


True to Life—or True to Hollywood?

THE WAR AGAINST MRS. HADLEY

(M.G.M.)

 IN some advertisements, this film is presented as the successor to *Mrs. Miniver*. I should have much preferred myself that the lady had passed away intestate and without issue, but success in the film world never fails to encourage the imitators and emulators, and from now on we may expect a whole crop of minor *Minivers*. Mrs. Hadley, I know, is being accepted in many quarters with such emotional fervour and acclaim that the floor of the theatre is almost awash with tears, but in my opinion, she is just a very distant American connection whose only kinship with her illustrious English cousin lies in the fact that she originated in the same studio, belongs to the same rich, leisured minority, and finds herself in a similar situation of being suddenly called on to face up to war. In her reactions she is I trust, less typical of American womanhood than Mrs. Miniver was typical of English.

IT is unfortunate, really, that the comparison ever arose, but since the film people themselves have brought it up, let us examine further Mrs. Hadley's claim to Mrs. Miniver's high estate. My own enthusiastic support of the latter was based mainly on this: that the film did attempt to depict "the natural behaviour of ordinary people in the catastrophic situation," and, despite some faults, did it exceedingly well. But whereas Mrs. M. was notable for its restraint and good taste, Mrs. H. is chiefly notorious for the fact that it drips with phoney emotion and sentimentality. (As a friend remarked to me, in that scene where Mrs. Hadley meets Mrs. Winters, you almost expect to see the treacle oozing out from under the sofa!) And are the characters of the new film ordinary people, and is their behaviour natural? Not on your life. On the contrary, I would say that they are stereotyped puppets who behave in a conventional way when the director and script-writers pull the strings. Their behaviour is, of course, "natural" to this extent: it conforms perfectly to the orthodox, artificial pattern which Hollywood has established, and which many people have come to accept as being "true to life."

THE *War Against Mrs. Hadley* might be described as the perfect pigeon-hole picture. The acting is good, the production polished, but nearly every character, nearly every situation, has been drawn from very old stock. The people in it are as much strangled by Hollywood tradition as any Englishman by an old school tie. There is no element of surprise: you know (from experience of a hundred other films), exactly what will happen long before it does. When the rich, widowed Mrs. Hadley (Fay Bainter) behaves with utter selfishness because her comfortable

life has been upset by the war, you can rest assured that eventually she will have a sudden change of heart and become a very model of patriotism. And when her son (Richard Ney), carries on like a spoilt brat, you know that he is destined to become a hero. It is as inevitable that Mrs. Hadley will finally marry the Old Family Friend (Edward Arnold)

with whom she has quarrelled, as it is that Mrs. Hadley's daughter (Jean Rogers), will marry a common soldier, and that Mother's outraged pride will completely melt with the advent of a grandchild.

IS it "natural" that husbands (even modern, young husbands), should always be taken completely by surprise when their wives coyly announce that they are about to become fathers?

Is it "natural" for sisters always to be so indulgent and emotional towards drunken, weak-willed brothers?

Is it "natural" for two mothers to pile on the agony as they do in that dreadful scene on the sofa? (It is at any rate natural, I hope, for the unfortunate on-

looker in the audience to feel acutely embarrassed).

BUT go and see *The War Against Mrs. Hadley* and answer those questions for yourself. You may even decide that they are questions not worth raising; for you may have accepted the Hollywood pattern of behaviour so completely for your purpose of entertainment that you will find nothing in the film to irritate you and a great deal to please you. But in the cause of realistic thinking and common sense, I believe it is time we declared war against Mrs. Hadley and all her phoney tribe, and besieged the ivory towers in which they dwell. Any volunteers for a forlorn hope?



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