

SPEAKING CANDIDLY... REVIEWS of the NEW FILMS

That Slight Case Of Murder!

["A Slight Case of Murder." Warner Bros. Directed by Lloyd Bacon. Starring Edward G. Robinson, Allen Jenkins, Ruth Donnelly. First release: Wellington, December 2.]

"REPEAL has come, see. It ain't Prohibition no longer. Yeah, you mugs, we're goin' straight. We're on the up and up. So park your shootin' irons. Sure, we're goin' to sell our beer. But y' gotta get this right. Y' gotta be real salesmen. Y' gotta wash behind ya ears; y' gotta wear clean collars; y' gotta shave. We're legitimate, see. We ain't illegitimate no more."

Thus Edward G. Robinson in the role of reformed beer-baron Remy

Marko in Warners' glorious farce, "A Slight Case of Murder." He is speaking the language of Damon Runyon; and the temptation is strong within me to continue writing this review in Runyonesque. But it's a bit of a strain to write, a bit of a strain to read (though not to hear) and it wouldn't really do justice to one of the most original, most wildly hilarious pictures to have come from America.

It's rather superfluous to mention America. You couldn't possibly imagine any other country in the world producing this picture. For that matter, nobody but Damon Runyon could have written it, and I doubt if any studio except Warners would have had the courage and imagination to film it. For that, much thanks.

Virtue Rewarded

THE story first. Repeal spells the end of boot-legging for Remy Marko and his "mugs." But is he dismayed? Not a bit of it. He'll go legitimate; he'll run a brewery and be respectable.

Marko is as proud of his new-found honesty as a small boy with his first pair of long pants; but virtue is his sole reward. For Marko's a teetotaler, see, and it's just one part of the joke that not till the end of the story does he realise that his beer tastes like bad furniture polish.

But the public has realised it all along—which is why, after four years of honest dealing, Marko is faced with foreclosure of the brewery mortgage.

Dear Little Douglas

TO forget about money troubles, Marko takes his family and henchmen to his country-house at Saratoga for a quiet holiday, pausing just long enough to collect the toughest little guy in the world from Marko's "Alma Mater" (a reformatory). It's his habit once a year to reward the star pupil of the place with a vacation; but this time for a change he asks the headmistress for her worst specimen. "Pierre," she says, "take three of the older boys with you, go down to the cellar, unlock Douglas, and bring him to my study." So the incredible beer-drinking, cigar-smoking Douglas Fairbanks Rosenbloom is added to the family party.

On arrival at Saratoga, Marko makes several disconcerting discoveries. The spare bedroom is occupied by four neatly-plugged and quite dead gangsters. In another room reposes half a million dollars, the booty from a hold-up. Elsewhere, but he doesn't know it, is a fifth gangster, very much alive, the cause of the four corpses. And to cap it all, Marko's gently-educated daughter goes and gets herself engaged to a husky State Trooper.

Marko may have gone honest, but if there's one thing he and his "mugs" can't abide it's the sight of a policeman. It's in their blood. It just ain't natural, see, to like a copper.

Those Corpses

STILL, a live copper for son-in-law is less embarrassing than four dead gangsters in the spare bedroom. People might misunderstand; therefore, to avoid explanations, Marko and "mugs" hit on their grand and glorious idea of planting corpses on the doors of local residents they dislike!

With yelps of glee they deal them out, while Allen Jenkins—left out of the fun to look after

little Douglas—sits at home and sulks.

No sooner are the corpses distributed than it is discovered there's a 10,000 dollar reward for each of them (dead or alive). The henchmen rush out and gather up the bodies, bring them back to the Marko house, hide them in a closet without telling Marko about it. There they stay while a wild party goes on downstairs, while the murderer snoops from room to room, while Marko frantically tries to find money to save his brewery.

Not Gruesome

IF I've described the story in some detail up to this point, it's because I feel it's only right to warn you what to expect in "A Slight Case of Murder." But the



RUTH DONNELLY
"a hard-boiled matron."

finale you must discover for yourselves. All I'll say is that it contains the best last line of dialogue since talkies began.

In normal circumstances, a story mainly based on the inconvenience of having four corpses lying round the house sounds like entertainment of the grimmest kind. But "A Slight Case of Murder" is exactly the opposite. It is not just a wildly funny farce full of delirious complications and side-issues (all developed clearly and concisely). It is also expert satire on the American gangster (or the popular idea of the American gangster), and the social climber; as well as a liberal education in the rich and racy language (or rather argot) of the U.S.A.

Jolly Good Company

THE film is also a triumph of comedy characterisation. If space permitted I would wax enthusiastic in detail over Edward G. Robinson's joyous burlesque on all the gangster roles he has ever played straight; over the exquisite dumbness of Allen Jenkins; the incredible comical toughness of young Bobby ("Dead End") Jordan; and over Ruth Donnelly's invaluable contribution to the picture as Marko's wife—a hard-boiled matron with a heart of gold, desperately striving to maintain her veneer of refinement against enormous odds. But it is enough to say that these, and other characters, are all the best of good company.

Perhaps I'm making a mistake, perhaps "A Slight Case of Murder" is just what they call a "critic's picture" because it's so unusual. Yet I don't think so.

Hollywood Calls

TWO of England's brightest young stars are on the verge of a trip to Hollywood.

Negotiations have just been completed for Laurence Olivier to co-star with Merle Oberon in Goldwyn's "Wuthering Heights." At the same time Paramount have been discussing with Vivien Leigh an important part in De Mille's "Union Pacific."

"Army Girl" Better Than It Looks

["Army Girl." Republic. Directed by George Nichols, Jr. With Madge Evans, Preston Foster, James Gleason, H. B. Warner. First release: Wellington, December 2.]

THE very title of "Army Girl" had me on my guard at once. I seem to be sensitive to such things. Surely, I thought, it wasn't time already for another of those West Point disappointments, or another of those sugar-coated recruiting-propaganda "epics of the service" which Hollywood puts out every now and then in return for the loan of a battleship for Dick Powell to sing on, or a regiment of cavalry to act as extras in a Western?

But I need not have worried, and neither need you, for "Army Girl" is a much better picture than its title. It is, in fact, a pretty good show.

The American flag is undoubtedly wagged a bit, but with commendable discretion. And as recruiting propaganda I have a feeling that this picture might work both ways. For "Army Girl" is a story about the peace-time mechanisation of the cavalry, its central figure being an infernal machine called a whippet tank; and after seeing what the crew has to put up with, I'm still further than ever off being convinced that the best way to serve my country is inside a tank.

Tank v. Horse

THERE'S something to be said for the theory, though, that an occasion might arise when it would be a trifle more comfortable inside a tank than outside it.

The highlight of this picture is a cross-country race and endurance test between two men in a tank and a hundred men on horses; and the way that whirring, snorting machine of the devil runs rings round the horses, rattles and bumps over all kinds of obstacles, and then practically sits up and sneers at the cavalry, is not only extremely exciting, but also rather terrifying.

By demonstrating with such signal success that petrol and steel are superior to horseflesh in warfare, Captain Dike Conger (Preston Foster) arouses the enmity and jealousy of officers and men at the desert cavalry post to which he has been sent to carry out mechanisation tests. There is even a con-

spiracy hatched to disgrace him—which doesn't seem to be at all the proper army spirit—leading to the death of the dear old colonel (H. B. Warner), much bitterness from the previously-infatuated colonel's daughter (Madge Evans), court-martial, and a last-minute unsmirching of the Conger escutcheon.

Tries Too Much

PRESTON FOSTER portrays one of those self-confident lady-killers to be found in the ranks of practically every Hollywood army; but does it with such spirit, such a wealth of brittle, wise-cracking humour that he makes the part worth while. Madge Evans, always intelligent and beautiful, has seldom been more so as the colonel's daughter.

In supporting roles of "Army Girl" are to be seen many competent, well-proved players, such as James Gleason, Ruth Donnelly, Heather Angel, Billy Gilbert and Neil Hamilton. It is, indeed, the chief fault of this picture that, while finding room for such artists in the cast, it couldn't find enough

Romance Returns

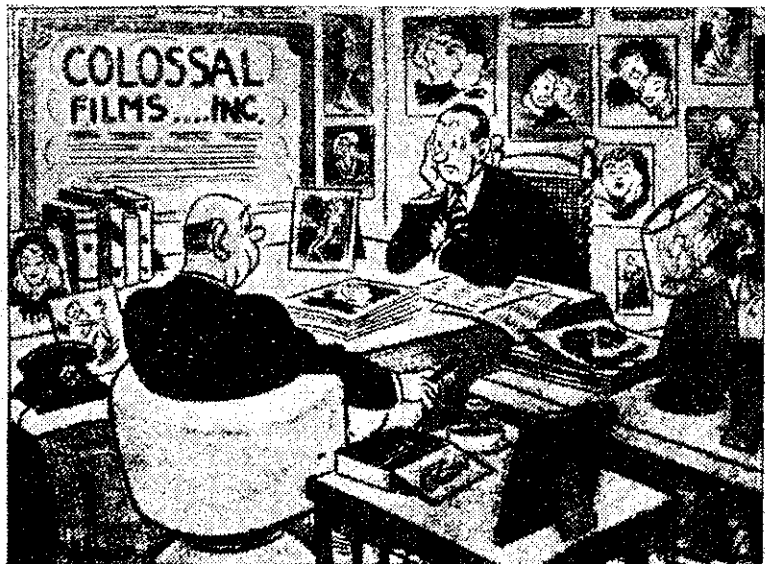
FOLLOWING the success of "Robin Hood," we seem to be in for a cycle of "cloak and sword" drama. Romance will be the antidote to the crazy comedy excesses.

Another of the Douglas Fairbanks silent successes, "The Man in the Iron Mask," is to be remade by Edward Small Productions. James Whale will direct, but no cast has been announced yet.

M-G-M have taken "Scaramouche" down off the shelves and are busy looking for likely successors to Ramon Novarro and Alice Terry.

for them to do; or, in trying to justify their presence, cluttered up the story with side-issues. For instance: Heather Angel appears in the first scenes, establishes herself with a fine piece of acting in an hysterical outburst against the monotony of life at the army post, and thereafter fades right out of the picture. This is just one of several side-tracks in the plot that lead nowhere.

Like the small boy who overrears at a party, a tendency to attempt too much is a common symptom of immaturity; and it has to be remembered that "Army Girl" was produced by the comparatively unknown studio of Republic. In practically every other aspect, however, this is a film which even the biggest studios could feel very pleased to have produced.



"I can't understand it—we haven't found a new Garbo for nearly a fortnight."

—With acknowledgment to the "Film Weekly."

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