"A WINDOW IN LONDON" (RKO-British, 1939; US release in 1942 as "Lady in Distress") Directed by Herbert Mason; screenplay by Ian Dalrymple and B. Cooper, from an original French story by Herbert & Maret; Camera: Glen McWilliams; Music: Britton Byrd; Art Director, Ralph Brinton; 6 reels With Michael Redgrave, Paul Lukas, Sally Gray, Patricia Roc, Hartley Power, Glen Alyn, Gertrude Muirgrove, George Carney, Alf Goddard, Brian Coleman, Wilfred Walters, George Merritt, John Salew, Pamela Bandell.

A remake of a late-30's French film (the title of which alas continues to elude me) "A Window in London" is a curiously obscure little film which, despite an excellent script and a quartet of strong and popular star names, has been almost as forgotten in England as it has been here. Even when it first appeared, and despite the re-teaming of Redgrave and Lukas from the fantastically popular "The Lady Vanishes" it created a stir. It was already short film, it was shortened still further for US release, and automatically fell into second-rate status. Our print is of this US version, but I remember the original well, and little is actually missing. A prolonged dialogue exchange between Redgrave & Gray (in which he tells her about his wife) is the key casualty, and this is covered by dialogue throughout, many of its cuts are not harmonious with the continuity. The overall flavor and characters do suggest Paris rather than London, but this is a minor drawback. (Interestingly, the opening seems to have influenced Leslie Charteris in writing the Deanna Durbin vehicle, "Lady on a Train".) The story is strong, unpredictable, and unpadded throughout; it is taut and economical fashion, it concentrates on the story at hand, and the extremely neat (yet uncontrived) climax is one of the few genuine surprise endings the movies have given us. Herbert Mason, the little-known director, also made some of the mid-30's Arliss vehicles for Gainsborough, and that excellent Hitchcockian thriller "Strange Boarders".

Intermission.


A foremost personal favorite of both director LeRoy and star O'Brien, "Oil" is a fairly familiar item on TV, but hasn't been afforded any other kind of showing in New York for 20 years or more. A recently scheduled performance at the Gallery of Modern Art was arbitrarily cancelled for some kind of Eisenhower Retrospective and thus far hasn't been re-scheduled. A powerful, gripping and 90% honest account of a company man in the Orient, it is almost one of LeRoy's best films, but though it does fall somewhat short of "I Am a Fugitive From a Chain Gang" and "They Won't Forget", it is nevertheless well up with the leaders of his second echelon of pictures. The failings seem to be a combination of script and lack of invention in his direction; the frequent transitional device of a page turning is annoying, trite, and constantly reminds us that we are just seeing a movie adaptation of a novel; while the happy and provocative climax is totally false, though in the mid-30's not a large price to pay for what was a fairly daring indictment of American business methods. Directorially, LeRoy maintains a sense of power throughout and does cast give in to the many melodramas. (This sometimes makes it a slow film, but never an uninteresting one). However, he never quite convinces us that, Willie Fung notwithstanding, all of this is taking place in the Orient. The locations are ingenuous, the sets elaborate, but somehow it all still smacks of Hollywood; certainly LeRoy doesn't possess von Sternberg's flair for suggesting the Orient with a few deft visual strokes.

"Oil" was remade by Warners in 1941 as a 7-reel programmer titled "Law of the Tropics", with Jeffrey Lynn in the O'Brien role. However, the emphasis was shifted to the wife - Constance Bennett, playing a shady lady with a past. She even went through the old "Camille" routine of trying to earn his hatred so as not to ruin his career. It was a good little piece of hokum, but actually a less faithful remake than many of the Warner "reworkings" that weren't officially regarded as remakes at all (e.g., "Northern Pursuit" out of "Across the Pacifie")

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