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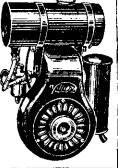
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Film Reviews by Jno.

The Cold War Grows Colder

THE IRON CURTAIN

(20th Century-Fox)

THE Iron Curtain has already won so many golden opinions from the Right, and caused so much significant disapproval on the Left, that I will probably please no one when I say that, in my opinion, the film is not so good as it might have been. Perhaps I should make it clear that I invariably react against obvious propaganda. If the radio tells me that I sweat and that therefore I should wash with So-and-so's soap, I will go to quite ridiculous lengths to avoid buy-ing Messrs. So-and-so's product. There has never been any secret about the propagandist nature of The Iron Curtain, and therefore I went along to see it full of Dangerous Thoughts and in a highly resistant frame of mind. I won't say that I emerged with my resistance quite unimpaired, but it was still working well enough to suggest that Hollywood had missed the really important point about the Gouzenko affair.

Igor Gouzenko, as the world now knows, was a Russian cipher-clerk assigned to highly confidential duties at the Soviet Legation in Ottawa, Early in 1946 he placed himself, his wife and child, and a file of highly explosive documents in the protective custody of the Canadian authorities. The immediate consequence of this was the uncovering of a substantial portion of the Soviet atomic spy-ring in Canada, and the indictment, trial, and imprisonment of a number of more or less eminent collaborators.

Now there are two ways in which this sensational piece of contemporary history can be treated. One can concentrate attention on the spies and the collaborators, or one can treat it as The Strange Case of the Absconding Cipher-Hollywood has, in the main, followed the first course. The result is strong but rather second-class propaganda which will no doubt scare seven bells out of those naive enough to believe that spying is carried out only by the Soviet (or that spying into atomic secrets is in some way not quite playing the game), but which a good many filmgoers will absorb much as they absorb the routine movie melodrama. in fact, rather negative propaganda, and tells us little more about the affair than we have already read in the newspapers.

A much more interesting story-and a much more positive kind of propaganda-might have been made from an examination of the motives which led Gouzenko to act as he did. This aspect of the case is not altogether neglected but it is handled so ineffectively that it is difficult to take it seriously. It is implied at various points in the story that Gouzenko deserted because Canada was, a more comfortable place to live in than Russia, because he found Canadian friendliness pleasant after the suspicious atmosphere of the Legation and the U.S.S.R. generally, because he managed to get a pleasant apartment to live in, because he was tired of being afraid. The last reason, which seems the strongest on paper, is in fact the weakest of the lot since Gouzenko is still so much afraid that he and his small family live

BAROMETER

FAIR: "The Iron Curtain."

OVERCAST: "Forever Amber."

under constant police surveillance. It is true that there is also a suggestion that he wanted his child to grow up in the free atmosphere of the democratic West, but this has become so much of a convention in American films (the curious will find it even in Forever Amber, q.v.) that it is scarcely admissible as evidence.

Yet there must have been some overpowering compulsion at work. One must remember that to be a cipherclerk Gouzenko must have been believed by his Government to be completely indoctrinated and completely trustworthy-the last person, in fact, to be shaken by a relatively brief contact with the decadent West. What made Gouzenko take the step he did? What, for that matter, made Madame Kasenkina take the jump she did? What lies behind the flight of Mikhail Samarin and his wife? These more recent events add immensely to the force of some of the scenes in The Iron Curtain-and some of the scenes certainly need such accidental emphasis to offset the inadequacy of the acting (Dana Andrews to earnestly acts the poker-faced Russian that at times he suggests rigor mortis): But the vital questions remain unanswered. Blood is thicker than vodka, and there is no doubt where most New Zealanders would stand if the cold war reached absolute zero, but Gouzenko was under no such senti-mental compulsion. Did he think too much, and so become an intellectual traitor? There is still time to ask him, if the Mounties haven't lost their man.

FOREVER AMBER

(20th Century-Fox)

IF I were Miss Lejeune-and what a lot more fun it would be for you-all if I were-I would be tempted to compress my reactions to Amber into the space of a brief couplet which I learned in infancy and which has somehow or other stuck in the sediment of my subconscious.* It is the refrain of one of the late Mr. Longfellow's lesserknown lyrics, about the solemn ticking of a grandfather clock, and runs (as \bar{I} would now punctuate it),

Forever? Never!
Never Forever.

I don't know how true to the original Kathleen Winsor the film is, since I haven't yet read the book (the Minister of Finance has the advantage of me in many ways these days). But those who anticipate a by-blow by by-blow description of a hussy's progress are likely to be disappointed. Amber is brought to bed once-apparently as the result of a kiss-but she does not make the same mistake twice (and the child is ultimately sent to Virginia to grow up in a decent political atmosphere). Nor can the acting be called outstanding. Linda Darnell has the now familiar facade of the hussy but her intellectual equipment does not obtrude to the same extent, and Cornel Wilde is forced to grow a three-day stubble to vary his facial expression. Even with the Great Plague and the Great Fire of London thrown in Forever Amber excels only as a soporific.