

CHIVALRY TAKES THE COUNT

A Film Article

By

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Leslie Howard hit a new high . . .

NOT so many years ago, when Rudolf was the Sheik, film audiences used to sit rapt through close-ups of two-minute-long kisses—and love it. Now tender Romance is on the down, wilting like the screen heroines who used to be wooed by it. Rough-house courtships keep the box offices busy. So screen heroines don't fall for kisses any more—it's black eyes and fisticuffs that make them take the vow.

When Jimmy Cagney pushed a grape fruit into Mae Clarke's face, way back in 1931, screen chivalry took its first sock. It has been taking them ever since and to-day is groggy indeed. For 1938 Romance is rough and tough. If the lover embraces his sweetheart at all it's in an all-in wrestling clinch. Remember Leslie Howard's and Joan Blondell's tussle in "Stand In," and the classic Lombard-March boxing bout of "Nothing Sacred?"

Yet when Cagney pushed that grapefruit he was regarded as something of a screen rebel. Why to-day a good crack on a lady's jaw is one of the first signs of "lurv" awakening in the cave-man chest.

Once upon a time the man that hit the heroine wasn't known as the hero . . . but that's an old story. Like most rebels, tough guy Cagney was not so much wrong as ahead of his time.

It was not until Clark Gable came along that the "man-hits-woman" type of romance really became popular.

Gable, as Public Idol No. 1, brought the "treat 'em rough boys" into the front rank. He even got an Academy Award when he spanked Claudette Colbert with a hair brush in "It Happened One Night." Of course there was more to the role than spanking, but still, it showed tough romance had definitely arrived. It was accepted and approved in the highest cinematic circles.

Gable curbed his pugilistic spirits a little after "It Happened One Night." But I can remember some fairly rough treatment he gave the late Jean Harlow when he wooed her in "China Seas." In

the recent "Test Pilot" he is back again as the hard-boiled hero—swooping from the skies to carry off Myrna Loy and marry her without a by-your-leave.

IN any case, Gable or no Gable, the taste for he-lovers did not stop with one picture. Robert Donat was, I think, the first Englishman to forget the "old school tie" traditions when he hauled Madeline Carroll, willy-nilly, through the exciting adventures of "The Thirty-Nine Steps."

Another "English gentleman" actor, Herbert Marshall, breaks through his inhibitions most unexpectedly in "Breakfast for Two," when he and Barbara Stanwyck mix it in no uncertain manner—custard pies and all. I can remember the time when Marshall played nothing but "other men"—who suffered silently with stiff-lipped British chivalry.

And who would have imagined scholarly Leslie Howard, who established a new "high" for tender romance in "Romeo and Juliet," acting like any American G-man who had never been taught how to play the game, the cad?

Yet in "It's Love I'm After" Howard plays a role that portrays him as very nearly a boor, egoistical and unchivalrous. He even burlesques the death scene in "Romeo and Juliet!"

THESSE cultured Englishmen are following the path that every film actor must take these days if he wants to hear his woman say, "I will."

Even suave William Powell, Hollywood's perfect gentleman forgot himself in "Double Wedding." Dignity went by the board in his dealings with Perfect Wife Myrna Loy. Naturally, she could (Contd. on page 53.)



. . . and hit something more substantial.