

SPEAKING CANDIDLY

SWAMP WATER

(20th Century-Fox)



IKE *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Tobacco Road*, and *Of Mice and Men*, this is a story about people right outside the common round of experience—the

backwoods folk of Georgia who dwell alongside the Okefenokee Swamp, 700 miles of practically unexplored watery wilderness, infested by alligators and the poisonous cotton-mouth snake. A nice place for a melodrama, and the producer has given it to us here with all the trimmings. I feel, though, that a less floridly decorative treatment would have been preferable, and I'm told that the original novel by Vereen Bell was very much a work in pastel shades. Not content, however, to let the swamp spread its own sufficient miasma of mystery and horror over the story, the producer has covered it with such a thick pall of melodrama that not many of the characters emerge as human beings. You do get a few glimpses of reality—the blonde charmer who is, in her way, as treacherous as the waterways of Okefenokee and as dead as the cotton-mouth; the village storekeeper; and one or two others. But these are incidental characters, on the fringe of the fog.

To give them their due, the central players are very capable melodramactors. With different handling they might have done better, but what they are called on to do here they do with a will and with considerable technical skill: Walter Brennan as the hermit of the swamp, a man in hiding because of a murder he did not commit; Walter Huston as a stern, jealous, but well-intentioned Old Testament type, with a much younger wife and a rebellious son; Dana Andrews as the son who braves the terrors of the swamp and clears the hermit's name; John Carradine as a snake-in-the-swamp-grass; and Anne Baxter as the Cinderella of the story.

Swamp Water is not a pretty picture, for it is not about a pretty place or pretty people. Some may even call it sordid or morbid, but that would not be to its detriment if it were good art, as *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Of Mice and Men* were. *Swamp Water* is not in the same quality street as those two pictures, but since it is an interesting and unusual melodrama I have no qualms about giving it a handclap (seated).

CALL OUT THE MARINES

(R.K.O. Radio)



VICTOR McLAGLEN and Edmund Lowe are reunited in *Call Out The Marines*: fifteen years since they were last together — so

they keep bellowing at each other — and perhaps better if they had made it the round fifty. They both look awfully "Sazzy" (Victor's word) when they get, without any apparent untying of red tape, out of their race course checks (also "Sazzy") into their sergeants' uniforms. Then they have lots and lots

of leave at the Shore-Leave Cafe and meet Binnie Barnes, an entertainer with a finger in a plan-stealing broth into which too many cooks poke their noses. Franklyn Pangborn, a harassed waiter at the cafe, continues his uninterrupted career as a top-line "bit" player.

The film is sometimes a vaudeville show, sometimes a Mack Sennett comedy, and sometimes a steal-naval-documents mystifier. I'm still mystified.

GEORGE AND MARGARET

(Warner Bros.-British)



WHEN you are escaping from anything it is usually a good idea to put as much distance as possible between you and what you are escaping from, and this

principle would seem to apply to "escape" films. I've nothing against this type of entertainment as such, and can think of a lot to say in its favour; but personally, when I'm trying to get away from the present I like to get well back into the past. So I prefer to be precipitated, for instance, into the Naughty 'Nineties atmosphere of *Strawberry Blonde*, rather than into the effete Noel Coward era of *George and Margaret*. This film is from the stage success of some years back by Gerald Savory, and to its credit it must be said that the action is rather less static than in the average British screen version of a play. Characters keep on running up and down the inevitable staircase, banging on the bathroom door, following one another in and out of different rooms. The dialogue isn't particularly slow, either. It is, however, dated by such remarks as "You're not turning socialist, are you?" (intended as a rebuke), and "You talk like one of the Karl Marx Brothers": but it is not sufficiently dated to be really funny, except on odd occasions. And the central situation, though amusing, is slight: the fuss and bother caused in a suburban London family by the news that two unpopular guests, George and Margaret, are coming to lunch. The audience never gets a chance to see either George or Margaret, but their impending visit upsets everybody in the house from mother down to cook, and brings to a head two young love affairs.

In this film, as in *Swamp Water* above, the players (taken from the stage) do a good job within the narrow limits of the script and the direction, particularly Marie Lohr as the impetuous, erratic mother, Oliver Wakefield as the mild, understanding father, and Ann Casson as the housemaid in love with the Scout-minded elder son (who is a little too old for the part). As a study in comedy tastes, it interested me to notice that the typically English humour of the film was hardly registering at all with the American servicemen around me in the audience, and I was beginning to wonder if my own taste was becoming completely Americanised until somebody reminded me of that excellent British film *Quiet Wedding*, by likening *George and Margaret* to it. It is a useful comparison, but not in favour of *G. and M.* One is merely smart: the other was penetrating. One is just burlesque: the other was social satire.



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