

SPEAKING CANDIDLY

WE WERE DANCING

(M.G.M.)

AZ I SOMETIMES wonder these days if Hollywood, like the legendary creature which devoured its own young, is bent on self-destruction. Not content with having sabotaged Greta Garbo in *Two-faced Woman*, M.G.M. now appear to be doing their best to squander another of their greatest assets, Norma Shearer. This suggestion may be far-fetched, but it is a stupid, wanton waste to put Miss Shearer into such a shallow and futile film as *We Were Dancing* for her first appearance on the screen after a year's absence. I don't mind her new hair-style, I don't greatly object to her being used as a clothes-horse for Adrian's latest and most expensive creations, but I do think she deserves something better than having Melvyn Douglas make embarrassing love to her in a divorce court sequence that is even more fatuous than the average. And she certainly is worthy of a better plot than this travesty of a sketch from Noel Coward's *To-night at Eight*, which presents her and Melvyn Douglas as two penniless European aristocrats in the U.S.A. He is a Viennese baron who makes a living as a professional week-end guest and gambler ("A moth who nests in the wardrobes of the rich"), and she is a Polish princess who is looking for a millionaire husband. You have to take the film's word for it that they are Polish and Viennese — apart from the fact that Miss Shearer occasionally turns temperamental and makes foreign-sounding noises you'd hardly guess. Amid a welter of ballrooms, sable and mink coats, country houses that resemble miniature Taj Mahals, twin beds and double beds, people with names like Tyler-Blane and Bryce-Carew, and phoney dialogue, they fall in love at first sight, get married, get jealous, get divorced, get married again. In its effort to reach a foregone conclusion the story behaves like a dog chasing its tail—and becoming very tired in the process.

The Noel Coward influence is fairly strong, and I for one came to the conclusion some time ago that Mr. Coward has ceased to have much relevance to this day and age, but it is a pity that Hollywood has not yet discovered that this is 1942 and that so far as most of us are concerned, films like *We Were Dancing* are speaking a dead language. In some ways it would be a good thing if the shortage of raw film became as acute as the shortage of raw rubber, then we might get some better pictures.

THE CHOCOLATE SOLDIER

(M.G.M.)

AZ IF we had produced a chocolate as sickly and indigestible as this we would have written to Aunt Daisy immediately to ask what was wrong with the recipe. But in default of the Daisy Chain, perhaps we can explain

why our little man is feeling slightly off colour.

First, we're doubtful about the choice of ingredients. Admittedly it was the best butter and the sweetest sugar, but were they added in the right places and the right quantities? Then again, in spite of slow and very prolonged cooking, the story remains sticky and one is forced to the conclusion that Molnar's spicy *Guardsman* plot was never meant to mix with Oscar Straus's sugary *Chocolate Soldier* music. It's about as happy a combination as that of Karl (Nelson Eddy) and Maria Lang (Rise Stevens), and that theirs isn't a very happy marriage can be gathered from the fact that Nelson Eddy even has to disguise himself as someone else before he can persuade his wife to fall in love with him.

While we prefer chocolates to have hard centres, one good thing does emerge from the effort to digest this confection—we are introduced to the possibility of disguising Nelson Eddy *always*. Now that's an idea.

THE CITY

(Civic Films—Documentary)

MOST of the virtues as well as most of the faults of the documentary film are well illustrated in this interesting 30-minute production, made with the aid of the Carnegie Corporation. It was photographed and directed by Ralph Steiner and Willard Van Dyke, the original outline being by Pare Lorentz, with a commentary written by Lewis Mumford. The design is to show how modern cities (American particularly, but the criticism could be applied fairly generally) have grown more and more complex and less fit for full and satisfactory living and the development of human relationships. By contrast with the overcrowding, dirt, and disorder of a metropolis, where slums cluster round factories, are shown the cleanliness, sunshine and spaciousness of a smaller, well-planned community, where the factory is in right relation to the home.

On the credit side of the film there are the sharp contrasts, the dramatic simplifications, and the emotional stimuli of words and music, cleverly co-ordinated with visual images, which are generally accepted as being necessary to effective screen propaganda. On the debit side there are the over-simplifications, the repetitions, the noisiness, and sometimes the childishness of almost any film that deliberately sets itself out to proclaim a message. At the same time, it will be largely a matter of personal opinion, or even of intellectual bias, where the line between debits and credits will be drawn.

A copy of "The City" was sent by the Carnegie Corporation of New York to the New Zealand Council for Educational Research, on the understanding that it would be made available free of charge to interested organisations throughout New Zealand. Anyone wishing to borrow the film should write to the Director, New Zealand Council for Educational Research, Southern Cross Building, Brandon Street, Wellington, C.I.A.



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