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Film Reviews by G.M.

SPEAKING CANDIDLY

BRIGHAM YOUNG

(20th Century Fox)

ASK the average person for what the Mormons are chiefly noted and the chances are ten to one he will tell you, perhaps enviously, that they were not satisfied with one wife each. But although 20th Century-Fox stressed the polygamous angle in their publicity, anyone who goes to *Brigham Young* expecting to see colourful details of mass-marriage is likely to be disappointed. This film, another of Producer Darryl Zanuck's ambitious, long-winded treatises on American history, takes the line that the Mormons are chiefly noted for their mass-migration across 1,384 miles of unfriendly country to found their new Zion of Salt Lake City. Most of the wives who figure in advance publicity seem to have been left on the cutting-room floor. With a delicacy perhaps not unprompted by the prospect of having his film black-listed by the substantial Mormon community of America, Mr. Zanuck confines mention of the fact that Brigham Young and his followers had more than one bed-fellow to an innuendo about rabbits, a cryptic reply of "Twelve!" to the question "How many—?" which Young is asked by a stranger, a protest about being just one among many from the non-Mormon heroine (Linda Darnell) when Mormon Tyrone Power asks her to marry him, and a few other similar devices. The marital limelight in Brigham's own household is taken almost exclusively by Mary Astor, as his staunch, sympathetic favourite wife, with Jean Rogers and one or two other shadowy female forms glimpsed only occasionally in the background. That Mr. Zanuck was repaid for his tact is shown by the fact that when *Brigham Young* had its world premiere in the Mormon stronghold of Salt Lake City nobody raised a squeal of protest.

What *Brigham Young* may seem to lack in muliebrity it makes up in factual detail of the bitter persecution of the Mormons in the middle of last century which caused the Prophet of the Latter Day Saints to lead his people, 20,000 strong, into the wilderness, and of their amazing trek across a continent. The picture is at its spectacular

best in scenes showing the hasty night evacuation of the Mormon town of Nauvoo in Illinois under threat of massacre by armed bands roused to a frenzy of intolerance against the new religion, and the escape of the refugees across an ice-bound river. Mr. Zanuck does not mince matters in suggesting that religious passions were as capable of being whipped up to a frenzy of violence in America at that time as they were in Europe a few centuries before.

But the actual Mormon trek from Illinois to the Great Salt Lake of Utah is sometimes almost as wearisome to the watcher as it must have been to the participants. In some ways, perhaps more; for the audience doesn't get such a variety of scenery. For his 1,384-mile trek, Mr. Zanuck employs much the same scenic background.

Arriving at Salt Lake after many privations en route, the Mormons are not yet out of the wood. Before their new Zion is securely established, they must starve through one bitter winter, be rent

by internal doubts and discords, and suffer a plague of crickets which descends on their crops in spring. Only the timely arrival of huge flocks of seagulls to eat the crickets prevents disaster, and brings the picture to an overdue but spectacular finish.

Holding together the often lumbering, straggling material of the picture as the Mormon leader himself held together his people in their ordeals, is the performance of Dean Jagger as Brigham Young. A young veteran of the Broadway stage, Jagger plays his trying part with dignity and sincerity, putting into it a feeling not only of religious enthusiasm, but also of that strength of character and leadership which alone could have made possible the trek and the settlement of Utah on a communal basis. Beside the fire and purpose of Dean Jagger's character-study, the conventional romance conventionally enacted between Tyrone Power and Linda Darnell is a thing of small importance.

I don't suppose *Brigham Young* will break any box-office records—little-known American history seldom does in this country—but I found it interesting and worth a handclap.

(Continued on next page)



MORMON LEADER: Dean Jagger in the title role of the 20th Century-Fox film "Brigham Young"

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