

Johnson as Mrs. Gibbons. There is nothing spectacular about any of the performances in the film, but this portrayal is even less obviously noticeable than the acting of Robert Newton, as the head of the family, or of Stanley Holloway as their neighbour, or of Kay Walsh as the rebellious daughter. Celia Johnson gets no help from the make-up department and little from the Technicolour camera; she is almost as drab as the background into which she blends. And yet she is the centre of the picture just as she is the real centre of the family; there is honesty and insight and genuine feeling in every aspect of her many-sided portrait, whether she is portraying the overworked mistress of the household, the affectionate but undemonstrative wife, the tragic mother embittered by her daughter's flouting of respectability, or the tired but quietly-proud grandmother who must again shoulder responsibility.

This is not a perfect film, but if you compare it with others of its type and especially with *Since You Went Away*, its most recent Hollywood counterpart, I think you should agree that it deserves the highest possible grading.

THE SEVENTH CROSS

(M.G.M.)

THE concentration camp "atrocities" disclosures, together with the reported emergence from underground of the German Communist Party, give this film some special interest and topicality and add to its already rather controversial nature. For the film, in itself, is a fairly successful antidote to the idea that there are no such people as good Germans. Indeed, it has already come in for some criticism on that score, a fact by no means to its discredit. It would be hard, on the face of it, to sustain the argument that the story (taken without much obvious change from Anna Seghers' best-selling novel) is a lop-sided attempt to whitewash Germany, for not only are the good Germans in it extremely difficult to find, but there is also horribly clear evidence of the existence of plenty of bad ones, a classification which includes those who are merely mean, spiteful, and apathetic as well as those who are spectacularly cold-blooded and bestial.

The "baddies" are those who put George Heisler (Spencer Tracy) and his fellow-Germans in Westhofen Concentration Camp, who lead the man-hunt when seven of them escape, and those others who do nothing to aid the fugitives and look on approvingly when they are found and returned, either dead or soon to die, to the camp parade-ground where seven crosses are waiting. Soon six of the crosses carry burdens, and all the energies of the Gestapo are concentrated on bringing Heisler back to hang on the seventh. They do not succeed.

The "goodies" in the story are those who assist Heisler at various stages of his journey, pass him on from one to the other, and eventually over the Dutch frontier to safety. Some of them are members of the organised underground movement, others are old personal

friends, and others are just Germans who have not lost their human instincts after three years of Hitlerism (the date of the story is 1936). There is the truck-driver who gives Heisler a lift, drops him when he suspects his identity, but does not betray him; the theatrical costumier (Agnes Moorhead) who supplies him with clothes; the Jewish doctor (Steve Geray) who treats his injured hand; the rich architect (George Macready) who was once with the underground and is shamed into returning; the timid little workman (Hume Cronyn) who is not interested in politics but only in his job, his wife, and his babies, but who puts friendship before security; and the barmaid (Signe Hasso), who shelters Heisler in her room for his last night in Germany. Not many of these characters are obviously heroic; they are just ordinary people, fearful of the consequences to themselves and their families. They are embarrassed by the arrival of Heisler; they would much prefer that somebody else had to look after him. But with the exception of the girl (Karen Verne) who had been his sweetheart and who has since married a Nazi, and the brother who has become a Storm Trooper, these Germans help to restore Heisler to health and freedom. And they do much more; they restore his shattered faith in the innate goodness of human nature, and give him hope for the future.

Although talk about "goodies" and "baddies" may tend to obscure it by suggesting that *The Seventh Cross* is primarily an exciting man-hunt, this is the real theme of the story, this search not merely for freedom but for faith and self-respect and for evidence of a soul in Germany. There is nothing very original about it, of course; the same idea is at the basis of many fairy tales and legends, and Noel Coward used it in *The Scoundrel* when the leading character was saved from damnation by the forgiveness of a victim. But it is an effective piece of symbolism, and Anna Seghers made very effective use of it in her novel.

WHERE the film version falls down is not in the handling of this symbolic aspect; indeed, the acting is often brilliant and the direction shows considerable ingenuity and intelligence. What is lacking in the film is political motivation—exactly the same fault of timidity as we found in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. The characters move about in an ideological vacuum. Surely the chief reason why people are bitter opponents of Nazism is because they are ardent supporters of some other system; yet there is no real suggestion of this in the film of *The Seventh Cross*, though the implication was strong in the novel. There is no real suggestion either that the Nazis are so desperately anxious to recapture Heisler because he is a symbol of resistance and a political menace; in fact, a professional revolutionary. Was Hollywood shy about making a hero of such a man? So far as one can judge from the film, he is just any kind of escaped prisoner. Yet if Hollywood is prepared to apply political terms to one side (e.g. Fascism, Nazism), it should be prepared to apply them to the other side, and when it makes a picture which is, in a sense, a tribute to the German Underground Movement, it should be bold enough to give credit where credit is due—even if this involves using the word "Communist." As it is, the only touch of political colour in this whole long story is a reference to a red dress which one of the women characters says she is going to wear!

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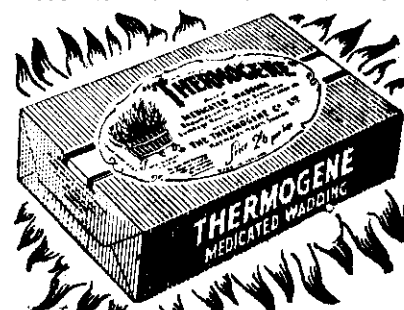
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