

SCREEN VALUES

A Survey of Current Tendencies and Qualities

by LIONEL COLLIER, M.A., Review Editor

WALLACE WORSELEY'S production of "The Hunchback of Notre Dame" (Universal) is a remarkable piece of work in many ways, and seems to have been strongly influenced by German methods. There is the same effective use of light and shade, an artistry about the magnificent settings and a real insight into the most successful way to exploit crowd psychology. The direction, too, is notably good, and where this has been augmented by the personality and cleverness of such artistes as Lon Chaney (the Hunchback) and Ernest Torrance (the King of the Beggars) the acting becomes outstanding.

The scenario, some will consider, unfortunately, does not follow Victor Hugo's novel, but since the interest is never allowed to flag, and since the novel is a very gloomy one which deals out death and destruction to most of the characters in a very wholesale manner, the producer has a very good excuse for his adaptation.

Two points of interest arise especially from this picture, one is the fact that a new producer of unusual merit has come to the fore, and the other is that Lon Chaney has added fresh laurels to his reputation. His make-up is wonderful, but that is only a minor consideration when compared with the way he has interpreted the character of the title role.

Once again in Quality Plays (Gaumont) George Cooper demonstrates that he is a producer whose work has an individuality and artistic restraint that is not often equalled.

Quality Again His work is characterised by an economy of action and a complete sincerity of characterisation. For instance, in "The Reverse of the Medal" we are clearly shown the working of a general's mind during the planning and execution of a plan of action which will probably involve the death of his son.

In "Darkness" we are again given sincerity and also some very effective camera work, while in "Finished" Cooper has succeeded in transferring to the screen the actual atmosphere and impression of a Guy de Maupassant short story; an achievement of which any world famous producer should be proud.

Of the other British pictures one can safely prophesy a popular success for "A Couple of Down and Outs" (Napoleon). Samuelson has produced a picture which while entirely sentimental in conception is far removed from the average American "sob stuff" in that it has an object and a human perspective. It brings vividly home the beastliness of the exportation of war-worn horses to Belgium and France to be turned into table delicacies, and also brings once more into the limelight the plight of down-and-out ex-Service men.

Wonderful War Scenes It cannot be said that the simple little story has been treated as artistically as it might have been; there has been a tendency unduly to prolong several scenes beyond the limit of their strength and importance, but a great improvement could be made here by cutting out a lot that is both superfluous and redundant. The producer, however, puts in many touches which undoubtedly appeal to the general kinema-going public's taste, little domestic details and sentimentalities which gain a round of applause, even though they be somewhat obvious and even crude.

The outstanding scenes in this picture are those which show the hero's part in the war. Lately we have seen many reproductions of trench warfare and battle scenes, but I venture to submit that none have been more effectively produced than these. The red tinting of shell bursts is a

mistake; it tends to artificiality rather than conviction, and some of the explosions are too near the participants to allow one to imagine that they escaped disaster. But the general impression is excellent and thrilling.

"Bonnie Prince Charlie"

(Gaumont) provides another costume picture, a type which seems to be considerably in favour with British producers at the moment. Our country's legends, history and traditions certainly open a wide field for picturesqueness and effective settings and backgrounds. American pictures have taught us to know California and kindred landscapes even better than we know our own, so that it is an absolute joy to see this beautiful Highland scenery used so effectively.

A Change of Scenery The story value is, unfortunately, not equal to the picturesqueness. The plot is sound enough, but C. C. Calvert has allowed the interest to flag by a too rapid change of scene and a tendency not to follow up an action quickly enough with its logical sequence. For instance, in the various escapes of Charles Stuart, the thrill that ought to be there is missing, because the whole conception of the situation is too leisurely. The artistes, too, necessarily suffer because they are not allowed sufficient time to impress their personality or convey an emotion.

"Comin' Thro' the Rye" (Hepworth) suffers somewhat from the same causes as "Bonnie Prince Charlie." The treatment is slow and mechanical, it lacks the flesh and blood effect it should have expressed.

Brilliant Photography

There has been a tendency to allow the artistes to emphasise their types rather than to express their characters, and they do not contribute sufficiently to the action of the plot. Cecil Hepworth has suffered chiefly, however, from the material at his command, and taking this into consideration, one cannot fail to see the obvious beauties of the production.

The photography is really beautiful and his exteriors are as artistic and satisfying as one could wish; they form one more testimony to the facilities and advantages of this country in the matter of locations.

That a picture can be redeemed by the personality and artistry of an individual artiste is clearly demonstrated in "Gipsy Love" (Pioneer). This Lubitsch production was

A Screen Genius. Trade shown under conditions which hampered its effectiveness very considerably, and yet because of the artistry of Pola Negri it could not help proving interesting and attractive.

In the first place the print was a poor one and, secondly, the action was held up while verses from the opera, "Carmen," were shewn on the screen and sung by a voice heard off. This simply helped to ruin the continuity which already suffered from cutting, and also induced an air of artificiality which only an artiste like Pola Negri could have overcome.

In this issue we have departed from our usual custom and reprinted in full our review of "The Secret of the Monastery" (General). The reason for so doing is that it can undoubtedly be classed amongst the screen classics, and was one of the first pictures to depart from the American screen conventions which gained such a hold both during and after the war. This admirable production, in which artistry and popularity seem to combine, has been re-edited and re-titled, and provides a subject for those exhibitors who do not believe that the public is entirely brainless and will put up indefinitely with anything it is given.

Re-issue of a Classic