



LEFT: Jane Wyman and Dennis Morgan in "The Lady Takes a Sailor" — "the divine spark is struck as the result of a purely accidental encounter"

there were a fair number in which the main characters were married, engaged, or already in love when the story opened. Leaving these out of account, we find that 73 per cent of all the films examined dealt specifically with the topic of boy meeting girl and falling in love. In breaking down the data on the films showing romances between the leading characters, I have divided them into cases of "Love At First Sight" (L.A.F.S.) and "Love As a Growth" (L.A.G.).

"Whoever lov'd that lov'd not at first sight?" asks Phebe in *As You Like It*. Clearly the average film scenario-writer would agree with her. For in 68 per cent (more than two-thirds) of the films affected—British and American combined—it is a case of love at first sight, if not at first glimpse. Let it also be frankly recognised that, for "love," it would frequently be more appropriate to read "lust." This is inevitable in a prevailing atmosphere, by no means confined to the cinema, where men and women are adjudged attractive, and suitable as mates, almost solely on the basis of their sexual allure, with emphasis on physical details in close-up.

The most frequently-encountered formula is for the girl to be kissed by the boy at their first meeting. Thereupon conflict is likely to develop; and a case of L.A.F.S. can almost invariably be diagnosed from the bickering and bad manners (love at first slight?) which accompany the unfolding of the romance. Characters in American films show a greater tendency towards hair-trigger romantic reaction than British ones—the comparative L.A.F.S. figures for films from the two countries are 70 per cent and 55 per cent.

So we come to the films in which love is depicted as a growth, or gradual development, arising from frequent meetings and propinquity—stories in which perhaps the hero and heroine have grown up together and belong to the same social group, or have been thrown much into one another's company at work or in recreation. This is probably the usual pattern in real life. In films with situations of this type, we find again that British characters are slower to succumb than are American characters. In the total of all romantic meetings involving heroes and heroines, the percentage of cases of L.A.G. is 32 per cent, as against 68 per cent of L.A.F.S.; but the comparative figures for American and British heroines to whom "love is a growth" are 30 per cent for Hollywood, and 45 per cent for British films.

It is possible to probe a little deeper still into the private lives of movie heroes and heroines. As I have said, love at first sight can be love at first glimpse, in which case it is classifiable as "L.A.F.S.-extreme." However, love may dawn as a result of only two or three meetings, and still be accurately described as a case of "L.A.F.S.-delayed." On this basis the figures for the films of Britain and America combined, within the L.A.F.S. pattern, are 68 per cent "extreme" and 32 per cent "delayed." Seventy per cent of American cases are "extreme" as against 56 per cent in which British characters went

BOY MEETS GIRL—on the Screen

THIS is a serious subject, although it is more often than not treated as a joke. Indeed, it is difficult not to ridicule the manner in which the topic of meeting and mating is so frequently portrayed on the screen. Yet the patterns of behaviour and the standards of value which the movies present as normal and acceptable in courtship, marriage, and boy-girl relationships generally may be likely to have a deep influence, on real life—largely for the very reason that these patterns are so remote from reality.

The 1950 Report of the Departmental Committee in Great Britain on Children and the Cinema puts it like this:

The most dangerous aspect of bad films, from the children's point of view, is the repetition and glorification of false patterns of life. . . . Less harm is done by crime films, or even sexually suggestive films, than by films which depict life as grossly different from what it is. . . . It stands to reason that the moral values, social habits and standards that are dinned into the public by film after film, must make a mark if only by repetition.

Assuming this viewpoint to be correct, and that the reiteration of patterns of screen behaviour does have some effect on the outlook of susceptible picturegoers, particularly juveniles—who lack the experience and knowledge of life which can enable them to recognise the artificiality of much screen "realism" and put it into proper perspective—exactly what sort of guide does the cinema offer to young people

with reference to the circumstances in which they are likely to choose their life-partners, and the way in which they should behave towards one another? And secondly, supposing that they do not meet the right person or do not, for some reason, choose to marry, will the cinema give them any reason to believe they are not abnormal in this? In other words, to what extent is life without "exciting" love regarded as worth living?

Almost anybody who sees even a few films could give answers in fairly general terms to those questions. Yet to talk vaguely about the "average film" is now not enough. Having the official opportunity as Censor to see all films, and being interested in carrying out unofficial but fairly intensive research into the content of the motion-picture and its trends, I believe I am in a position—perhaps for the first time—to answer the above questions precisely, and even with statistical accuracy. I would suggest that, as a basis for any attempt to assess the real influence of the cinema, it is essential to know these answers.

For the purpose of this survey, I have taken 300 feature films from America and Great Britain which came into this country two or three years ago—not a selected sample of British and American films, but all those imported here over a period of about nine months. In a way it is a pity that they are not new films. Yet any influence they exerted

A survey of screen behaviour, based on an examination of 300 feature films, by the N.Z. Government Film Censor, GORDON MIRAMS

could still be relevant, while they are far enough out of date to be unlikely to cause embarrassment by being cited. I would add that recent observation does not suggest any appreciable variation in the patterns revealed by analysis of these 300 films.

Let us dispose of the second question first: to what extent is a romantic interest deemed essential for a screenplay? In the 300 features—250 American, 50 British—under survey, only 48 (or 16 per cent) contained no love element involving the leading male and female characters—for our purpose let us call them "hero" and "heroine." Other characters, even villains, do often lead love-lives of their own; yet when it is a question of social influence through conscious or unconscious emulation, it is obviously the heroes and heroines who are by long odds most important. There is almost no difference in the comparative percentages for American and British films in this regard; but account should be taken of the fact that the 250 Hollywood films included 60 Westerns—a type of entertainment which, largely because of its appeal to small boys, is traditionally less interested in love-making than other types.

Among the 84 per cent of all films which contained some love element,