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Film Reviews, by Jno.

The Clutch of Circumstance

THE OCTOBER MAN

(Rank-Two Cities)

THOSE who have come to expect the ultimate in thrills from Eric Ambler may be a little disappointed with *The October Man*, his first venture as an author-producer, but I thought it on the whole a reasonably promising beginning. It is certainly not out of the top drawer; there are occasional banalities of dialogue and direction, and some of the sets are too palpably mock-ups, but the plot is a good one and if the thrills are not so thrilling and the climaxes not quite so climactic as some would wish there is a compensatory increase in realism and verisimilitude. What marks the film out from the general run of thrillers (if, indeed, one can properly place it in that category) is that it is for the most part quite believable.

When one comes to think it over, however, *The October Man* appears as a blend of several story-forms. It could be classified with the murder mysteries, since there is a mysterious murder in it. Like *Frieda*, it is also a psychological study concerned with a guilt-complex and the mental disequilibrium which derives from it. But it will appeal most, I think, as the story of an innocent man caught hand and foot in the toils of circumstantial evidence, and tormented—by the persistent questions of the police and the whispers of his neighbours—to the point of doubting his own sanity. This situation is contrived so neatly, the hunt closes in with such seeming inevitability, that one becomes too preoccupied with the possible miscarriage of justice to complain at the relatively prosaic ending.

The October Man is not brilliantly acted, but there is an above-average competence shown by all members of the cast and the blemishes which mar one or two performances are as much the faults of the story or the direction as of the players. In particular I noticed a tendency to repetitiousness in some small matters of detail. John Mills, the young industrial chemist whose neuroses and misfortunes provide the plot-material, holds his bewildered head too much, hears just too many train-whistles, kisses Joan Greenwood just once or twice too often. At least the audience seemed to think so, for on one or two occasions the tension or tenderness of a scene was broken by a spatter of laughter—and not the involuntary nervous laughter with which most film-goers are familiar. Not that I blame John Mills for these slight backslidings—least of all for the superfluous clinches—since these are matters for the director to decide. No doubt there is a formula somewhere which lays down the proper incidence for such brief encounters, but it seemed that neither Mr. Ambler nor his director (Roy Baker) had got hold of it.

Disregarding these minor matters I found John Mills well cast. He gives one the impression of being a serious and painstaking young man, and in the

BAROMETER

FAIR: "The October Man."
OVERCAST, BRIGHT INTERVALS:
"It Happened on Fifth Avenue."

part of a serious young man with hypertrophy of the conscience he seemed completely at home. Joan Greenwood's acting I always enjoy. Her delightful accent prejudices me in her favour, I admit, but there is also a quality of emotion in repose about her which I find piquant and intriguing. Out of about a score of minor players there was hardly one who did not do well, the best being Catherine Lacey as the faded Miss Selby, Frederick Piper as the bland police inspector who is so sure that he has an open-and-shut case, and Edward Chapman in the character of the mysterious Mr. Peachey. But the best supporting work was done, in my opinion, by the property-men who devised the boarding-house in which much of the action takes place. It is so true to type that I could almost smell the cabbage-water.

IT HAPPENED ON FIFTH AVENUE

(Allied Artists-B.E.F.)

AS the story of Aloysius T. McKeever, a philosophical tramp who has for some years solved the residential problem by installing himself as unofficial caretaker in the empty mansions of migrating millionaires, this picture begins well. McKeever—surely one of the few Irishmen to turn absentee landlordism to his own advantage—represents a bright idea on someone's part, and Victor Moore's eroded dignity and asthmatic diction fit the character to perfection. But someone else could not leave well alone and before it has time to blossom properly the bright idea is spoiled by the addition of about a dozen other characters—stereotypes with whom one has become only too painfully familiar over the years. The most dog-eared of these is the cantankerous but fundamentally good-hearted millionaire whose devotion to business has brought him nothing but domestic unhappiness and ulcers. There is also his divorced wife, in whose eyes the love-light still flickers bravely, but who has been eating her heart out alone in a miserable 25-roomed shack at Palm Beach. And there is (but inevitably!) the millionaire's wilful daughter who wants to be loved for herself alone and is scared stiff in case her Young Man (a homeless and penniless war veteran) will discover her rating on the social cash-register and turn her down. In addition to these three perennials (and the young man) there is the now familiar troupe of war veterans, plus wives and babies, all at the moment homeless and hard up but all full of big business ideas and ready for translation to the upper income bracket as soon as the millionaire has a change of heart.

It is fair to say that the picture has its bright interludes, but to the critical at least these will be interludes only and the story as a whole is an indigestible mixture of over-sweet sentiment, folksy philosophising by the McKeever, and