

The Ego and Id

CLOCHMERLE

(Blue Ribbon Films)

Life went forward without needless hypocrisy, but with a certain Gallic fondness for the licentious text.

THOSE who have read *Clochmerle*, by Gabriel Chevallier, will probably agree that his description of the Beaujolais way of life constitutes one of the classic understatements of the half-century. With the exception of the ageing spinster Justine Putet and her equally withered companions, the inhabitants of the little town of Clochmerle enjoy wine, women, a modicum of song, and an almost total absence of inhibitions.

Filmgoers who remember *The Baker's Wife* and *The Well-digger's Daughter* will also be familiar with the unconventional conventions of what might be termed the Pagnol tradition of French rural comedy. But neither familiarity with Chevallier's novel nor memories of Raimu and Fernandel can quite prepare one for the visual impact of *Clochmerle* and its celebrated "monument," its complaisant wenches, and its cuckolds. And there are good reasons for this—some

BAROMETER

OVERCAST: "*Clochmerle*."
DULL: "*Somebody Loves Me*."

of them in the film, some in ourselves. If we had all grown up in the atmosphere of provincial France (and if that atmosphere was as pungent as the comic tradition implies) one could perhaps assimilate such a film as this without suffering moral indigestion afterwards. But, of course, we haven't grown up in that way. Our tradition is puritan and that is no preparation for French humour at its most basic. Or should I say that it is no preparation for its public acceptance. I do not think it is evidence of innate Anglo-Saxon hypocrisy that there should be jokes which we can enjoy in private but which may embarrass us if made into a public spectacle. And that is the kind of embarrassment *Clochmerle* is likely to provide for sensitive people.

It is, in fact, one thing to read the book and quite another to see it in uncompromising visual terms, and the filmgoer gets little relief of any kind from the screen treatment. Chevallier's novel though it is Rabelaisian enough, has both gaiety and subtlety. The film is broad farce in which the subtler aspects of the satire are lost either in the French dialogue or in the earthier distractions of the photography.

It would be sheer humbug to say I wasn't amused. At its best *Clochmerle*

is classically comic and hilariously satirical (it was diverting to discover that whatever language they may be speaking and whatever occasion they may be celebrating, politicians all sound the same), but at its worst—and it is too frequently at that, I think, for our tastes—it is unnecessarily grubby. If one may use the language of the psychologists (and I hope I am using it with reasonable accuracy) its appeal is too often to the *id* instead of the *ego*. Certainly this is no film for juveniles. Speaking as an adult, I was rather glad that I went on my own.

SOMEBODY LOVES ME

(Paramount)

[[OLLYWOOD has turned out some quite presentable musical films of late, but this is not one of them. I am impelled to that conclusion by an ineradicable conviction that Miss Betty Hutton is no more musical than an alarm-clock. I admired her gymnastics in *The Greatest Show on Earth*, and I have heard and enjoyed her in comic numbers where the melody was made for maltreatment, but in *Somebody Loves Me* she has little scope for comedy and rather less to show her muscle-tone. It purports to be the more or less real-life story of two popular entertainers, Blossom Seeley and Benny Fields who married and flourished in the States a generation or more ago. Stage life for

Blossom apparently began at *forte* (when the San Francisco earthquake interrupted a cabaret turn she was giving) and if Miss Hutton's portrayal is at all accurate it went on from that point in a steady crescendo. As the young man who fell for her beaux yeux and bel canto, Ralph Meeker has a somewhat unsympathetic role which he is quite incapable of handling effectively. As a picture of life backstage and before the



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