

SPEAKING CANDIDLY... REVIEWS of the NEW FILMS

This Picture Is Bloody!

["The Vampire Bat," Action Pictures. Directed by Frank Strayer. With Melvyn Douglas, Fay Wray, Lionel Atwill. First release: Wellington, January 20.]

THAT heading, let me hasten to make clear, is not intended to refer to the quality of "The Vampire Bat," but to the nature of its contents. For what would you expect to find but buckets of blood in a film about vampires and the old superstition which makes them come out of their graves to gorge on the life-stream of humans? B-r-r-h!

It is so long since we have been given the chance to sample any good old-fashioned, dyed-in-the-wool horror on the screen that I found the nocturnal flittings of "The Vampire Bat" sufficiently entertaining. At the same time, I am afraid that my taste for blood is not as strong as it used to be. Perhaps that is because one film like "Dracula" sucked nearly everything there was out of the subject of vampires; or perhaps it is because "The Vampire Bat" explains itself all away with another mad scientist.

Spoils The Fun

I ALWAYS feel it is rather a mistake when ghost stories or ghost films end with rational, pseudo-scientific explanations. It takes half the fun of the thing



LIONEL ATWILL

A man you love to hate.

away when you know that the spook is caused by wind in the chimney. A story of the supernatural should remain in the realm of the supernatural, should leave you, if possible, with the uncomfortable query "Can Such Things Be?"

That is where "Dracula" scored so heavily, with its hearty Grand Guignol thrills and its pretence of reality. That is where "The Vampire Bat" scores not quite so heavily. Even though you suspect from the outset—in spite of a lot of quotations from ancient legends to prove the existence of vampires—that the apparently benign doctor of the panic-stricken, murder-ridden village will turn out to be a madman who goes round leaving corpses drained of their blood in order to prove his theory about creating life; even though you suspect all this, it is still something of an anti-climax when the doctor really is unmasked as the vampire.

Things On The Roof

STILL, if you like horror, half a blood-pudding is better than none. All the good old hair-raising

machinery is put into effective motion—din. shapes crawling over the housetops while the clock strikes twelve; a village idiot who gibbers horribly and comes to a nasty, but undeserved, end; and rows and rows of sinister test-tubes and bubbling retorts in the laboratory where the mad doctor visibly—and audibly—siphons his victims' blood into a bottle, and where, finally, he is sent to his account by the plucky, but puzzled, detective.

The People In It

THE picture has the benefit of a good cast. Melvyn Douglas plays the detective-hero, and rather gave me the impression he was wondering what it was all

HER WORSHIP.

Glenda Farrell As Mayor

GLEND A FARRELL has been elected Mayor of North Hollywood and is California's first woman mayor. She boasts that she didn't kiss any babies, either. "Babies," says Glenda, "can't vote."

about—why he should be assigned to catching vampires when he is so much more at home in sophisticated comedy. But his bewildered expression is at least in character.

Fay Wray, the heroine, has little more to do than scream when laid on the operating-table (though, Heaven knows, she's been in so many monsters' clutches during her screen career she must know it will all come out right in the end). As chief blood-curdler, Lionel Atwill—a man I love to hate—didn't fool me for a moment that he wasn't up to something particularly unpleasant, but acted well enough to keep the character of the mad doctor interesting. For comedy—and it's almost the best thing in the picture—there's Maud Eburne; and for additional horror, there's Dwight Frye, whom I last remember eating flies in "Dracula." This time, he's the village idiot with bats (real ones) in his attic; and—poor fellow!—he looks it.

As for the blood—well, it's there by the bucketful!

Beery, Rooney And A Horse

["Stablemates," M-G-M. Directed by Sam Wood. Starring Wallace Beery, Mickey Rooney. Release: Date indefinite.]

IN 1931, Wallace Beery and little Jackie Cooper made, if not history, at least something of a sensation with a picture called "The Champ," in which a broken-down pugilist became a new man, physically and morally, under the influence of a small boy. M-G-M's new picture "Stablemates," differs from "The Champ" only to the extent that Mickey Rooney substitutes for Jackie Cooper as Beery's cause of uplift, and the race-track replaces the boxing-ring.

That "Stablemates" will create as much of a sensation is unlikely, for success is not so easily duplicated. But, in its cut-and-dried fashion, it is quite a good picture.

To me, "Stablemates" was principally interesting as a contest for acting honours between the Beery,

the Rooney, and a horse named Lady Q. The humans go at it so enthusiastically that they over-act noticeably in several parts, particularly the tearful ones; but the horse, remaining natural and well-trained, walks off with the decision.

Man And Boy

WRITING about several of Mickey Rooney's recent pictures, I have described him as the finest juvenile actor on the screen. After seeing "Stablemates" I will qualify that by saying he will remain so only as long as his directors make him use more restraint in emotional passages. Both he and Wallace Beery are often guilty of the technique known as "mugging" (baldly, that means pulling faces).

At other times, their partnership produces some splendid acting.

Beery, of course, is as dilapidated and beery as ever (only this time it's gin). He's a disgraced veterinary surgeon who knows horses inside and out, but is wanted by the police on a criminal charge. Stable-boy Rooney, having acquired a lame thoroughbred

race on which all hopes are pinned. Surprise, kiddies, the horse wins!

And then Beery (the law having caught up) goes off to take his medicine like a new man, while the Rooney smiles through his tears and comforts himself with the thought that it won't be long, anyway, before they can all be together again. I don't object to the tears, but the parting kiss on the Beery visage from a tough little guy like the Rooney might very well, I think, have been omitted.

Good Scenes

AS you may have gathered, the story of "Stablemates" is caulked to the gunwales with hokum; but it has one standout sequence when Beery, fortified with gin, operates on the horse by the light of a torch.

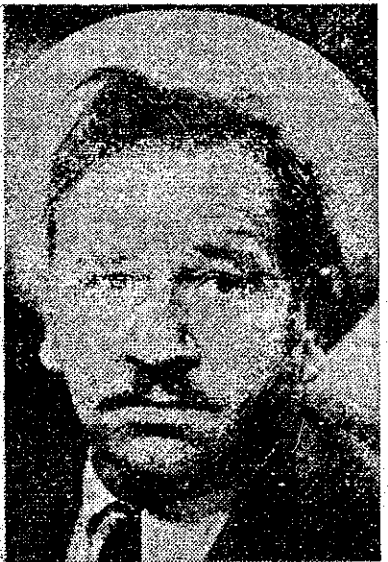
Very good also is the sequence down on the farm when Beery runs the risk of bringing the score to half-a-dozen for a dominating female who has buried five husbands. He prefers to take his chances with the Law.



Many stars have become famous with one picture. Paulette Goddard has stayed famous. Since Chaplin "discovered" her in "Modern Times" she has been often in the news, never on the screen. But Selenick's "The Young in Heart" will soon change that. The one in the middle is Paulette Goddard.

which has been sentenced to the glue-factory, persuades him to perform a difficult operation on the horse. This being successful, they set up in partnership, and Beery's regeneration through the devotion and trust of the boy is soon so far

The race-track atmosphere and the scenes where Mickey rides his nag to victory are handled as efficiently as Hollywood always handles these things. Though one knows the horse can't lose, the big race could hardly be more exciting if one had a bet on the outcome.



WALLACE BEERY

... This time it's gin.

advanced that they adopt one another as father and son.

And Then The Race

FOLLOWS an idyllic episode on a farm, shattered by the menace of the law, which is on Beery's trail. Follows renunciation, misunderstanding, reconciliation, and the customary finale of the big

"Winterset's" Hero Goes To College

["Spring Madness," M-G-M. Starring Maureen O'Sullivan, Lew Ayres, Burgess Meredith. Release: Date indefinite.]

FOR a collegiate picture, "Spring Madness" has at least one distinct mark of novelty. It entirely omits the football.

Somewhat less distinctive is the opportunity offered for Burgess Meredith to return to the screen he graced so memorably in "Winterset." Not that his performance isn't the outstanding feature of "Spring Madness." It is; but unless Mr. Meredith was fooling us in "Winterset," he is a great tragedian; and "Spring Madness" permits him to be just another crazy comedian. Rather more gifted and even more eccentric than the average, perhaps, but still just one of a crowd.

He is presented as a senior of Harvard with an urge (and a hard-earned boat ticket) to go to Russia. It is a pity he didn't make it, for the Russians would probably know better than Hollywood how



BURGESS MEREDITH

Mixture of Marxist and Marx Brother.

to employ Mr. Meredith's peculiar talents.

Love Finds Lew Ayres

LOOKING and behaving rather like a mixture of a Marxist and a Marx Brother, Mr. Meredith remains on the verge of hysterics and his trip to Russia throughout the story, while his chosen travelling-companion (Lew Ayres) spoils all their plans by pursuing, and being pursued by, an attractive co-ed (Maureen O'Sullivan). Love, you see, has come to Mr. Ayres with a wallop, and though he is sincere enough in his desire to study conditions in the Soviet, he is led astray by the more immediate prospect of studying conditions in an American girls' college.

Higher Education

FOR their part, the girls seem to have adopted wholeheartedly the dictum of Pope that the proper study of mankind is man. With a constant stream of undergraduates at their door, there is no lack of subjects. When the heroine discloses that she is about to lose her boy friend to the Soviet, her room-mates rally round enthusiastically, employ all the subtle weapons in woman's armoury—and some of the blunter ones, too—to make him change his mind. And, of course, they succeed.

Even allowing for the benefits of America's higher education, which includes a knowledge of the Big Apple, car-wrecking, and a language all its own, these college lads and lasses seem abnormally bright and frisky. However, the title "Spring Madness" explains a lot; and the curtain-fall, is likely to find you exhausted but mildly amused.

I still think, though, that those boys should have gone to Russia—if only for the sake of the Russians, who are a notoriously gloomy people.

Dorothy Lamour Has Her Own Ideas

DOROTHY LAMOUR startled Hollywood by her announcement that she was taking a year off from work in which to have a baby. She also intends to have a perfect home and has been busy studying landscape gardening with the expert who has just laid out the garden of her new home in Coldwater Canyon.

Dorothy's long black tresses are setting a new fashion for glamour in Hollywood, and all the film stars are trying hard to emulate her.