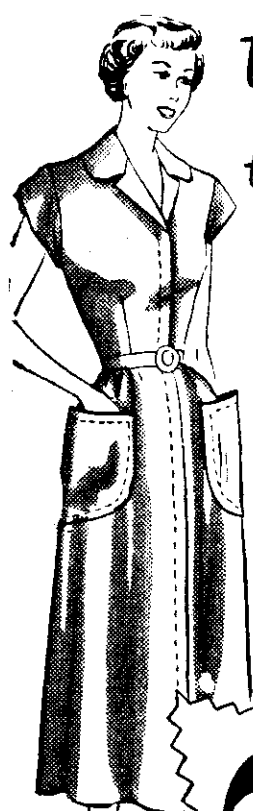


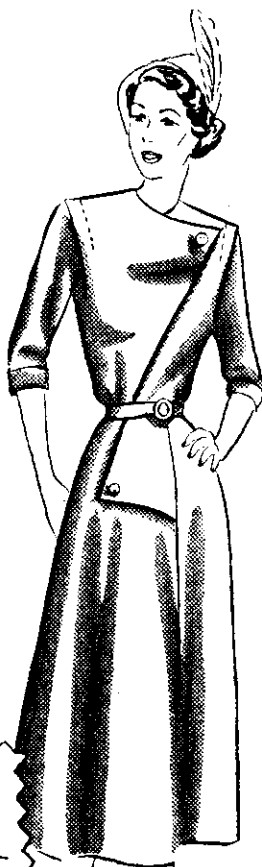
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Film Reviews, by P.J.W.

DOUBLE INDICTMENT

GIVE US THIS DAY

(Rank)

IT was a pleasure to see last week two such conscientious and generally well-made films as *Give Us This Day*, directed by Edward Dmytryk, and *Storm Warning*, directed by Stuart Heisler. Both deal intelligently with serious themes, are technically sound, and work up a lot of tension. Both also have well-written scripts.

Give Us This Day is a film which comes close to greatness. It is based on the short story (later expanded into a novel), *Christ in Concrete*, by Pietro di Donato, describing the life and macabre death of an Italian immigrant bricklayer in New York. The hero is played by Sam Wanamaker, and his wife by Lea Padovani. The story is set in the depression years, and the film makes a grim indictment of society for the tragedy which befalls the hero, Geremio. Dmytryk, who was the director of *Crossfire* and *Obsession*, made it in England, although it is a thoroughly American production for all that. The leading parts are played by Americans and Italians, apart from Kathleen Ryan, who played opposite James Mason in *Odd Man Out*, and here takes the role of the Other Woman.

From its scarifying opening sequence showing the hero wandering home through the dark city streets (photography by Robert Day), to the terrible intensity of its depression scenes, *Give Us This Day* has an emotional strength which is rare in the cinema. This is as much due to the high standard of acting (especially by the two leading players) and the spare, almost Biblical rhythms of the dialogue, as to the authority with which the director handles his material. The film is couched in the simplest terms. Its characters are unsophisticated to the point of naivety, and speak in a simple, rather stilted English befitting people unfamiliar with the language. The action deals with the most elemental incidents in life—the betrothal, marriage and honeymoon of Geremio, his love for his wife and family, and their desire for a home of their own, the dignity of labour and the comradeship of the five companions (of whom Geremio is the leader) in their work of bricklaying.

As the film proceeds Geremio develops into a symbolic Christ-like figure. When the workers are starving during the depression he persuades them to come in with him on a piece of construction work which only he knows is dangerously unsafe. He takes the full responsibility for their lives upon his own conscience and the strain, after one of them is crippled in an accident, causes his moral breakdown. He consorts with a tart whom he had known before his marriage, bullies his friends on the job, and reaches the point where in shame and despair he impales his hand on the spike of an iron railing outside the block of flats he lives in. He resolves to return to his wife and to tell his friends how he had lied to them about the safety of their work. He does both these things on Good Friday, and shortly afterwards a second acci-

BAROMETER

FAIR TO FINE: "Give Us This Day."
FAIR: "Storm Warning."

dent occurs in which he is buried alive in liquid concrete. This climax, because of its suddenness and despite its deliberate irony, is the weakest part of the film. The manner of his death is unbelievable, and I think it shows a weakness in the structure of the film that it fails to prepare the audience sufficiently for such an ironic, horrifying end.

STORM WARNING

(Warner Bros.)

THE setting of *Storm Warning*, which makes a second, but rather different, indictment of society, is a small Southern town in America which is under the sinister patronage of the Ku Klux Klan. Ginger Rogers, a New York model, arrives to visit her sister, and accidentally witnesses a brutal murder performed by hooded members of the Klan outside the local gaol. At the inquest on the victim (an over-curious journalist) nobody in the town will testify, although the local membership of the so-called secret society is generally known. She discovered that one of the killers is her sister's husband (Steve Cochran), and when she is produced by the district attorney (Ronald Reagan) as the star witness, she has to decide whether justice comes before her sister's happiness.

This dilemma is neatly handled in the film until towards the end, when an old-fashioned shooting match between police and villains solves the particular problem involved, but side-steps the general moral implications of the Klan's activities. Despite this limitation, the film presents its problem very skilfully and with considerable authenticity. The opening sequence is first-rate in effectiveness. The uneasy atmosphere of the citizens at the bus depot on her arrival (a few minutes before the murder is timed to take place) is admirably conveyed. Then as the lights in the shops go out and the owners scurry home while she walks innocently down the darkened street, the tension rises rapidly to the shocking violence of the scene which she unexpectedly witnesses.

There are at least two other sequences in the film worth watching for. The first is the inquest scene, where the sullen, fearful mood of the crowd outside the courthouse is cleverly shown through the person of a radio announcer wandering amongst them seeking comments. The second occurs at the recreation centre where the crowd goes after the verdict, and where, amid the stifling heat and noise, the stupid young lout, who is the heroine's brother-in-law, gets involved in a drunken, bullying brawl.

Storm Warning has all the gloss and speed of the best Hollywood thrillers. Its action is presented compactly, but its characterisation, by comparison, lets it down. Steve Cochran gives the best performance in the nastiest role, and Doris Day as his misguided sister also creates a believable person. Ginger Rogers, Ronald Reagan and Hugh Sanders (as the Klan leader) seem fluent but mechanical by comparison.

N.Z. LISTENER, AUGUST 3, 1951.