

Thank Goodness for Guinness

LAST HOLIDAY

(Watergate-Associated British)

THERE are a number of things about *Last Holiday* which should be of interest to the discerning (or inquisitive) filmgoer. For one thing, this is no film adaptation of a successful novel, play, or short story. The script, we are told, was written directly for the screen by J. B. Priestley, and Mr. Priestley appears a second time in the credits as a producer. There are, in fact, three producers in all—a slight deviation from the normal, which is probably worth noting, too; though perhaps not, on the evidence, so worthy of imitation.

Much more interesting than these things, however—and more important to the success of the production even than Mr. Priestley—is the appearance of Alec Guinness in the principal role. As it happens, this is the first occasion on which he has headed a screen cast of characters. His Fagin was a classic performance, but he shared honours then with the juvenile John Howard Davies. His protean virtuosity in *Kind Hearts* was impressive, too, but there Dennis Price had the dominant role, and even in *A Run for Your Money* he was almost submerged in a tide of wild Welshmen. But this time he is the centre and focus of the action and the film gains immeasurably in credibility and interest.

Without him, *Last Holiday* might have been rather hard going for film enthusiasts. Mr. Priestley may have written it for the screen, but there is no internal evidence to suggest that he recognises any substantial difference between stage and screen techniques. The film, in fact, could be made over for stage presentation without serious modification. Of course, Mr. Priestley may have done that on purpose—it's always hard to keep up with these shrewd North Countrymen—but more probably it was just habit repeating an accustomed pattern.

The story is almost a stereotype. George Bird, an insignificant and inoffensive salesman of agricultural machinery, is told by his doctor that he is suffering from Lampington's disease, an obscure and fascinating malady, but one which is inevitably fatal. Having no relatives, dependents, or even friends, George quits work, buys himself a swagger outfit and books in at an exclusive South Coast hotel to enjoy the good life for the short space that still remains to him. There Mr. Priestley makes certain that he meets as diversified a bunch of characters as one could wish for. There is an attractive young couple living on their wits, a coarse, domineering North Country dowager and her mousey companion, an elderly inventor busy spending a £10,000 free-of-tax award for war services, a pompous Cabinet Minister, an industrialist and—the final theatrical twist—Sir Trevor Lampington, the discoverer of the disease. There are also numerous minor characters (even An Inspector

BAROMETER

FAIR: "Last Holiday."
MAINLY FAIR: "Bright Victory."
MAINLY FAIR: "Happy-Go-Lovely."

Calls at one point), and all are at some time vastly amusing, but you do not feel of any of them that they have an existence extending before or after the play itself. They are no more than dramatic devices. Except for little Mr. Bird. Wherever Guinness moves there is an oasis of reality; he can arouse laughter and at the same time draw compassion, and I felt better for seeing him. In fact, Guinness (if I may coin a phrase) is good for you.

BRIGHT VICTORY

(Universal-International)

THE first part of *Bright Victory* is a sound March-of-Time style treatment of the return of a blinded serviceman (Arthur Kennedy) to the United States, and of his re-education in the Army's Valley Forge Hospital. Kennedy is a good actor and there was conviction in his portrayal of that crucial moment in which the blinded man realises that his darkness is permanent. But once away from Valley Forge, with all its neat routines, its institutional heartiness, and its impressive efficiency, the story slips and falters. The soldier's girl flinches from the prospect of marriage with a blind man, but as luck (and Hollywood) will have it, there is a much prettier girl (Peggy Dow) waiting to take her place. This—Miss Dow's prettiness—jarred a little on me. I don't mean to suggest that a pretty girl is wasted on a blinded soldier. I was just depressed once again by the thought that Hollywood cannot cope with notions of love, compassion, and the gentler virtues except in terms of the cover-girl convention. Miss Dow was just too neat and tidy a solution. Admittedly, blindness is a difficult subject to handle, and the problem is to keep emotionalism within bounds, but *Bright Victory* does not succeed very well in this, and in consequence suffers by comparison with some other "rehabilitation" films.

HAPPY-GO-LOVELY

(Associated British)

WHEN I saw the trailer for this show I thought, for one numbing moment, that we were going to see Cesar Romero as a killed Scotsman. However, as it turns out, he has the part of a brash U.S. musical show producer struggling desperately (against the odds which always afflict producers in screen musicals) to get his show under way in Edinburgh at Festival time. To that extent the setting is novel—Edinburgh looks well in Technicolor and most of the accents are genuine—but the situations are painfully hackneyed, and little use is made of several good players (John Laurie, Wylie Watson, for example) in the cast. Vera Ellen, however, is delightful when she's dancing, and David Niven is a model of diffident charm.

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