

# SIGHTS AND SOUNDS

*A documentary on medical aid to Spain and two distinguished imported films—New trends in radio*

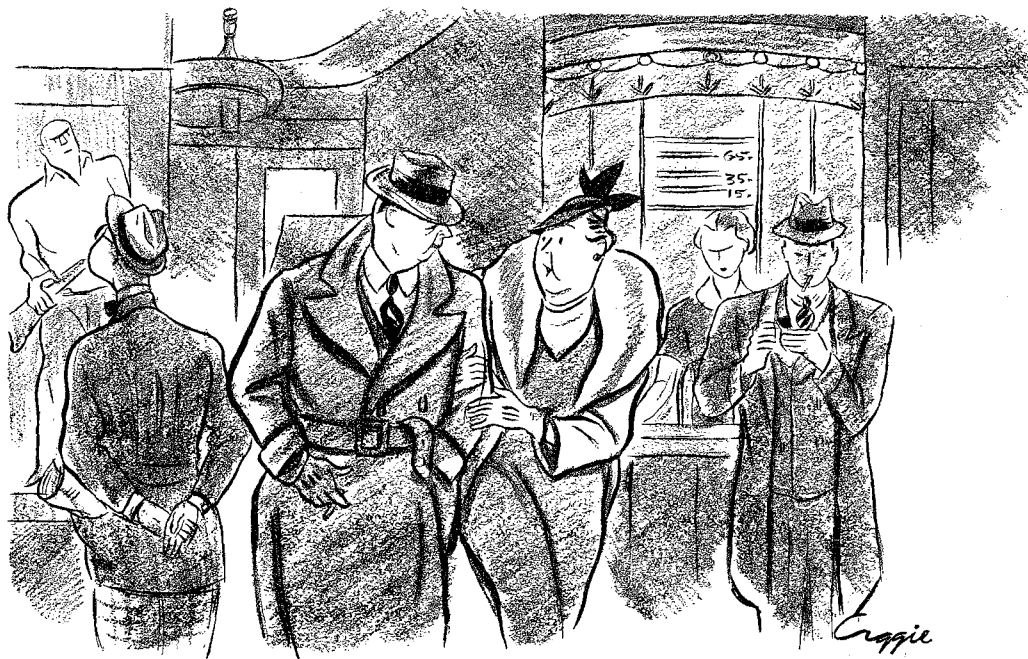
AUDIENCES interested in better and more liberal cinema, both here and in France, seem to be realizing their demands. The number of such films on current display in New York is greater than ever before. And the 55th Street Playhouse, which played host to *Spanish Earth* (which, by the way, has moved into the larger Squire Theater, Eighth Avenue and 44th Street, for an indefinite run) is now showing two extremely important and beautiful (both in their own way, of course) films. The feature is from France and is Jean Renoir's realization of Gorki's *The Lower Depths* (Mayer & Burstyn). The accompanying attraction is the Frontier Film production, *Heart of Spain*.

*Heart of Spain* has been rightly advertised as "thirty minutes of pictorial dynamite from Spain." It is composed of documentary material taken by Herbert Kline and Geza Kapharti (a young Hungarian cameraman) in Spain for the Canadian Blood Transfusion Unit and the American Medical Bureau. It was edited into a dynamic motion picture by Paul Strand (of *Redes*) and Leo Hurwitz. Contributing greatly to the success of the film is the commentary written by poet David Wolff and Kline.

Basically *Heart of Spain* sets out to illustrate the remarkable work of Dr. Norman Bethune and his Canadian group in saving the lives of hundreds of wounded by means of transfusing blood that has been refrigerator-stored. But it is also a testimonial to the brave Spanish people who are giving their blood so that their defenders may live. In addition it makes the generalizations about the Spanish conflict that have been made by its distinguished contemporary, *Spanish Earth*, to which it should not be compared, because they are films of a different genre. *Heart of Spain* represents the work of a group of young film makers about whom America will hear a great deal in a short time. The excellence of this film clearly demonstrates that.

*The Lower Depths* is the work of a great director using a great play as the basis of a magnificent film. Naturally the emphasis of the play has been shifted to suit the needs of the scenario. The grouping of many of the characters has been shifted and the scope of the play, physical and literary, has been increased. Although the characters still bear their Russian names and (for instance) they still talk about "rubles," the spectator never gets the impression that he is seeing a Russian movie, or what is worse, the French version of a Russian movie. While Gorki's story no longer applies to contemporary Russia, the theme (in Renoir's own words), "a heart-rending, thrilling, lyrical poem on the loss of class, human wastage, and the loss of human dignity," represents a true situation in other countries, especially the fascist.

There are many extraordinary things in the film and there are occasionally some weak



"I think I really would have enjoyed the picture if I hadn't known it was made in Russia."

Orange

spots. These may be due to the transcription or they may be due to the limitations set by the commercial producer. The so-called "happy ending" is a case in point. But Renoir succeeds in doing it with his tongue in his cheek. Many of the characters have been softened. But on the whole it is a further indication of Jean Renoir's artistry although it may not be as satisfying to some as his earlier *Toni*. At any rate the play that Gorki wrote thirty-four years ago has been transformed into a powerful contemporary social film.

*Mayerling* (Pax Film) at the New York Filmarte is another importation from France. It is the work of Anatol Litvak, who is now directing *Tovarich* in Hollywood, and serves to introduce the lovely Danielle Darrieux. Based on a historical incident, the supposed suicide pact between Archduke Rudolph of Austria (Charles Boyer) and Baroness Marie Vetsera (Danielle Darrieux), it is merely a well produced and acted romantic drama that sacrificed realism for no reason at all. A realistic treatment of the archduke's story would have made just as "interesting" a film and certainly a more important one.

The fact that *Mayerling* is tender and very moving doesn't increase its importance, especially when compared with the other films that are its contemporaries. On the same program you will find an interesting little short, produced by the Film and Photo League, called *Getting Your Money's Worth*. It was produced with the coöperation of Consumers' Union and does a great service to all consumers as well as increases the number of fine independent films.

For the rest we have a remake of the *Prisoner of Zenda* (United Artists) which hasn't

improved with age in spite of the fact that it contains Ronald Coleman and Madeleine Carroll in the leading roles. *Double or Nothing* (Paramount), *Broadway Melody of 1938* (M.G.M.), *Thin Ice* (20th Century-Fox), are conventional musical films that do not even reach the standard of *You Can't Have Everything*.

PETER ELLIS.

## RADIO

THERE are a couple of straws in the wind which may indicate some relief from the flood of guff from commercial sponsors, which has made radio well-nigh intolerable for listeners. It would be too much to hope that there will be anything like complete freedom from the bore of commercial plugs, but there are signs which may foretell some mitigation. That the revolt of the listener is at least latent has already been recognized by some stations and some sponsors, as witness the successful enterprise of WQXR in New York, which broadcasts hours of fine music unsullied by encomiums for Puppee Dee Lite dog food, and the tremendous success of the Shakespeare, O'Neill, and other unsponsored dramatic programs. In a few cases sponsors have had the wit to put over the name of their product by having comedians spoof it so that the plug itself is entertaining. And, of course, there was that pioneer safety-valve for listener revolt, the Cuckoo Hour.

But now from Detroit comes news that sponsor and station have agreed to cut down the ad plugs of Wheaties because the commercial blurbs for this product in connection with broadcasts of the Detroit Tigers' baseball games produced an actual listener revolt which broke into the local papers. This is reported

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to have thrown such a scare into sponsors that the program editors of stations and advertising agencies have been able, contrary to the situation hitherto, to talk turkey to sponsors about keeping their plugs at a minimum to maintain listener interest. Let's hope the revolt sweeps the country.

Something which may help it along is *Poisons, Potions, and Profits*, a book by Peter Morrell which exposes misleading radio advertising and names names in so doing. The book quotes air advertising sales talks of various well-known products, and analyzes them for falsehoods, referring to laboratory reports on the products much in the manner of Consumers' Union reports. And although newspapers and radio have for a long time been at swords' points as competing advertising mediums, the press has come galloping to the rescue of radio in this connection by cracking down on publicity and advertising for the book. In New York the *World-Telegram*, *Times*, and *Herald Tribune* are reported to have rejected advertisements for Morrell's exposé. This is done, of course, not out of any love for radio, but because the book attacks concerns which are also newspaper advertisers. But if the book gets the sale it deserves; it will help a lot to intensify the listener revolt against false and excessive plugs.

With the replacement of Bishop Gallagher by Bishop Mooney as the head of Father Coughlin's diocese, there has been some talk that the fascist-minded cleric's wings will be clipped. This talk is to the effect that Bishop Mooney, who hails from Rochester, has always been something of a mouthpiece for the Holy See, and that the Holy Father wants to tone down Coughlin's ravings. That remains to be seen. Meanwhile Coughlin is getting ready to resume Sunday broadcasting over some fifty stations beginning October 31.

ROBERT WHITE.



Peter Verdi

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