



Gordon Mirams Turns Movie Astrologer

NOW that the Academy Awards for the best screen performances of 1937 have been announced and the new pictures for 1938 have been lined up, it seems an appropriate time to attempt a little prophesying about the prospects of some of the cinema's leading stars. In other words, what quarter of the movie heavens are they likely to be occupying a year from now?

It is probably much harder being a star-gazer of the film firmament than an ordinary astrologer because the stars of the sky above move according to unchanging physical laws, whereas the stars of the screen are principally governed by the public's fickle whim. So in my new role as prophet I expect no honour, even outside my own country. The best one can hope to do is make some sort of forecast of what might conceivably happen to well-known players under certain circumstances—such circumstances depending on everything from choice of stories and directors to unhappy private love affairs.

It was not always so difficult to map the stars in their courses. There was a time when a player could build up a terrific personal following by force of personality and hold his position practically unchanged for several years, even though the merits of his individual pictures varied greatly during that time. The star, like the king, could do no wrong.

But these days, competition is so fierce, the public so star-conscious, that a player can rise to fame with one picture and disappear almost as quickly. Every single film he makes has an effect on his standing.

To this general statement there are a few exceptions. Four or five planets have moved in the highest circles for so many years that as long as they care to go on making pictures, they will always command respect. A poor film may cause public confidence in them to waver slightly, but does not shake it seriously. A series of poor films would probably have that effect, but by virtue of their special position these planets of the screen are in little danger of being cast in unworthy pictures.

The handful of stars whom I would single out as being apart from the constant state of flux of the rest of the movie universe are Greta

Garbo, Norma Shearer, Paul Muni, Gary Cooper and possibly Ronald Colman. They, I believe, are fairly certain to be in almost exactly the same high position a year from now as they are to-day. And thereafter for as long as they care to go on making pictures—provided they don't go on until they are approaching senility.

Take Garbo, for instance. Her latest film, "Marie Walewska," is in many respects her finest. Yet it won't make her much more famous or popular: it will simply entrench her even more firmly in her present position, a position from which nothing short of sheer bad taste or insanity will dislodge her. It is much the same with Norma Shearer. Like Garbo she has almost become a tradition of the screen—but a good deal more alive than most traditions. Paul Muni joined the select circle of the Big Five after three pictures—"Louis Pasteur," "The Good Earth" and "Emile Zola," but before then he was steadily rising. Similarly, after a long apprenticeship, Gary Cooper came on top to stay, after "Mr. Deeds" and "Souls at Sea." Only rank miscasting will bring Muni and Cooper tumbling down—and both are in a position to refuse to be miscast.

There was a time when George Arliss seemed to be in the same position as Muni is to-day—as the screen's greatest character actor—but there is no real comparison. Muni can make almost any role convincing, whereas George Arliss is just a good portrayal of George Arliss.

I'm not quite so sure about Ronald Colman's claims to lasting stardom, but "The Prisoner of Zenda" proved that he has not lost his touch, and his reputation is so firmly founded that it could be undermined only by a succession of flops—and that isn't likely. But he's not getting any younger; he would be wise to think about retiring before the romantic glamour wears off.

These, as I say, are the planets of the film firmament, and we can be reasonably sure about their position a year from now. It is when we come to the other stars that we are very much in the realm of conjecture.

This even applies (Contd. on p. 34).

