

NEW FACES COME BACK

Produced by RCAF Film Unit and National Film Board. 28 mins.

There is one point about this film for which every doctor will be grateful to the producers: that in a subject full of potential 'drama' they have remained calm and dispassionate. For they had a difficult job to do, and the temptation must have been great. Briefly the idea behind the film was to enlist the sympathy and understanding of people in Canada, far from the reality of bombs and their consequences, for those who returned from the war maimed and disfigured.

The film tells how a young Canadian flight engineer, badly burned in a plane crash, is sent to the Plastic Surgery Centre at East Grinstead, for treatment. Here he gets his 'new face'. The course of his recovery is followed and we see how with the help of hospital staff and local friends he gradually returns to a normal attitude to life. In its earlier part the film moves fast. Although in places the continuity wavers, there are moments of skilled film craft which are a pleasure to watch. In the latter part, however, the story breaks down. More than self-consciousness, the haunting fear of these men is sexual failure; the girl's casual refusal to dance, although it symbolizes this fear, does not become a reality. The film fails to convince that Jim would have taken this incident so much to heart, particularly as he does not seem to lack for other outside friends. Even less are we convinced by his subsequent reactions. Sublimation, symbolized by an interest in music, again appears too simple for reality. The film here never quite makes up its mind what it is trying to get over; eventually it gives up the struggle, Jim recovers his balance and goes happily home, leaving us with the theme that the rest is up to the people there.

The superficiality of the part dealing with the ups and downs of readjustment is a pity, because it inevitably nullifies the permanent value of the film. The problems of psychological adjustment after injury are complex and deep. They cannot be treated in a film which is obviously looking over its shoulder at the theatrical distributors. As events proved, even in this form, it was unacceptable to the theatres, and an opportunity for making a real study of the problem, which would have a permanent value, has been lost. Nevertheless this is a competent film, which has a value for general audiences as an introduction to some of the problems of rehabilitation.