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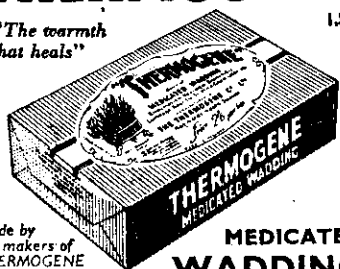
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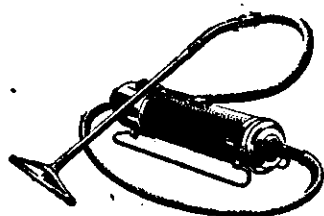


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Film Reviews by G.M.

## SPEAKING CANDIDLY

### THE WAY AHEAD

(Two Cities-GBD)

ON principle, and from a long-term viewpoint, I don't in the least like the idea of one man having a virtually complete monopoly of all film production in Great Britain, but I have to admit, from what we have seen so far, that J. Arthur Rank is making a pretty good job of it. *The Way Ahead* is the latest production to reach us from Mr. Rank's pet Two Cities studio (which the week before gave us *Demi-Paradise*) and it is in almost every way an expert and heartening piece of film-making, employing that semi-documentary, semi-fictional technique which we have recently seen in several notable British pictures. Indeed, *The Way Ahead* does for the British Army what *San Demetrio*, London did for the Merchant Marine, what *In Which We Serve* did for the Royal Navy, and *The First of the Few* did, not so successfully, for the R.A.F. Only *San Demetrio* has done it better. If this is the direction in which the British cinema is going to develop, then—with or without Mr. Rank—the way ahead looks bright.

Civilian into soldier is the theme of *The Way Ahead*. The method of treatment is to apply the matter-of-fact, impersonal approach of the documentary to a set of characters and circumstances which, though actually fictional, are representative and plausible enough to seem almost entirely realistic. We see an assorted group of civilians—including a floor-walker, a shop-assistant, a farmer, a travel agent, a mechanic who tends the boilers under the House of Commons—being conscripted into an infantry regiment; see them rebelling against discipline, gradually adjusting themselves to it, learning that their officers and n.c.o.'s are capable of being considerate as well as sarcastic; see them in training, going to war, being torpedoed and sent back again; and finally we see them justifying all the work that has been put into them during a battle in North Africa.

The film was produced with the co-operation of the Army authorities. They released David Niven to be the star, Carol Reed to direct, and Eric Ambler and Peter Ustinov to write the script. Now, official interest in any venture of this kind is always apt to be a drawback; the authorities may insist on too much propaganda and not enough entertainment; they may want this said and not that. In fact, they may want just an "official picture." But that hasn't happened here. Those responsible for *The Way Ahead* have had the sense not to pretend that everything in the Army is so lovely that civilians are just breaking their necks to get into it. On the contrary, they make it plain that new recruits are likely to be thoroughly fed up, that the process of adjustment will be long and often difficult, and that during their training they really may stand a pretty fair chance of breaking their necks.

The producers, however, have not gone to the other extreme: they have been realistic (notably so during a fire at sea), but they have also been human; underlying the spectacle and the facts

are humour, warmth, and shrewd observation of character. Indeed, very little has been left undone to make this a noteworthy picture. The music—an original score by William Alwyn—has been well chosen, and so has the cast, headed by David Niven as the young officer, and by Billy Hartnell as the sergeant, a professional soldier who at first is the focus-point for the recruits' dislike of the Army, and later, when they understand him better, for their respect. Almost the only place where the film departs from its convincingly factual pattern, by introducing some rather too highly-coloured material, is in the final battle scene.

It is casting no aspersions on the film—though it may be casting some on our civilisation—to mention that it was replaced after only one week in Wellington by Betty Grable's new opus, *Pin-up Girl*. On second thoughts, perhaps the way ahead is not quite so bright after all.

### THE WHITE CLIFFS OF DOVER

(M-G-M)

SCALING the white cliffs of Dover, from the Hollywood approach, is an emotionally exhausting business. The climb lasts only two hours, which is considerably less than that required for some of the cinema's recent endurance tests; but the ground to be covered is so treacherous with sentiment, so overgrown with Hollywood, so rank with snobbery, and so many huge close-ups keep popping out at you, that it is very hard going. Our Little Man, as you can see, was flat out at the end of it, and we noticed a good many others in the audience who were using their handkerchiefs pretty freely, though this may have been to mop their eyes and not their brows. In fact, under another system of grading, *The White Cliffs of Dover* would have to be put in the "four handkerchief class"—which in itself is probably enough to guarantee it an overwhelming box-office success.

I have not read the long narrative "poem" by the late Alice Duer Miller on which the film is based, so cannot make any comparisons, though I do know in July, 1944, Mrs. Miller's sister made public apology to the people of Britain for gross and grotesque misrepresentations of their manners and customs in the film, claiming that Hollywood had "travestied and vulgarised a beautiful thing" and that she was "more than shocked."

As I say, I don't know how beautiful the thing was in the first place, but what interests me most about the picture is the chance it offers to compare the American and the British way of treating a similar subject. In *Demi-Paradise*, which I reviewed a fortnight ago, a British studio gave us a picture of England as it might be seen by a Russian visitor. In *The White Cliffs of Dover* a Hollywood studio gives us a view of England and the English as seen through the eyes of an American girl who goes to London in 1914 for a fortnight's holiday and stays the rest of her life. She marries a

(continued on next page)