

Collapse of an Empire

THE pricking of the bubble of J. Arthur Rank's film empire, which became apparent with the publication the other week of his annual financial statement, was not a great surprise to those who had been following the course of events in recent years. In 1945 the *New Statesman* had remarked that the real power of the Rank combine rested upon its control of the distributing and exhibiting end of the industry, with little capital invested in the production side, from which at any moment it might withdraw, leaving a vacuum which could only be filled by "American financed companies making cheap films." On the surface this gloomy prophesy seems to have been very close to the mark. Rank has said that he will keep his studios at Pinewood and Denham going only until next June, after which they will either close down or "produce a limited number of films making use of the joint resources of our group and a number of American companies."

During 1948 and 1949, of course, matters had gone from bad to worse with

his empire. Three and a-half million pounds were lost on the films he produced, a sum which a box-office slump had prevented his 556 theatres from satisfactorily recouping. The industry languished generally, with thousands of technicians becoming unemployed, and several of the main studios becoming idle. "This crisis," said the *New Statesman*, "was to be expected. The film industry is now paying the price for mismanagement, extravagance, and for the monopoly which Mr. Rank was permitted to build up during and after the war. He made two expensive gambles. First, he made costly prestige films in the hope of breaking into the American market. Secondly, when the Dalton tax (requiring British exhibitors to show 40 per cent British features) cut off the supply of imported films for several months, he over-extended his resources, technically and financially, in the effort to produce more British films. Both gambles failed."

But another reason for Rank's failure was that several of his best production teams—Carol Reed, Powell and Pressburger, Launder and Gilliat—had gone

over to the rising Korda organisation. And it is in this direction—that of the independent producer—that one must now apparently look for the maintenance of the prestige that the British film industry attained in the post-war years. Gavin Lambert, in the latest issue of *Sight and Sound*, points to the recent co-operation between Korda and David Selznick, which has resulted in the production of *The Third Man* and *Gone with the Wind*, both expensive films, but with an assured American market to help pay for them.

"Perhaps disaster will be avoided for the moment by Anglo-American production," he says, "but as a permanent solution this is hardly satisfactory. It would be more encouraging to see a company with such resources experimenting in the production of good films on a low budget instead of covering expenses with American aid. The need for really independent activity—film-making that is not beholden to any executive power, whether it be of production, distribution, or the unions—is now more urgent than ever." But since the existing independents are already being financed in part by the Government, the question of State Control is also being raised. Whatever does happen, it is certain that nothing will be done in this direction until the dust of the election campaign has completely settled down.

Reviews

THE GLASS MOUNTAIN

(Renown Pictures)

AMONG the few principles to which Hollywood rigidly adheres is the one that if, for some reason not quite clear to the producers, a film scores an unexpected success, it should be followed up immediately by another production using the same actors and repeating, with slight variations, the same magic formula. Occasionally, as happened with *Mr. Belvedere Goes to College*, the successor to *Sitting Pretty*, the result is a picture quite worth seeing in its own right, but more often than not we are treated to a watered-down version of the original. Nevertheless, such a practice is bound to have its profitable side, and it is not surprising to see some English studios adopting it, too.

All three of the films reviewed this week fall more or less into this category, and two of them are British. The best is *The Glass Mountain*, which is claimed to be "the mighty successor to *Dangerous Moonlight*," but which, although it has a different cast—Michael Denison, Dulcie Gray, and Valentina Cortese—and although much of it is filmed in the Austrian Tyrol, is not as good as the

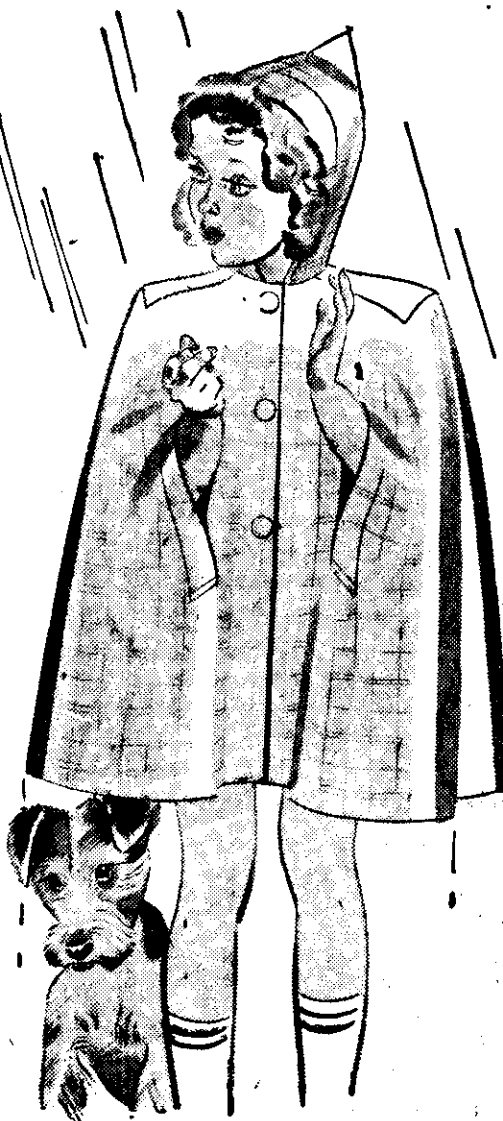


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