

Mr. Greene Goes to Venice

THE STRANGER'S HAND

(John Stafford-London Films)

FLY a small boy from England to Italy for his holidays and let his father be kidnapped, for political reasons, while the child waits for him in a hotel bedroom and you have, shall we say, a situation of some human interest. For *The Stranger's Hand* this one was worked out by Graham Greene and it has besides two other big names from *The Third Man*: Trevor Howard is the kidnapped father and Alida Valli a typist at the hotel who helps the boy to look for him.

Venice is the setting and Venice through the camera's eye is alone enough to half-win my submission—Venice after dark especially, lit like the Vienna of Holly Martins, with an atmosphere that is haunting and right. In it the beautiful Miss Valli (here directed by Mario Soldati, who discovered her) is, of course, completely at home. She's a refugee and, trying to forget the past, she can wish aloud she had never met the child, but knows she will help him when all she wants is to go off and meet her American boy friend, Joe Hamstring. And Joe (Richard Basehart), who curses the boy when he spoils their date, later risks his life to help him.



EDUARDO CIANNELLI
"He brings to the film that something extra"

The characters, you see, are roundly (greyly?) human, not a conventional, consistent black or white—even the vil-

lains, or one at any rate, a doctor (Eduardo Ciannelli), who is serving the kidnappers with hypodermic and drugs. An unforgettable character wonderfully realised, he conveys all the poignancy of the humane, kindly man whose devotion to an ideology obliges him to act inhumanly; and more than anyone else he brings to the film that something extra that we expect in a Graham Greene "entertainment." When, by accident, he finds the boy in the street, hears his story and buys him an ice cream, the scene between them as they sit and talk in an open-air cafe is both moving and terrible. Trevor Howard gives another of his flawless performances (he is certainly among the actors I most admire), and young Richard O'Sullivan is completely convincing as the sad-eyed boy, alone or almost so, in a strange city and a stranger grown-up world. As a thriller *The Stranger's Hand* is occasionally a little slow, but its other merits make up for that, and after seeing it twice I can vouch for its power to take hold of you and not let go.

THE STREET HAS MANY DREAMS

(Lux Films)

[F *Four Steps in the Clouds* was anything to judge by, Italian film-makers can combine humour and pathos as well

BAROMETER

FINE: "The Stranger's Hand."
FAIR TO FINE: "The Street Has Many Dreams."
FAIR: "Passage Home."

as anyone. *The Street Has Many Dreams* is not as good as *Four Steps*, but it has the same flavour—apparently both were written by Piero Tellini. Like *Four Steps*, in less capable hands all round it might have turned out sentimental and bathetic, and its dénouement might easily have seemed contrived. Writing of another piece by its director, Mario Camerini, a critic has mentioned his fondness for the end with a note of pardon and sober hope that is never mere sentimentality, and that describes well the end of this one.

Nagged into desperation by his wife (Anna Magnani) because he can't find a job, Paolo (Massimo Girotti) is persuaded by an acquaintance to steal a car. On his way to the country to make a deal with a "fence," his wife and little son (Giorgio Nimmo) intercept them and join the party. Much of the action takes place in the countryside. There's one of those wonderful farmhouse family gatherings, for a christening, and at first unaware that Paolo is in the shadow of prison, his wife and the boy go on to make a picnic day of it. Besides these idyllic passages, which the score beautifully underlines, there is plenty of excitement; and there's much humour in the wife's impetuous, talkative, near disastrous efforts to do the right thing. Miss Magnani is excellent, yet never steals the show, for none of the players is ever less than highly capable. The score is by Nino Rota (who also wrote the haunting music for *The Stranger's Hand*), and the photography by Aldo Tonti—two people whose work I praised a fortnight ago. This is a warm, compassionate film; aware of human frailty, it has too much heart to judge harshly.

PASSAGE HOME

(Rank-Group Films)

PASSAGE HOME is one of those English films that begins with a good idea, is competent, well-acted and up to a point interesting—but a bit disappointing. On a cargo ship bound from South America to England in the depression years the food is bad, the crew dissatisfied, the captain unreasonably harsh; but the real complication is a passenger, a young, attractive governess whom the captain decides should marry him. This tense complex of relationship is worked up convincingly through several crises. Then a storm breaks and the situation is treated so conventionally that I'm afraid I began to lose interest. Fortunately, the director, Roy Baker, gets some sort of grip on his material again before the end. Peter Finch gives a satisfying depth to the tense, lonely captain, both on the voyage and years afterwards—for the story is told in flashback; and Diane Cilento, an attractive newcomer, makes a promising start as the girl. Geoffrey Keen and Bryan Forbes are among a number of others who play interesting parts well.



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