

THE SCREEN

The "Merry-Merry" of Today.

THE MARRIAGE WHIRL, with Corinne Griffith, Nita Naldi, Kenneth Harlan, Harrison Ford and others, from "The National Anthem," by J. Hartley Manners, directed by Al Sartell; "The Man and the Marionettes," a Joseph Plunkett presentation; Blondell's Saxophone Sextet. At the Mark Strand.

There was in the theatre of the long ago a "here-come-the-merry-villagers" era. You know: jolly music; the chorus dancing on to the stage; a toast to the young squire, bless his heart, and now that he's mah-ster of the old hall naught but happiness shall reign in this village; a kiss for the young mah-ster from the prettiest girl as ever danced on the green, the saucy little manx; many a loud huzzah and all is merry and bright. If you are too young, your parents perhaps, and your grandparents certainly, will remember it. The stage got rid of that long ago. But the moving-pictures have discovered it only comparatively recently.

They do it a little differently in detail, of course, but the principle is the same. What they do is to have jazz parties, scattered at more or less regular intervals through their pictures, with a set of lady and gentleman cut-ups dashing from one to the next, laughing with great determination and ever and anon breaking out into dances and other symptoms of playful abandon. They also drink. This is all very wild and wicked, and when you see it you may be sure there is dirty work in the offing. One imagines there must be some film factory where they turn this sort of thing out, made by the mile and sold by the foot to directors who require it.

There is a good deal of it in "The Marriage Whirl," this week's feature at the Mark Strand. There is a good deal of it, as a matter of fact, everywhere. Probably one should not get too much annoyed over it, for a certain percentage of the audience undoubtedly thinks it is what the same percentage would probably call "hot stuff." The best thing to do, all things considered, is probably to suffer it in silence, confident that the day will ultimately come when it will go the way the merry villagers of the stage have gone. At the same time, one cannot prevent certain wistful consideration of the excellence of the motto: Eventually, why not now?

In "The Marriage Whirl" they have a better excuse for it than many other pictures, for this one is supposed to show the baneful effects of jazz. There is a husband (Kenneth Harlan) who insists on making a jazz devotee of his wife (Corinne Griffith). Every once in a while when things seem to be going nicely he says, "The gang will be here in a minute," and then the same troupe of merry villagers—New York or Paris, it makes no difference—trip blithely on on and do their stunts, and you know our hero has sunk one step lower, and thus much nearer the final ruction that is going to "end it all."

You know that is what is going to happen, for this is one of those films in which you always know what is going to happen. If you were uncertain at all, you could be sure because of the fact that the true-as-steel childhood lover is hovering in the background. And of all the faithful childhood lovers who hover in the background, give us the ones played by Harrison Ford. He has been doing it so many years by this time that he must be beginning to believe himself it happens regularly in real life. And, quite incidentally, one may feel pleasure that so excellent and modest a young actor as Harrison Ford has been progressing so steadily all these years while hosts of patent-leather haired leading men have come and gone. He has even now reached the movie actors' heaven, a job as leading man in a D. W. Griffith production.

In "The Marriage Whirl" Mr. Ford really does the best acting of any one. Corinne Griffith and Kenneth Harlan are excellent for long stretches of their work, particularly when the lighter emotions are required, but at critical moments they are sometimes a little too

conscious of the fact that they are acting and let their features slip into contortions not ordinarily seen outside the precincts of the observation ward at Bellevue or places like that. Mr. Ford does not make that mistake. He probably wouldn't even with greater provocation than he gets in this play. Nita Naldi plays another of her siren parts, and does it so particularly well that one expects her press agent to get busy immediately broadcasting an illustrated article for the movie magazines on "Favorite Occupation of Screen Siren Is Darning Socks—Nita Naldi in Private Life Is a Perfect Home-Body."

Less Than It Might Have Been.

PRIVATE AFFAIRS, from "The Ledger of Life," a story by George Patullo, with Mildred Harris, Gladys Hulette, Betty Francisco, Robert Agnew, David Butler and others, directed by Renaud Hoffman; Walter Hiers in "Oh, Bridget"; Cameo Review, "The Village School"; Meatrice Melaraens, soprano; an Aesop fable. At the Cameo Theatre.

When this world gets to be a perfect place we shall no longer have a great idea for the moving pictures turned into a merely satisfactory photoplay. That is what happens in "Private Affairs." It has a fine idea in it. An old-style postmaster of the village of Two Forks lets a packet of letters slip down behind his desk and lie there for five years undelivered. When he dies his successor discovers and delivers them. In the five years things have happened and haven't happened because of the non-delivery of those letters.

Here is a perfectly valid situation from real life with a touch of novelty about it, and one can imagine how a sensitive and imaginative director and scepapist could have told an intensely human story of the village with that as a background.

They have by no means missed it altogether in "Private Affairs," however. The film makes an interesting story out of the lives of the folks in Two Forks and is certainly to be commended as an attempt to keep a film story in the realm of real life, where, they tell us, lots of interesting and delightful things happen.

What is to be complained about in this picture is that so little imagination is shown as to make the production commonplace at times. A single example of the viewpoint may be instanced in the fact that, for no particular reason at all, a fight is thrust in at the end. "When in doubt, give them a fight," is a much-worn adage in the making of pictures. This one is particularly tiresome because there is no reason for it. There has been no conflict between the characters who engage in it. You do not care very much who wins. And then, how the rules of self-respecting heroism are violated! The hastily manufactured hero wins by distracting his rival's attention and flooring him when his head is turned the other way. We insist that is no way for a hero to act.

Gladys Hulette is named as the featured player, but what little dramatic action there is centres around another character played by Mildred Harris. Both do well enough with rôles in which the dramatist has not helped them very much. The human values have not been well looked after. The mother, for instance, has mourned over the necessity of leaving her children. When her old-time lover returns, the one whose letter sending for her to marry him was held up five years, and she finds him an impossible "dude" for whom she would never think of deserting her husband, she does not immediately rush upstairs to the children preparing to "stay with their grandmother for a little while" when he has left the house, but instead occupies herself with giving a satiric imitation of his dandified manners for the benefit of an empty room.

David Butler, as the disillusionizing dandy, and Hardee Kirkland, as the town drunkard, in the gutter five years while a letter notifying him of an inheritance waits undelivered, have the most colorful rôles and do them excellently, even if both indulge in exaggerations allowed by the director. A comedy on the same bill, in which Walter Hiers masquerades as a cook to get into his fiancée's house, provides many laughs.