

# A Slight Case of Doubt

## THE KIDNAPPERS

(Rank-Nolbandov-Parkyn)

FEW filmgoers, I imagine, will disagree with the grading I have given *The Kidnappers*—or *The Little Kidnappers*, as the New Zealand distributors are calling it—at the top of the page, yet I must admit that this week I don't feel as completely sure as I usually do about the films which win top marks. *The Kidnappers* is a remarkable piece of work which everyone should see. It should delight audiences everywhere in much the same way as, say, *The Quiet Man*. But looked at as a whole has it. I wonder, the quality of greatness which some are prepared to allow it?

The story is set in a Scottish settlement in Nova Scotia soon after the Boer War. Two small boys whose father has been killed in the war go to live with their grandfather on a poor, rather lonely farm. The old man is a Puritan of the sort who won't allow a picture book even of Bible stories in the house, and who keeps a Dutch neighbor—



Vincent Winter

—he hates all "Boers"—off a disputed piece of land with a rifle. Desperately wanting a dog or some other creature that they can love and play with, the boys eventually adopt and keep in their hideout for several days a baby which they find unattended.

The most remarkable thing about this film is the astonishing performance of five-year-old Vincent Winter as the younger of the two boys. Among British directors Carol Reed is supposed to be the one with the magic touch with child actors, but he has never given us anything so startling as this little essay in innocence and naturalness which captivates us from its very first line of dialogue. It's a well-written part, too. As the older brother, aged eight, Jon Whiteley also is outstandingly good—how good you realise when you try to think what you would say about him if he had the show to himself. What's more, these two youngsters give a sustained performance—it's their film and they are seldom off the screen. Chief credit for their response to direction should probably go to a New Zealander, Margaret Thomson (rather than to the film's director, Philip Leacock), who spotted young Winter in an Aberdeen school and coached both boys for the film. Given the same material to work with, a de Sica might have done no better. Apart from the boys the main character, and certainly the most interesting one, is the grandfather (Duncan Macrae), really a far from simple person. You should watch the fine early sequence in which his character is established, especially on the walk home to the farm, if you are to find the end of the story convincing. Among other characters Adrienne Corri's Aunt Kirsty, a woman whom life is passing by, shows that this young actress is not limited to the sort of part she had in *The River*.

I may be too solemn about this, but the feeling I'm sure most people will have that they have seen a "delightful"

### BAROMETER

FINE: "The Kidnappers."  
MAINLY FAIR: "Sudden Fear."  
OVERCAST: "Anna."

film and nothing more is probably the cause of the faint, persistent doubt I have about *The Kidnappers*. To deprive a child of any of the opportunities for growth and development is just about the ultimate crime, and no child ever had me more on its side than the boys in this film who find themselves up against Puritanism in its most austere and life-denying form. With a theme like that this film as a whole might have been really unforgettable. Considering the pitfalls it's extraordinarily unsentimental, it's well made, many of the scenes are memorable, and the quite credibly happy ending is tense and moving. Yet—unless I'm just an incorrigible sourpuss—somewhere, I suspect, between the story (by Neil Paterson) and our very delight in those astonishing child players the something that would make it a great film is missing. But don't stay away from it. You're almost certain to like it, and even if my hunch is right it's still worth seeing, if for young Vincent Winter alone.

### SUDDEN FEAR

(R.K.O.-Radio)

I SHALL probably be thought very uncritical when I say that I rather enjoyed much of the new Joan Crawford vehicle. It's one of those all-this-and-the-kitchen-sink-too sort of melodrama that could have been cut well below its 10,000-odd feet by a less extravagant use of Miss Crawford's anguished face alone or by taking a great chunk out of the middle—of the film, I mean—where, just when it should be fairly palpitating, it sags badly. There's a quite fantastic ending, too, with no one rushing out to save the heroine when the villain's pursuit of her is making enough din to wake the whole of Frisco. But once one starts looking for flaws... In spite of them all, then, some scenes are very well done; there's quite a deal of tension, there's Jack Palance as an ugly frightening villain, and Gloria Grahame as his evil accomplice, and one might even have said some kind things about Miss Crawford herself if only her director (David Miller) had used some restraint.

### ANNA

(Archway Films)

WE have known for some time that though the Italian studios have produced since the war some of the best films ever, they are also capable of producing—in pursuit of the Hollywood ideal—some of the worst. *Anna* is a dull one about a night club singer who joins a religious nursing order when one of her two lovers kills the other—the baddie, as it happens—in a fight. The way things were going there was really no reason why she should, but even so, I'm sure the film could have been made more interesting than it is. Silvana Mangano, as she showed in *Bitter Rice*, is one of the most vital of the new Italian actresses, but even she and Vittorio Gassman can't bring this piece to life—which suggests to me that there's a pretty fundamental fault somewhere.

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