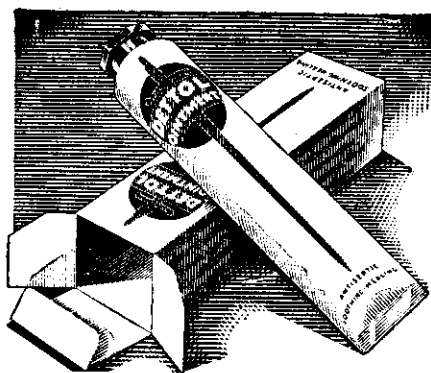


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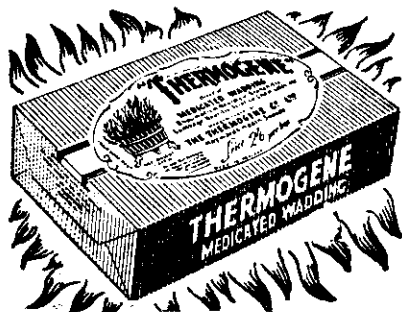


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(continued from previous page)

satirical farce, such overstatement might be in order: but it ends on a note of tragic melodrama with the return of Job Skeffington from Germany and the profound observation that "when a woman is loved she is still beautiful."

\* \* \*

THERE is consistency of a kind, to be sure, in Miss Davis's performance, but it is the consistency of artifice rather than of true art. The star cannot give much depth or feeling to the picture because the central character is essentially shallow and heartless; and the only two genuine human beings in the story, the husband and the family friend (Walter Abel), are mere sketches of characters—but she certainly succeeds in making Fanny Skeffington a superficially interesting figure. Every detail of dress, decoration, and posture has been given close attention; the star even pitches her voice several tones higher than usual and keeps it up throughout the picture to convey Fanny's vacuity. Such devices, and there are several, are brilliantly calculated and contrived—but the point is that they are contrived. What other actress than Bette Davis, I wonder, would be willing to play so unsympathetic a role, and revel so obviously in the playing of it?

## PERFECT STRANGERS

(Korda—M-G-M)



[ FIND that I have left myself comparatively little space in which to discuss this picture. A pity, because it deserves attention, not merely as Sir

Alexander Korda's first production for several years, but also as one of those rare films about the war which make use, not of the melodrama in the front line, but of the drama, as it were, on the back doorstep. *Perfect Strangers* shows the metamorphosis which war brings about in the characters and lives of a colourless married couple in a London suburb. Robert Donat is Mr. Wilson, a humdrum, plodding, unimaginative clerk in a big firm; he joins the Navy in 1940. Deborah Kerr is his dowdy, unromantic wife, snivelling through her boring existence with a perpetual cold; she becomes a Wren. Life in the Services changes them spectacularly—rather too spectacularly perhaps for realism, but a producer may be allowed some latitude. The husband loses his inferiority complex, his mousy moustache, and his air of suburban respectability, and becomes a man of action; the wife loses her perpetual snuffle, learns to smoke, use lipstick, and be attractive to men. When they meet again after three years' separation, both have decided that they cannot return to the old boring life together; each expects the other to be as dowdy as when they parted. At first the shock of finding so great a change produces bewilderment and conflict; but as the curtain goes down we are left with the comforting assurance that divorce is no longer contemplated and that they will continue happily as Mr. and Mrs. Wilson.

I am by no means sure that this film is as fundamentally true to real life as it may appear on the surface. There is rather too much special pleading from the particular to the general. Not all disrupted wartime marriages will be resumed as comfortably, especially in those cases where only one party has had the experience of service and has found wider horizons. And I think it is also a significant lack in the story that

the question of children is never once introduced. The presence, or the absence, of a family would surely be a contributing factor in such a domestic situation as this, and might well have been referred to.

Yet though *Perfect Strangers* only skims the subject, it is at least something that the subject was approached at all, for the theme is undoubtedly timely and important. Some other producer may give it a more profound and realistic treatment. In the meantime, Alexander Korda, ably assisted by the stars, and by Georges Perinal as cameraman, has given us a lively and frequently amusing British picture, which is only slightly marred by excess footage and by some inconsistency of mood.

## THE WAY TO THE STARS

(Two Cities)

HAVING been brought fairly close to the earth by a bou. of 'flu, I was unable to make *The Way to the Stars* when it was previewed recently. But I am able to pass on the report of a colleague who saw it in my place and whose judgment I respect. Though I cannot guarantee this, it seems likely that if the Little Man had been present he would have stood up to applaud:

WHEN the readers of the *London Daily*

Mail recently chose this as the best British film produced during the war, they showed surprisingly good taste. It is, in fact, an outstanding film. Though it deals with the Air Force, *The Way to the Stars* is not in the usual sense a "war" film. Its problems are the human ones that arise from war, and the director (Anthony Asquith) treats them with an understanding and intelligence which we seldom get from Hollywood.

In some impressive opening shots, the camera takes us through the gates of an airfield in Britain. It is now deserted, but what is left—the pin-up girls, a cigarette lighter, a signature scribbled in chalk on the wall, a small notice in German—all these things had meaning for the men who flew the Blenheims and Flying Fortresses. As we go back to the early days of the "Blitz," and over the comparatively short history of Halfpenny Airfield, these things have meaning for us, too. We see the everyday life of the airmen, their comradeship together, and their relationship with the civilians in the neighbouring village where their off-duty haunt is the local pub.

Then the Americans arrive, "chewing the cud, shooting the bull, and calling each other 'Buddy,'" as one British airman puts it. There is no attempt to gloss over the difficulties of Anglo-American relations. Differences of temperament and customs are frankly admitted and brought into the open. In this way a better understanding of each other's problems is made possible.

Although there are some well-known people in the cast (Michael Redgrave, Rosamund Johns, and John Mills) they are not played up merely for the sake of the box-office. The influence of the documentary can, in fact, be seen throughout the film. You feel that here are real people, real situations—certainly a rare experience in the cinema.

## NATIONAL FILM UNIT

Weekly Review No. 250, issued on June 14 by the National Film Unit, contains a variety of short news items. Included are "Coupon Champs," "U.S. Memorial Day," "J Force Sails," "Bee Day," "Sir Keith Park Arrives," and "Anzacs in Japan." The Review has its premiere each week at principal theatres in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, and Dunedin, and then goes on circuit.