

# TRADE SHOWS SURVEYED

THERE are three British productions this week, all of which are good program features, and which reflect credit on their several producers. All of them have the merit of good technique, and the weakness of each lies not in the way the story has been told, but in the story itself.

"Shifting Sands" (F.B.O.) is a Granville production, the chief merit of which lies in its very excellent desert settings, and in the effective way scenes have been shot. There is plenty of excitement in various situations, but the final climax, which depicts the struggles of the heroine in the arms of the villain while a rescue party gradually ride furiously nearer and arrive, of course, in time, has been so consistently used by various producers that it has lost any thrill or conviction it might have had in the early days of cinematography.

The whole story is thoroughly conventional, but it has been so well handled that it interests and will be a popular box-office attraction for any hall.

The old faults are apparent of poor sub-titling, and the continuity jerks one from one scene to another rather than leading in a smooth and unbroken sequence. Both these faults are minimised by the excellent way each individual situation has been made the most of.

In "Silent Evidence" (Gaumont) much the same faults are in evidence. The story is conventional, but is redeemed not by fine scenes this time, but by the novel way the husband discovers his wife in her lover's arms. This is effected by an invention which does for sight what wireless does for sound. Most stories which depict some wonderful invention are apt to be unconvincing and sometimes boring, but in this case a good atmosphere of reality is obtained and the final climax is a strong one well led up to and well exploited. It will undoubtedly be a good popular attraction in spite of its weakness in continuity and other minor defects.

Finally, "His Wife's Husband" (Walturdaw) is a frankly conventional melodrama, but the producer has handled his material so skilfully and convincingly that the characters seem real and the interest is held throughout. In this case, both continuity and sub-titling are good and the picture shows what can be done with quite conventional material if sufficient care and ingenuity are expended upon it. This Quality play fully lives up to the promise displayed in the producers' short "stuff" and is excellent entertainment.

All these three British pictures are of a high standard, and it is very gratifying to find that the only British features shown are among the best the week can provide in entertainment value. The weaknesses dwelt upon above are not by any means confined to British productions, and the tendency to illustrate sub-titles rather than express what is intended by action and pictorial detail is world-wide.

Apart from the sub-titling being a little prolific, except, perhaps, in "His Wife's Husband," which is the most successful of

the three in this respect, it is not too badly expressed, although in "Shifting Sands" it could certainly be greatly improved on.

The acting in these pictures is generally very good, and though such an absurd generalisation that there are no good British screen artistes, a remark which has been expressed in the lay Press somewhat frequently, hardly needs confutation, there is a complete confutation in these three features. Peggy Hyland, Willard Lindsay and Richard Atwood are excellent in "Shifting Sands," and the same applies to David Hawthorne and Marjorie Hume in "Silent Evidence," and Olaf Hytten and Madge Stuart in "His Wife's Husband."

Murder mystery stories are often disappointing on the screen because mystery is put in for mystery's sake and merely to confuse the issue without much direct bearing on the story, but in "The Last Card" (Ward's Production) we have a plot well above the average because it has been so well handled; the interest is held from beginning to end. Here again it is the continuity, the care and ingenuity expended by the producer, and the sincerity of the artistes which have made what could have easily been, under less skilful handling, a mediocre conventional picture.

## A French Film.

French films are none too frequent, so that it is a pleasure to see such a good dramatic offering of that nationality in "The Sport of Fate" (General Kinema Film). This story, too, is conventional and once again is rescued from mediocrity by the excellence of the acting and the skilfulness of the production. The continuity is good and the dramatic effect is excellent.

This picture, like most, could do with a little judicious use of the scissors; there are flashes of cloud and sea which would not be missed if eliminated.

"Mamma's Affair" (Assoc. F.N.) is rather thin comedy-drama. The titling is prolific, and there is little scope for Constance Talmadge, the star. However, it is quite usable and has natural showmanship opportunities in the star's name.

Finally, "The Men of Zanzibar" (Fox), featuring William Russell, makes a useful general booking with a love and mystery story. It differs from "The Sport of Fate" in its mystery atmosphere, in that here the mystery element is included for its own sake and "to make it more difficult." The production is good, as is the acting.

Vitagraph is represented by a re-issue called "The Suspect," which, although showing some signs of age, is quite a useful booking. It is somewhat unconvincing and deals with the Nihilists in pre-revolutionary Russia, but there are some good situations. The star, Anita Stewart, is melodramatically excellent. Some of the lighting and photography in this picture is quite favourably comparable with later productions and the snow scenes are admirable.

## Short Stuff.

The "short stuff" this week is not so notably outstanding as last, but European's Two-reel Dramas are quite useful shorts of the "North-West Mounted" type. The action is rapid, there is plenty of excitement, fights and love interest, while the photography is excellent.

Master's one-reel sporting dramas are not particularly attractive; there is no improvement on the samples shown last week.

# TRADE SHOWS AT A GLANCE

TITLE.	NATIONALITY.	RUNNING TIME.	TYPE.	TECHNIQUE.	SUMMARY.
SHIFTING SANDS (F.B.O.)...	British	85	Triangle drama ...	Fine desert scenes. Somewhat conventional story with good individual situations	A good general booking.
THE SUSPECT (Vitagraph) ...	American	85	Intrigue melodrama ...	Re-issue. Quite good interest, apt to be unconvincing; good Russian scenes	Useful general booking.
HIS WIFE'S HUSBAND (Walturdaw) ...	British	51	Domestic melodrama ...	Very well told conventional story. Excellent acting and detail work	Very good general booking.
THE SPORT OF FATE (General) ...	French	65	Domestic drama... ..	Not a new plot but very well produced. Strong dramatic value and excellent acting	Good dramatic feature.
THE MEN OF ZANZIBAR (Fox) ...	American	70	Mystery melodrama ...	Unusual African settings. Good production but rather overburdened with mystery	Useful general booking.
MAMMA'S AFFAIR (Assoc. First Nat.) ...	American	75	Comedydrama ... ..	Superabundance of sub-titling. Some good humour and photography. Rather thin story, with little scope for Constance Talmadge	Useful general booking.
SILENT EVIDENCE (Gaumont) ...	British	80	Domestic drama... ..	Novel climax but a generally conventional story. Good technique; well acted with interest sustained	Good general booking.
THE LAST CARD (Wards' Production) ...	American	75	Murder mystery... ..	Unusual story very well told. Excellent acting, sets and continuity	Very good general booking.