

THE INNOCENT EYE

THE FALLEN IDOL

(Korda-London Films)

BAROMETER

FINE: "The Fallen Idol."
MAINLY FAIR: "Act of Violence."

SUBTLETY is a rare enough thing in the cinema, and so is that indefinable quality known as style. *The Fallen Idol* has both of these in full measure: subtlety of characterisation and plot; style in its direction, set decoration, and acting. The credit for all this goes to several people, but mostly to the director, Carol Reed, who seems here to have equalled his achievement in *Odd Man Out*. The others who help mould this into one of the most pleasing pictures to come out of a British studio are the principal actors, Sir Ralph Richardson and Bobby Henrey, and the script writer, Graham Greene.

Altogether it is a brilliant team, and one striking characteristic of the resulting product is its refinement: nearly everything is played in a minor key, and the most shattering emotional scenes are taken quietly and with restraint, as if the production was designed partly as an exhibition of perfect breeding and good manners under stress. This may have been carried a little too far, since much of the dialogue is spoken in a tone little above a whisper (that was my impression anyway) and it requires considerable concentration to follow all that is going on. One theory is that this is a device intended to convey the impression of a child living in an adult world, who can't hear very well from the level of the table legs.

The scene is a foreign embassy in London. The ambassador and his wife are away for the week-end, leaving their son Felipe, played by eight-year-old Bobby Henrey, in the care of the butler, Baines (Sir Ralph Richardson) and his wife (Sonia Dresdel). The boy idolises Baines, who loves him with a fatherly instinct in return. He takes him for walks, tells him tall tales of how he fought the blacks in Africa, and protects him from the spiteful attacks of the virago-like Mrs. Baines. When she attempts to destroy his pet, a live grass snake, Baines is his friend and protector. The snake is a clever inspiration, although it was not (like the embassy setting, the trick ending, and a few other things) in the original short story *The Basement Room* from which the film is taken. But it is a typical product of Graham Greene's imagination, symbolising perhaps the nascent evil in the boy's make-up, which is brought out through his contact with an adult world. This hint of the corruption that seems to come inevitably in the process of growing up is again foreshadowed by the sticky, fly-specked cakes in the tea-shop window (another familiar Greene image) which he sees just before discovering Baines out with his girl-friend—his "niece" as he calls her in his first deceit, obvious to the audience, but not as yet to the guileless boy.

Soon, however, the innocent eye of childhood—through which the whole action of the film is seen—becomes clouded. It clears (or rather, attains a new focus) only with the realisation that Baines, though still lovable, is really a bit of a fraud. Of course the hidden

moral of the film is that, by the standards of innocence, we all have feet of clay. This is brought out by various small touches: the implacable police inspector (Denis O'Dea, in a role similar to the one he played in *Odd Man Out*) won't give his watch to the boy to play with; the ambassador unexpectedly turns out to be known to a prostitute who has just been picked up at the police station, and so on.

In the climactic tangle of emotion, lies, and suspected criminality—in which Mrs. Baines is killed during a night of escapade at the empty embassy, and Felipe runs wildly through the dark London streets in his pyjamas and is rescued by a kindly policeman—the boy's moral vision becomes so distorted through his bewildered half-knowledge of the events into which he has been thrown that his love for the butler, and the lies by which he tries to save him, almost cause Baines to be arrested for a murder he did not commit. By a clever twist Baines is finally cleared on evidence that is false, but which only the boy knows to be so. Although he tries to explain this to the inspector in the long, skilfully built-up suspense sequence which ends the film, and finally does tell him, he is not believed because his previous lies have made nothing he says seem credible. This ending—in fact, the whole screen play—is a subtly worked out *tour de force* wholly worthy of a writer of Greene's stature.

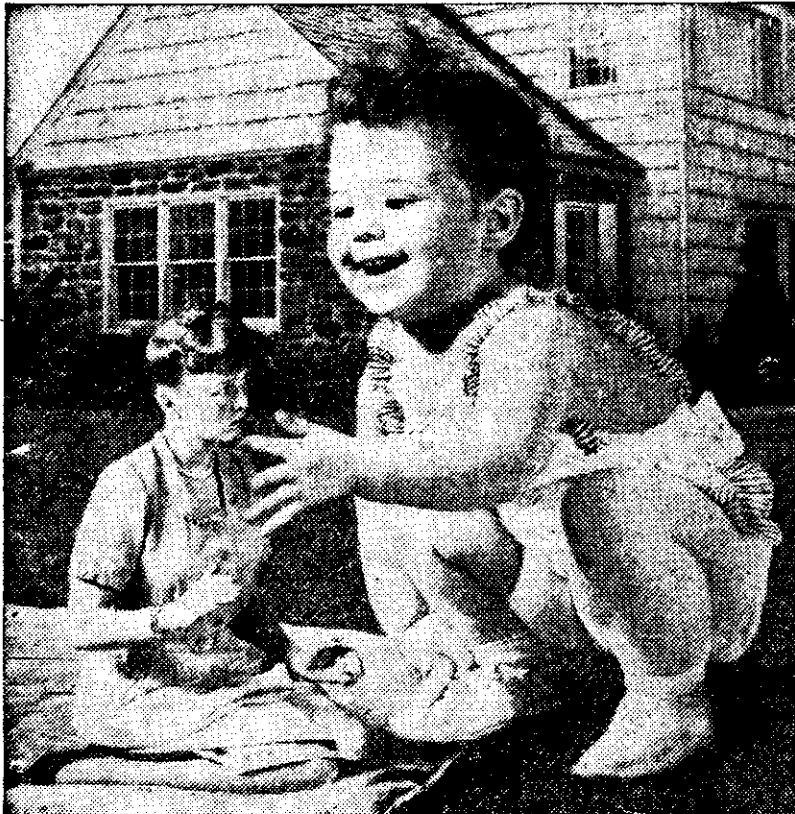
Finally, the acting of Bobby Henrey is outstanding, and would alone make *The Fallen Idol* worth going a long way to see. His naturalness, the unselfconscious charm of childhood that he recreates under Carol Reed's guidance, when combined with the precision timing and poise of Richardson, and the satisfying portrayals of Michele Morgan and the other members of the cast, results in a rounded excellence of performance rarely seen. There is plenty of humour in the film too, notably at the expense of the Englishman pompously and unnecessarily trying to make himself understood in bad French. Indeed there is a piquant Continental flavour about the picture that gives it an unusual and refreshing slant: *The Fallen Idol* is a three-dimensional production that can be fruitfully explored at different levels and at successive sittings.

ACT OF VIOLENCE

(M.G.M.)

THIS is a gangster film of a type that the Americans sometimes do well. It is essentially a story of the hunter (Robert Ryan) and the hunted (Van Heflin), but told with a softer note and with a little more care in filling in the background than is usual. The inexorable pursuit of the killer, and the frenzied attempts at escape by his victim, are depicted through skilful photography and editing—and with a minimum of violence.

N.Z. LISTENER, AUGUST 26, 1949.



"Hey, Mum...
where's that big smile?"



BABY: What a gloom-puss, Mum! Mean to say you don't enjoy being me for a day?

MUM: Enjoy, nothing! Maybe it's the hot weather, or the wriggling around, but my skin's so uncomfortable I could roar. Do all babies feel this miserable?

BABY: Here's one that does, Mum. And it's your fault. Why don't you do like other mothers do and protect my poor helpless skin with nice Johnson's Baby Cream and Johnson's Baby Powder?

MUM: Uh... well... guess I did slip up, honey. Give me another chance?

BABY: Two chances, Mum! One—to keep me smoothed up with pure, gentle Johnson's Baby Cream. After my bath—and at every diaper change, to help prevent what doctor calls "urine irritation"...

MUM: No sooner said than done, lamb. And then!

BABY: Two—don't forget that a warm weather baby like me needs plenty of Johnson's Baby Powder between baths. Nice cool sprinkles of it, to help keep heat rash away!



MUM: Honey let's go back to being ourselves—go get some Johnson's—and turn on two big grins!

Safe for Baby—Safe for You

Johnson's Baby Powder
Johnson's Baby Cream
Johnson's Baby Soap

Johnson & Johnson
(NEW ZEALAND) LIMITED



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