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Film Reviews by G.M.

SPEAKING CANDIDLY

SHINING VICTORY

(Warner Bros.)



THIS film provides a useful follow-up to last week's discussion about Mrs. Hadley and her "phoneyess," because there is a sense in which *Shining Victory* represents a shining example of victory over the Hollywood conventions that were so apparent in the other film.

Shining Victory (from the play *Jupiter Laughs* by Dr. A. J. Cronin), has as its hero an embittered, mature doctor-scientist, who treats his colleagues and patients not as human beings but as machines or guinea-pigs. This is perhaps not unusual in a Cronin doctor, but it is unusual for Hollywood, which regards the bedside manner as being highly important at the box-office, and therefore strongly favours the Young Dr. Kildare type of medico. Again, although films which are bold enough to kill off their heroines are by no means unknown, they are still rare enough to be worth comment. These are the two outstanding respects in which *Shining Victory* disregards cinema tradition, but there are a good many other less obvious signs that the director (Irving Rapper), still has a mind of his own. Lunatics and mental asylums scarcely lend themselves to frivolous entertainment, but they can make strong drama, and Rapper has preferred to be realistic rather than diverting.

All this, of course, must be rather upsetting to those members of the audience who like their drama to be true to Hollywood rather than true to life. I was interested (and maliciously delighted), to overhear the comments of two women behind me who agreed that the whole thing was "absolutely spoiled" because the heroine had died. But even more illuminating was the reaction of a girl aged about 12—obviously an experienced picturegoer—who came out of the theatre just ahead of me muttering, with concentrated venom, "I hope he got killed, I hope he got killed"—meaning the doctor-hero, who, in the final scene, is shown leaving for China on a dangerous medical mission. "Why do you hope that?" I heard her mother ask. "Because he was such a beast!" replied the disillusioned young lady. (I wonder how many Dr. Kildare pictures she had seen to get like that? A better example of Hollywood-conditioning of the emotional reflexes could hardly be imagined.)

There is another reason why some of those who see *Shining Victory* may feel disillusioned, and even cheated, for the posters and advertisements blatantly exploit a type of cheap sensationalism that the film itself does nothing to justify. If you took the publicity seriously, you would expect to see intimate medical mysteries revealed in a story that is all about the awful effects on women of not having husbands, causing them to suffer from morbid fancies and disturbed sleep. Bunkum! While it is true that one of the characters is a love-sick attendant at the sanatorium (Barbara O'Neill), who loses her mental balance and precipitates a tragedy, she is only a subsidiary character, and her

neurosis is quite incidental to the plot, which principally concerns the struggle by the doctor-hero (James Stephenson), to perfect a serum for mental disorders, and the part played by his pretty assistant (Geraldine Fitzgerald) in keeping him human. This theme is embroidered by intelligent direction, much-better-than-average dialogue, and some excellent acting by the stars and by such supporting stalwarts as Donald Crisp and Montagu Love. Stephenson (who supplied almost the only paragraph worth reading in *The Letter*), should now, I understand from *News Review*, be referred to as "the late James Stephenson." I do not know the circumstances of his death—but evidently the 12-year-old mentioned above has got her wish.

ARE HUSBANDS NECESSARY?

(Paramount)



BY a coincidence, it is also necessary to warn you against being misled by the title of this next film, and for somewhat similar reasons. The idea behind the title "Are Husbands Necessary" isn't what you might expect; it is simply that a smart wife can deal with the bills, deal with the vice-presidential vacancy on the bank staff, and land the fattest account the bank has been chasing for a lifetime without the help of a bungling husband. Of course I mustn't forget that in the last few feet it's announced that the adopted baby is to have a real flesh-and-blood brother (they seem sure that it is going to be a brother). Still, I feel that here again the public is being enticed along on somewhat false lines.

According to the introduction, addressed in generous type, to an omnipresent "you," the hero and heroine are to be regarded as a typical small-town man and wife who have been married about two years. "George and Liz (Ray Milland and Betty Field), might be the people living in the two-story house next door."

Eugene Palette appears in high good humour as the wealthy fish that all the bank officials set themselves to hook; he perversely takes a fancy to George and Liz, and it becomes fairly clear early that Liz won't really need to work her patent filing system with the bills by the time the film ends, because obviously George will have to be made a senior officer. The system invented by Liz consists of sorting her bills into three groups—"utility," the butcher and so on, with particularly impolite early-remittance-will-oblige notes; "utility and non-utility," with mild footnotes; and "sweethearts," friendly little bills with no footnotes. These last she quite ignores, aware that they will come back next month, and the month after, graduating at last into the second group and then into the first. The budget generally meets the utility group, and stretches as far as a few in the second group. She explains all this to a bewildered husband as "living within our income." A very pretty scene.

Are Husbands Necessary? is no must—but it has its laughs—and that's something.

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