

The Influence of the Cinema.

A GREAT deal of attention is being focussed at the present time on the various phases of our social system and many and varied are the problems that present themselves for solution. Among all these there is none of more practical or vital importance than the cinema, or as it is commonly known the "movies." It is an agency that reaches millions of people and must therefore wield a tremendous influence either for good or evil. Just the proper status it should enjoy as a social factor gives rise to much controversy and a very wide difference of opinion. Some regard it as a great art that combines amusement and education, while others look upon it not only as a hindrance to good but a positive evil in itself. We shall try to find out in this brief article just where the truth lies.

Certain concessions must be made first of all to the possibilities of the cinema. As a medium of depicting historical and geographical scenes it can't but have some educational value. It might also be made to serve a useful purpose in placing before the public some of the great classics of literature as modern psychology lays a great deal of stress on education by visual impressions.

The Cinema, however, does not lay claim to popular support so much as an educative agent as a form of entertainment. No one can have any quarrel with a high-class moving-picture as a legitimate recreation. In fact it is a great boon to the labouring classes, who are more or less barred from the higher-priced performances. Even a comic picture like

"Shoulder Arms" has a certain merit if it helps to refresh people and make them forget the day's grind.

Indiscriminate denunciation of the moving-picture is, therefore, not quite fair, although there is a danger to be guarded against even with the best. There are forms of amusement which are not really evil in themselves but which lend themselves easily to an abuse. Those who haunt cinemas expose themselves not only to physical danger to the eyesight but to psychological dangers as well. The rapid change of sense stimulus with the resultant dissipation of attention has an effect on the mind similar to that caused by an abuse of reading. Real thought or meditation becomes painful, seriousness and collectiveness impossible, flippancy and sentimentality a habit. Even, a picture that pretends to have some educational and scenic value prevents the formation of orderly mental pictures by carrying one too rapidly through a geographical jumble of countries. Not only this but it presents only a caricature of life and impairs one's power of fixing his attention on the realities of life.

If the decent picture is attended with such psychological risks, what can we say of the moral dangers of the bad cinema? The bill of fare offered by the majority of picture-houses at the present time is not good. Below most of the sensational programmes are written such words as "nerve thrilling," "eye-openers tonight," and one is forced to the conclusion that it is the horrible that draws,

Let us take a typical scenario:—

The millionaire's beautiful daughter has been abducted by the villain and carried away to the mining camp.

Broncho Pete drops into the saloon to have a drink, and is attracted by the girl's beauty and perhaps

touched by her sad appearance. He decides to rescue her if possible.

After a fight in which a number of cowboys are killed or wounded, he leaps on his mustang with the heroine and they ride away. The villain and a couple of his gang give chase. Pete is steadily increasing his lead when his horse becomes exhausted and falls to the ground. What is he to do now? His own life as well as the girl's safety depends upon his immediate action. Drawing his automatic he shoots the foremost of his pursuers who happens to be the villain. He pulls the trigger again but there's no report.

Then a notice is flashed on the screen:—

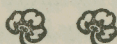
"End of part 1. The remaining parts will be shown nightly. No one should miss them as they are of rare educational value."

This picture is really not so sensational as the majority but it is bad for the young mind because it familiarizes it with criminal sights and thoughts. Any influence that causes the child to become unduly excited, stimulated or depressed is not good. It is useless for the cinema manager to plead that his story has a moral ending and that crime is finally punished and virtue rewarded. This is the paralogism by which indecent literature is defended. In the majority of cases sympathy is aroused for the criminal hero and the boy's imitative faculties are awakened. The map of evil is clearly traced and the possibilities of a life of crime opened up to him by the clever burglaries he sees depicted. A glance at the records of our juvenile courts is sufficient to convince one of the havoc wrought by this evil. It is the testimony of those who have made a study of the problem that nine-tenths of the offences for gun-play, thefts etc.

are directly traceable to the influence of moving pictures.

The menace of this social evil is very apparent, you will say, but what is the remedy? We do not pretend to be versed in **sociology** but we have a few well-founded convictions in the matter. Suppression is impossible owing to the amount of money involved, but a rigorous control is both possible and imperative. No film should be permitted to be shown without having passed the inspection of a local board of censors, or at any rate an inspector (preferably an educated woman). In the case of children this censorship should go much deeper; no child should be permitted to see any but a special film and then only under sanitary conditions. A strict code of rules should govern the management of cinemas, and the infringement of these should result in cancellation or suspension of license. All this is necessary if we wish to promote the physical and moral welfare of our children. It is only by a banding together of all those interested in social betterment that we can expect to combat all these evil influences and attain to a high standard of human culture.

L. N. '22



Kindness is the golden charm by which society is bound together.

Kindness has converted more sinners than either zeal, eloquence, or learning—F. W. Faber.