

What Is Wrong With Our Movies?

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ANYONE WHO has been unfortunate enough to venture into one of our glacier-cooled motion picture houses recently has no doubt been forced to the conclusion that our "movies" have not only hit rock bottom, but that they are attempting to burrow through it. The average person, sick unto death of psychiatrist's couches, mother fixations, and planned crimes, may take one of two paths: He may give up movies altogether, or he may turn to foreign pictures and thereby find a rewarding experience free from Betty Grable's legs and Alan Ladd's torso. What is wrong with the American movies? Predominantly three things started this journey to rock bottom.

The most glaring fault of all—as wide as a church door and as deep as a well—is our star system. The agent, about to give birth to a new star, "ballyhooes" this magnificent creature, this angelic imp, this typical American girl, this darling of society to the skies. Despite our reluctance to become so, we are soon made aware of everything that has ever happened to her, and of quite a little that has never happened. We are given to understand that seven men are about to commit suicide for the love of her, and that she uses a magenta toothbrush and so on ad nauseum. And so, at long awaited last, her first picture is completed and sent out to be received by the incredulous gasps of her admiring public. It takes place in a dirty Russian garret, and she is a dreary little seamstress who hates all men. Here is art, indeed! After her great success as the seamstress, the new born star goes on to even greater ventures. She appears as a psychoanalyst, an idiot, a debutante, a slave, a lady of 90, a girl of 10. And so, she merrily pursues her industry, adding to her fame with each succeeding epic and becoming less believable with each. It is impossible for even the most fertile imagination to believe that someone whose

face, personality and doings are as familiar to one as one's own has suddenly become transformed into another person in another world.

The second thing which sweeps across the motion picture colony, leaving half the pictures maimed in its wake, is the morality code of the motion pictures. It would be very wonderful to believe that people were the purest of the pure, that never a word was said in anger, or a deed committed in haste, but that all was sweetness and light; but we know that life is not like that—except in the movies, that is. I know that a great many self-righteous individuals will accuse me of wishing to corrupt the morals of the American people. Frankly—and forgive me if I am wrong—I do not know of a single person who is so pure that a four-letter word spoken now and then will set him upon the path to degradation. And, if there is such a one, may I say to him, "Congratulations, and may you be happy in your ivory tower." I do not remember very much of "Gone With the Wind" except the closing scene where in reply to a question from Scarlett, Rhett turns and says, "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn." There was true power of thought. There was a majestic utterance. Can you imagine Rhett standing there and saying, "Frankly, my dear, I don't care."

In the Hollywood of today, there is a growing trend toward realism, and behind that simple, innocent word lurks horror, pure, unadulterated horror; for Hollywood attacks—I use the word advisedly—realism in the same manner in which it approaches everything else, in a non-realistic way. Thus far, the realism has taken the course of making normally beautiful actresses as hideous as possible, but we are headed for bigger and better accomplishments. I do not believe that the future of the motion picture lies in this direction. Suppose, by some chance, that Hollywood decided to make a picture on the trials and tribulations of a street-cleaner at precisely the same time as the Italian motion picture industry. In Italy, they would go out in the streets, find a likely street cleaner, and assign to him the role. And what would Hollywood do? Well, after a great deal of thought and probably a million dollar talent search, they would decide upon Cary Grant for the part, equip him with a \$500 outfit and a mahogany broom, polish up his British accent and set him to work. Of such stuff is realism in Hollywood made.

I shall not attempt to offer suggestions for improving our movies, for that is up to the public. As soon as the people refuse to accept a picture whose only claim to fame is its "color by technicolor," the pictures will improve immensely. As soon as they demand true realism and refuse to accept pseudo-realism, the motion picture industry will be forced to make better pictures. The public alone has this privilege, and it alone will be responsible for the eventual fate of our entertainment level.