

FILM REVIEWS

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—unnatural woman! At last, and somewhat obviously, she finds herself in love with her boss, the course of their romance having included eye exercises at a select club and an all-night spree on Coney Island where the brightest line of the piece is spoken by a side-show barker—"Laugh and the world laughs with you, snore and you sleep alone." Finally, she throws over her not very reluctant play boy and runs out on her wedding in order to get married.

Not the least unsatisfactory feature is the way in which the consciences of the principal characters step into the picture at odd intervals and advise their respective charges—an attempt at fantasy quite out of place in a film that was already attempting too many other methods of plot development.

CHAPAYEV

(Lenfilm)

I IMAGINE my reactions to Chapayev would have been rather different had I seen it five years ago. This is not to say that one's standards of criticism change from year to year; standards of comparison, however, certainly do change. In fact, I could not help feeling a little as I did when I saw an ancient scratched copy of Eisenstein's *Ten Days That Shook the World*—what a pity it was to have missed seeing it before its edge had been dulled by the work of inferior copyists in America.

Chapayev is the story of the exploits of a Red Army divisional commander during the Civil War. Not greatly concerned with the conflicting politics of the time, it is more a study of the development of a personality which the circumstances of the revolution had thrust into a sudden and unaccustomed limelight, and a day-to-day record of a phase of one of the bitterest civil wars ever fought. The character study, though a little forced and artificial to start with, gathers strength and dignity as the picture progresses. The record of the fighting is also confused at times, but it, too, has its moments of dignity and drama.

One thing the picture does give is an interesting glimpse into the method employed by the leaders of the Revolution of posting a political commissar to each Red Army division. It worked admirably, the picture would have us believe. While control was divided, questions of military tactics were wisely left to the military commander, and questions of discipline and morale to the commissar. Military strategists, I believe, have been heard to question its real practicability.

However, that is by the way. To return to the quality of the picture, to me there were four highlights: the "psychological attack" of a brigade of the "Death Guards," a lurid shot of a tank spewing out death from two machine guns, a bald, Prussianish White Russian commander playing *The Moonlight Sonata*, and Chapayev's desperate attempt to escape across a river with machine gun bullets making little splashes in the water as he swims.

The attack of the "Death Guards" reproduces a gallant and fantastic epi-

sode of the civil war. Shoulder to shoulder, in lines of fifty men abreast, these guards advance against the Reds, their rifles slung over their shoulders and cigarettes in their mouths. They march relentlessly to the beat of drums, and when one man falls, the ranks close up and the others march on. It is a tribute to the heroism of "the other side," all the more remarkable in a Soviet film.

But on the whole, as I may have succeeded in indicating, *Chapayev* must have been a trifle disappointing to those who had seen its merits proclaimed so enthusiastically overseas.

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