

VERBATIM REPORT

GONE WITH THE WIND

(Selznick M-G-M)

 **SPEAKING** personally (and of course candidly), *Gone With The Wind* is one of the few pictures I've ever encountered in which realisation has proved at least as good as expectation. Indeed, rather better than it; for this seemed to be another of those occasions when Hollywood's high-pressure publicity methods were likely to have defeated their own ends. They are always at such pains to promise you the moon that you go along to the theatre with the sceptical conviction that you won't be able to get far off the earth. But this time I did get the moon—the moon of my delight in an intensely gripping book and a film version which does it full justice.

WHILE I'd probably have enjoyed the film almost as much if I hadn't read the book first, I'm quite sure I shouldn't have liked the film if I hadn't liked the book. For the film is, so to speak, a verbatim screen report of what Margaret Mitchell wrote. If there are faults in the film, they are, almost without exception, faults from the book. They've telescoped incidents here and there, omitted a few minor characters, but the faithfulness with which they've translated Miss Mitchell's 1,037 pages is one of the most impressive things about an impressive picture. With nearly four million dollars to spend and more than 21,000 feet of film (three and three-quarter hours) to show, the makers of *Gone With The Wind* certainly did not face the problems of condensation which worry the ordinary producer who films a popular novel. The man who is successful in squeezing a best-seller into a film of average length probably deserves more credit for his achievement; on the other hand this doesn't often happen, and anyway, *Gone With The Wind* is a much longer-than-average novel. So its fidelity is still most impressive. It may be argued by some that the story is not intrinsically worthy of such lengthy and elaborate treatment, and could have gone just as well into half the length. This is a matter of opinion (not my own) and there will be plenty of argument about it in the next few months.

ON the whole, most satisfaction with the picture will, I think, be found among women. That is not to suggest that men won't like it—here is one at least who did—but the whole outlook of *Gone With The Wind* is rather peculiarly

feminine. Curious, isn't it, that two of the biggest films ever made have dealt with the American Civil War — *The Birth of a Nation* years ago, and now *Gone With The Wind*. But whereas *The Birth of a Nation* was concerned with events rather than with people, with politics rather than with persons, *Gone With The Wind* takes the personal approach all the way—and by so doing is feminine rather than masculine. It isn't interested in great causes as such, in the abolition of slavery, or in the collapse of an outworn social order before the impact of more virile forces from the North: these things are significant only insofar as they affect the day-by-day lives of certain individuals. We are shown the Civil War and its aftermath, not broadly and in perspective, but in intimate close-ups of marriage, childbirth, domestic quarrels, and the problem of finding enough food to eat. We're not so much interested in what these terrific events meant to America, as in what they meant to Scarlett O'Hara and the men she marries, to Gerald O'Hara, to Melanie Wilkes, to Mammy, to Scarlett's baby. And there's no question about the intimacy of some of the details.

There is, of course, some of the grisly panorama of war, in the siege and burning of Atlanta, and in that astounding "shot" of the dead and wounded lying in the city square (even though you can pick out the dummies). Yet even in this part of the story the approach is personal. Weeping crowds reading the casualty lists from Gettysburg and not cavalry charges and cannonades on the battlefield itself are what strike the high note of tragedy. However, I will venture the opinion that, just because it does contain more action, more about the war, men in general will appreciate the first part of the picture more than the second part, and may be getting a trifle restive while their wives are still revelling in the tangle of personal relationships toward the close.

I HAVE said that the film is a faithful copy of the book, and that, of course, includes the characterisations. Of Vivien Leigh as Scarlett (the "bitchiest of all bitches" someone has adequately described her), no more need now be said than that Selznick's much-debated choice has turned out to be a perfect piece of casting. The same is true of Clark Gable as Rhett Butler, of Leslie Howard as Ashley Wilkes, of Hattie McDaniel as Scarlett's black Mammy, and of almost



"STILL TWENTY INCHES": The problem of a waistline worries Scarlett O'Hara (Vivien Leigh) and Mammy (Hattie McDaniel) in this scene from "Gone With The Wind"

all the others. But something special must be said about Olivia de Havilland, whose selection as the gentle Melanie was not quite so obvious. Miss de Havilland has always appealed to me as an intelligent actress as well as a strikingly beautiful one, but frankly I had not expected her to be capable of such a sensitive interpretation as this. A woman as good as Melanie Wilkes is always liable to be interpreted as goody-good, but Miss de Havilland completely avoids this pitfall. In competition with Vivien Leigh's portrait of the highly-coloured Scarlett, she manages to make virtue as interesting as vice, and that takes some doing. I wish I could claim authorship of that last remark, for it appeals to me as pretty searching comment. Unfortunately some other critic got in first.

The colour? It is so good as to be commonplace, except in some scenes when the effects are so striking that you wake up suddenly to the fact that you have been taking it for granted. The direction? Painstaking utilisation of all the melodramatic possibilities in the novel (and when you think of it, what a lot of de luxe melodrama there is! What beautifully stage-managed situations!) But why did Selznick choose to shift the emphasis and play for laughs in the sequence where Scarlett shoots the raiding Yankee soldier? In the book that situation is pure tragedy, the turning-point of her life. Still, you won't find many such deviations from the original.

I am enthusiastic about *Gone With The Wind*, not because I want to see many more pictures of the same stupendous pattern (it is a bit of an endurance test) but because—well, because I liked it.

CHEERS FOR MISS BISHOP

(United Artists)

 **I HAVE** not read *Miss Bishop*, by Bess Streeter Aldrich, on which this film is based, nor do I know when it was published, but I would hazard the opinion that any resemblance between it and James Hilton's *Good-bye Mr. Chips* would be, as the American radio-feature announcers cannily put it, "purely co-incidental." On the other hand, I would hardly go so far as to say that the film *Cheers for Miss Bishop* bears only a coincidental resemblance to the screen version of *Mr. Chips*. For one thing, the parallel between the two films is "plugged" hard in the publicity and on the screen itself the ageing Ella Bishop finally develops an almost startling resemblance to the Robert Donat of the last phase. In short, it is a more or less blatant attempt to capitalise on the success of the earlier film, and like most attempts of that kind, it is not altogether successful.

The story told is, in brief, that of Ella Bishop, a foundation graduate of Midwestern University, who becomes lecturer in English at her Alma Mater, and in time becomes herself as much of an institution as the university. During her fifty-odd years of teaching, she has two unhappy love affairs, plus the unrequited but unswerving adoration of her childhood friend, William Gargan. The latter, to some extent, compensates for the former, but her true anodyne is teaching. For, as the film points out not once but several times, "Wisdom

(Continued on next page)

Use SHELL MOTOR OIL



NATIONAL SAVINGS
MOVEMENT