

## Film Record—by Gordon Mirams

# FIRE AND THE O'LEARYS



Scenes from Fox's Academy Award - winner, "In Old Chicago," with Alice Faye, Tyrone Power, Alice Brady and Don Ameche. It is reviewed on this page.

"YES, it's pretty good, but, of course, it's not another 'San Francisco'."

Thus spoke a member of the small audience which attended a preview screening of Twentieth Century-Fox's "In Old Chicago." Since then I've heard three other people say exactly the same thing in different words. I didn't say it, but I thought it.

Such comment may, in the circumstances, be natural, but it strikes me that the attitude of mind which produces it is wrong. It's wrong that our first inevitable reaction to a new picture should be comparison with an old one. Films and stars these days are seldom judged on their own merits, but only in competition with what has gone before. Since the past nearly always has a glamour—very often unjustified—the new work suffers by the comparison. It's about as bad as a second wife having a picture of her dear departed predecessor hung over her dressing-table as a shining example.

### Copy-Cats

HOLLYWOOD goes out of its way to foster this preoccupation with the past. A certain amount of such interest is healthy and desirable, but it is becoming an obsession, sapping the vitality of the cinema. There is hardly a picture that isn't described as "Greater than Something or Other," or a "Sensational Follow-up to This or

That." A new star is hailed as a "Second Garbo" or "Another Gable." Originality isn't given a fair chance. The producer who succeeds in Hollywood isn't the man who breaks new ground so much as the man who does something that has already been done, but does it just a little better. Hollywood is a city over-run with copy-cats. And it will remain so until we picture-goers show ourselves more ready to welcome originality. It will remain so just as long as our first reaction, on seeing a picture like "In

Older, but otherwise run a close parallel with the earth-shaking climax of the other picture. In addition, both "San Francisco" and "In Old Chicago" have heroines who are singers, and heroes who are political bosses, and both stories are about cities which grew up rotten and had to be wiped out by colossal disaster.

Reading that back, there certainly doesn't seem to be much reason to claim originality for "In Old Chicago." But there is, and it's thankful you should be to the O'Learys, whose real life story provided Mr. Zanuck with the basis for his Chicagoan saga.

*'Twas Near as Distrissful a  
Blaze, Sure, as the Quake in  
Old 'Frisco Town*

"Old Chicago" is to decide that, while it's pretty good, it isn't another "San Francisco."

Of course, it isn't. Why should it be?

### Thank The O'Learys

AS it happens, though, "In Old Chicago" is not as strong an illustration of my point as I should like, because it is plain that there has been some attempt by Darryl Zanuck to ape M.G.M.'s methods with "Frisco." Zanuck's picture ends with very impressive scenes of fire and panic which last about 10 minutes

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More about that cow later.

Dion (Tyrone Power) was the bad boy of the O'Learys, but is the hero of this film. He is pretty soon getting

### The Cow

THE O'Learys, one gathers, were responsible for a lot of things in old Chicago. Father O'Leary died before he reached there, but the Widow O'Leary settled her brood of three husky lads in