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The Courier Covers

THE NEW MOVIES

By John Springer

(Editor's Note: Listed as Class B (objectionable in part) by the National Legion of Decency, this week, is "Call Out the Marines"; objection: "Suggestiveness in scenes and remarks.")

H. M. Pulham, Esq.—A-2

J. P. Marquand's popular novel, "H. M. Pulham, Esq." has been transferred to the screen and emerges as a satisfactory, though far from brilliant, motion picture. For some reason or other, it is disappointing. This is possibly because Robert Young does such an excellent job of re-creating an essentially staid and plodding character, and because King Vidor, in the direction, is so faithful to the spirit of stody, conservative upper-class Boston, that the picture itself occasionally seems a bit stuffy and pedestrian. Yet when you come right down to it, "H. M. Pulham, Esq." is a very good picture. It's just that one feels it isn't as good as it should have been.

This Harry Pulham is a sort of male Kitty Foyle from Boston instead of Philadelphia, from the upper-stratum instead of from across the tracks. Otherwise the stories are similar using the same period, making the same use of flashbacks to tell the story. The parallels are much more apparent in the movie than in the novel, which was so readable and so adroitly charactorized that one seldom stopped to consider that the story was far from original or novel. Yet, Vidor's screenplay and his direction are in the mood of the book.

Cleverly, he sketches the suburban routine of the middle-aged Pulham, returning to the life story of Pulham from birth through flashbacks. Vidor, in his direction, and Robert Young, in his performance, combine to make Harry Pulham a rounded, complete characterization. Yet, here is another fault of "H. M. Pulham, Esq." as a picture.

Although the book necessarily revolved about Pulham, the other characters were drawn as real people, not as mere foils for Pulham. In the picture, only the character of Marvin Myles, the girl with whom Pulham has a romantic interlude, is drawn to scale and that, unfortunately, is played by Hedy Lamarr, one of the worst possible choices for the role. Miss Lamarr is very beautiful, but her acting is in monotone and her personality is unsuited to the role.

On the other hand, Ruth Hussey, Van Heflin, Charles Coburn, Bonita Granville and the others are well cast, but their roles are reduced to shadowy types, are quickly sketched without development. The love affair is Pulham and Marvin is drawn out to such an extent that it throws the rest of the picture out of proportion. However there are some exceptionally clever scenes, particularly those in which Marquand wrote most caustically about the advertising business, the old "do-it-for-Harvard" spirit and the smug superiority of Boston society. But, as the old lady behind us remarked: "They's too much lovin'. Lovin', lovin' all the time."

"Hellzapoppin'"—A-2

Olsen and Johnson's stage "Hellzappin'" was a unique type of entertainment a show that had something going on all over the theater—in the aisles, in the orchestra pit, in the boxes. Now they attempt to capture the same craziness in celluloid—and no one can say they don't try. Of the original show, the picture retains only the woman calling "Oscar," the gentleman delivering a rapidly-growing plant, and the man disinterestedly reading a magazine on stage.

The rest of it is a disjointed series of gags and specialties—presented in the most studiously wacky manner. Some of it is very funny despite the aroma of ancient corn that somehow hangs over all of it. Most of it, however, is too determinedly foolish. There is little spontaniety about it. You want to laugh because you know it's supposed ot be funny. Lord knows, they're doing everything but bop you over the head. But possibly the very fact that everything is so forced, so full of the "we'll-make-you-laugh-if-it-kills-us" feeling, transmits itself to the audience who just can't get hilarious when they know they are expected to howl. The stage show had personal contact had things, unexpected and crazy, happening to you or to the person in the seat next to yours. But everything about the movie seems calculated. It has some good songs, some lavish production numbers and some funny sequences.

"Swamp Water"—A-2

Towards the end of "Swamp Water" comes a nice gruesome sequence when one of the villains is sucked into a bog of quicksand. Earlier there have been a couple of alligators, a cottonmouth snake and a skull on a post in the middle of a swamp. Outside of that "Swamp Water" hardly lives up to its "horror" billing. However the picture, adapted from a Saturday Evening Post novel, is good melodrama and Jean Renoir, the noted French director, takes full advantage of the atmosphere in building the sombre story.

"Kathleen"—A-1

Shirley Temple, now 13 years old, returns to the screen in a passable, though somewhat thin and familiar picture. Miss Temple is Kathleen, neglected daughter of Herbert Marshall, a widower with no time to be a father. During the course of the film, Miss Temple wins her father's companionship, breaks up his romance with designing Gail Patrick and promotes a new one with Laraine Day, in the regulation "little child shall lead them" manner of her earlier days.

Air Raids—Two Angles

A terse, gripping documentary of R. A. F. bombing activities, "Target for Tonight," produced in England and acted by R. A. F. fighters, is an effective and realistic movie about a typical night bombing raid. The target is selected, the men are given their instructions; they go out on the mission, find their target, bomb it and one of the planes has trouble before it gets back. That's all there is to it—it's handled in an unmelodramatic, almost casual manner, but there is no lack of excitement. The New York Critics recently rated it the best documentary film of 1941.

Carole Lombard is dead. One of the most sparkling and alive actresses on the screen, rated with the most popular off-screen, she will be very much missed on the screen.

For many years, Carole Lombard was one of the less impressive ingenues. She went steadily along turning out picture after picture in which she was the sweet young thing—and they were all pretty bad. She was almost a has-been when Columbia, then a minor studio, took a chance and cast her in a decidedly different role in "20th Century." In that one picture, she proved that she was one of our best comediennes. Her comedy talents were seen to splendid advantage also in "My Man Godfrey," "Hands Across the Table" and "Nothing Sacred." Then, just to prove her versatility she gave two outstanding dramatic performances—in "Made for Each Other" and "They Knew What They Wanted."

This is not an obituary. The papers have taken care of that. It's just farewell to a likable and talented actress.

(Instead of the regular "Movie Memory," John Springer interviews popular Robert Wilcox, screen and stage actor, over WSAY, Monday morning at 10.)

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Movie Guide

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