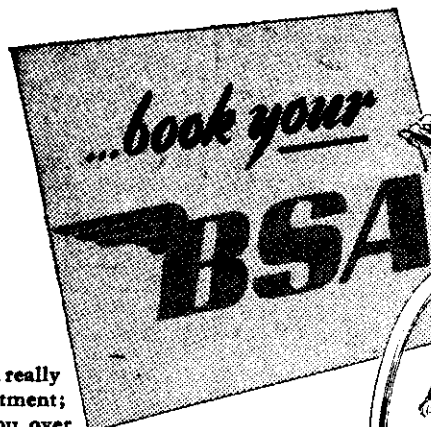


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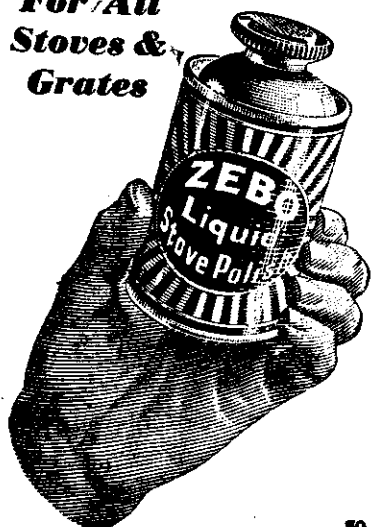
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Film Reviews by G.M.

SPEAKING CANDIDLY

THE BEGINNING OR THE END?

(M-G-M)

SINCE 55 nations have so far failed to find a way of handling the atom bomb, it was perhaps scarcely to be expected that M-G-M would succeed. But even from Hollywood one didn't look for anything quite like this. Considering the tragic scope of the subject and its moral and philosophical implications for all mankind, this account of the manufacture and use of the atomic weapon at Hiroshima is just about the equivalent of *Oedipus Rex* played by a fifth-rate vaudeville company.

Though it doesn't, because it obviously wasn't allowed, tell us anything that isn't common knowledge, the film certainly manages to convey the impression that the harnessing of atomic fission for war purposes was a long, difficult, expensive, and often tedious business. The object seems to be to baffle the on-looker with science; and those scenes of flashing lights, sizzling generators, leaping sparks, and tense-faced research-workers, though a bit too reminiscent of *Frankenstein* and Co., are impressive enough, as also are the sequences showing the test at Alamogordo and the wiping-out of Hiroshima.

I don't want to damn the film unreservedly: it may have some salutary effects, if only because it appears to support Professor Oliphant, who says that no nation going to war in the future, however well armed, can avoid the consequences, as against General Clay, who seems to want the U.S. Air Force to rule the world with atom bombs. But if a movie studio felt itself capable of tackling this subject—and I doubt if any is, yet—it would have done much better to secure the rights to John Hersey's *Hiroshima* and put that on the screen. For this story needs to be told, as Hersey's was, in terms of human beings; and these need to be the persons who suffered the terror and agony of the bomb and not, as here, a couple of simpering young women (Beverley Tyler and Audrey Trotter), an objectionably cocksure and infantile major (Robert Walker), and a depressed young scientist (Tom Drake). Other figures come and go in the story, some of them representations of such real people as Einstein, Roosevelt, and Truman—but all are unreal.

Only in Tom Drake's characterisation of the scientist who dies from his handling of uranium is there the faintest recognition of the moral issues raised by the use of the bomb: the other difficult but all-important aspects of the subject are either totally avoided or else emerge as a peculiarly fatuous and rather impious attempt by M-G-M to justify man's ways to God. In the final scene, against a background of angelic choir, Lincoln statue, and ghostly presence, one of the girls reads a letter from her dead husband which contains such sentiments as "All ages before the discovery of atomic energy were the Dark Ages,"

and "Atomic energy is a hand God has extended." Thus, with its customary mixture of high-pressure sales talk and crass sentimentality, does Hollywood weaken, cheapen, and vulgarise the supreme tragedy and dilemma of our age.

The Beginning or the End? begins with an alleged newsreel shot of the film being sealed up and deposited in a "time capsule" for the benefit of posterity, and ends with a message to those who, presumably, will dig it up 500 years hence. If there are any human beings still around when that day dawns, the contents of the capsule may help them to understand a little better why 20th Century civilisation finally blew itself to bits—and perhaps why it was deserving of that fate. For, to borrow *Time's* phrase, the "cheery imbecility" of this film would suggest that the men who made it, like some of those who have discovered the secret of atomic energy, were just not big enough for the job.

PICCADILLY INCIDENT

(Associated British)

BECAUSE several readers have lately been suggesting that I always give unqualified praise to British pictures, my disappointment in this Herbert Wilcox production is tempered by the mild satisfaction of being able to prove them wrong. And what should make the proof positive is the fact that *Piccadilly Incident* is the film which, by a poll of newspaper-readers in Britain, was voted as the best of last year.

Piccadilly Incident seems to be trying, at the beginning and the end, to make some valid social comment on the subject of illegitimacy, as it affects a child whose father and mother have married in the erroneous belief that the father's first wife is dead. This is a theme which, expertly and responsibly handled, would make good drama, but it gives the impression here of having been dragged in more or less as an after-thought; it is purely incidental to the story, instead of being fundamental. Instead we concern ourselves with the whirlwind wartime courtship of Diana Fraser, a Wren (Anna Neagle), by Captain Alan Pearson (Michael Wilding), their marriage, and separation after a few hours, when she is posted to Singapore. Escaping from there on a ship which is torpedoed by the Japanese, she and five other survivors eventually land on an uncharted Pacific island, where for three dreary years she valiantly defends her honour against the advances of a former sweetheart (Michael Lawrence) who, by an equally implausible twist in the story, happened to be in the same boat. Meanwhile her husband, having mourned her sufficiently, has in the interests of Anglo-American solidarity, married a U.S. war-worker and begotten a son. Back comes Diana, honour intact and

(continued on next page)