


# LITTLE FOXES, A VIXEN AND SOME NICE PEOPLE

## THE LITTLE FOXES

(Goldwyn-RKO Radio)

 HOW you, the public, will like this picture, I won't attempt to prophesy. Any critic who could do that successfully and consistently wouldn't stay a critic long — he'd be earning thousands a year as the world's greatest film producer. All that I can honestly tell you is how I myself liked it. And I didn't, much. Not "like" in the sense that one likes a person, a pleasant book, or an experience. For the people of *The Little Foxes* are nearly all unpleasant, even vicious.

But if "liking a picture" means simply "Did you find it interesting?" then the answer is yes. For unpleasant people are usually interesting — often more so than virtuous ones — and the

main characters of *The Little Foxes* possess all the horrible fascination of spiders catching flies.

The film is based on a long-running Broadway play by Lillian Hellman, and the title is taken from some Scriptural text about the little foxes who destroy the vines. These rapacious animals are personified by two families named Hubbard and Giddens, and the vineyard they despoil between them is a town in a southern state of America at the turn of the century. Mad for money and the power it brings, they have built themselves up into a capitalistic clique which dominates the town. They snarl and snap at one another but work together on their major project: to persuade Regina Giddens's invalid husband (Herbert Marshall), who unfortunately has a few scruples, to hand over his fortune



BETTE DAVIS  
A nasty bit of work

so that it can be invested in their pet scheme of exploiting the cheap and unorganised labour of the southern states by setting up a cotton factory on the spot where the cotton is grown. They plot, threaten, steal, double-cross, and quarrel — too noisily and long-windedly for real entertainment — and finally harass the scrupulous husband into his grave. And then they fall out among themselves, and it is some consolation for the audience to know that Regina's daughter has turned against her. But though any sort of "happy ending" would have been out of the question even if it had been desirable, it would have been more consoling, and therefore more entertaining, if there had been even some slight indication that the schemes of the unrighteous were soon to be tumbled into the dust. But apart from a vague suggestion that the idealistic young man who loves Regina's daughter will get busy as a union organiser and labour agitator, there seems no prospect that the little foxes will get their necks wrung. Which is what, as a matter of fact, they thoroughly deserve.


The vixen of the pack, and its leader in cruelty and greed, is Regina Giddens, and I hope it is no reflection on Bette Davis but rather a tribute to her acting (and her casting) if I say that she seems made for the unlovely part. With a succession of domineering, objectionable roles, Miss Davis has just about filched Tallulah Bankhead's (or was it Vivien Leigh's?) reputation as "the bitchiest actress that ever was." Almost her equals in nastiness here are her two screen brothers, the Hubbards, and their noxious spawn. These roles, and others, are taken by members of the original stage cast, and it could hardly mean anything to you if I listed their names. But it is certainly a change (I was about to say a pleasant change, but the adjective is wrong) to see new faces and new styles of acting on the screen.

In more than its cast *The Little Foxes* bears obvious marks of its stage origin. It is wordy, slow-moving, and the action is, for the screen, too much confined within a few settings. There is, for instance, too much walking up and down a staircase. This does not, however, mean that there is not much excellent camera-work by Gregg Toland, nor that there is not much pungent dialogue and much strident melodrama. Because the film is interesting I give it a hand-

clap but must confess that I came away from it with a nasty taste in my mouth which was not, I suspect, entirely caused by too much smoking.

## TOM, DICK AND HARRY

(RKO Radio).

 BY my standards of entertainment, *Tom, Dick, and Harry* is a much better picture than *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, which I reviewed at length last week, and *The Little Foxes*, which I review above, and therefore perhaps by your standards I should devote at least as much space to it as I did to them. But the length of a review is seldom any criterion of quality. *Tom, Dick, and Harry* is good because it is a trifle, an honest trifle, and to parody Mr. Shakespeare, nothing is easier than "to win us with honest trifles." The film has no message and little sense, but a great deal of gaiety, wit, and engaging invention. It is what they call a "director's picture," which in this case simply means that the director hasn't let his stars run the show but has infused them with his own mood of airy whimsicality and fitted them into a neat balance between fact and fantasy. The result is that he gets away with even such a preposterous piece of imagination as those bells which sound when the heroine is kissed by the right man.

Ginger Rogers is, of course, the perfect choice for the telephone girl who lives (and sleeps) in a perpetual romantic haze—a girl who, as her young sister puts it perfectly, "gets more adolescent every day." And Burgess Meredith is a similarly good choice for one of her suitors—the untidy, eccentric, whimsical garage-mechanic. But it is still the director's picture. The director, by the way, is Garson Kanin. One of Hollywood's brighter young men, he has already given us a pretty fair sample of what he can do in *Man to Remember*, *Bachelor Mother*, and *They Knew What They Wanted*. Certainly a man to remember.

All that Kanin has for story material here is the fact that the telephone girl — by coincidence which would be fatuous outside this context—gets the chance to marry either a nice millionaire (Alan Marshall), a stolid hard-working

(Continued on next page)

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GINGER ROGERS  
More adolescent every day