


SPEAKING CANDIDLY

THE GOLD RUSH


(United Artists)

 IT would be easy to become dreamily sentimental about *The Gold Rush*. Ah, me, those were the days! They don't make pictures like that nowadays, do they? No, they don't and more's the pity perhaps, yet the plain fact is that we wouldn't really be satisfied if they did. We'd miss the bustle and the slickness and the noise and all the technical achievements that we've grown accustomed to in the past 17 years or so.

But now and again it's a delight to look back, and this revival of Chaplin's film of 1925, with music and commentary added by the comedian himself, provides an ideal medium. Actually, the film has stood the test of time remarkably well—far better, I should imagine, than its average contemporary. Perhaps this is the very proof of its immortality: that we begin to laugh the moment Chaplin comes on the screen, that we immediately recognise again the genius in the Dance of the Bread-Rolls or in that sequence where the cabin balances on the edge of the precipice, and that indeed it all comes back to us so clearly from across the years. Curiously enough, the film is not so much an occasion now for roars of laughter as for smiles and chuckles, and the "little fellow" bedevilled by fate has never seemed more pathetic, perhaps because life (and the cinema itself), has become rowdier since 1925, and because we have a closer fellow feeling for the little chap shut up in the cabin and trying to get out of the way of the gun. At any rate, when we now describe *The Gold Rush* as a classic of the screen, we may do so with some authority, and when we talk about Chaplin's undying and universal appeal, we may begin to know what we are talking about.

WEEK-END IN HAVANA

(20th Century-Fox)

 "MUCH better than their usual, didn't you think?" "Well, yes. You saw more of her dancing." "And there was quite a nice story attached to it, too."


That was one of the conversations I listened-in to as I walked away from the theatre after seeing *Week-end in Havana*, with Alice Faye doing the week-end on all her salesgirl savings plus the money paid out by the shipping company to stop her from talking about why the captain was not on the bridge when one of their luxury liners went aground. The dancing that more was seen of is done by Carmen Miranda, the unexploded Brazilian bombshell, who swings no mean hip through a series of song-dances in which she wears head-gear and torso-gear of brightest reds, greens, yellows and whites in cunning combination, and in which she sings South American songs whose words are made up of bombardments of consonants and vowels going up in flames. And the nice story attached to it is about Cinderella

Alice Faye — even the Slippers come into it — and Prince Charming John Payne, the young vice-president of the shipping line, sent to keep a tag on Alice until he can persuade her to sign a waiver absolving the company of all blame for the wreck. Alice, knowing her 10-cent pieces, says she will sign the waiver only when she has had her holiday that has been interrupted by the wreck; and it's got to be a good holiday, too, and she's got to have fun. Back in New York there's a foot-stamping society bride (daughter of the shipping magnate) waiting for her Prince Charming; but the wedding has been postponed one week already, and this engagement in Havana is Important Business.

Alice explains that she has saved up all her life so that she can go on a luxury cruise and have those lovely clothes. She went without lunches to do so, she says; not, as a matter of fact, that the audience can notice this; although I'd say she has probably gone without a few morning teas since the first time I saw her, and I find the result fairly satisfactory. In fact, Alice in Technicolor, wearing blue and singing a song in a hay-waggon, makes a colour scheme that is not hard to look at. Cesar Romero's antics as a gambling playboy leave me as unmoved as his antics as any other kind of playboy have nearly always left me. But I have to sit up and take a good look at Carmen Miranda's dancing and let my astonished ears hear as much as may be of her extraordinarily agile utterance. She keeps her face muscles as dancing-fit as her leg muscles.

THE BIG BLOCKADE

(B.E.F.)

 IF anyone is tempted to regard the little man's apathetic attitude as a trifle unpatriotic, I can only say that we both prefer, whenever possible, to consume our ration of entertainment apart from our ration of propaganda and when, as in the present instance, we are served up with a large helping of palpable official propaganda thinly disguised as entertainment, we rather resent having to pay 2/3 a seat for it. *The Big Blockade* was produced in England for the Ministry of Economic Warfare, and was made with the close co-operation of that Ministry and of the Fighting Services. The "greatest all-star cast ever assembled in one picture" (vide advertisements), contains the names of many well-known actors (most of whom do not, however, appear for more than a few minutes each), and such "amateurs" as Quentin Reynolds, Sir Ronald Cross, and Dr. Hugh Dalton (whose appearances are even briefer). When the film is being factual or documentary, it is good—though unfortunately some of the documentary episodes traverse almost the same ground (and the same sky) as *Target for To-night*. But when the film is being fictional, it is mainly just silly, often dangerously silly. There is one bright episode in which Will Hay argues with a sailor about

STAND-UP CLAPS: *Fantasia, The Man Who Came to Dinner, The Next of Kin, How Green Was My Valley, Sullivan's Travels, Ball of Fire, Remember the Day, Alexander Nevsky, Sergeant York, Mrs. Miniver.*

SIT-DOWN CLAPS: *This Gun for Hire, Eagle Squadron, The Bride Came C.O.D., The Oppenheim Family, The Lady is Willing, Bedtime Story, Ladies in Retirement, Three Girls About Town, The Turtles of Tahiti, Captains of the Clouds, Swamp Water, Strawberry Blonde.*

navicerts during a bombing attack on his ship: in most of these fictional episodes, however, the film crudely repeats our old national blunder of under-rating our opponents, presenting the German leaders and German people as buffoons and propaganda-soaked morons. If that's all they are, why bother to use such a complicated weapon as Economic Warfare against them? This kind of folly is bad enough in an ordinary movie; here it is given the stamp of authenticity and official approval. So, what with one thing and another, I didn't think much of *The Big Blockade*, in spite of Michael Redgrave, Leslie Banks, Will Hay, Frank Collier, Alfred Drayton, Michael Rennie, John Mills, Robert Morley, Quentin Reynolds, Ronald Cross, old Uncle Hugh Dalton and all.



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