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Film Review, by Jno.

A MACABRE AFFAIR

THE SORCERER

(Discina-Exclusive Films)

CHRISTIAN-JACQUE, who directed this film for Discina in 1944 (earnest students of the cinema may recognise it more readily under the title *Sor-ti-lèges*), belongs to the second flight of French directors, has a well-developed pictorial sense, is inclined to be weak in characterisation and superficial in his effects, and produces films which show fairly wide variation in quality. At least, that is as much as I had learned about him from casual reading, but until I saw *The Sorcerer* I knew nothing about him "of my own knowledge" as the legal phrase has it.

It was not difficult to discover evidence of the tendencies and characteristics I had read about, but on the other hand not easy to be sure that these did not obtrude because they were sought or expected. *The Sorcerer*, in spite of good acting by Lucien Coedel in the title-role, is little more than a melodramatic shocker, though possibly it might sound a little better in the original French. I was most disappointed, however, by the photography. My first impression was that since the film was made during the Occupation, the poor definition of most shots might be due to the indifferent quality of the film available at the time. A film camera-man with whom I discussed this point, however, was of the opinion that the poor reproduction was due to printing from a second duplicate negative. Whatever may have been the cause, it quite spoiled the effect of many scenes which appeared to have been carefully staged by camera-man and director. A good deal of the photography was merely clever, but there were moments which must originally have been both beautiful and dramatically effective.

The setting of the story is a French mountain village, the time a century ago (a safe remove from any French filmmaker working in 1944), and the theme embraces jealousy, superstition, witchcraft and murder. Properly handled, these elements might have made an arrestingly dramatic story, but an apparently irresistible pre-occupation with the macabre—blood dripping from a sacrificial pigeon, a frozen corpse staring glacé-eyed from a snowdrift, the sorcerer himself jerking like a marionette as he hangs by the neck in his blazing barn—overlays the whole with a thick dressing of *grand guignol* which is not likely to attract those who have supped their fill on subtler horrors. *The Sorcerer* was an interesting experience, but not an indispensable one.

SPRING IN PARK LANE

(London Films)

THOUGH they are immensely popular in Britain, the Anna Neagle-Herbert Wilcox films have in the past usually left me rather less than enthusiastic. During *The Courtneys of Curzon Street* I aged terribly, and I was

BAROMETER

FAIR: "Spring in Park Lane."

MAINLY FAIR: "The Sorcerer."

OVERCAST: "Miss Tatlock's Millions."

not unduly enthusiastic about the advent of *Spring in Park Lane*—there seemed to be something disturbingly familiar about the title. But I was quite delightfully mistaken. Of the three films which made up this week's stint—one French, one English, one American—the English production, unpretentious, artless, even trivial if you like, pleased me most. No doubt that was partly because I had not expected too much, but in the main *Spring in Park Lane* succeeds as entertainment because it uses the light touch excellently well.

It is, of course, the old familiar Wilcox stamping-ground. How pleasant to live in Park Lane! Everyone is well-heeled, or well-born, the young men are handsome, the women (or Anna Neagle, at least) are ever young and always beautiful, even Tom Walls has ripened to a rich old tawny mellowness. God's in his Heaven, the pound is at par, and you can almost hear the nightingales in Berkeley Square. It is all so innocuous (unless one happens to view it with a jaundiced socio-economic eye), and it could all be so ineffably boring if it were not handled properly.

I suspect that it would have been boring enough if it hadn't been for the good work of Nicholas Phipps who took the story by Alice Duer ("The White Cliffs of Dover") Miller and rewrote it for the screen. The rewriting was, I imagine, extensive, and it is surprisingly good. The dialogue is brisk, brightly-polished and well-handled—in particular by Michael Wilding whose performance as the Old Etonian turned footman has wit and grace as well as comedy to commend it. As for Anna Neagle's performance, it was as sweet and wholesome as might be expected of

(continued on next page)



ANNA NEAGLE

A respectful salute

N.Z. LISTENER, JULY 22, 1949.