are Roland Young and Billie Burke, whose performances are competent if stereotyped. Ian Hunter is the inventor who has the misfortune to be sponsored by Dulcy, and Reginald Gardiner is the amiable lunatic.

The screen play is by George Kaufman and Marc Connelly, which is in itself guarantee of a lively story, and the film was directed by S. Sylvan Simon. Incidentally, I would like to know if Mr. Simon is a real or a fictitious personality. One sees his name frequently, but it always seems too good to be true.

Either Mr. Kaufman or Mr. Connelly must have been listening to *Easy Aces*, the radio programme, for Dulcy produces several typical "Mrs. Ace-isms" (or perhaps they have read *The School for Scandal*). "Doctors," Dulcy observes on one occasion, "make mountains out of molehills."

## BROTHER ORCHID

(Warner Bros.)


 I WENT along to see *Brother Orchid* for two reasons. The first, of course, was Edward G. Robinson. Ever since I saw *Passport to Fame* I have regarded him as the goods—as capable as he is ugly. And that, I suggest, is saying something. Then, I was under the impression that *Brother Orchid* was going to be like *A Slight Case of Murder*. I still get a nostalgic ache in the ribs when I remember that riot. It was, you will recollect, by Damon Runyon, and Damon at his pithiest, with "roscoes" in every pocket and cadavers in every cupboard.

Though not a Runyon commentary, *Brother Orchid* started off just as well. Unfortunately, it got right off the rails before it had gone halfway. Robinson is introduced as little Johnny Sarto, "protection" racketeer, who, having piled up a modicum of mazuma retires to seek culture in Europe, leaving Humphrey Bogart in the managing director's chair. Fleeced in every capital on the Continent, Johnny returns, still full of confidence, to take over his old business again. However, neither Bogart nor the other ranks are willing to kill any fat-headed calf. Instead they try to kill Sarto. He escapes by the film on his teeth but with some lead in his hide and finds sanctuary in a "floracian" monastery (i.e., one where the brothers grow flowers to support their charities). Here, as the novice Brother Orchid, he hides out for some time, but leaves hurriedly on learning from a stray newspaper that his "doll" is about to wed another. Away from the cloister, he takes time off to wash up the protection racket which has kept the brothers' flowers off the city markets before he decides that the world is too much with him and goes back to grow bigger and better zinnias, leaving Ann Sothern to Ralph Bellamy.

Weighed against other Robinson films, *Brother Orchid* must be found wanting, but the fault lies with the story, not the players. You can't laugh at racketeers and take them seriously in one and the same film and even Robinson can't make Sarto's renunciation of the world convincing. More, the juxtaposition of tough citizens and kindly friars left me feeling just a little uncomfortable. The cast do their best. There are flashes of the real Robinson. Bogart and Ann Sothern do well within the limits of their parts, but though Ralph Bellamy, as a daffy Western millionaire, has plenty straw in his hair most of the bricks are dropped by the producer. And what happened to Allen Jenkins? After appearing in two early and delightful scenes, he simply disappears from the story without even a tommy-gun to patter out his hasty orisons. No, the director is Lloyd Bacon, but I don't think he brings any home this time.

## CONTRABAND

(M-G-M)

 DESPITE its title, *Contraband*, I should warn you, is not concerned with the Senior, so much as the Secret Service. It is, therefore, ipso facto, a thriller. And all thrillers, whether detective stories or spy films, are built round the idea that right must prevail. Conrad Veidt and Valerie Hobson, the former a bewildered neutral sea-captain, Valerie a British Secret Service agent must, it

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