

Film Record—by Gordon Mirams

A BREATH of FRESH AIR

*"Tom Sawyer" Has What
Hollywood Cannot Spoil—
—Youthful Spirits*



Tommy Kelly and Ann Gillis, as Tom Sawyer and Becky Thatcher in David O. Selznick's remarkably successful screen version of the Mark Twain classic. Master Kelly, son of an unemployed New York sexton, was selected from among 25,000 aspirants for the role.

EVERYONE who reads a book visualises it differently. Therefore, the more popular a book is and the more it has become wrapped in lavender-scented memories with each passing year, the more difficult becomes the problem of the producer who sets out to make a film version of it. All around him are self-appointed critics—ardent and uncompromising—each one of whom is ready to pounce on anything that deviates from his own conception of the characters and action.

So, when I took with me to the preview of Selznick's "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" a friend who is so enamoured of the Mark Twain classic that he has read it almost once a year since boyhood, I realised that I was setting the picture the severest test it could face.

My friend's unbounded enjoyment of "Tom Sawyer" was proof to me that Selznick has done again with this picture what he did just recently with "The Prisoner of Zenda"—made as

nearly perfect an adaptation of a literary favourite as seems humanly possible. This was borne out by the comments of other Twain-lovers whom I saw after the screening. They had their quibbles on this and that, of course, but they themselves were prepared to admit that they were no more than quibbles.

Adults Come First

I DID not, however, require all this enthusiasm to fire my own. Having read "Tom Sawyer" only once, and that too long ago to remember it clearly, I went to the preview with a more or less open mind—and came away feeling that I could do humanity no greater immediate service than recommend this film in the strongest terms possible.

Between then and writing this, several days have passed, and I have had time to sleep on it and chew it over; but although the first rosy glow of enthusiasm has naturally faded a little, I hope that enough remains to warm this review and dispel the common illusion that candid film critics(sic)

are cold, impersonal creatures who are always more ready to damn than to praise.

The story is American? Yes, but Tom Sawyer was a little boy first, and an American little boy second.

However, this is certainly not exclusively a film for children. It is not even primarily a film for them, any more than the cartoons of Walt Disney are. Disney says that he makes his pictures to appeal to the childishness that remains in every adult. Selznick must have been guided by the same principle in "Tom Sawyer."

Clear The Decks

WHAT shall I praise first?

Yet, perhaps it would be better if I cleared the decks for a good, hearty broadside of appreciation by saying that the picture is not faultless. For instance, one feels that Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer was not quite the little gentleman that Selznick has made him. Furthermore, the picture is inclined to be episodic, to lack continuity, because so much emphasis has been placed on action. One adventure ends; another