

Film Record—by Gordon Mirams

LABOUR OF LOVE

Walter Huston, a very important white horse, brilliant young Gene Reynolds, and Beulah Bondi in scenes from "Of Human Hearts."



Director's Dream Comes True In One of the Ten Best Films of 1938

["Of Human Hearts." M-G-M. Directed by Clarence Brown. With Walter Huston, Beulah Bondi, James Stewart. First release: Auckland, July 22.]



PUT YOUR SHIRT ON THIS

IN 1920, Clarence Brown, M.-G.-M. director, bought for himself the screen rights to a novel by Honore Morrow, entitled "Benefits Forgot." He then, I can imagine, tied it up with a pretty pink ribbon and put it away with a sprig of lavender in his bottom drawer, hoping for the day when he could give his story to the world. It rather alters one's conception of the typically level-headed, businesslike magnate of Hollywood, doesn't it—this thought of a director sentimentally treasuring an embryo screen play through 18 long years?

And I think the fact is of practical importance. Clarence Brown has at last brought his story to the screen, under the title of "Of Human Hearts"; and if ever a film gave evidence of being a labour of love, it is this one.

"Of Human Hearts" has a certain quality very few other films possess—and that tale about a script cherished by a director for 18 years helps to explain what that quality is.

It is almost as if Brown's devotion to his subject has been transmitted to everyone connected with the making of the film, so that it finds an outlet not only in his almost inspired direction, but also in the utter honesty of the acting, the sanity and deep feeling of the dialogue, the quiet, moving beauty of the photography.

Of Any Age

IT is necessary, I suppose, to describe "Of Human Hearts" as a "period" picture, in that its action takes place in the middle of last century. But the whole atmosphere is so convincing, the characters and situations so real and recognisable, that the picture has an everyday intimacy which modern drama seldom achieves and historical drama practically never. This story, one feels, could be set in the twentieth century, the nineteenth, or the ninth, and it would make little real difference to its power to touch the heart.

There is more genuine feeling, more simple humour, more truth and more dignity per foot of this film than almost anything we've seen since Hollywood learned the meaning of sophistication and fell a victim to it.

Good And Bad

JUST a simple story . . . Plain people living plain lives in a small backwoods village in Ohio round about the time of the American Civil War. . . No tangled young romance. . . No heroes, heroines or villains in the conventional sense. . .

With one exception, no character is either all-virtuous or all-bad. The parson who comes to guide the spiritual destinies of this little flock in the wilderness is an upright, wise, and godly man—but guilty of the sin of pious intolerance toward his own son. To his parishioners he is a model of virtue; to the boy he is a martinet. Even when the text is hammered home by a leather strap in a strong paternal hand, scriptural precepts about being grateful for small mercies do not make much appeal to a boy whose heart is young and rebellious—especially when those small mercies consist of the neighbours' cast-off clothing.

To the lad, the very pants he wears, the very food he eats, are a reminder of shameful dependence upon other, less worthy people; to the father, secure in his faith, they are honourable rewards for service. Scanty rewards, it is true, but that is just another cross to be bravely and uncomplainingly borne.

Man's Ingratitude

THERE is as much light and shade in the character of the son as there is in that of the father. As the boy grows to manhood, the breach widens,