

# THREE JEKYLLS, THREE HYDES

## Screen Career of a Classic

THE screen career of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde could provide an interesting case-history for a social historian of the future (or even of the present).

In the various methods used to present Robert Louis Stevenson's classic story in film form he would find a record of the growing sophistication of the cinema and its audiences. There have been at least three film versions (and possibly more)—one in 1920, starring John Barrymore; one in 1932, starring Frederic March; and now, in 1942, the Dr. Jekyll to end all Hydes, with Spencer Tracy as the luckless Harley Street physician who dabbled with the Unknown, thereby bringing upon himself a much worse fate than that of merely defying the B.M.A. Our social historian would find that, whereas the first film of those mentioned was almost wholly content to play upon the simple emotion of horror, the second, though still chiefly concerned to make us shudder, was also interested in making us think, while the third (the version just released) has gone almost exclu-



BARRYMORE, MARCH, AND TRACY AS MR. HYDE  
A toadstool, an anthropoid ape, and a by-product of Freud.

TRACY AS DR. JEKYLL  
The authorised version

sively psychological. With his attendant complexes, neuroses, repressions, and inhibitions, Freud is now enthroned in place of Hecate. Even the theatre advertisements inform us that "the most fascinating film in years has got the whole

town examining its 'sub-conscious.' So, presumably, does this twentieth century grow up!

THIS new Dr. Jekyll is a most pretentious piece of work, befitting the traditional lavishness of M.G.M., an all-star cast, and the direction of Victor (Gone With the Wind) Fleming—but give me the more straightforward, 1932-vintage version every time. March is the man for me, not Tracy. And this is not, I think, just a case of rosininess in retrospect, of remembered pleasures being sweeter than those just savoured. I am aware (though it is so long since I read it that my memory is open to correction) that Stevenson conceived his original tale less as a lurid shocker than as a parable of degeneration on the spiritual plane; but I shall still argue that, through the simple medium of the screen, the piece is best played for its sheer physical horror.

Do we get horror here? Not, I submit, as we should. When the daring doctor swigs the fizzy brew which will bring out all the worst in him and transform him into the vile Mr. Hyde, we are treated to a most impressive display of montage shots and camera tricks which are supposed to symbolise all the frightful Freudian things that are happening to his soul (or maybe it's his sub-conscious). Here's a lily, and that's for purity, but it gets swamped in primeval mud; and then the pure manifestation of the lily-like Lana Turner (who plays Dr. Jekyll's innocent fiancée) is obscured by his lustful vision of Ingrid Bergman as the desirable barmaid (they both looked equally desirable to me). But hold, what is this—a lion rampant? And that, my dears, is to symbolise the Beast in Man. What now — is this an hour-glass that I see before me? In case you don't know, it's supposed to represent Dr. Jekyll's frustration. And here he is in a chariot whipping along a couple of scantily-clothed dames where the horses should be: and now you realise that he's a sadist at heart. Finally, a whole welter of lilies, lions, luscious lasses, and mud. Well, I don't know. It is interesting enough the first time, but apt to be boring as an encore. And of course it's the whole point of the

story that Dr. Jekyll can't let well alone; he has to go on swigging down his devil's brew until at last his evil self gets the upper hand without scientific encouragement. And nearly every time it happens we get the full Freudian cycle and Victor Fleming's ever-so-clever camera-work. Now Mr. March, he just gave us gasps and groans and throat-clutching writhings; and being a simple soul, I found them much more terrifying.

And while I'm at it, let me say that I couldn't get much of a kick out of Mr. Tracy in make-up addressing long discourses on sin to his other self in the mirror, nor hearing him cackling fiendish "hee, hee, hees" in the best style of the Old-Time Theatyr.

IN their wisdom M.G.M. have decided that the purposes of publicity and the box-office can best be served by withholding the horrific spectacle of Spencer Tracy as Mr. Hyde until you have actually paid for your seat. Consequently, on their posters and "still" photographs only the benign countenance of Dr. Spencer Jekyll will be found. Nevertheless I am able (I might say at enormous trouble and expense, but actually it is by courtesy of Time) to present on this page the portraits of the three screen Hydes; and I do so because — though the reproduction is by no means perfect—I think they illustrate my point about horror taking a back seat to psychology. There's John Barrymore looking like a cross between the Hunchback of Notre Dame and a toadstool; there's Frederic March looking like an anthropoid ape; and there's Spencer Tracy looking like — well, not unlike Spencer Tracy. His metamorphosis is more mental than physical; and while I take off my hat to the director and cameramen who have enabled him to change so miraculously before our very eyes, I couldn't help wondering, for instance, why the barmaid didn't immediately recognise her beloved doctor in the monster who was tormenting her.

SPEAKING of the barmaid, it was interesting to find that Ingrid Bergman, who hitherto has mostly played pure, (Continued on next page)

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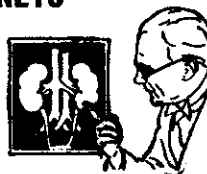
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