

Hath Not a Jew Eyes?

GENTLEMEN'S AGREEMENT
(20th Century-Fox)

I WOULD not call *Gentlemen's Agreement* an Almost Overwhelming Emotional Experience, or the Cinema at its Mightiest, or employ any other of a hundred hysterical labels which the American press has fastened on it. And I have been long enough steeped in disillusion to feel sure that the social content of the novel from which it was adapted weighed rather less with Mr. Darryl F. Zanuck than the fact that the novel had established itself as a best-seller. But whatever considerations led to the making of the film, and whatever success may be claimed for it as entertainment, it has one virtue which raises it from the ruck of Hollywood productions. It compels its audience to face one of the uglier facts of life—anti-semitism—by presenting it as a social and not a political issue.

I think it is of particular importance for us that the problem should be restated in its human terms. Many of us to-day find it difficult to sympathise wholeheartedly with the Jews, for a

number of reasons. The most elementary of these, of course, is that no ordinary human being has an inexhaustible supply of sympathy or compassion, and in most of us to-day after six years of war and three years of nerve-racking and unstable peace—the milk of human kindness is drying up. But a more immediate cause of the revulsion in our feelings is that we see the Jew not as the old symbol of oppressed mankind but as a militant political force. If British people to-day have hardened their hearts it is because they have seen their kinsmen murdered and their leaders threatened with the weapons of political terrorism: if to-day they do not react so violently to anti-semitism as they did in 1939 it is because they have seen two semitic peoples carry anti-semitism to the point of armed conflict in the Holy Land itself. Political developments, in fact, are confusing our thinking. We cannot see the fire for the smoke.

Gentlemen's Agreement is important so far as it reminds us that peace in Palestine will not mean the solution of the Jewish problem, in the old pre-war meaning of the term, so long as racial discrimination persists (as it does to

BAROMETER

FAIR TO FINE: "*Gentlemen's Agreement*."
MAINLY FAIR: "*The Street With No Name*."

some degree to-day) in every Western society. Palestine is far away, but there is anti-semitism next door—the anti-semitism of personal relationships and private conversations, which is no less corroding because it is casual. It is good for our souls to be reminded of this, for we can all do with a little mortification of the spirit occasionally.

But if I was impressed by the theme of the film, I was not so taken with the treatment. The screen story is rather too slickly written, too smoothly articulated with the love-interest to convince one that entertainment was not the primary consideration. The story, in brief, concerns a young magazine writer who is commissioned to write a series of articles on anti-semitism in polite society, where there is a "gentlemen's agreement" in force to keep Jews in their place. To see for himself what is going on he masquerades for some weeks as a Jew, and the effects of the masquerade upon him, upon his family and the girl with whom he is in love are nearly disastrous. The film, in fact, overdoes the special pleading to such an extent that I suspect some filmgoers


will go home feeling that it was fortunate that such a nice boy as Gregory Peck really wasn't a Jew, or he would not have managed to marry that sweet girl Dorothy Maguire. And these filmgoers, of course, are the very ones who are most in need of a sound punch on the spiritual solar plexus.

The acting of the principals is competent if not brilliant, and John Garfield, as a Jewish army officer, gives a sound performance, but the two who caught my eye were Celeste Holm, as a smart fashion editor who sounded like a member of Henry Wallace's Third Party, and Sam Jaffe who contributed an excellent thumbnail drypoint of a Jewish professor. *Gentlemen's Agreement*, however, would be worth seeing without them. It does try to get to grips with a problem, even if it can't hang on properly. I hope to be around when Mr. Zanuck screws his courage up far enough to tackle another racial problem—the filming of Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, or *Native Son* perhaps?

THE STREET WITH NO NAME

(20th Century-Fox)

CRIME may not pay in the United States, but it must be an expensive business convincing criminals of the truth of that old adage if *The Street With No Name* is as a true picture of the



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