

TO SEE OR NOT TO SEE?

PROFESSOR MAMLOCK

(Amkino)

This was a remarkable picture from the moment it was made, but in British eyes it only became a really striking one a few weeks ago. At the same time it became a paradox. Before then, even if the film had escaped censorship, it would have been just a curiosity to the average picturegoer: now it is likely to draw the crowds to the box-office as the most effective and timely indictment of Nazi-ism the cinema has produced. By comparison, the recent "Confessions of a Nazi Spy" resemble the coy disclosures of a schoolgirl. To make "Professor Mamlock" completely suitable for current consumption, it draws a most satisfactory dis-

tinction between the Nazi regime and the oppressed masses of Germany—abhorring the one, pitying the other.

The paradox I have mentioned lies in the fact that "Professor Mamlock" was produced in Soviet Russia. In the light of political events, it now makes no more sense than the Russo-German pact itself does. A cynic might remark that one of Stalin's chickens has come home to roost — and found the perch embarrassingly occupied by an amicable German eagle.

Trying to leave politics out of it, one might describe "Professor Mamlock" as being as explosive as dynamite, as exciting as any spy melodrama or screen man-hunt. There is none of the ponderous technique often associated with Continental films: the action is breathless, and the Soviet cameras, with the relentless realism of a newsreel, have turned the characters into real people and the

settings into real places, and have caught the terrifying intensity of mob emotion. As Frank Nugent said in the "New York Times": "It has something to do with the Russian ability to train lens and lights upon a mass of men and reduce them to a single dramatic mood — panic, suspense, rage, fear, or horror."

Professor Mamlock is a German Jewish doctor, head of a Berlin clinic, far too engrossed with serving suffering humanity to worry his brilliant brain about party politics. But the Reichstag is burned, the Nazis come to power; and his scientific detachment, his fine war record, and his obvious goodness are no excuse for his crime of non-Aryanism. As the film records the horror of his crucifixion, it also records the underground war of the German Communist party, with the Professor's son acting as one of the Marxist shock troops. We see the printing of the secret Workers' Paper, the ingenious method of its distribution, the infamy of informers, the ruthlessness of the Gestapo toward its victims, and the sullen resistance of the German masses to their rulers. There is something of a "Scarlet Pimpernel" atmosphere about this side of the story, with its hair-breadth escapes over rooftops and its last-minute rescues; but the real power of the film lies in the heroic tragedy of the old professor. The climax is magnificent. As the Storm-troopers raise their machine-guns to fire into a cowering mob that has given protection to two fugitives, the sick scientist stumbles on to a balcony, curses the men who have ruined Germany, and warns them that their day is nearly over.

The shots which end his life should also have ended the film; but I suppose it was not to be expected that the Soviet producers could resist the temptation to tack on an anti-climax identifying the persecuted Jew with the persecuted Communist in Germany and suggesting that only through Marxism can Jewry be saved. Yet even if "Professor Mamlock" doesn't now make political sense, it makes great drama.

I had almost forgotten to mention that the dialogue is in Russian. Don't let this worry you, because the English subtitles are so good that it doesn't seem to matter.

Footnote for the dubious: "Professor Mamlock" is the first Soviet film to have been shown through America with the official blessing of the high-minded Hays organisation.

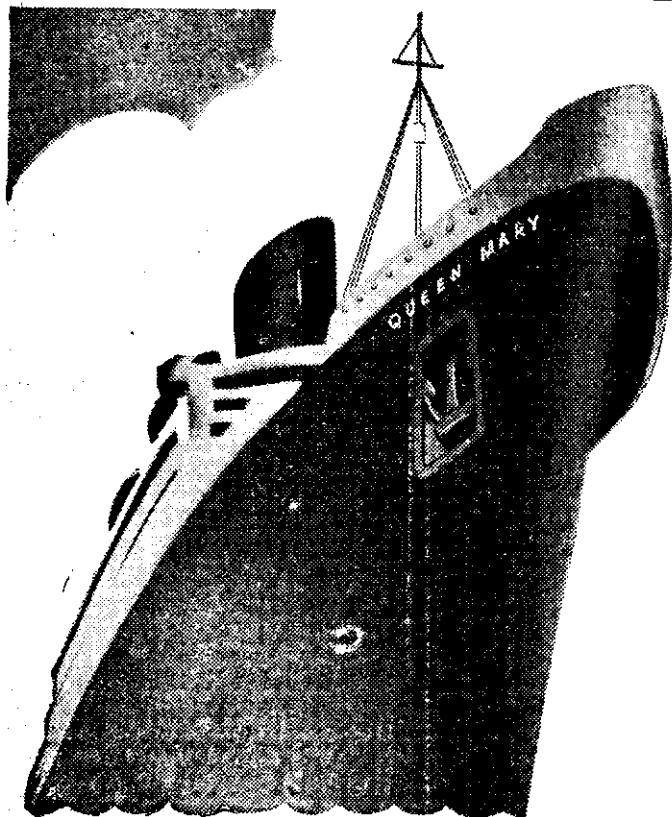
THE FORGOTTEN WOMAN

(Universal)

An injustice is done, and the repairing of it leads to some complications. But there is a new angle on the crooked politician situation. The man with the power really is consistently honest, and the story is built round the inability of the other characters to believe this evident incongruity. Sigrid Gurie is attractive, but not more so than many other actresses. For that, of course, it is possible — as always — to blame the director. In spite of some almost new twists to old situations, Director Harold Young has not lifted this production out of the rut worn by a thousand other mediocre films.

—G.M.

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