

Meet Inspector Poole

AN INSPECTOR CALLS

(London Films-Watergate)

THOUGH J. B. Priestley's play *An Inspector Calls* has become well known in this country, especially since a BBC radio adaptation was broadcast a few years ago, I had always missed it till it turned up in this film version directed by Guy Hamilton. I must say that I found it an absorbing piece of work, and now that I have read the play as well I can add that it's a very fair translation of the original.

The story concerns the aftermath of a dinner party at the home of an English industrialist named Birling. The occasion is the engagement of his daughter to a young man whose family is a bit above the Birlings. Others present include Mrs. Birling and a slightly drunken son. Birling is smugly prophesying a coming knighthood when Inspector Poole arrives with news that a young woman has died from poisoning. For the rest of the play he is busy finding the points at which the girl crossed the path of members of the dinner party, who all in one way or another let her down. At the end there's a brief airing for one of Mr. Priestley's metaphysical ideas, which in the film is given an additional theatrical twist.

The whole action of the play takes place in the Birlings' dining room in the one evening, and the dead girl, Eva Smith, is never seen. The film makes her one of the most important members of the cast, bringing the play's conversation about her vividly to life in some of the most effective flashbacks I've seen for a long time. Mr. Hamilton showed in *The Intruder* that he could get away with extravagant use of this much-criticised device, and here he has refined his technique. The best of his ventures into the past are quite brilliant and cut most skilfully into the rest of the film. The one catch is that now we must believe that the Inspector was speaking all the time of the same girl, while Mr. Priestley, I imagine, meant us to understand that it was the responsibility of each participant to behave like a human being even if his encounter were not part of a cumulative individual tragedy.

An Inspector Calls has an exceptionally good and balanced cast. Many of

BAROMETER

FAIR TO FINE: "An Inspector Calls."
MAINLY FAIR: "Blowing Wild."
OVERCAST: "The Creature from the Black Lagoon."

the players will be new to most of us, and among these none is better than Jane Wenham, who gives a fresh and touching performance as Eva Smith. There will be argument about the fitness of Alastair Sim for the part of the Inspector, but he seems to me to do a very good job. He isn't quite the Poole (it was Goole, anyway) of the play, but he is for all that a very effective Inspector whose occasional grim smile is not out of place.

I don't quite know why Mr. Priestley set his play in 1912. Of course, he could really "go to town" on social distinctions in a story set so long ago, for no doubt we have come some distance since then. But if social distinctions aren't what they were, the smug and unimaginative are still with us—which is something we might overlook if we think of *An Inspector Calls* as a period piece. It isn't really that at all.

BLOWING WILD

(Warner Brothers)

A SOLEMN, purposeful, incorruptible Gary Cooper, a haunting theme song by Dimitri Tiomkin (sung by Frankie Laine), and sun-baked locations might remind a few people of *High Noon* when *Blowing Wild* opens. Well, this is far from being another *High Noon*, but for all that it's in places a quite diverting piece. The problem here is whether to pay the local bandits or fight them for the right to win oil in their territory, and there's plenty of fighting and other forms of action, including an exciting drive with a truckload of nitro-glycerine—with the bandits, of course, in trigger-happy pursuit. Mr. Cooper has already lost his round with the bandits when he runs into an old friend (Anthony Quinn), who is married to another old friend (Barbara Stanwyck). As always, Mr. Quinn is worth watching, whether loving or fighting, and Miss Stanwyck makes an interesting study of a certain kind of woman in love. Less interesting but very easy on the eye is Ruth Roman, the other woman, who only sits and waits.

THE CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON

(Universal-International)

THE semi-documentary opening of this new horror film was, I felt sure, intended to win a suspension of disbelief in something really overpowering to come, but once fully revealed the Creature was, after all, disappointingly human. Maybe I was feeling tired, but I couldn't help suspecting that here was just another refugee from the McCarthy Committee who had fled all the way to the Upper Amazon to make his reappraisal, and there had grown a really thick skin and wicked paw against the day of his return. All the same, this is no stuff for the children.

Pictorial Parade

THE National Film Unit's Pictorial Parade No. 30, released on December 10, includes a glimpse of the people who make up a Hawke's Bay shearing gang, a reminder of holiday fire dangers, and a view of skilled immigrant glassblowers making lightshades and other glassware for New Zealand homes.

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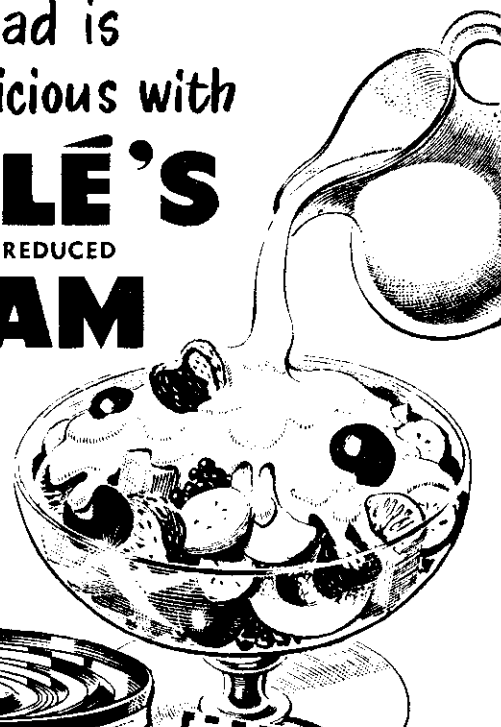
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An occasional grim smile