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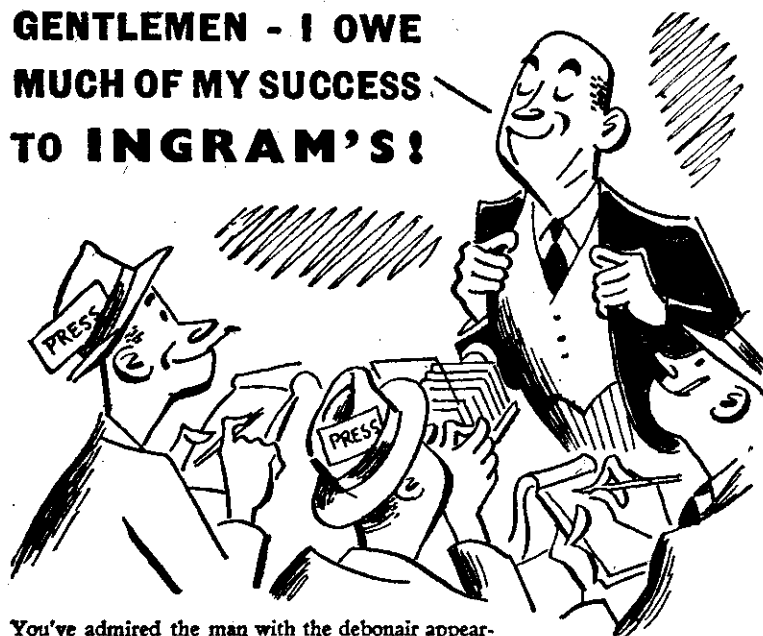
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Film Reviews, by Jno.

A Film to Remember

ODD MAN OUT

(Rank-Two Cities)

THOUGH I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

THESE words of St. Paul, wrung from a hunted and dying man in his ultimate agony of body and soul, climax the action of this film and are obviously intended to explain its theme. But the theme of *Odd Man Out* is not one which can be so simply summarised. Certainly, this is a story of human weakness, and of the egotism or self-interest which inhibit charity; and at least a dozen times this moral is driven home with all the force that inspired direction and masterly photography can bring to bear. But the whole is greater than the sum of the parts and the basic conflict (to my mind) is that between essential human kindness and the inexorable sanctions of the society which humanity has contrived for itself. *Odd Man Out* is a story of crime and punishment, but not all of the crime is indictable and punishment falls as inevitably (if not always so perceptibly) upon the just as upon the unjust.

In the advertisements *Odd Man Out* is described as "Britain's greatest film" and as "the most exciting picture ever made." The first of these claims would not be made were exhibitors the kind of people who weighed their words with any care. There can no more be a greatest film than there can be a greatest novel. But the second is closer to the truth than these catch-phrases usually are. This is an exciting film, and in more ways than one. It contains some of the best nerve-stretching action and most skilfully manipulated suspense I have seen, and some of the finest acting that could be seen anywhere. But I feel that for many filmgoers it will be (as it was for me) most exciting as a revelation of what can be achieved by a first-class director (Carol Reed) and a first-class camera-man (Robert Krasker) working in perfect unison—well, in nearly perfect unison. At times the camera's is not the art which conceals art, but on the occasions where it momentarily diverts attention from the action it disturbs the thread of the story no more than a vivid metaphor disturbs the sense of a paragraph.

The action of the film covers the space of eight hours—from four until midnight—of a winter's day in Belfast. They are the last eight hours in the life of Johnny McQueen (James Mason), leader of a revolutionary "organisation," as it is euphemistically called, who has killed a man and has himself been mortally wounded in an armed robbery. In a headlong terror-stricken flight which is one of the most exciting pieces of action photography I have seen, Mason falls from the racing car and in panic his companions abandon him.

From that point the film is concerned not so much with the dying man and his eight hours of agonised liberty, as with the reactions of those who come in contact with him. At scarcely any point

BAROMETER

Fine: "Odd Man Out."
Dull: "Desert Fury."

is he more than a two-dimensional character, symbol of the social non-conformist who is hounded down by the society which bred him. Physically encircled by the police who work closer and closer as the hours drag by, he is also spiritually isolated from the charity and the compassion of his fellow-citizens either by the sanctions of Law or the horror of imminent death.

The fruit of this plot-structure is a sequence of character-sketches, brilliantly presented by English and Irish stage players. Three of McQueen's comrades try to rescue him—but to regain their own self-esteem and not for any love they bear him. Two are shot and one is captured by the police. An elderly harridan informs on him and the hunt draws closer. A housewife (Fay Compton) who finds him lying in the street takes him in and gives him first-aid. Then she discovers the gun in his coat-pocket and reluctantly turns him out of doors into the night. His sweetheart (Kathleen Ryan) searches for him because she would rather shoot him herself and commit suicide than see him captured and face the ordeal of his trial and execution, and the parish priest (W. G. Fay) tries to get hold of him because it is his business to shrive the dying whether they die inside or outside the law. Robert Newton, as a half-mad artist (and unhappily still somewhat reminiscent of *Hatter's Castle*) gets hold of the dying man and tries to paint his eyes in which he thinks he sees "The truth about us all," while a seedy medical student binds up his wound and, at the same time, his own self-respect.

Most dominant of these minor characters is the police inspector (Dennis O'Dea) who manages to represent the impersonal force of law without losing his own humanity. Beside him, the priest—who, I thought, should have been secure in the infallible armour of Church and faith—was a weak and indecisive character. The least real among the minor characters are the artist and the medical student, but the mounting impetus of the action at the time of their appearance, and the by then obvious allegorical significance of the story make them at least acceptable if not entirely believable.

The real triumph of the director and the camera-man, however, goes beyond their handling of the named cast. Under their hands the whole population of the town is drawn into the action—either as direct participants in the central story or as symbols of society's indifference to humanity. It is often difficult (as indeed it should be) to separate the work of Reed from that of Krasker and the finest sequences in the film are those in which the two work in closest unison. The flight of the gunmen in the opening stages of the story, for example, with its suggestion of speed in the spinning buildings and rippling tram-tracks and its strong atmosphere of hysterical terror is almost perfect in conception and execution, and a special

(continued on next page)