

The Second-last Laugh

THE MAGGIE

(Rank-Ealing)

NEVER take your conscience to the movies. I chuckled and hiccupped, whooped and wheezed as the story of *The Maggie* was unfolded, but before her voyage had ended I had come out in scruples all over—quite the worst attack I have suffered at a comedy performance, I think, since the last of the noble d'Ascoynes died uncomfortably by stepping on one of his own mantraps in *Kind Hearts and Coronets*. But don't let my allergies deceive you—many filmgoers will, I'm sure, rate this the best of the Ealing comedies since the *Passport to Pimlico-Whisky Galore* cycle was peddled round the neighbourhood cinemas in 1950.

The Maggie is ostensibly (and apparently by intent) a joke at the expense of the Americans. You can say that it is a joke at the expense of a particular kind of American—the big business man who is accustomed to getting his own way, preferably by making soft rustling noises with a cheque-book, but if necessary by his own blood and toil, tears and sweat—but I have an uncomfortable suspicion that its genesis is broader and

more contemporary. Guying the Americans—or the gaucher American social fallacies—is an international pastime. It reinforces our *amour-propre*; to the extent to which it inclines us to better values, it could be salutary—and it's probably safer than making fun of the Other Fellows. But it seemed to me as if Alexander Mackendrick (who both wrote and directed *The Maggie*) had allowed his practical joking to go a little too far. It seemed that in the end he was even making fun of American generosity and good nature, and his last dig in the ribs caught me squarely on the solar plexus. I'm sorry not to give an unqualified approval to this film; so much of it is so good (and so true). But I don't think it accomplished what it set out to do. The canny Scots who take the American for a ride don't get the last laugh at all—only the second-last.

Before you reach that point, however, there is a great deal of good fun which even the most scrupulous can enjoy without inhibition. *The Maggie* is a derelict steam-lighter or "puffer"—an obsolescent type of vest-pocket freighter peculiar to the Clyde—the American is an airline executive who is in a desperate hurry to get a cargo of plumbing



TOMMY KEARINS, PAUL DOUGLAS

"Guying the Americans is an international pastime"

fixtures delivered to a West Highland castle which he has just purchased. By a series of coincidences, a modicum of sharp practice, and a considerable infusion of gamesmanship, the skipper of the *Maggie* (which has just been refused a certificate of seaworthiness) gets the charter, and the American's troubles begin.

To detail these would spoil the best of the fun, and whatever your ultimate verdict on the film you should not miss

those astonishingly good child players that the British studios seem able to produce as required) will steal the show for most filmgoers. I must admit, however, that it was the American (as played by Paul Douglas) who ultimately won my full sympathy. If only he had been a fat, self-satisfied Sassenach from the southern counties *The Maggie* might have come closer to perfection.

(continued on next page)

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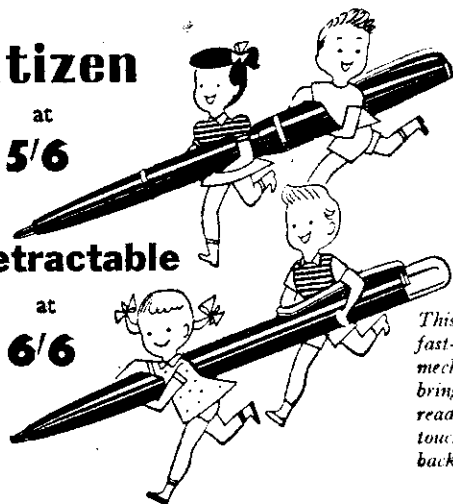
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