



MAKERS OF BRITISH FILMS (No. 2).

The Boulting brothers—left, John; right, Roy—producer and director of the forthcoming film of Howard Spring's "Fame is the Spur," and of several other notable British films, including "Pastor Hall" (1940), "Thunder Rock" (1942), "Journey Together" (1945), and "Burma Victory" (1945).

nature, his passionate fondness for singing, and his uncanny flair for showmanship, the story becomes a fabrication of half-truths and outright invention which suggests that Jolson was not only a very great artist but also a bitterly misunderstood husband; a man who sang the way he did because he wanted it to sound "something like prayers," and whose one and only marriage ceased to be idyllic and broke up merely because he became bored with rustic retirement and his wife nobly realised that she was an inadequate audience for a genius who loved "faces" in large quantities.

The love-interest in the film is the sheerest hokum of all. The producer has concentrated on Jolson's romance with Ruby Keeler (who was actually Al's third wife), and his analysis of the motives which are supposed to have actuated them both in breaking-up their marriage is as shallow and sentimental as one might expect. But it is easy to understand the ticklish problems of copyright, and other things, that must have been involved in filming this story. For instance, Jolson was a Warner star, but this production comes from the Columbia studio; and though Ruby Keeler is herself never once mentioned (her name is spelt Julie Benson throughout the story), the titles of a number of Ruby Keeler films are given. However, Miss Keeler is said to have accepted 25,000 dollars for her co-operation in this matter; and Jolson is also reported to be well satisfied with *The Jolson Story*. He should be, and not merely because he is getting 50 per cent of the profits from it.

Whether Al Jolson is in himself a figure of sufficient importance to be worth making a film about, and a two-and-a-half hour film at that, is a subject that could be debated at length; and if it were I might not be found on the affirmative side. Nevertheless, *The Jolson Story* is technically of some interest (the fusion of voice and performance is just about perfect), and for all the inaccuracy of detail it offers probably a fairly faithful panorama of a fabulous era in show business. As such it compares quite well enough with other films of the species. This is not really my sort of entertainment, but it may be yours; and I have to admit that I found myself beguiled by parts of it and in others carried away by its sheer exuberance.

BOMBS AT BIKINI

[I]N the past month I have seen three films dealing with the atomic bomb, and particularly with the tests at Bikini. One of them is a 20-minute *March of Time* item which tries to explain in simple terms the scientific principles involved in atomic fission, gives some of the background to the discovery of the bomb, and dwells rather diffidently on its awful potentialities. There are interviews with a number of prominent scientists, including—after a terrific build-up which leads us to expect from him some portentous announcement—a meeting with Professor Einstein himself. But the wise old man, confronted with a document for his signature stressing the need for control of atomic energy, confines himself to the two words "I agree."

The other two films, one an official U.S. Defence Services production in colour and the second a compilation of civilian black-and-white newsreels, were shown in Wellington by courtesy of the American Legation. Both comparatively straightforward records of the actual Bikini tests, they are impressive and terrifying enough in all conscience. I see that a writer in the *New Statesman* has suggested that these atomic bomb films are the U.S. equivalent of the *Nazi Baptism of Fire* which was used to soften up recalcitrant countries. I think that is a little unfair. My complaint is that none of the three films I have seen has the intelligence, or the desire, to draw the conclusion that needs firmly to be drawn—a conclusion aptly summed up by the scientist who, in discussing in another place the atomic bomb and the allied menace of biological warfare, said: "There may still be some debate as to what weapons will be used in the next war, but there is no question about the one after that—they will be stones and spears."

On the contrary, the official film from the U.S. Army and Navy Departments, whistling to keep their courage and their budgets up, ends by advocating the need for Americans to build better battleships to meet the challenge of the bomb. The civilian newsreel film is rather more realistic and concedes that though a few battleships survived at Bikini, all human beings aboard them would have perished. By implication it therefore suggests that the need is not to build better battleships but better men; and perhaps one may safely go on from there and wonder whether the future of the world (if it is to have any future) may not depend on much of the energy formerly expended on armament being now expended on education.



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