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Film Reviews, by Jno.

Dietrich Deglamourized

GOLDEN EARRINGS

(Paramount)

IT'S astonishing what can happen when you don't keep your mind on your work. Take the case of Professor Krosigk, for example. The professor was a scientist and humanitarian living in the little South German town of Eshbach in the days before the war, yet in a fit of sheer absence of mind he invented a new and ultra-deadly poison-gas. As a humanitarian, the only sensible course open to him was to hand over his formula to the British Government, but this put him in a proper fix, for there were Nazis at the bottom of his garden, and Gestapo agents behind every neighbouring hedge. So, being a wise man as well as a humanitarian, he scribbled the formula on a five-mark note and sat down to wait for the British Government to come and collect.

That was almost fatal, as anyone better acquainted with the British Government would have guessed. Before Colonel Ray Milland and an aide get to Germany it is late in the summer of 1939. After literally incredible adventures, in which the aide dies in considerable discomfort and the Colonel wins through as the result of a purely fortuitous encounter with an amorous gipsy wench who falls for his *beaux yeux* (and his beau chest), the formula changes hands under the noses of the Black Guards who are taking time off to celebrate the invasion of Poland with a few bars of *Deutschland Uber Alles* and the *Horst Wessel Song*.

If they, and the professor, had only kept their minds on their work what a different story this might have been! And if Mitchell Leisen, who directed *Golden Earrings*, had only kept his mind on his there is no knowing what the film might have been either. To make sense of *Golden Earrings* as it stands is almost an impossible assignment. It begins as melodrama, threatens to develop into musical comedy, thinks better of it and relapses into farce and slapstick. But since there are Nazis and Gestapo men riding furiously through the scenery an occasional reversion to the original melodramatic theme is apparently necessary and these lapses sort oddly with the farcical situations in which they occur. Personally, I don't care how much fun is made of the Nazis, but I don't think a shot in the stomach is a howling jest even with a Nazi at the receiving end. Nor do I object, *per se*, to the deglamourization of Marlene Dietrich, who hides her light under a bushel of gipsy petticoats and a liberal application of cocoa-butter. I could stand the sight of her guzzling fish-stew straight from the pot (gipsies don't use cutlery either), and when she played the zither I took it on the chin. I ever had a good laugh, towards the end of the picture, when she cried "O Spirits of the Earth and Water watch over my Beloved" as Colonel Milland, clad in nothing but his underpants plunged into the Rhine on the first lap of his long voyage home. But when

BAROMETER

FAIR: "Road to Rio."
CLOUDY: "I Walk Alone."
DULL: "Golden Earrings."

she picked the pockets of a dead German and then poked round in his mouth to make sure he had no gold in his teeth I felt that Mr. Leisen was carrying farce too far, and being a trifle ungallant into the bargain.

If one is not too prone to queasiness, and if one can go on laughing at the ludicrous and the inane, *Golden Earrings* may be entertaining. I found it dull. As a piece of incidental information I might mention that the whole story is related by the flashback method (a device with which most filmgoers will be by now tolerably familiar). It is told by Colonel Milland to that celebrated newshawk Quentin Reynolds, who appears in *propria persona*. I had no idea foreign correspondents were so gullible.

I WALK ALONE

(Paramount)

BURT LANCASTER and Lizbeth Scott, who I had hoped were safely and obscurely settled down in the wildly technicolourful West (see *Desert Fury*, *Listener*, 16/1/48), have turned up together again—this time 'Way Down East among the penthouses and nightclubs. Mr. Lancaster—as Frankie, a strong-armed but simple-minded type with a permanent five o'clock shadow—has just completed a 14-year stretch in the pen for an unspecified offence not unconnected with the running of bootleg whisky. A lot of liquor has, however, flowed under the bridge since the early 'thirties and Frankie's one-time associates have now achieved a specious respectability as proprietors of a swanky nightclub in which Miss Scott is the principal entertainer.

In spite of much backslapping, and similar ostentatious conviviality, the homecoming atmosphere is gravid with intimations of impending skullduggery and it soon becomes apparent that while the boys are ready to relinquish their claims on Miss Scott's attentions they are not prepared to cut their old buddy in on the nightclub profit-and-loss account. This irks Frankie, who rounds up a small group of old-time trigger-men and tries to get himself elected to the board of directors. Of course, only a chryselephantine character like Frank—solid ivory from the neck up, solid gold from the neck down—would believe that the gordian knot of interlocking directorates could be cut in so simple and straightforward a fashion. The upshot is that Frank gets thrown out on his ear and thoroughly beaten up. This piece of unalloyed brutality—painstakingly filmed—shows Miss Scott where both her duty and her affections lie. "A man without a rudder," she cries, as she shakes the dust of the cabaret from her pumps and prepares to set Frank

(continued on next page)

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