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I Know Where I'm Going

Harmonica Player.....Arthur Chesney
Torquil, the Eagle....."Mr. Ramshaw"

In the appraisal of the regional film the critic of nondescript provenance is at a grave disadvantage. He cannot say, with the assurance of the native, that this is or is not a fair rendering of scene. He cannot even, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, claim the remotest acquaintance with the original, for no matter how mobile the journalist, he gets around less than the camera. The best he can do, in fact, is to decide whether or not the film conveys to him personally the strong flavour of earth and water, and leave it at that.

It is, then, not for me to discuss the accuracy of the new Powell-Pressburger piece, "I Know Where I'm Going." This story of the storm-swept Hebrides may or may not speak to the Islander of his home; I can say only that to me it communicates an overpowering sense of place.

Regional films have not been common in our cinema. "The Edge of the World," "Owd Bob" - before the war they were a handful and no more, if we exclude the documentary pieces. The sensuousness of the French regional background, the fervour, in turns romantic and savage, of the Russian rendering of landscape and man in relation to landscape, were almost entirely lacking in our own films. The war, indeed, narrowing the physical horizon, turned the eyes of producers and directors in on the native scene; from this constriction there emerged at last a native subject, obvious enough in all conscience, yet not grasped before: English character. The setting has been slower to find than the theme. Films of English character (I speak again of fiction films) have dwelt chiefly on urban character without a corresponding emphasis on its pictorial background. There has been nothing to compare with the Frenchman's poetic handling of the back street and the seamy alley, or the American's rendering of the confused movement of subway and pleasure park; only the documentary worker has composed the dramatic lights and shadows of the tenement and the playground. And only within the last year or so have country character and the country scene begun to play a considerable part in the entertainment film.