

Bring 'em Back Alive-O

THE SNOWS OF KILIMANJARO

(20th Century-Fox)

HOW strange, I thought, as I watched Gregory Peck dying morosely on his camp-stretcher under the shadow of Kilimanjaro (and knocking back the whisky-sodas), how curious that this should remind me of *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*. And yet, when the last Technicolored after-image had faded from the retina, the association did not seem quite so grotesque after all. Thurber's Mr. Mitty, with his comic-book daydreams, Hemingway's dying Harry (for once unsure of where he is going) tormenting himself with memories, are both frustrated products of this arid century. Or they would be if Hollywood could leave well alone.

At that point I recalled what the subconscious had perhaps been trying to intimate earlier—that Thurber had made a public scene over the film version of his miniature masterpiece (which turned a small-scale satire on escapism into a general exodus for the cash-customers). I can't say that that metamorphosis dismayed me—Danny Kaye was a more than adequate compensation—but I wonder what Ernest Hemingway thought of this present production. If he made any public comment it escaped my notice, but in a preface which he wrote to *The First Forty-nine Stories* there are a few lines that he might well have resurrected. Listing the stories he himself liked best he excluded "those that have achieved some notoriety so that . . . you are always faintly embarrassed to read them and wonder whether you really wrote them or did you maybe hear them somewhere."

The Snows of Kilimanjaro would now, I suppose, be added to the list of tales that embarrass. If you have read the story (and the best anthologies usually include it) the film is bound to remind you of something you've read somewhere. Its defect is that it reminds you of too much. I don't know how Carey Robinson (who wrote the screen play) set about the assignment, but the impression I have is that he sat down

BAROMETER

MAINLY FAIR: "The Snows of Kilimanjaro."
OVERCAST: "Meet Me Tonight."

and did a fast semi-literary digest of all the Hemingway best-sellers, whittled the title-story down to the bare bones, then padded it out with excerpts from the novels. The result still sounds like Hemingway (a good deal of it is, of course), but not like *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*. Only the physical setting remains—the snow-capped mountain, the hunters' camp, the vultures and the hyena waiting for the sick man to die, and the man—half delirious from his gangrened leg—wandering in his mind back along the long road he has come. Under the careful chaperonage of Mr. Robinson, and the director Henry King, these flashbacks become a sort of conducted tour through the more salubrious sections of the Hemingway country—Paris (only the better *bistros*, of course), the Côte D'Azur, and the Green Hills of Africa. There are also a couple of Spanish interludes with an apparently composite source — *For Whom the Bull Tolls*, perhaps. Mainly, however, Mr. Robinson's character remembers women. In this he differs from Hemingway's Harry, who remembered other frustrations and satisfactions—war and death, the fleshpots, and the hills of home. He remembered a hundred stories he had not written and now could never write. And, of course, he died. Mr. Cary's Harry doesn't. He is saved by the devotion of his wife who puts hot packs on his leg, lances it with a hunting-knife—and lets the gangrene out.

What is there on the credit side? An abundance of fine photography—excellent landscape shots from Kenya, good wildlife studies of hippos, rhinos, elephants, antelopes, and a particularly malevolent hyena; better-than-average shots of Paris and Madrid. And there is also Ava Gardner. I don't usually take much notice of the lovelies—of their acting, I mean. But, this time, this young woman compels attention. Of all the players she is the most vital, the least a stereotype. I was sorry they killed her off so messily. The only other casualty was a story—and I suppose with that thought we can say Farewell to Hemingway (at least till next time).

MEET ME TONIGHT

(Rank)

VALERIE HOBSON, Stanley Holloway, Jack Warner, Kay Walsh, Nigel Patrick, Ted Ray and others in a strenuous (and sometimes strident) attempt to do with three cheap little Noel Coward sketches what has been done with Somerset Maugham's short stories. "The Red Peppers" may have been funny with Coward and Lawrence in the leading roles, but Kay Walsh is miscast and Ted Ray I find more amusing on the radio than brawling backstage in a provincial theatre. Stanley Holloway struggles mightily (in "Fumed Oak") as the henpecked husband who has the last word, but the supporting players he is saddled with would scarcely pass muster in a local repertory production. This centre-piece is sub-titled "An Unpleasant Comedy." The third sketch, "Ways and Means," set in the Riviera, invites comparison with "The Facts of Life" and "The Ant and the Grasshopper"—and can't stand up to it. With Shakespeare still in the air, I feel I can sum up only in Hamlet's phrase—"A plentiful lack of wit, together with most weak hams."



GREGORY PECK AND FRIEND
On the credit side, fine photography
and Ava Gardner

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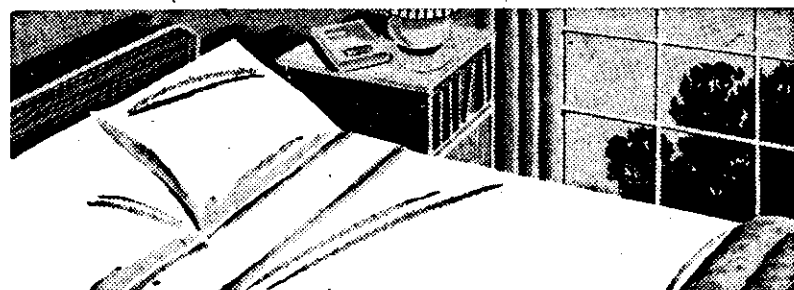
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