

SPEAKING CANDIDLY

Quiet Wedding

(Paramount British)

IT is as pleasant as it is rare, and pleasant because it is rare, to encounter a film like *Quiet Wedding* in which a critic's task is not to pick holes but to find words of praise adequate to express his enjoyment. In this case the task is made more difficult by the fact that *Quiet Wedding* depends for its success less on the material from which it is constructed than on the way in which that material is put together. In other words (and the words are inadequate) atmosphere counts for much more than narrative. The film has a style or flavour of its own, and one cannot hope to appreciate a style or a flavour simply by reading about it. I might, as another critic did, liken the quality of *Quiet Wedding* to that deliciously piquant French novel *Clochemerle*, in which a most riotous storm arose in a village teacup (well, hardly a teacup!) and spread far and wide, or perhaps to the film *Storm in a Teacup* in which much enjoyable ado was also made about nothing. Or I might go even farther back and recall that early Korda comedy with Roland Young, *Wedding Rehearsal*, which depicted the impact of an impending marriage on a choice collection of humorous characters. But you still wouldn't have had more than a whiff of the orange-blossom from *Quiet Wedding*.

Here then is a world, a pre-war, self-contained world, which is, one feels, as authentically English as the jokes in *Punch*. Like *Punch*, the film pokes fun at county types and social customs; but it does more than that: there is a keen edge of social satire to the humour, the farce is barbed with a malicious irony, so that half the laugh is turned against the whole artificial social unit, the whole semi-ridiculous code of "respectable" behaviour, which *Punch* itself so indefatigably represents. The other part of the laugh, of course, is against the rather likeable absurdity of the human animal almost anywhere, who regards the fact that a boy and girl have decided to live together legally as the pretext for a fantastic orgy of junketing, dressing up, eating, drinking, sniggering, leering, giving and taking presents, back-slapping, and speech-making. In brief, a wedding.

It was, of course, to have been a "quiet wedding," and what actual plot there is in the film concerns itself with the effect of all this preparation and lip-smacking anticipation upon the two who should be most intimately concerned—the bride and bridegroom, victims on the altar of ancient custom—when, news of their engagement having spread through the village like wildfire, practically every inhabitant, from the parson to the porter, feels called upon to take a hand in seeing to it that the lovers are properly wedded and bedded. Small wonder really that the bride (Margaret Lockwood), a sensitive youngster, shrinks from the mild atrocities committed in the sacred name of tradition, exclaims "It's horrible! All they're thinking about is the wedding night!" and almost decides that there will

be no wedding. And, with customary injustice, it is of course her fiancé (Derek Farr), who bears the brunt of her revolt.

Anthony Asquith has never made a better film than this. In the village and in the country house, swarming with relatives and well-wishers attracted by the scent of orange-blossom, there is one delicious character-study after another; and while I give the players much credit for their performances I must give just as much to Asquith for the way he has handled them, the way he has fitted each cameo so perfectly into its setting—Marjorie Fleming as the mother in full cry toward the kill (an awesome study in single-minded sentimental purpose); Athene Seyler as the understanding aunt; Hay Petrie as the railway porter; Frank Cellier as the bridegroom's father, the only intruder from the outside world into the matrimonial beehive of the village; and many others, far too many to mention—friends of the bride, friends of the groom, in-laws, hangers-on, policemen, pump gossips, bridesmaids, ushers—who, under Asquith's guidance, make *Quiet Wedding* such a feast of caricature and wit.

It was encouraging to me, because it was further evidence that critics are not always the high-brow minority we are popularly supposed to be, to discover from the comments of those about me in the theatre and of others to whom I have since spoken, that everybody seems to enjoy *Quiet Wedding* as much as I did. This may have had something to do with it: that although the film was made in England in the midst of war, there is absolutely nothing in it to remind one of the fact.

ZIEGFELD GIRL

(M.G.M.)



MR. METRO, Mr. Goldwyn, and Mr. Mayer, who glorified the Ziegfeld Girl so adequately in *The Great Ziegfeld*, might well have left it at that, instead of undertaking this new revelation of How Showgirls Make Good (or Bad). Or at least they could have omitted enough of the spectacular ensembles to have enabled me to catch my last bus home. Anyway, a good many of those final ensembles were just repeats from a previous show, which indicates either that Hollywood is running out of money (it never runs out of girls) or that Messrs. M., G., and M. are running out of ideas.

Missing my last bus and having to strap-hang in a tram may have made me unduly critical, but I am convinced that being long-winded is the greatest single fault of the M.G.M. studios—and if they can't keep us critics interested during the last half-hour they must expect us to amuse ourselves looking for faults. Having had rather more than enough of feminine charms for one evening with the spectacular episodes in the first half of *Ziegfeld Girl*, I thereafter concentrated more on the psychological side: the effect of fame—and exposure—on the character of show girls, as exemplified by Sheila Regan (Lana Turner), Sandra



LANA TURNER

Mr. Ziegfeld wasn't to blame

Kolter (Hedy LaMarr), and Susan Gallagher (Judy Garland). As the film is rather anxious to point out, it isn't Mr. Ziegfeld's fault that Sheila should go

wrong, spurn her matrimonially-inclined truck-driving boy-friend (James Stewart) in favour of a Park Avenue apartment (complete with Ian Hunter), and develop a taste for diamond bracelets and brandy. That would have happened anyway. Just as it also happens that Sandra and Susan remain Nice Girls, the one going back to her violinist-husband, the other going up to top place in the electric lights outside the theatre.

Throughout this extravagant display of Limbs, Love, and Life among the ladies of the chorus, Miss LaMarr has little to do except look lovely, and does that very successfully; Lana Turner goes into a moral decline with considerable dramatic skill; but Judy Garland never was and never will be a glamour girl, and should not, I think, have been required to make the attempt. The best job of all, however, was done by the man—it surely was a man—who wrote the bright dialogue.

WHISTLING IN THE DARK

(M.G.M.)



THIS re-make of a 1933-vintage talkie which starred the stage comedian Ernest Truex, launches the screen career of another recruit from the stage, Red Skelton, who looks and acts rather like a slightly subdued version of Bob Hope. A farce about a radio crime expert called The Fox who is kidnapped by a gang of fake evangelists (led by Conrad Veidt) and ordered to provide them with a detection-proof method of murdering a man in order to secure a rich inheritance, *Whistling in the Dark* is a moderately successful mixture of wisecracks, familiar gags, and rough-and-tumble among the trick paraphernalia and tough guys at the gangsters' headquarters. It's chief virtue is that it is much more lively at the end than at the beginning, so that one can go out into the blackout with a laugh.

LISTENINGS

Perpetrated and illustrated by
KEN ALEXANDER

Yes, Teacher!

THIS war has taught the world a lot besides geography. Here are a few truths it has taught a few sections of humanity and inhumanity:

Hitler: That when you scratch a Russian you find a Tartar. That German crack troops sometimes do. That the best Axis lie is not as good as the worst Allied truth. That it's difficult to keep the home-fires burning on hot air alone. That the first surprise is never as surprising as the last.

Mussolini: That when two dictators mount the same horse one has to ride near the tail. That a black shirt does show the dirt. That all the king's horses and all the king's men can never put Musso together again. That Italy is a nation of waiters—but they took the wrong order. That Italy is completely Boched.

France: That Vichy France is "Nobody's Darlan." That the cry of Free France is "Re-vive la France!"

Occupied Nations: That the darkest hour is before the rising.

Britain: That Democracy keeps better in cannon balls than in moth-balls.



PINCERS!!

U.S.A.: That money talks in peace and barks in war. That it's safe to leave it to Churchvelt.

Neutrals: That when in neutral it's wise to keep the engine running. That a neutral is a nation that hasn't yet been attacked.

China: That the invader usually invades himself to death. That China just keeps on burying her troubles.

Japan: That the way of the aggressor is hard. That the future tense of Japanese is Jap uneasiness. (Yet to be fully learnt.)