

# SPEAKING CANDIDLY

## STRAWBERRY BLONDE

(Warner Bros.)



THIS is a funny picture and a sentimental one, and much of the fun and much of the sentiment arise directly from the fact that it is set in those dear dead days near the turn of the century which are still embalmed in many living memories or in the pages of family photograph albums. It is a curious but undeniable fact that whereas, for instance, the fashions of the Caroline or Regency period were perhaps the most extravagant in history they don't seem half as funny to us as those that Father and Mother wore at their wedding.

*Strawberry Blonde* may not start the average picturegoer philosophising in exactly this vein, but its lush Edwardian atmosphere of bustles, straw-hats, gas-lamps, horse-carriages, and the fight for Women's Rights will probably give him a good deal of nostalgic enjoyment—almost as much as that to be derived from the able and energetic performances of James Cagney, Rita Hayworth, Olivia de Havilland, and Alan Hale, and from Raoul Walsh's cheerful direction of a Broadway hit entitled *One Sunday Afternoon* (it was filmed under that title in 1934 with Gary Cooper and Fay Wray as stars). Suitably enough, the story is told in retrospect, presenting the reminiscient musings of a struggling dentist (Cagney) one Sunday afternoon when a street band plays "The Band Played On" while he is waiting to pull the aching molar of a crooked alderman (Jack Carson) who not only stole his girl but was instrumental in sending him to gaol for five years. The dentist is gloating over the possibilities of revenge with gas when the band cuts in with a tune that is full of painful and sentimental associations—the chief of them being the strawberry blonde of the neighbourhood (Rita Hayworth) who dropped him in order to marry the villain, and thereby caused him to marry her less spectacular girl-friend (Olivia de Havilland) on the bounce. Working overtime, the dentist's memory then carries him back over the even more bitter experience of being made a criminal scapegoat for the other fellow's crooked dealing as a building contractor. But his wife waits patiently for the prison gates to open; and when the dentist that Sunday afternoon sees what the years have done to his enemy and to the strawberry blonde (who is no longer a delicacy), he realises that he has, after all, had much the better of the bargain. Instead of murdering the fellow with too much gas, he pulls his tooth—without any gas at all.

Even the gentlemen who ordinarily prefer strawberry blondes will probably agree with the dentist that, so far as choice of consorts goes, in picking the brunette Olivia de Havilland, he picked the winner. Rita Hayworth is the kind to catch the eye, but Miss de Havilland is the type to stay in the mind, especially when, in an effort to be daringly modern, she confides to the nonplussed young dentist that her mother was one of the original Bloomer Girls, her aunt

was on the stage, and she herself considers marriage old-fashioned—and backs up each of these startling revelations with a high-voltage wink. Her panic retreat from modernity when the disillusioned dentist suggests that she put her views into practice is another highlight of an almost consistently entertaining film: so is the scene where Cagney practises dentistry on his happy-go-lucky Irish father (Alan Hale). Cagney himself is, of course, something of a special taste—I know some people who can't stand him—but personally I relish his tough, human dynamo style of acting. And it's pleasant, for a change, to meet him out of a crime picture.

## MANPOWER

(Warner Bros.)



DON'T imagine from the title of *Manpower* that it has anything to do with New Zealand's Problem of the Hour, nor even anything to do with war, except perhaps the domestic war which Einstein says that every man must wage. If there is any shortage, it is not of man—but of woman-power, for here we have Edward G. Robinson and George Raft as two close friends who are emergency repair-men in a Power and Light Company, and there is only Marlene Dietrich to share between them. It is obvious that there will be a short-circuit in their friendship, followed by

**STAND-UP CLAPS:** *Fantasia, The Man Who Came to Dinner, The Next of Kin, To Be Or Not To Be, How Green Was My Valley, Sullivan's Travels, Ball of Fire, Remember the Day, Alexander Nevsky, Sergeant York.*

**SIT-DOWN CLAPS:** *This Gun for Hire, Eagle Squadron, One of Our Aircraft is Missing, The Bride Came C.O.D., Nazi Agent, The Oppenheim Family, The Lady is Willing, Footsteps in the Dark, Bedtime Story, The Corsican Brothers, Out of the Fog, Ladies in Retirement, Three Girls About Town, The Turtles of Tahiti, Captains of the Clouds.*

violent explosions, when she marries the unglamorous Mr. Robinson, but falls in love with the more magnetic Mr. Raft. This fierce emotional storm is worked out in an equally eruptive setting of natural disturbances, amid sheets of rain, hail, and lighting, with the Power and Light employees climbing huge pylons and braving electric shocks to mend damaged high-tension cables. There is, however, if you will excuse the pun, rather a tendency to pylon the agony; and though the general effect of the film is raw and rowdy (as befits its theme), and the pace of the direction is terrific and the detail excellent, the incidental moods of the story are curiously mixed. For nearly every sequence of serious melodrama, there is an interlude of sheer slapstick, in which actors like Alan Hale and Frank McHugh clown with the brakes off. And it is a pity that so much high-pressure wit in the dialogue should be wasted just because nearly all the players talk too loud and too fast for you to hear them.



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