

CRITICISMS OF THE FILMS

BY "THE BIOSCOPE" REVIEWERS

OFFERINGS OF THE WEEK

"The Hunchback of Notre Dame," the outstanding production of a by no means unimportant week, is, perhaps, the greatest spectacular picture that has ever reached us from the United States. The reproduction of the vast cathedral, around which the action of the story surges, is an object lesson in studio craftsmanship, and may be said to establish a new standard in film settings. Although of a less exceptional nature, the acting of the picture is also remarkably fine, Lon Chaney's performance as the grotesque, misshapen hunchback being a real *tour de force*. Despite inevitable modifications, the story is a faithful interpretation of the spirit and the main facts of Victor Hugo's novel. As a screen entertainment, the production has had, in its class, few equals.

Another uncommonly interesting picture of the week was the whaling romance, "Down to the Sea in Ships," which Reginald Ford is presenting for a season at the Palace Theatre. Although marred to some extent by a weak and commonplace scenario, the picture has a quality of actuality that few film plays possess. The production was made entirely without the use of a studio on board a whaler and in real interiors. Apart from its technical interest, it makes stirring entertainment of a decidedly novel character.

There were only three British Trade Shows during the week, and two of them were devoted to short features. In the new Quality Plays the standard of this clever and distinctive British series was well maintained, whilst the fresh instalments of the "Secrets of Nature" series were also worthy of their predecessors. Walter West's latest production, "In the Blood," is a picturesque costume romance with a strong sporting interest, and providing a characteristic rôle for that fine screen artist, Victor McLaglen.

Other productions of more than ordinary merit and interest were Maurice Tourneur's novel sea spectacle, "The Isle of Lost Ships," and Famous-Lasky's picturesque Balkan gipsy romance, "Law of the Lawless."

In our correspondence column will be found a correction concerning the realistic war scenes in "A Couple of Down-and-Outs," the clever Samuelson production, which was reviewed in THE BIOSCOPE last week.

"THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME"

Offered by: European.
Directed by: Wallace Worsley, for Universal.
Length: 11,000 feet.
Type of Production: An elaborately mounted adaptation of Victor Hugo's novel.
Place and Period: Paris; 1482.
Special Features: The wonderful reproduction of the Cathedral of Notre Dame and other realistic settings of mediæval Paris; the eerie and powerful performance of Lon Chaney; the dramatic and romantic appeals of the story; the stirring and spectacular crowd scenes.

Quasimodo: LON CHANEY. Esmeralda: PATSY RUTH MILLER.
 Clopin: ERNEST TORRENCE. Phoebus: NORMAN KERRY.

Probably the finest picture of its type yet produced in the United States, this thrilling, stately and beautiful version of Victor Hugo's novel is a genuine masterpiece of film-making. The reproduction of Notre Dame is without much doubt the greatest individual studio setting yet created, and is an astonishing piece of craftsmanship. Equally realistic, though on a less elaborate scale, are the many street scenes of mediæval Paris which is pictured with a realism of atmosphere seldom previously attained. Although one feels impelled to mention the settings first, the production is no mere spectacle but is essentially a romantic drama in which the story-value is always kept uppermost. The vast towers of Notre Dame overhang the

human action (in the apt words of the synopsis writer) as a "spiritual background" but never crush it. Amid a maze of changing scenes, the main threads of the plot are preserved unbroken throughout.

Although the story has been rearranged and conventionalised to some extent for film purposes, it retains the spirit of the original in its bold and vigorous characterisation. Considered solely as a screen entertainment, it could scarcely be improved upon.

Of the acting, Lon Chaney's remarkable performance as Quasimodo, the grateful hunchback, is, as it should be, easily the outstanding feature. His extraordinary make up as a veritable living gargoyle reaches the limit of grotesquery (and at moments seems to go a shade beyond it) but his sprawling movements and frantic gestures are brilliantly conceived, and his final dance of frenzy at the defeat of Clopin's rabble is a scene of delirious passion which has seldom been equalled on the screen. Although a more conventional film type, Patsy Ruth Miller's gentle Esmeralda is a very pleasing performance which contrasts well with the weird savagery of Chaney's Quasimodo. Ernest Torrence makes Clopin, king of the beggars, a figure of great power and passion, whilst Norman Kerry lends distinction to the less striking rôle of Phoebus. Almost every other part throughout a long cast is well filled, whilst the huge crowds act with an intensity and spontaneity of feeling that few other directors have secured from their supers.

So much of the action passes in and around the great Cathedral that one seems to penetrate every nook and cranny of the building in the course of the story, and, from whatever angle one views it (one remarkable bird's-eye shot is made from the tower-top to the cobbled paving below), the illusion of reality is perfect.