

Books into Pictures

THOMAS BURTON

HERE are several recent books which this department commends to Hollywood as likely motion picture material:

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: THE WAR YEARS. By Carl Sandburg.

Here is the material of a great motion picture that in matter and content is much superior to "Abe Lincoln of Illinois." As a poet and historian, Carl Sandburg has an eternal and understanding touch that Robert Sherwood never had. Sandburg is better able to understand this groping for expression of humanity.

"The War Years" contains scene after scene that could become great moments of motion picture history. There is Washington itself, full of office-seekers and gay parties and sellers of pork and shoddy and paper shoes. There are the men in office and out who hate Lincoln—and who in scene after scene bow to the will of the lean, black-dressed man with the chin whiskers. Lincoln comes through these volumes as a great statesman. His simple attack on pomp and snobbery is shown in page after page. Such things are natural screen material.

As for drama—what could be greater than Early's attack on Washington—when the Southern general held Washington in his power with 30,000 barefooted, hairy followers and let it go because he didn't know the city was empty of troops? Or the moment when England was ready to declare war, and Lincoln had them call off the war by freeing three prisoners of war? Or the day of the speech at Gettysburg when he knew he had left a son behind who was deathly sick; when his wife was slowly going mad; when his own Cabinet was plotting against him; when the Copperheads were whispering that the hopes of the Union lay dead in the peach orchards at Gettysburg; when after he had delivered a great and stirring address, the people just stood there staring up at him—not lifting a voice or a hand and he left the field feeling his speech had failed and all that he had said and done was a failure? This is motion picture material.

And what of the great drama of his death? Would any writer of plays ever have dared to put such a dramatic finish on his work? Lincoln, his work done—his heart feeling for the South—tired—30 pounds underweight, goes to relax at a play. In the background a fool and a madman is plotting his silly and bloody little putsch with a handful of demented storm-troopers. The drama climbs as the plot starts; the plotters gather, make mistakes, carry out a few of their plans, and then—as Lincoln sits smiling at the native actors, Booth strikes . . . flees in the night with a broken

foot and a boot full of blood, and Lincoln goes into his last sleep, as one of the men around the bed, thinking perhaps of history, mouths the line—"Now he belongs to the ages . . ."

And who shall play the Lincoln—Sandburg's, America's Lincoln? Raymond Massey is that Lincoln. I said so when I saw the motion picture he had made of the younger Lincoln—and having seen the picture again I know he will make a great Lincoln of the war years. Sandburg should write his own motion picture script. No man living knows more about Lincoln—and a greater virtue is that no one feels so closely the spirit and the mood of the man who's story this is. Sandburg is an artist of environment, an expert among native linguists. Great sections of "The War Years" are almost pure cinema in their flow of scene and action and comment. The great stirring chapter on Lincoln's funeral procession is a climax that few productions will be able to equal.

★ ★
THE NAZARENE. By Sholem Asch.

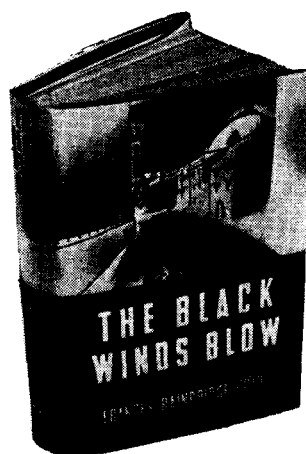
The motion pictures have again and again touched on the Christ theme and failed. The most dreadful was the

multi-million dollar artcraft production "King of Kings." "The Nazarene" is a fresh version with many new approaches to the Christ story. It is not written in the grave, sepulchral manner so often used by writers of this theme. Sholem Asch presents his material in a great story with an interpretation that is as timely as "Grapes of Wrath" and as interesting as the over-publicized "Gone with the Wind." Hollywood does not know its own strength. It is surprised every time it hatches out a great picture. Here is a theme and treatment which should surprise them again.

★ ★
SINCE YESTERDAY. By Frederick Lewis Allen.

Behind us lie the Threadbare Thirties, crystalized into yesterdays. Over our shoulders we can still see the last decade marching backward along the halls of history with a forced jocularity. It was a decade that we will not soon forget, a decade whose events may see the shattering of our shortening civilization or a new hope for man. Only an illiterate idealist would call it a happy decade. "Since Yesterday" should be the base from which a motion picture history of the Thirties will be built. The whole spirit and madness and nerve-tearing lament and turmoil can be captured in a simple style, telling of people and events as they slide toward the Second World

Second
printing



Frances Bainbridge Colby's remarkable novel is "adroit, moving, observant . . . She has a wicked eye for the follies of social intercourse."—N. Y. TIMES BOOK REVIEW.

The Black Winds Blow tells the story of a woman who moves in exactly the same sewing circles as Santayana's Mrs. Alden and Marquand's Mrs. Apley.

(\$2.50, Harrison-Hilton Books, N. Y.)

War. A casualness of manner, a crudeness almost, is needed. A simple story could with ease be tacked onto this material. It holds us all interested as the fateful decade moves past, gathering events, while Chamberlain mouths the phrase "Peace in our times."

★ ★

GENTLEMAN OVERBOARD. By Herbert C. Lewis.

Here is a book of intellectual integrity that is equal to Maugham at his best. It has been overlooked by both the public and Hollywood producers. It tells the story of a gentleman who fell off a steamship and then slowly, politely, began to drown because he was too well-bred to yelp for help. Told in flashbacks, it is the story of an American who was educated beyond his means, took the wrong truths to heart, married the wrong woman, and died in the South Pacific—a gentleman true to his inescapable social destiny. No young writer today has Herbert Lewis's force, manner, and background. He will be heard from again—and Hollywood has the chance to hear him first.

★ ★

DAYS OF OUR YEARS. By Pierre van Paassen.

Van Paassen is no Zola, no Lincoln, no great character of public history whose story, when told on the screen, will send us out to live better lives. But his enthusiasms are infectious. He is a man who has seen and thought much about this whirling apple on which we live. His book is one of the really significant ones published in our times and his story told on the motion picture screen will make us understand the Age of Stormtrooping and perhaps give us a look ahead at the things to come. It is packed full of fine concentrated material. The producer who makes a picture based upon "Days of Our Years" will be the pioneer in the filming of contemporary history.

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