Both of tonight's films, which unwittingly form a minor Barry K. Barnes festival, are now virtually forgotten British films of 1938, both released here within months of each other, in 1959. Not major productions in a period in which Britain was gearing itself more and more to collaborative efforts with Hollywood ("The Citadel", "Goodbye, Mr. Chips" etc.) they were not minor films either, and thus quite representative as cross-sections of British movie-making at that time.

**PRISON WITHOUT BARS** (London Films—Alexander Korda, 1938) Directed by Brian Desmond Hurst; Associate Producer, Irving Asher; Screenplay by Arthur Wimperis, with dialogue by Margaret Kennedy, based on the original play by E and O Eis, Gina Kaua and Hans Wilhelm, and a French film version of that play produced by Arnold Pressburger; Camera, Georges Perinal, Bernard Browne; Supervising Art Director, Vincent Korda; Music, John Greenwood; Edited by Charles Crichton; 8 reels. Distributed by United Artists. Written with Dorothy Mansfield and John Pearson. Directed by Barry K. Barnes, Mary Morris, Marita Hunt, Glynnis Johns, Margaret Yarde, Elsie Shelton, Lorraine Clewes, Sally Wisher, Enid Lindsay, Phyllis Morris, Nancy Roberts.

In Britain, "Prison Without Bars" did not do well, since it followed hot on the heels of the original French version (to which it was very similar, even to having the same leading lady in Corinne Lanchaire) and because British audiences never took too kindly to home-grown films of an even mildly sensationalist nature, perhaps thereby admitting that Hollywood did them so much better. A couple of weeks after opening in New York at the Globe (it was hurt by having in the midst of a prolonged cycle of prison movies. It's an interesting and quite unusual film, if ultimately fairly traditional in content. Visually and stylistically it often recalls Fabst's "Diary of a Lost Girl", but it is somewhat let down by the cast. Edna Best for example, gives an excellent performance as always, but she is thoroughly British, and the supporting cast of almost Dickieannish characters - the madames Hunt and Yarde in particular - likewise seem especially ungallic, not least because of the contrast with Corinne Lanchaire. Miss Lanchaire then seemed on the threshold of a sudden Veronica Lake kind of instant stardom but came to an end, shot during the occupation of France. The film is also one of the more interesting examples of the worthwhile if not terribly prolific directorial career of Brian Desmond Hurst, whose best film - the 1939 "On The Night of the Fire" with Ralph Richardson and Diana Wynward, called "The Fugitive" here - seems permanently lost, and who is known primarily for his Alastair Sim version of "A Christmas Carol".

--- Ten Minute Intermission --

**THE WARE CASE** (Ealing Studios, Capad Productions, 1936) Directed by Robert Stevenson; produced by Michael Balcon; screenplay by Roland Pertwee and Robert Stevenson from the play by George Pleydell Bouvercoft; Camera, Ronald Neame; Distributed by Associated British Film Distributors, in the U.S.A. by 20th Century Fox; 8 reels.


"The Ware Case" earned a minor niche in British film history as being the film with which Michael Balcon launched his new, overhauled Ealing Studios, giving it a glossier and more professional look than the more rough-hewn Ealing films of the earlier 30's had enjoyed. It got things off to a good if not strikingly original start. "The Ware Case" is the kind of typical, pre-tested material that British studios always turned to when in doubt. The play had been filmed first in 1917 (with Matheson Lang) and again in 1928 with Stewart Rome, so offered few surprises to British audiences - and of course surprise is the one element it needs in a narrative sense. (It may well have it over here, where the property is much less well-known). It's another good, tastefully and stylishly done film by Robert Stevenson, one of the best around British directors of the period, able to tackle anything and everything, with a notch or two below Hitchcock, Agatha and Saville, but still one of Britain's most reliable and useful film-makers. He married Anna Lee and ultimately took off for Hollywood, where his best film was probably "Jane Eyre". He is still a bulwark of the Disney organisation, where his innate taste has always stood him in good stead. Even if one is aware of the solution to the film's mystery - if one may term it that - it's a film to which one can always return with pleasure for its craftsmanship, good acting, and accomplished delivery of good dialogue. The murder scene is a beautiful exercise in economy and suspense - the true classics - performed even by Francis L. Sullivan with his inevitable pointing pencil - are suspenseful and not unduly protracted. Clive Brook as a sympathetic rotter - a role vaguely parallel to Pierre Fresnay's doomed aristocrat in "La Grande Illusion" - has a welcome chance to depart from his usual stuff upper-lip Britisher, Jane Baxter is as graceful as always, and the film is full of fine cameos from such fast disappearing character actors as Peter Bull and Ernest Thesiger.