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Films by G.M.

THE BIRTH-CONTROL OF BRITISH PICTURES

SOME of you may have noticed a small cable message the other day, stating that an attempt was to be made to establish a chain of theatres in Australia devoted exclusively to the screening of British pictures. This interested me, not only because it recalled similar attempts in the past, but because it raises the whole question of the present status of British pictures in relation to those from Hollywood.

It may not be very generally realised that the British Quota system is still operating—that much-discussed piece of legislation which ensures that at least one film in five seen by New Zealanders originates outside Hollywood, and under which American distributors must find some room on British screens for British pictures. In the long run, the Quota has probably saved the British film industry from extinction, but not before it had almost succeeded in ruining it. For, of course, by its very existence the Quota implies that, if left to itself, Hollywood would capture the whole English-speaking screen; and when the Quota first came into force, this would almost certainly soon have happened, for the British industry was then in a very bad

way, quite unable to compete on equal terms with the giant studios of America.

* * *

THIS new move in Australia to operate a chain of exclusively British theatres may be more successful now than previously, partly as a reaction against American influence, partly because the war has increased patriotic sentiment towards Britain, but largely because British films, though still made under Quota, must now cost at least £10,000 to produce.

But an even more salutary form of birth-control operating against inferior British films than the minimum expenditure clause in the Films Act has been the war itself. Shortage of manpower and materials, and other restrictions, have meant a reduction in the number of individual British studios and some pooling of available resources—in brief, fewer and better pictures. Those are the material aspects; but I think the war has also had some spiritual effect on the quality of British films. It is, probably, no accident that the best films of this war have been those produced in a country which much more than America, has felt the effects of it. The war has been a little too close to be treated by British producers entirely as a glamorous adventure, and the British picture-going public is rather less ready to put up with shams than it used to be. Fairies cannot survive at the bottom of anybody's garden along with an air-raid shelter. Hollywood, on the other hand, is still pursuing a policy of isolationism towards the true nature of the war.

So we have had from wartime Britain such an outstanding war picture as *In Which We Serve*, and such relatively good ones as *Next of Kin*, *Salute John Citizen*, *The Foreman Went to France*, and (apart from its technical inaccuracies) *The First of the Few*. Nor has the British industry in the past four years been wholly obsessed with the war atmosphere. It has taken time off to entertain us with the wholly delightful comedy of *Quiet Wedding* and the wit of *Major Barbara*; and—perhaps most notable of all—it has given us that excellent social document *Love on the Dole*. There may be others I have overlooked, but as it stands that is not a bad record. I doubt if Hollywood can equal it.

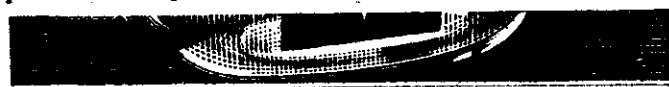
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IN spite of all the foregoing, however, the chief difference between the average British and American film is still the sound of the players' voices. Notwithstanding the progress of British pictures and the fact that they are now holding their own (in this country and elsewhere) against the Americans, in every essential particular they closely follow the Hollywood pattern. Apart from accent, the most noticeable superficial distinction is the humour, and here I doubt if the comparison has always been in favour of the British product. In my opinion, bawdy buffoonery of the Mae West variety or the

(continued on next page)



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