


THE MAJOR and the MAYOR

THE MOON IS DOWN

(20th Century-Fox)

 IN the past week I have seen two Hollywood accounts of life in Occupied Norway, and one was as different from the other as the cream cakes we used to eat were different from the ersatz variety we have these days. *The Moon is Down* represents Hollywood in one of its rare grown-up moods: it is distinctly a picture for adult minds, whereas *First Comes Courage* is—well, perhaps I'd better not push the comparison home, since I know several people of riper years who thought it was wonderful.

The Moon is Down is not a perfect picture—but, except for *This Land is Mine* (which was uneven and over-complicated), it is the only one I have yet encountered which tackles the subject of conquest and resistance in present-day Europe with an intelligent appreciation of what must go on in the minds of both victors and vanquished; which treats it as something more than just an excuse for the commandos to strike at dawn after the wily heroine and the daring hero have pulled the

wool over the stupid Nazis' eyes and made things easy for them.

Many people may not like this treatment. Steinbeck's novel and play have already landed him in hot water in some quarters, and now that the film is reaching an even wider public, I expect that the water may just about come to the boil. What is resented is Steinbeck's suggestion that some Germans are actually human beings and that, being human, they are capable of being upset by the passive resistance, as well as by the active opposition, of the people they have subdued; that the unveiled dislike of civilians, hardening into contempt and hatred, can get on a conqueror's nerves and convince him of the ultimate futility of his mission as certainly as can physical reprisals in the form of sabotage and assassination. But surely it is absurd to pretend anything else.

Having said that I should perhaps hasten to add that Steinbeck does not suggest that all the members of the Nazi occupying force in the Norwegian village of Selvik are sensitive enough to react to this sort of reception: only two or three. The others are sufficiently

brutal to satisfy the most ardent Vansittarte and Hun-hater. And on the screen they take a more gloating delight in the cruelties they perpetrate than their counterparts did in the novel. This, and a false note of burlesque here and there (the business with the band that plays "We're Sailing Against England"), are the two chief respects in which the film differs from the book. They are Hollywood's gauche concessions to popular taste. Otherwise, the film is a remarkably close, often word-for-word, translation.

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THE MOON IS DOWN advances two main arguments—that the spirit of liberty and of democracy is an intangible thing, impossible to isolate and coerce; and that "defeat is only a temporary thing." The first argument is expressed through the mild little Mayor of the village (Henry Travers) who, realising that he is the symbol of his people's way of life, finds unexpected depths of courage to draw on in defying the invaders; and the second argument is put into the mouth of Major Lanser, the German commandant (Sir Cedric Hardwicke). The major remembers what happened in Belgium in 1914-18; he knows that, however overwhelming the victory, no war is ever finally won until and unless enemies can be turned into friends; and he knows also that that

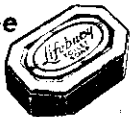
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Dinner for one, after all!

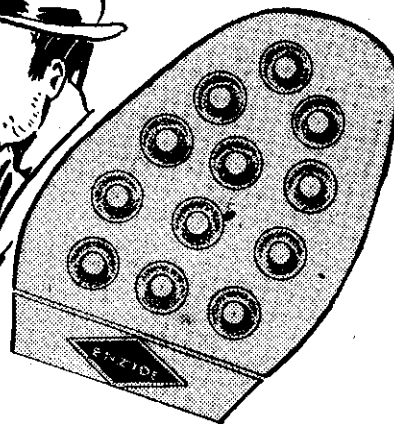
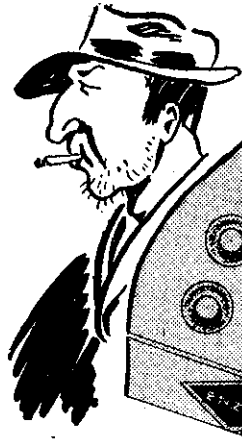


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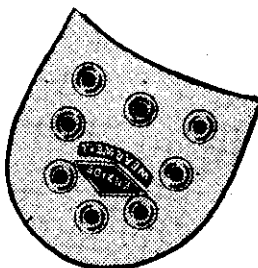
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