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Film Reviews, by Jno.

MR. WELLES EXCELS

THE STRANGER

(International Pictures)

[T will be generally conceded that any film in which Orson Welles has a hand is worth seeing for that reason alone. From that proposition to one which holds that any film with Orson Welles in it must benefit from the impact of that erratic genius could be a facile step, but *The Stranger* leaves no room for any serious doubt about its quality. A screen story pure and simple, it is (within the narrow compass of its genre) practically without flaw. For this almost the whole credit must go to Welles, who is both director and principal actor.

The fact that the story is a thoroughly orthodox and uncomplicated one about the catching of a criminal, that it moves through the routine cycle of such stories from the first tally-ho to the final encounter, and that the forces of good triumph in the end over the forces of evil, does not detract one iota from the warm feeling of satisfaction which remains once the gooseflesh has subsided. After all, Picasso could make an orange look like the sun, and though Mr. Welles may find the comparison odious it may not be too far-fetched.

When the story opens Edward G. Robinson, American member of a sort of international F.B.I., has just convinced his colleagues that the only way to track down the most dangerous of the Nazi war criminals—Franz Kindler, the brain behind the genocide campaign—is to allow one of the lesser fry to escape, then shadow him until he reaches the inevitable rendezvous. As for arrows, so for Aryans. If you lose one, you shoot another off and follow it up. The plan works and before long the lesser Nazi (Konstantin Shayne) arrives in the quiet little U.S. town of Harper. Edward G. Robinson arrives on the same bus.

From that point the show belongs entirely to Orson Welles, who will keep the most case-hardened filmgoer on the edge of his seat until the last horrible moment. All the personal touches of Welles the director are brought to the task of building suspense almost to breaking-point—unorthodox camera-angles, the use of shadows and foreshortened perspectives, the concentration of attention on minutiae (sticking plaster on Robinson's pipe-stem, the tinkling of a drug-store cash-register), the close-ups of faces. At times I could almost hear Mr. Welles saying to Mr. Welles, "Don't shoot till you see the whites of my eyes."

The cast is hand-picked. Robinson, as impassively batrachian as ever, plays his part faultlessly, and Loretta Young (of whom I have more than one unhappy memory) is perfectly cast as the arch criminal's hapless wife. But in convincing you that Kindler could be a nightmare reality—wickedness incarnate in the body of a small town schoolmaster—Welles takes the honours with arrogant ease.

At only three isolated points was I unsatisfied. At one, about three lines of popular "psychology" are put into Robinson's mouth. Then just before Kindler ends he cries, "I acted under orders"

BAROMETER

Fine: "The Stranger."
Fair to Fine: "The Man Within."
Fair: "Dear Ruth."

—such a character does not break down so easily. And I would like a horologist's opinion on the probability of the final coup de grâce.

THE MAN WITHIN

(Rank-G.B.D.)

THE small quantity of Christian dust within the urn of old Sir Thomas Browne might reasonably have been agitated by the news that one of his more private speculations had been used by Mr. Rank to win dollars and influence exhibitors. But though Sir Thomas and Mr. Rank are the alpha and omega of *The Man Within*, this not inconsiderable film—the first technicolour show made at Shepherd's Bush studios, I understand—is mainly the work of four other people. First of all, it is based on a novel by Graham Greene who used as his leitmotiv Browne's sad comment on his own conscience "There is a man within me and he is angry with me." Then, the screen adaptation was done by Muriel and Sydney Box, who were, I suspect, responsible for the narrative technique superimposed on the story, and finally the direction was in the hands of Bernard Knowles. The latter, presented with a story about an Informer, has made good use of mist, fog, and darkness, but under the technicolour camera it is lambent mist, fog that glows eerily under the moonlight—even the night is darkness visible.

I found it one of those peculiarly satisfying pictures at which one can, as one wishes, either abandon oneself to the sheer enjoyment of an exciting tale (smugglers v. excisemen in olde worlde Sussex), superbly acted and presented with all the vivid colour of a fancy-dress pageant, or eschew the sensuous elements and concentrate on a psychological conflict involving in its complex pattern all the principal characters. The result of this astute blend of action and introspection is a film which will appeal to the uncritical filmgoer and stimulate argument among more independent minds. Add to the ingredients Sacred and Profane Love, and recurrent glimpses of good old-fashioned torture, and it will be obvious that Mr. Rank's investment is pretty safe.

But in spite of the strong appeal to the eye and the emotions, it was the moral issues raised which I found most interesting and which remained in my mind after the picture was over. I found it difficult to believe that Browne's aphorism applied simply to the central character—a youth (played by Richard Attenborough), who in anger betrays his fellow-smugglers but resists the threat of torture and in the end even risks the gallows to shield his friend and mentor (Michael Redgrave). Conflict between right and wrong, law and lawlessness, lust and love; between

(continued on next page)