



# PILLS AND OLD LACE

*Alvah Bessie doesn't think much of Miss Crawford's newly acquired rubber legs. . . . Some other films in which the planes are more beautiful than Ann Sheridan.*

FROM where I was sitting it seemed as though Columbia Pictures had taken a long, hard look at MGM's *Woman of the Year* and decided, "What've they got that we haven't got?"

So they remade Katharine Hepburn's starring "vehicle" and called it, irrelevantly, *They All Kissed the Bride*. For the bride they all kissed had nothing to do with the case. What *did* have to do with the case was the *Woman of the Year* "idea" that a successful business woman must be a man in order to be a successful business woman.

As Charles Humboldt pointed out in *NEW MASSES*, July 28, this is to a certain extent true in America under the present arrangement, but it's not terribly important here. What is important is the other *Woman of the Year* idea that any successful woman would be glad to ditch all for Love; that what Joan Crawford (this time) needed was not the billion-dollar trucking business her father left her but, as the company doctor so subtly put it, "A man who will dominate you." That's what Every Woman Knows, according to the Hollywood credo.

Accordingly they have provided Melvyn Douglas, whose charms I can't see. However, Miss Crawford did. For every time he came into her very efficient tailor-made presence, she acquired rubber legs *a la* Leon Errol. No matter how many of the old doctor's pills she took whenever she was going to confront Mr. Douglas—who was a freelance writer out to expose the vicious labor practices of her trucking company—Miss Crawford's knees became dislocated. When he induced her to put both hands on his shoulders, she went into a deep coma. This is what is called Sex Appeal. It is also called Male Chauvinism, and if it wasn't funny the first time it happened, by the seventh repetition it was positively obscene.

Nor is the picture redeemed by the improved labor relations induced in Miss Crawford's firm by Mr. Douglas' charms. This may be a new method of labor organizing, but I doubt if it will appeal to the teamsters' union.

Reliable players like Billie Burke, Allen Jenkins and Roland Young are thrown away on a thing like *They All Kissed the Bride*. So is Miss Crawford, whose director apparently regards rubber legs as superior to any exhibition of acting talent. Miss Crawford, however, did not waste her work in this movie—she donated her entire salary from it to war charities.

"WINGS FOR THE EAGLE" is a tribute to Lockheed Aircraft Corp. and its many thousands of workers who are keeping 'em flying. Filmed largely within the great airplane plant itself—with due regard to the necessities of military intelligence—it will give the audience a substantial idea of the enormous job involved in building an air force, the miraculous organization America has built, the tireless workers on the production line who are pushing their daily quotas higher with each passing day.

It is a pity, therefore, that with such material at hand, Warners still feels it necessary to make the entire production of American airplanes revolve about the plastic physique of Ann Sheridan. The answer, of course, is that they still do not feel that war production and the issues of this war are in themselves sufficiently compelling to the American people without being glamourized by oomph girls.

Hence the semblance of a plot, which involves Miss Sheridan's marital triangle with Dennis Morgan and Jack Carson. There is a sub-plot that holds considerably more interest, although it is sentimentalized all out of semblance to human life. This is the situation of the German-American worker, Jake Hanso (ably played by George Tobias, in a serious role for a change) and his American-born son. This situation makes it possible for the film-makers to say some really valid things about foreign-born Americans, in the spirit of President Roosevelt's non-discrimination order, and in the spirit of the war of liberation we are fighting.

Miss Sheridan is as negative as ever, but the Lockheed interceptors and bombers are beautiful. There is a humorous performance by the apex of the triangle—Dennis Morgan. Some day it would be nice to see Hollywood acknowledge the fact that aircraft workers are union men; that the relationship of the union to the factory is in a large degree responsible for the magnificent production records that are being made today. But when you expect such a consummation, you are only asking that some film-makers become as adult in their thinking about America and our global war as they are adroit in film technique.

IF "WINGS FOR THE EAGLE" is merely inadequate as a reflection of aircraft production in America, *Flight Lieutenant* is the veriest drivel. If *Wings for the Eagle* is merely sentimental in its treatment of the father-son relationship, *Flight Lieutenant* is positively maudlin.

For here, for the nth time, is the ancient

plot about the alcoholic pilot who is grounded for flying while intoxicated and killing his best friend and co-pilot. Disgraced, he must redeem himself. His son, by the oddest of coincidences, grows up under an assumed name and falls in love with—the daughter of his father's victim. But the son, too, is a great pilot, about to test a dangerous plane. Therefore the father must knock him cold, dive the wings off the ship himself, and perish nobly to redeem his early misdeeds and bring boy and girl together.

With the old wheel-horse Pat O'Brien ambling sadly through the film as the disgraced pilot, Glenn Ford plays his son with some semblance of humanity. The war is injected—as with a syringe—while the ancient plot creaks onward to its inevitable conclusion. Sit this one out.

"PRIORITIES ON PARADE" is second-rate musical comedy plot grafted onto a well intentioned desire on the part of Paramount to serve the interests of the war. It is only a pity that you sometimes get the impression from the film that Paramount is more interested in making use of the war than it is in serving it.

The idea here concerns an unemployed swing band (complete with girl singer-dancer) that wangles its way into an aircraft factory. The manager thinks music will help production, but he can't pay for it. So the swingsters take jobs as aircraft workers—with the exception of Miss Ann Miller, the singer-dancer, who wants to be a big success on Broadway.

When the band becomes so famous as a workers' entertainment outfit that it interests Broadway, Miss Miller, who is only in the film to dance competently and sing badly, takes notice and returns to the fold to complicate further the love interest between the band leader and a girl riveter. There is a neat and (I'm not certain) unconscious twist when it turns out that the girl riveter can sing much better than Miss Miller; and though she can't dance, she gets the boy. The whole band, too, decides to remain with the factory rather than accept Broadway's \$2,000 a week. Which is all to the good.

But the whole thing is so ancient in plot, so uninspired (even as gag-writing) and so poorly performed—with the exception of the lady riveter, Miss Betty Rhodes—that it is neither good musical comedy nor a valid contribution to the war effort. It is good, however, to hear Paramount stand up on its hind legs and applaud the girls in our war indus-



tries, and indicate that our war is more important than a name band on Broadway. In such mysterious ways does this people's war move its wonders to perform.

TO THE National USO, the motion picture industry has contributed a moving little film, *Mr. Gardenia Jones*, that runs about fifteen minutes. Employing the talents of Charles Winninger, Ronald Reagan, and Fay Bainter, it is a fairly good example of how the films can stimulate contributions for the war effort.

This is simply a day in the life of an American family whose son is a pilot at Pearl Harbor on that "day that will live in infamy," Dec. 7, 1941. It simply shows why young Johnny Jones enlisted in the army (before Pearl Harbor), his mother and his father, the girl he left behind. It shows how the USO has made it possible to bring home to the boys who are away from home. And when the lights come up, you will dig into your pocket for a contribution.

CURRENTLY showing in every film theater in the country is a short film made by the Signal Corps in cooperation with the Office of Civilian Defense. It is excellent, and it drama-

tizes tersely and intelligently the job of *Your Air Raid Warden*.

Neatly disposed of for all time is the public indifference and ridicule that first greeted our civilian volunteers. By showing what the air raid warden would be doing in the event of an actual raid, the audience is impressed by the courage and self-abrogation of these men and women, who fill dangerous posts with no compensation.

*Your Air Raid Warden* is a brilliant indication of what government-sponsored films can do with the subject-matter of this war. Like the recent USO film, *Mr. Gardenia Jones*, it delves into the heart of American life and comes up with a gem.

ALVAH BESSIE.

## "Turn on the Heat"

The current revue at Allaben features new Earl Robinson-Lewis Allen songs.

THE theater at Allaben Acres (Allaben, N. Y.) is under the direction of Alfred Saxe, a veteran in the progressive theater whose work ranges from the Theater of Action to last season's *Johnny Doodle*. So it was not surprising to find that "Turn on the

Heat," the revue I saw at this upstate resort, had a pleasantly fast pace and an air of professionalism. The notable thing about the revue, however, was the introduction of two new numbers by Earl Robinson and Lewis Allen. These two, whose collaboration was marked by "Kickin' the Panzer," a good number somewhat mauled in last winter's presentation, have shown steady improvement as a team. The first of their new numbers, "Look Out the Window, Mama," may lack the invention that an experienced combination produces, but it has everything else a successful production item should possess. The tune is contagious (people hummed and whistled it as they left the hall), the lyrics are fresh, and the subject is timely, dealing as it does with the various members of the family engaged in civilian defense. The other number, "Fight, America, Fight," served as the finale. It is stirring by virtue of its exhortatory music and lyrics, but falls short as a curtain-closer. It is far too brief, and little was done with it in the way of production possibilities. Given its full ensemble values, "Fight, America, Fight" would have a rousing emotional impact.

"The House I Live In" was to have been included, but was omitted for some reason—



Cooperative life in an American community during the middle of the nineteenth century. One of two murals executed by Anton Refregier for the Plainfield, N. J., post office. The murals, together with sketches and studies, are on display at the ACA Gallery, 26 W. 8th St., New York, until August 14.