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## Film Reviews by G.M.

# TWO RUSSIANS AND TWO OTHERS

*[I]t isn't likely that the Russians are now pinning much faith to the possibility that the Nazi regime will be overthrown by a Communist revolution inside Germany, but that they were still thinking along those lines not so very long ago is shown by two Soviet films, "The Oppenheim Family," and "Concentration Camp," which I saw at a preview recently. In both cases, underground opposition to the Nazis within the Reich is the theme.*

## THE OPPENHEIM FAMILY (Mosfilm)

*[I]f you saw Professor Marnlock, you have pretty well seen *The Oppenheim Family*. Which isn't to say that it is not worth seeing, but you will at least know what to expect — the gradual decay of decent standards within Germany, the mounting boldness of the Nazis, the spread of the slow poison of racial hatred which finally destroys some of the country's greatest benefactors, the men of science and culture who have made the mistake of being born Jews. Concurrently, there is the organisation of revolt against the Government by the Communists; all this being portrayed with ruthless realism and considerable dramatic art by one of those casts of talented character-types which Soviet producers know so well how to assemble. When a Soviet producer makes a film about Nazis, Jews and Communists, the Nazis certainly look like Nazis, the Jews are unmistakably Jewish, and this being so we may assume that the Communists resemble Communists. The propaganda is similarly clear-cut black and white. Indeed, as a friend remarked to me after the preview, in these Russian films they aren't merely content to cut you open and ram the propaganda inside, they practically crawl in after it and poke it into the corners!*

However, *The Oppenheim Family* is not as naive in its propaganda as some of its type, and for this reason perhaps I found it interesting if not exactly joyful entertainment. The reaction and revolt against the Nazi tyranny which it

depicts takes place as much in the intellectual sphere as in the physical. There is the heroic Communist chauffeur who organises active revolt and sabotage and gets beaten up for his pains; but there is also the quiet, intellectual student who dies by his own hand rather than retract what he knows to be the truth. And there are the Jewish doctors who go on quietly doing their job until the Nazis crash into the clinic and pack them off to concentration camps. You feel that the director wants you to believe that the chauffeur and his fellow party-members played the nobler and more useful part, and that the student who insisted that the Germanic hero, Arminius, was more of a barbarian than a demi-god would have been better employed making bombs than writing a thesis in defiance of the Nazis. But in spite of the director it doesn't quite seem to work out that way.

## CONCENTRATION CAMP (Mosfilm)

*[I]n this film, considerations of whether spiritual defiance is more potent than physical opposition don't seem to have bothered the director. He takes a much more simple and direct approach and is all for a mass strike of the workers as a weapon against Hitlerism, working up to a grand climax in a German munition factory when the employees down tools and in serried ranks raise their left fists in the Communist salute. He doesn't show what happens when the troops arrive with machine-guns and you can't help feeling that he may have been a trifle optimistic.*

Nevertheless it's a stirring finale for what is otherwise a rather dreary, slow-moving record of Nazi brutality—dreary that is, from the viewpoint of the person who goes to the movies to be entertained and not preached at or harrowed. The story follows the familiar course of the rise of Hitlerism, with a good deal of propaganda on the side to show that it all might have been different if the Social-Democrats had not been so stupid as to disagree with the Communists and reject their leadership in a United Front against Fascism.

There are, indeed, some rather long-winded and painstaking arguments on this very point; very absorbing, I have no doubt, to the Russian audiences for whom the film was specifically intended, but even with the finest sub-titles in English (and those in *Concentration Camp* and *The Oppenheim Family* are pretty good) it wouldn't be exactly easy to follow a debate on Marxian dialectics. And the effect of hearing a character on the screen speaking in voluble Russian for about half a minute and then seeing it all put into one line of English translation is curious.

However, *Concentration Camp* has some good moments — some very grim and some very exciting. The grimmest are those in the concentration camp; and most of the exciting action occurs when several of the prisoners make a break-away, and one of them succeeds in eluding his pursuers and, having gone underground again, organises that strike of the munition workers which I mentioned at the beginning.

And here, as in *The Oppenheim Family*, one is constantly struck with admiration of the casting: nearly everybody in the film, even in the smallest part, is an artist.

## THE MAN WHO RETURNED TO LIFE (Columbia)

*[N]O, not Dracula or even Frankenstein, but just John Howard, as a Northerner in a Southern town who gets mixed up with a low clan called the Beebys and, after having survived a false charge of murder, has to disappear in order to escape lynching. He turns up again in order to prove that the worst of the Beebys didn't murder him — though he did murder somebody else by mistake. Just a routine melodrama, but at least it has a story to tell.*

## MARTIN EDEN (Columbia)

*[T]HIS also has a story to tell — all about mutiny on the high seas, "coffin ships," a tough young sailor who wants to be a famous author, the girl who helps him, and the other people who get in his way. Jack London is credited with the original story, and one can well believe it. There's nothing niggardly or half-hearted about either the plot or the fights which take place at fairly regular intervals. And the presence in the cast of Claire Trevor is one other good reason why you might do quite a lot worse than go adventuring with Martin Eden, especially if there's something worth seeing in the first half.*



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