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SPEAKING CANDIDLY

WATERLOO ROAD

(Gainsborough)



THIS is one of Mr. Rank's efforts, and it is the sort of British film that I sincerely hope Mr. Rank will go on making, in spite of all temptations to expand to other nations. The idiom of *Waterloo Road* is so essentially and unmistakably English that it is not likely to win big markets in the U.S.A., but it may win a lot of respect in the right quarters, just as many French films have won respect overseas—and for the same fundamental reason: because they do not ape the Hollywood manner but are content to make their own modest way in the world. Harking back to something I wrote two weeks ago, I would suggest that, although the English-speaking world is now so accustomed to the Hollywood idiom, having heard little else for the past 40 years, that any deviation from it seems strange, if British studios were to keep on making films like *Waterloo Road* it would take considerably less time than that for them to break into America. And such a victory, gained by native merit, would be far more worthwhile and lasting than an immediate success secured by compromise and the sacrifice of national character.

WATERLOO ROAD is a good film on several counts. It is a comparatively simple, but far from dull, story about ordinary people—working people, not the upper-crust formerly so beloved by British scenario writers. Its observation of these ordinary people is informed with humanity, humour, and respect: there is no suggestion here of snobbishness and patronage. Very effective use is also made of genuine local colour; which is something that has happened all too seldom in the past in British films, with their concentration on the Stately Homes of Old England rather than on places like the Waterloo Road, where the majority of really important people in the population live. And as its third special virtue, this film has pace—again a comparatively rare quality in British films.

The story lends itself to speedy action, and under Sidney Gilliat's direction a kind of triple fugue of pursuit and escape is developed at a lively tempo. There is the theme of the bored and restless wife (Joy Shelton) pursued by the flashy fellow (Stewart Granger), who takes advantage of her husband's absence with the Forces. Combined with this is the theme of the husband's effort to catch up with his wife and the lady-killer. And weaving in and out, and carrying the audience into many corners of the Waterloo Road district, there is the chase by the military police after the husband (John Mills), who has broken camp in order to find out what his wife is up to, and, having found out, to knock the block off her would-be seducer.

AN element of sordidness is inevitable in any honest treatment of such a theme in such a setting. Sidney Gilliat has not sought to evade it. At the same time, this is far from being a depressing picture. There is sympathy, humour, and good rousing excitement—the last-named, especially, in the rough-and-tumble sequence where the soldier fin-

ally catches up with the lady-killer, an ex-pugilist, and uses his training in commando tactics to advantage.

The acting is as honest and unpretentiously successful as the direction: no false glamour about any of the characters, but no condescension towards them either. In particular I admired Stewart Granger's portrayal of the bad lot; a nasty, loose-lipped piece of work, but with something not entirely unlikable about him. It is not difficult to believe in the fascination he supposedly exercises over the heroine and other girls of the neighbourhood. Even the philosophic musings of Alastair Sim (as the doctor who observes with a fatherly eye all that happens in *Waterloo Road*) do not come entirely amiss, though I think the film would have been better without his post-war postscript.

OLD ACQUAINTANCE

(Warner Bros.)



BETTE DAVIS herself seldom lets a film down, but it quite frequently happens that a film lets Bette Davis down. This happens, I think, in *Old Acquaintance*. The trouble with so many of her roles, and certainly with this one, is that they require her to go to absurd extremes; she is not allowed to be a normal, natural woman, the kind you can believe in or would really care to know. Either she is the pathological type who drives her family and friends to drink and suicide, a succubus with soul as black as night, or else (less frequently) she is inhumanly noble and self-sacrificing, shining with an unearthly radiance amid the encircling gloom. In *Old Acquaintance* her characterisation is of this rarer, or sweetness-and-light, variety. I suppose it is just conceivable that, from a sense of loyalty and high principle, a woman of Miss Davis' (screen) character would deny the love in her heart and refuse to marry—or even dally with—the husband (John Loder) of her old school friend (Miriam Hopkins). I don't want to sound cynical about this: if you like I'll amend "just conceivable" to "quite possible." But what I do steadfastly refuse to believe is that anyone as intelligent and independent as Miss Davis is

Wider Still and Wider...

"THE Irish entertainment world has been shaken to its core by the irruption during the past week of Mr. Arthur Rank and the announcement of his purchase of an interest in a major circuit of Irish cinemas" (reports the "Observer," London, for January 27). "The first sequel to this move has been to denude Dublin of film critics. They have all been over to London as the guests of Mr. Rank." The deal is elsewhere reported as involving ten Eire cinemas with assets of a million-and-a-quarter pounds, and as being likely to lead to an increase in the number of British films shown there.