

Three Aces, Two Jacks

O. HENRY'S FULL HOUSE

(20th Century-Fox)

POKER players will already have guessed that *O. Henry's Full House* contains a pleasant fist-full of adaptations of O. Henry short stories. Each of the five films is about 20 minutes long and has a different director and actors, and to preserve the literary flavour established in this type of production by the makers of *Quartet* and *Encore*, linking narration is provided in Maugham-like fashion by the novelist John Steinbeck. The first two and the last of these vignettes, featuring Charles Laughton, Richard Widmark and Jeanne Crain respectively, have all the point and style of first-rate films, and the other two (Anne Baxter, Fred Allen), while not as good, have their bright spots.

Number one, called "The Cop and the Anthem," gives Charles Laughton an amusing role as a plump down-and-out who would rather spend winter in gaol than on a park bench in the snow, but has difficulty in persuading the police to run him in for the various minor crimes he commits in trying to achieve

this end. There is a nice ironic conclusion to the tale, and Laughton has a good second fiddle in David Wayne as his scarecrow hanger-on. The director is Henry Koster. "The Clarion Call" is a taut little crime drama in which Dale Robertson plays the part of a detective with a questionable past who has the job of arresting his former friend (Richard Widmark) for murder. As directed by Henry Hathaway this is a neat and concise piece of film work, and effective use is made of the snap ending typical of O. Henry's stories.

Number three, "The Last Leaf," is a tearful melodrama about a Greenwich Village painter (Anne Baxter) who gets pneumonia in the snow after her lover has jilted her. Jean Negulesco, the director, has provided some interesting tilted camera shots, but there is too much sentimentality about this piece for it to be completely successful. "The Ransom of Red Chief," directed by Howard Hawks, features Fred Allen and Oscar Levant as a couple of confidence men who get outwitted by the Alabama backwoods folk whom they try to dupe, largely through the ferocious activities of a boy they kidnap. This is a broad satire on the confidence man idea, overlaid with



DAVID WAYNE, CHARLES LAUGHTON
"The authentic world of O. Henry"

a drawling burlesque of the conventional conception of poor-white manners and behaviour. But the comedy is laboured and slow-moving—as O. Henry himself can be at times.

The last film, "The Gift of the Magi," directed by Henry King, is probably the most enjoyable, largely because of the fresh and vivacious performance of Jeanne Crain as the young bride who

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