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more—a firm of four brothers who between them have personally applied glamorous make-up to 90 per cent. of Hollywood's stars and have trained nearly 75 per cent. of Hollywood's make-up artists. Under the terms of the contract, Mr. Rank will make and distribute Westmore cosmetics in Britain: in return, the Westmores will do their best to make Britain's movie queens look just like Hollywood's glamour girls.

The influence of the cinema in other spheres may be debated, but in the field of fashion and make-up it is obvious to even the most casual observer. Therefore, if Hollywood standards of feminine beauty are going to be officially accepted as the pattern for British actresses, the triumph of the Hollywood Face will be complete throughout the English-speaking world.

THOUGH cosmetics would seem a curious sphere for such a staunch Methodist as Mr. Rank to be dabbling in, many people may regard his new interest in lipsticks and face-cream as comparatively innocuous. Yet this latest development does, I think, indicate as clearly as anything can the goal at which he is aiming for British pictures. He has, of course, never disguised his belief that the only way in which British films can compete with Hollywood is by providing them with finance, studio facilities, and technical efficiency on the Hollywood scale. And I would be the first to admit that so far this policy appears to have produced some of the best films ever made in Britain—including *The Way Ahead*, *This Happy Breed*, and *Henry V* (the last-named of which, however, our public is still waiting to see).

Mr. Rank therefore deserves our gratitude for what he has done already; and if he were working towards producing a truly "international" type of film, which would be acceptable to all the peoples of the world, he would deserve it still more. Unfortunately, the coming of the talkies robbed the screen of the internationalism which, to a certain extent, it did once possess; and barring a return to silent film-making or the adoption of a universal language (neither of which is in the least likely), the production of films of world-wide appeal will be beyond even Mr. Rank's powers. Instead, he seems to be aiming to make British films which will be as popular in America as American films already are in Britain. While this ambition may have something to commend it, I cannot help feeling that British films are likely to get the worst of the bargain, are likely to lose something far more precious than they will gain.

MR. RANK is, in short, attempting to play Hollywood's own game—and to play it according to Hollywood's rules on Hollywood's own ground. For the sake of gaining popularity in America, British films may have to sacrifice their individuality and become basically the same sort of films as Hollywood makes.

I think this is bad. For although I am very far from being an advocate of nationalism in the political sphere, I feel that it has a value in the cultural sphere. British films have, or should have, a special genius of their own to contribute

to world culture, just as there is a special genius in American films, and in Russian or French ones (particularly in French ones). Since complete internationalism is impossible in the cinema, I think it would be better if each nation cultivated and developed its own peculiar, indigenous style of film-making (and its own peculiar style of face), instead of submerging its national personality (and its own style of beauty) in the effort to secure uniformity, larger audiences, and bigger profits. This, I am afraid, is what may happen in the case of British films, if Mr. Rank goes too far.

There are other reasons for tempering with some misgivings one's enthusiasm for the present progress of British films—the fact that, however lofty and sincere his motives may be, Mr. Rank is becoming more powerful than any man should be; and the related problem, arising in all dictatorships and empires, of who will succeed to the throne. But this threat to the identity of the British cinema, developing from the attempt to win markets in America, is in my opinion the most serious of all.

Mr. Rank has, I believe, so far done more than anyone to save British films from mediocrity, but one wonders if the time may not be coming when it will be necessary to save British films from Mr. Rank.

## THEY WERE SISTERS

(Gaumont-British)



I DON'T know whether Mr. Rank's organisation was responsible for this film, but to my mind it is a bad advertisement for the New Order in British Pictures. It has almost all the faults that we used so rightly to complain about when we made comparisons with Hollywood products, and few of the new virtues.

*They Were Sisters* is slow, it meanders, its production values are poor, and with very few exceptions the acting is amateurish. I am not very enthusiastic about the story either, though admittedly there is occasionally accurate observation of real life in some of the domestic sidelights. One of the poorest features is the acting of the children. We may dislike some of the children in some Hollywood films because they seem precocious by our standards, but at least it can usually be said that they behave with natural spontaneity and a complete lack of self-consciousness (some of the best acting seen in American films, in fact, comes from juveniles). But the English children in *They Were Sisters* are natural only in the sense that the average self-conscious infant at a school break-up is natural; they look at the camera, they speak their lines as if they did not know what they meant, and you can feel them pause for their cues.

James Mason's juicily malevolent performance as a sadistic husband—yes, another of them—is the only thing worth serious notice in this depressingly long, depressingly incompetent, and, in brief, depressing British melodrama. I remember three lines of dialogue: "You deserved a better fate," "I'm talking too much," and "The trouble with me is I could never help being a bore"—remarks which struck me as applying very aptly to the film and some of the people in it.

## NATIONAL FILM UNIT

The Dominion Physical Laboratory, switching from war-time to peace-time activities, is engaged in most interesting research work to aid manufacture, and an idea of the variety of research being done is given in the National Film Unit's Weekly Review, No. 239, released on March 29. Other items include: "J Force 14 Squadron Departs," "Twins for the Tigers," and "First Steps in Swimming."

## RADIO

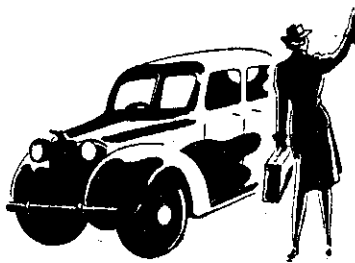
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