

arrived at this startling discovery of the supreme importance of the producer. I say startling because, to the general public, the public that knows of films only as moving pictures to be watched from the calm retreat of plush seats, the discovery may seem startling indeed. There is, all things considered, every reason why it should appear startling. People go to the cinema to be entertained and to see a star, and so long as they see Pola Negri in "Passion" and, provided of course that they are interested in the spectacle, what reason is there for anyone to suppose that to anyone other than Pola Negri is due the credit for the excellence of the film? But this fact, obvious as it may appear, is, as we have seen, very far removed from the truth. Pola Negri's name may appear in letters three times as large, and it may appear three or four times as often, as Ernst Lubitsch's, but, for all that, to him, and not to Pola, belongs the credit for "Passion", for "Gipsy Blood", for "Sumurun", and for others.

Everyone, or at any rate nearly everyone, is firmly convinced that the picture "is the Star's", and that to the talent of the star, masculine or feminine, it owes its interest. This misapprehension, for a misapprehension it is, has arisen because people still go to see Pola Negri, Valentino, or Mae Murray, as opposed to going to see a film: it is a well-known fact that a film without a star will not succeed. And all this has come to pass because the first films had nothing to recommend them apart from their novelty, except the graces, sinuous or winsome, of a Mary Pickford or a Theda Bara. In the early days people went to see a star because there was nothing else worth going to see; and it is the same to-day. People still go to the cinema primarily to see a star and only secondly to see a film.

Granted a good film and a competent producer, how will such a film be exploited? Will there be any

mention of Mr. A. the producer? No . . . or, at least, hardly any! It will be, let us say, "Cupid's Arrows" starring, then in enormous letters, Marceline X. And people will go and see Marceline X. and, having seen her clever mimicry, will come away and tell their friends that Miss X. is a wonderful actress. Miss X. makes good pictures. In future they will keep a look out for Miss X. And then, in a few months' time, they will see a poster announcing that "Love Darts", starring Marceline X., is "coming next week". They will, of course, go and see Miss X. and very probably they will find her disappointing, and if this is the case they will blame Miss X. as extravagantly as three months earlier they praised her. Miss X. will be said to be going off; she will be accused of losing her charm; she will be called sentimental, dull, stupid even. . . . Unhappy Miss X.! For she is as guiltless of the abuse as she was undeserving of the praise that was heaped upon her. She attained popularity and she lost it, and in neither case was she in any way responsible for the happening. In "Cupid's Arrows" she was working for a producer who understood what the public wanted, and who was, in consequence of this understanding, able to present the above-mentioned lady, in a manner that was gratifying to the audience. In "Love Darts" Miss X. was working for a different producer. He may have been a better producer, or he may have been worse, but what mattered was that the producer of "Love Darts" did not present Miss X. to the public in the way that the public wanted to have her presented. And so, just as surely as Miss X. was the recipient of undeserved praise, she will just as surely become the butt of much unpleasant criticism and she will be as guiltless of these accusations as she was undeserving of the foregoing praise.¹

¹ The above allegory is equally applicable in the case of Mr. X.!

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The Lathams got their way—an improved camera, capable of containing 150 feet of film, was constructed, and with it a more commodious kinetoscope: they had estimated the public taste to a nicety! All that was most “cowboy” in America thrilled at the thought of a prize-fight: a contest of strength against strength, where the greatest strength must win. . . . And all that was thrifty in America was more than delighted to see a prize-fight for ten cents. The new kinetoscope parlour on Nassau Street was packed with excited men and women. Much laughter, much jostling, and a voluptuous apprisement of the contestants’ muscles . . . The show was a *succès fou* . . . The waiting crowds stretched into the neighbouring streets, and the police had to be called in to keep order. What more could anyone desire? Only screen projection with its sure concomitant of bigger box-office receipts . . .

It was not, however, until 1896, two years after the Latham venture, that a projector, differing only in detail from its modern counterpart, was given to the public. It was not, however, for the Lathams to achieve this, the crowning triumph of their desires. They did, it is true, achieve projection of a sort, but there was neither the money nor the ingenuity to carry the thing further. The Latham projector disappeared in the smoke of its own creation.

While the Lathams were still struggling manfully with the problems of projection, a most amazing thing happened . . . an event of such importance that it has left its mark on all subsequent cinema dealings whenever and wherever publicity is concerned. It happened like this. The novelty of the kinetoscope was wearing off: after two years of peering at befogged lenses, at writhing muscles, and bespangled ankles, the American public was beginning to clamour for something new. Edison had given

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them the kinetoscope . . . that was all very well, they said, but now they wanted to see full-sized pictures on a screen, and that Edison must make possible. Only Edison can do it. . . . The exhibitors clamoured, and the public panted. Nothing else would do, but that Edison should make a projector.

In view of what was expected of him, it was perhaps unfortunate that Edison showed not the slightest interest in the production of a machine that would throw pictures on a screen. Nothing would move him. The kinetoscope he regarded as a toy that was proving itself highly lucrative: lucrative beyond anything he had ever dreamed of. The making of a projector, he argued, would kill the demand for kinetoscopes: and it was impossible, he affirmed, that there should be an equally large demand for projectors once they were made. Fifty, he estimated, would supply the world market. The situation was similar to that which arose soon after the invention of the phonograph. On that occasion Edison had refused to take out a patent for the disk record because, as far as he could see, the disk record could never compete with its cylindrical counterpart. All phonographs in use to-day are playing disk records, and similarly all the records being made are made on the disk pattern: the cylindrical record has disappeared. . . .

To the public, however, Edison was the “fairy god-mother” who had presented them with the phonograph and the kinetoscope, and who must therefore present them also with the projector. Everyone expected something from Edison; everyone except Edison, that is! The Latham projector was discarded, chiefly because it was expected that Edison might at any moment produce something better; and a projector produced by Edison, it was hardly necessary to say, would, of course, be far

The star system grew up because the first stars were beautiful (and indeed the stars of to-day are beautiful) and it has now become a habit. So strong is the habit of the star system that, as we have seen, it was found necessary to adapt the part of Mimi to Miss Gish's peculiar needs!

The public, and especially the cinema-going public, is a very conservative body; it is also, when cinema-going, a tired body—and at the same time a sexual body, and it is on this substance of tiredness and sexuality that the star system has builded itself a stronghold. When people, that is the mass of people, go to the cinema, they want, not so much to see a film, as to be entertained (the cinema, be it remembered, is a cheaper form of entertainment than the theatre), and they want, if possible, to be sexually stimulated. If then they find in the film both entertainment and sexual stimulus, they will, one assumes, be more than satisfied. And, to judge by the number of people that throng the cinemas each evening, one cannot but infer that these wants are satisfactorily catered for. But do people go to the cinema in search of "a sex thrill"? And is the popularity of actors and actresses dependent on their capability to provide the said thrill? These are some of the questions that we must answer.

The star owes his popularity not, as one might think, to his beauty or to his powers of acting, but to a strange and almost indefinable quality known as S.A., which, being interpreted, is Sex Appeal—a vague phrase, and one that can only properly be defined after an examination of the relative popularity of the various stars. The late Mr. Valentino, for instance, may be said to have been possessed of a phenomenal amount of the above-mentioned com-

modity. Miss Swanson has been endowed with more than her share, and so has Mr. Gilbert, and the same applies to Mae Murray. None of the afore-mentioned stars is in any sense of the word beautiful; they are not specially remarkable for their powers of acting, and yet they are popular. Why, then, are they popular, if it is not because they emanate sex appeal? And, at this point, I can hear the voice of indignation, the voice of an outraged coterie proclaiming that it is not sexual, and then, by way of extenuation, affirming that it does not seek sexual excitement in the cinema. But at this point, even at the risk of being rude, I must venture to disagree . . . for it is the cinema's subtle power of producing just this very sex stimulus that is the root and secret of its present popularity. Is there not the close-up? And is the close-up not used repeatedly in all films? And does not the close-up serve to enlarge the actor in face and form? And so, presumably, to enlarge his or her S.A.? And if it is not because of S.A., why, one wonders, do films like "The Sheik" and "Don Juan" succeed at all? It can only be—and even if it were not so, the prospect would be too gloomy to entertain—because, in films so preposterous as "The Sheik" and "Don Juan", an actor or an actress emanates sex appeal. There was no merit (for "merit" read "artistic merit") in either of these films; they were just preposterous, but they were popular, and they were popular because they provided a much-desired sex thrill for thousands and thousands of people the world over.

But let us examine the question more closely, and let us turn our eyes especially upon the late Mr. Valentino's film, "The Sheik". I ask any impartial observer (members of the Valentino Guild are excluded from this questionnaire!) just what that film had to recommend it? Was the story good? . . . No, most assuredly no! A trite tale of a girl who is

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abducted by a semi-chivalrous, semi-barbaric bedouin, whom it eventually transpires is the long-lost son of an English lord (and lady), and therefore a very fitting mate for the young girl in question. Is this story, even when handled in Mr. E. M. Hull's inimitable way, very interesting? And as for the production—there were camels, and at times they were seen on the skyline, and that about covers the merits both of production and of photography. "The Sheik" then had nothing to recommend it as far as story was concerned, and little except silhouetted camels in the way of production. It was not particularly well photographed, nor can I remember that it was in any way distinguished for the brilliancy of its sub-titles. It was just (and here, members of the Valentino Guild, support me!) that indefinable quality known sometimes as "it", but more often as S.A., that emanated from Mr. Valentino, and it was to this happy emanation that the film owed its success.

VI

The star need, then, have no powers of acting; he need not even be good-looking, but if he, or she, is to be popular, he must possess and he must emanate sex appeal. As far as the actor is concerned, this emanation of sex appeal is more than half the battle—it is the whole battle.

VII

The case of Rudolph Valentino is, I admit, exceptional. He was, and is, more popular than any star ever has been: his pictures are the only pictures that have made money after the death of the acting star. Wallace Reed was very popular, but after his death his pictures made very little money. Barbara la Marr was also popular, but since her demise her pictures have not been a profitable concern. But

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with Valentino it is different; his pictures still make good money, and will in all probability continue to make good money for some time to come. Admittedly, Valentino's is an exceptional case, and so, even at the risk of being tedious, I will cite yet another example of prodigious S.A., and of its equally prodigious exploitation.

And this, only to make sure beyond any shadow of doubt, that S.A.'s the thing. . . .

Clara Kimball Young, a star possessed of enormous popularity, and therefore of tremendous S.A., was very cleverly exploited by her backers. There were quantities of Clara Kimball Young pictures, but still there were not enough, and still the public clamoured for more. A picture every two months was not enough, and by all calculations it should have been—but it just wasn't! And there was another drawback, besides that of insufficiency, to the picture-every-two-month programme, and it was this: however often the pictures appeared there was never enough of Miss Young in any of them; never enough to satisfy her admirers, who sat like so many voracious sponges absorbing and absorbing!

The situation was, to put it mildly, difficult. . . . Miss Young was popular; so popular was she, that there was not enough of her to go round. The supply was hopelessly inadequate to satisfy the demand. Now, by all the rules of economics, a demand should create a supply. This, of course, was precisely what had not happened: there had been a supply of Miss Young, wholly adequate at first, which had created the demand. And there was yet another complication, because Miss Young, although under the aegis of clever exploitation she had assumed the form of a commodity, was in reality a strictly limited monopoly, and valuable only as such. The bi-monthly production of pictures had created a false illusion as to the true nature of Miss Young. For a time all

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superior to any produced by mere amateurs like the Lathams.

Things came to such a pass that, when at last Arnat hit on a satisfactory solution of the problem of how a film could be projected on a screen, it was found impossible to sell his invention! Because everyone was expecting Edison to produce something better! It was an amusing situation: Arnat had produced a satisfactory projector; everyone wanted a projector, and yet no one would listen to Arnat or look at his invention—because they all expected that Edison would produce something immeasurably superior! Edison at that time was working on a totally different subject; he had no thought whatever of a projector.

A compromise was arrived at (there was nothing else to be done), and Arnat's projector was given its first public showing on Broadway under the name of "EDISON'S VITASCOPE". . . .¹

"Mr. Edison's latest", said the papers. "Favoured few treated to an exhibition of the inventor's most recent production. . . . Calls it the Vitascope! . . . etc. . . . etc. . . ."

After a labour of two years the films were at last born.

At about the same time as the vitascope was first shown to an admiring Broadway, the Lumiere brothers in France, and Mr. Paul in London, had both invented projectors, similar in construction to the vitascope.

The vitascope was an unqualified success: the public adored it. Wherever it went, they went, and there also went the money. The whole world was

¹ This use of Edison's name in connection with a concern with which he was in no way CONNECTED is reminiscent of the use made of successful play-titles in the naming of films with which these titles have practically no connection: e.g. compare the film "The Sea Beast" with the novel *Moby Dick*, or the play "The Outsider" with the film of the same name.

ready and waiting for something. Exactly what that something was they weren't sure. . . . Everything was ready for the world-wide distribution of the new art, and it was only the lack of suitable talent which prevented such a thing from happening.

The Lumiere brothers established the film in Paris, and under their auspices it percolated through the frontiers of France and took root in the neighbouring European states. Like the kinetoscope, it became a craze. Its marvels were demonstrated in London, Berlin, Berne, and Vienna. All over Europe the papers applauded and the public exclaimed "How wonderful!". . . The foundations of a European film industry, that might have developed independently of America, were laid. Unfortunately, however, in 1897 the films received what might be called a "slap in the face" from contemporary Europe! This "slap in the face" being administered from the very highest quarters amounted to social ostracism. After the disaster of 1897 it was decided that the film was not a thing for "nice" people. At the charity bazaar, that superb relic of monarchist France, it had been decided (1897) to have a cinema as one of the attractions. The cinema was then a novelty, and the organisers of the bazaar prided themselves, in spite of the blueness of their blood, on being thoroughly up to date. Very unfortunately for the future of the cinema, it happened that the film caught fire, and that the flames, spreading from the projector, caught the woodwork of the temporary structure in which the bazaar was housed. The building was burned to the ground, and engulfed in its ruins were one hundred and eighty bearers of the most illustrious names in France. Paris plunged immediately into mourning, and from then on, and for many a year to come, the cinema was "taboo" in France. The charity bazaar, it must be remembered, had been instituted

was well; the demand was met with a two-monthly supply. But the demand grew and grew, whilst the supply, locked firmly in the face and form of Clara Kimball Young, was incapable of further expansion . . . and still the demand increased. The public, ever simple, ever trusting, had thought as they were intended to think, that Miss Young was a commodity capable of unlimited multiplication: for all they knew, she might have been a Ford car, or a best-selling novel. The situation was tense: Miss Young, a monopoly, was being demanded as though she were an ordinary everyday commodity! The public must somehow be satisfied; somehow the demand must be faced with an adequate supply. For a demand, if met with no supply at all, or even with an inadequate supply, is apt, after the way of all hungry things when left unsatisfied, to fall into a decline, to sicken, and finally to die. Such was the grim situation which confronted the Clara Kimball Young corporation: a case of *divide et impera* with a vengeance!

The solution to this problem was both simple and effective. . . . It was arranged for Miss Young to play no less than four different parts in the same picture! (It was still only *one* Clara Kimball Young, but there was also a very convincing illusion of multiplication!) Four different parts in the SAME picture meant, of course, four different stories: four different stories, all necessarily short, and all centring round Miss Young, mostly in close-up. Besides having the advantage of showing four times as much of Miss Young as any ordinary picture could possibly hope to show, this novel device had the advantage of showing Miss Young in at least sixteen different dresses, and in the throes of twice as many different phases of emotion (the average being two dresses per emotion). So the thing of monopoly value was given the appearance of a commodity; it was multiplied to meet the voracious demand for itself. The process

was simple, and the film resulting from its application was "The Eyes of Youth". The film told the story of a girl, the daughter of rich parents, who suddenly finds that her father is bankrupt. She finds also four suitors for her hand; one rich, one an impresario desirous of exploiting her voice, a third fairly rich, but with prospects of far greater wealth, and the fourth a young engineer with no prospects apparent. Each of these four suitors is desirous of marrying the lady as soon as possible. The lady herself is in love with the young engineer and at the same time desirous of obtaining the wealth of one or all of the other three suitors. Into this gathering comes a Hindu mystic (note the oriental touch) who shows to the lady in question what will happen to her in the event of her marrying each of the rich suitors. The mystic, one sees, is a man of discrimination, or rather of prescience, for he does not show the life of the lady when married to the young engineer, for that, being a man of prescience, he knows that she will learn for herself! The three demonstrations are effected by means of a crystal. There is a great deal of thrill, a great deal more of Miss Young, and "all's well that ends well", even to the father's ruined business!¹

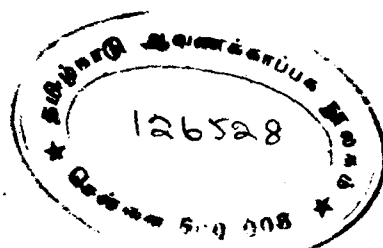
The new "Roxy" Theatre on Broadway was opened with a new version of the "Eyes of Youth", retitled "The Love of Sunya", and re-enacted by Gloria Swanson. This new version was in essentials the same as Miss Young's earlier effort. It may, however, be interesting to note that in "The Eyes of Youth" Clara Kimball Young played four parts, while in "The Love of Sunya" Gloria Swanson played FIVE!

¹ "The Eyes of Youth" is notable, among other things, as being the first picture in which Mr. Valentino appeared without a moustache.



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VIII

This little way of playing dual, triple, quadruple, or quintuple rôles is now an established trick of the trade with all really popular stars. The greater the popularity of the star, the more he or she finds it necessary to multiply him or herself! Rudolph Valentino was his own father in "Sons of the Sheik", John Barrymore did the same in "Don Juan"; Conrad Veidt in "The Two Brothers" played both of them, and in "The Cost of Folly" Gloria Swanson was her own daughter, and in "The Love of Sunya" she played, as we have seen, five characters almost simultaneously.

Miss Swanson's quintuple rôle holds the record to date with Clara Kimball Young a close second in "The Eyes of Youth"! So far Miss Swanson and Miss Young are the only stars that have found it necessary to do more than double themselves. Miss Swanson has multiplied herself by five, and seems, if anything, rather bettered by the process! Miss Young multiplied herself by four, and apparently the strain was too much for her, for she is no longer making pictures! How, one is tempted to ask, will all this end? Will Gloria continue to multiply, and will Miss Young take up the challenge and, with the aid of the megascope, swell as well as multiply? Will they, as time goes on, play, not five, but fifty-five parts? and is it not possible that the demand, once in danger of death from starvation, will meet an untimely end as a result of overfeeding?

IX

There can now, I think, be no doubt that the part of the film actor is confined to an emanation of sex appeal: so long as there is sex appeal, and so long as it is emanated, nothing else matters. The part of the

actor in films is necessarily small, because, firstly, the lack of continuity reduces acting to mimicry; and secondly, because the function of the film is to express an idea, whereas acting is connected almost entirely with the telling of stories. The actor has, therefore, to put himself in a position of total subservience. His mind must be as receptive as he can make it, and as near a blank as possible. He must be able to take the producer's instructions, and then to carry them out to the letter. He must be ready to register, at a moment's notice, hate, love, fear, triumph, scorn, or any other phase of emotion that the producer may see fit to assign to him. He must, in short, become a machine; a machine of which the producer alone holds the key.¹

And the producer—he must hold the actors in his hand; he must hold also the film. He must know the story, if any, and from him must come the idea. It is the producer who decides the number of close-ups, and it is he who determines their position in the film as a whole. He has not only to produce the film, but more important still, he has to cut it; or, to be exact, he ought to cut it himself.

The word "cutting" as applied to a film means just what it says! It is no trade term like the word "shot", nor is it in any way metaphorical. "Cutting", where films are concerned, means nothing more nor less than the application of the scissors to the celluloid.

Every company engaged in the making of films takes twice as much footage as it intends eventually to use. Twice as much is, in fact, a minimum, most companies taking between three and four times as much as is ever intended for showing. On paper this may sound extravagant, but in reality it is a form of

¹ The remarkable success of Jackie Coogan, Baby Peggy, and other infant prodigies of the film world, strikes me as being a very convenient illustration of the truth of the above theory.

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by Marie Antoinette, and, lingering on in republic France, stood as a symbol of that royalty for which she still so dearly hankers. Counts, Marquesses, Barons, and their spouses were always to be seen at the charity bazaar, and, in 1897, they seem to have been present in more than usual profusion. There was not a family in France that could not mourn the loss of some illustrious relative (and French women love wearing black), and consequently there was not a family in France, and later, as the fever spread, in Europe, that had words bad enough for the cinema.

It took the cinema a long time to recover from this, its first social ostracism. In Europe it has not entirely recovered even to-day. It retains still a certain air of naughtiness, which no doubt lends it a spice. And there are still people who talk in hushed whispers of "having been to the pictures", with a voice and manner that would lead one to expect a confession of a serious moral lapse!

But this was not the last of the trials which were to beset the struggling growth of the cinema. The disaster of the charity bazaar was, of course, immense, and its effect even more colossal. But people love to be entertained, and so it happened that, after ten years or so, "nice" people, even if not quite the very nicest, had forgotten the disaster of '97. Many of them had, I believe, abandoned their mourning, and the film was in consequence regaining a little of its lost prestige. It was discovered that films did not always catch fire, and also that, if proper precautions were taken, they need not catch fire at all. They were really quite well-behaved things; nice, long, snake-like rolls resenting only the direct application of a match. So the proper precautions were taken, and there were no more fires, and the cinema prospered. In England, Urban presented a coloured film of the Delhi Durbar, while Sarah Bernhardt graced

the screens of Paris in the rôle of Queen Elizabeth. From Italy came "Quo Vadis"—and then, from Sarajevo, came the war. . . .

Looking back on the war, one realises how very little it has achieved: some say it has achieved nothing, but this is not strictly true. The European War, merging later into the World War, was successful in killing the film industry in Europe. In England, France, Italy, and Germany studios were shut down, and production was at a standstill. Cinema managers with expensive houses that just had to be filled turned to America, and they have not turned back since. Seventy-five per cent of the films shown in Europe to-day are American made. They all bear the unmistakable stamp of the American mentality, and, what is more, they are "box-office successes", which means that people go and see them. The "code of the cowboy", from which, after two thousand years of ugly and unpleasant struggle, Europe was beginning to emancipate herself, is being proclaimed afresh in every town and village, from the Bay of Biscay to the Carpathians. And the preacher, although made of celluloid, is possessed of an eloquence that would shame even Mahomet and Peter the Hermit.

IV

The production of films in Europe was brought to an untimely standstill in 1914, and so, once more, in tracing the growth of the cinema, we must turn to America—America of 1897, the year of the Alaska gold rush . . . the America of which Pete the immigrant has laid the foundations.

When the first thrill of novelty had worn off, the vitascope found itself confronted with the same problem as had formerly faced its parent the kinetoscope—what could it do to keep itself alive? Pictures of trains, scenes in Central Park, close-ups of babies at

the most rigid economy: no one can tell just what a thing is going to look like when transferred to the screen. One can hazard a fairly accurate guess, but it can never be more than a guess; never can one be absolutely sure what the thing photographed will look like when it becomes the "thing projected". And, for this reason, it has been found safer to expose a large quantity of negative, and then to discard half and sometimes three-quarters of the exposed stock, rather than to risk being faced with an insufficiency of close-ups, long shots or any other form of shots, when once the film is finished, the actors disbanded, and the sets dismantled. Obviously it would be a very costly procedure to re-erect even a medium-sized set, and it would be still more costly to transport a vagrant star from New York back to California. Of course such desperate measures might not be necessary: the producer might have guessed right; but on the other hand, he might not! and the bare possibility of such a costly happening, bound sooner or later to occur, is sufficient compensation for the outlay of a few hundred dollars in extra footage. It is the safe way, the money-saving way, the American way, and therefore the way of the film.

When the last scene has been shot the actor's troubles are over, but not so those of the producer. When the film is completed (photographically) the producer must see each and every shot that has been taken. He must familiarise himself with every inch of the twenty or thirty thousand odd feet of celluloid and then, having obtained a thorough knowledge of the whole affair, he must start on the process of elimination. Forty thousand feet must be reduced to twelve thousand, and in many cases to less. To begin with, he will eliminate all such obvious superfluities as numbers (for each shot is numbered) and such things as he can see from a rough survey will be unnecessary in the completed film. He then has a

rough copy, ranging from anything to twenty-four thousand to thirty thousand feet. This rough copy is, above all things, rhythmless; it is disconnected, and there are many gaping chasms where titles will later have to be inserted. From out of this lifeless and still terribly disjointed and utterly rhythmless whole, the producer has to fashion a short lively rhythmic entity, finally to be called a film. This final polishing, shaping, or fashioning, call it what you will, is achieved by a vigorous and well-directed application of the scissors. Some shots must be shortened; others, it will be found, have been over-shortened, and must therefore be reprinted. Here a fade-out is necessary and there is a mix, and when the fade-outs and mixes have been overlooked in the process of photography, they have to be achieved by means of a chemical process: all this, of course, takes time; it takes also patience, and no small degree of intelligence. And all this the producer must do. In most cases he does, and if he does not, he has no right to the title of producer.

X

The producer is 95 per cent of a film; his position is paralleled only by that of the conductor of a large orchestra. The conductor is 70 per cent of the orchestra, but the producer is more than 70 per cent of a film. The London Symphony Orchestra can give a creditable performance even under an incompetent conductor, and similarly Pola Negri, in virtue of her own artistry, can shine through, even though she is unable to dispel the mists of incompetent production. There is, however, one essential difference—the London Symphony Orchestra will play the Fifth Symphony, and it will play it well, no matter who is conducting. The orchestra, although under the control of a director, has at the same time an enormous

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R. P. M.

N W

advantage over the film star, in that it has a mass of really good material to which, at any minute, it can turn its hand. A competent orchestra can play all the symphonies, and it can play them well, even if there is no conductor present, and so it is only when a Nikisch or a Toscanini is holding the baton, that we realise what wonders they can achieve. The film star, on the other hand, is in no such happy position, for there is no fund of screen classics to which the star can turn his hand—the very nature of the film makes such a situation impossible—"Greed" is a classic, but for all that we have no desire to see anyone other than Zazu Pitts in the leading rôle. Once a film is filmed it is FILMED; it cannot be reinterpreted as can a symphony; it can only be reprojected, or at the most refilmed, which process implies the creation of a new work as opposed to a fresh interpretation of an old one. And as it is impossible to conceive of a film without a producer, so it is impossible for the actor to launch out on established film classics (even assuming that they existed), and to interpret them without the assistance of a producer. The actor or actress may shine with reflected brilliance; a brilliance reflected from the directing sun of the producer. Without a producer, no matter how well the star does his work, he cannot succeed, because HIS work is so unimportant. To see Pola Negri in "The Crown of Lies" is to see genius wasted: to see her in "Carmen" is to realise the genius of Ernst Lubitsch.

Pola Negri has mistaken (or more probably she never had a choice) her vocation. As a stage actress she would be superb, but as a film star she serves only as a happy instrument for demonstrating the ingenuity or the foolishness of the various producers with whom she comes into contact. Pola Negri is an artist, and for this reason her films are never devoid of interest. There is something about her that penetrates the tedium of unbearable scenarios, that

surmounts the obstacles and breaks the restraining bonds of inefficient production; something that is reminiscent of . . . it is impossible to express it. Something that reminds one—that makes one feel that she has . . . and here again words fail me. An awful thought puts a sudden stop to my rhapsodies—perhaps, after all, it is only S.A.!

their food . . . these were all very well to begin with, when the vitascope was still a novelty, and when it was only expected to show pictures in motion. So long as ninety per cent of the population of New York had not seen pictures that moved, a few disjointed shots would suffice: it was the novelty that counted, but, as was to be expected, the novelty wore off. A few of the leading music-halls adopted the vitascope: it was a star turn to begin with, and then, after eight months or so, when the ingenuity of manufacturers failed to produce anything more startling than trains in motion and babies at their food, the vitascope was relegated to the end of the programme and used to clear the house.

In 1898 Holman Eaves, realising the immense publicity value of religious subject matter, and the still considerable drawing powers of the vitascope, decided to film the life of Jesus . . . but, just to make it more interesting, he decided to advertise his picture as being a direct photographic reproduction of the Oberammergau Passion Play. The "New York Passion Play" was an unqualified success, and even when the news leaked out that it was not a genuine reproduction of the Oberammergau spectacle, but had in fact been manufactured on the roof of the Grand Central Palace, it still continued to fill the theatres. In view of the fact that the last performance of the Oberammergau Passion Play had been given in 1890, that the production was decennial, and that the vitascope had not been invented until '96, one wonders why Mr. Eaves should have been at such pains to foist this elaborate deception on the public. One has not to look very far for an answer: the performance of the Passion Play at Oberammergau had attained the sanctity of tradition, that thing most holy in traditionless America. And further, as a stage presentation of the Passion Play had a few years earlier been vetoed by the Mayor of New York,

it is possible that Eaves, fearing lest the same fate should overtake his film, thought it wise to safeguard himself. And what better safeguard could he have than tradition-hallowed Oberammergau? The tradition of Oberammergau was two hundred years old, and, moreover, it was from Europe. . . .

I cite this incident, not because of its importance in film history, but because of the assertions I have made concerning the American mind. A stage version of the Passion Play was vetoed by the Mayor of New York, and the act acclaimed by an outraged public. A film of precisely the same subject was hailed as a triumph of art and morality, just because it was linked with the name of Oberammergau.

The Eaves Passion Play gave the film a temporary boost. For a few months it was again talked of as a "new art", a force for national uplift, and for mass education. It was but a temporary revival, and after the Passion Play had flickered its way through the larger cities of the West, the film, resuming its position of a "house-clearer", sank again into insignificance. Once again people groped for their hats as the shadowy figures materialised on the screen. And, as of old, there was adjusting of coat collars, and a powdering of noses, as the prize-fighters and acrobats shuddered through their hundred feet of contortion.

V

In 1903, however, a new element appeared in the films, and this was the "story picture". It seems to us of to-day that the idea of telling a story in pictures is so obvious that we can hardly conceive of a time when such an idea was not only a novelty, but absolutely unheard of. The Eaves Passion Play may be regarded as the first attempt to make a story picture. In view of the success of the picture, one cannot help wondering why the production of the story picture

CHAPTER XIV

"IS IT PEACE, JEHU?"

I

ADOLPH ZUKOR and Will Hayes, states a daily paper,¹ have been made a major and a colonel respectively in the United States army. This fact, trivial in itself, is, however, of the utmost importance to the films, and through them to the world at large. By this I do not mean that we are likely to see Adolph Zukor undergoing rigours of camp life, or even disporting himself on a parade ground. Nor is it likely that the overworked Mr. Hayes will find time for even the briefest sally in the things military. Zukor's majority and Hayes' colonelship are both honorary titles. They carry no pay, and likewise no inconveniences: I think one can safely say that the outbreak of another war would in no ways affect the ordinary daily routine of the newly created colonel and major. It is no longer plain Adolph Zukor and plain Will Hayes, but Colonel Hayes and Major Zukor, and therein lies the significance of the situation.

Ever since the signing of the Versailles Treaty, the United States Government has adopted a consistent obstructionist policy towards everything and anything that might lead to a solution of the world peril, the next war. This statement needs no amplification; and amplification, if it were necessary, would be beyond the scope of the present volume.

Having adopted this attitude of obstructionist militarism the United States Government have with characteristic thoroughness taken up everything that might conceivably help them to achieve their ends. Pacifism is taboo, patriotism is to be stimulated, and war to be glorified. The whole thing is reminiscent of the attitude adopted by a certain type of parson (padre he would prefer to be called) who prays that wars may vanish from the face of the earth and in the same breath utters a pious hope that when the next war comes along the youth of his great country will be as ready and as willing to fight as were the men who died in France. . . .

America having decided to glorify war, to stimulate the fighting spirit, known in polite society as patriotism, and to stamp out pacifism, realises that in the film she has just the ally she needs. The films are the thing, they have the power, as the Republican Party found to its cost. (Shown in June 1916, Charles Ince's picture "Civilisation" was largely instrumental in retaining the idealistic Wilson in the position of President.) If the films, then, have the power to support even so unspeakable a thing as pacifism, what power will they not have when invested with all the glory of patriotism, and the full brilliance of state co-operation in all matters bellicose? All this is only too true, and it is for this reason that one views with apprehension the present attitude of two of the most important men in the film world. These men have money and experience behind them. They have at their command all the vast forces of publicity, and the service of at least three-eighths of the now popular stars. And all this energy, which since the war has been hesitating on the brink of pacifist propaganda, has now been turned like a mighty avalanche of destruction in the channels of militarism.

"If you wish for peace, prepare for war," is the

¹ August 1927.

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old, old slogan, and the one with which the American Government would, if challenged, justify its actions. Have we not, ostensibly at least, in the hope of peace been preparing for war during the last 2000 years? Does not history show by repeated examples that preparation for war leads only to war? America, and Europe is not far behind, is preparing for war in the old-established and ordinary way; that much perhaps was to be expected. But one did not expect that to all this ordinary preparation would be added the extraordinary powers of the film. The film, which is the one force capable of combating the persistent and deep-rooted military propaganda of war offices, has been commandeered by those very war offices themselves

II

It is estimated that there are 50,000 cinema theatres in the world; 20,000 of these theatres are in the United States, and so show a full programme of American films. Of the remaining 30,000 one can safely say that two-thirds at a minimum of their programmes are made up of American stock. \$500,000,000 is paid annually in admission prices, which means that about 500,000,000 people see films every year. A great many people pay more than a dollar for admission, but on the other hand as many pay considerably less. An average of the amount paid per person per seat would result, I think, in a showing of something like 2s. 4d. or roughly half a dollar. And, calculating from the 2s. 4d. basis, one might arrive at the startling discovery that 1,000,000,000 people passed annually in and out of the cinemas. But people go twice, three times, four times, and more to the cinema; and so, while we can reckon the number of separate visits at somewhere round 1,000,000,000, the sum total of persons visiting cinemas annually cannot exceed,

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even if it amounts to, 400,000,000. The total population of the world is rated (M. Bunle, for 1920) at 1,819,000,000, which shows that rather less than half the world's population, and a good deal more than a quarter, are patrons of cinema theatres. Every year new theatres are being completed, and almost daily the plans of fresh ones are being projected, which means that the number of patrons is increasing. Very soon half the total world population will be cinema-tised, then three-quarters, and eventually the entire world population will develop into a cinema-going breed. Very nearly half the world is going to the cinema and consequently half the world is seeing American films and so half the total world population is being infected with American militaristic "ideals".

When called in to clear up the scandal of the motion picture world, Mr. Hayes (now Colonel Hayes) announced his intention of "selling America to the world by means of the motion picture". This statement, although it might cause flutterings in the industrial dovecots of Europe and Asia, had in it very little that was really significant to the general public. An increased supply of American goods following on an increased demand stimulated by the cinema—and as such it seemed to herald cheapness, durability, and a general reduction in prices to meet the new competition. American goods were, and are, all very well—but as to American "ideals". . . we have seen how the code of the cowboy is being broadcast through Europe and Asia, and we are now, it appears, to be subjected to a similar dose of American militarism; American militarism as crude as the American cowboy: as empty-headed, and every bit as destructively sexual. The code of a people only four generations removed from the primitive is to be thrust upon awaiting and exhausted Europe. A code of bullying strength, misconceived Darwinism, of diluted Prussianism and

was delayed until 1903. There is no visible reason for this delay. It took six years for this last lesson of Calvary to percolate. Six years . . . as compared with two thousand, and then nothing but a confused distortion. . . . By comparison, I say, it seems that this last lesson of Calvary was apprehended with incredible swiftness.

In 1903 came "The Life of an American Fireman." Fire thrill, cut-back, and a last-minute rescue. The film, as we know it, was already evolved, and waiting only for Hollywood to carry it to its illogical conclusion. The fireman venture was a success, and was followed, in the course of three months, by Edwin S. Porter's "Great Train Robbery". The "Great Train Robbery" was an even greater success: it toured America from end to end, and started a demand for more pictures of the same type. The result was "The Great Bank Robbery", "Trapped by the Bloodhounds, or a Lynching at Cripple Creek", "Kleptomaniacs", and others. Here was something more than novelty; here was a real thrill!

Simultaneously with the production of "The Life of an American Fireman", the moving picture was being put to yet another use at the St. Louis Exhibition. This was 1903, and the new use to which the picture was being subjected went by the name of Hale's Tours. Hale's Tours and Scenes of the World took the form of an entirely novel side-show. It was ensconced in a theatre of its own; a small building which simulated a railway carriage down to the motion of the wheels and the placement of the seats. There was a uniformed attendant at the door. He wore a peaked cap and brass buttons, and took the part of ticket-collector. At the far end of the hall, for such in truth it was, a changing panorama of scenery was projected before the audience. It was a moderately successful illusion of travel, and a great advance on the prize-fighting and acrobatic

snippets which had hitherto constituted the mass of the films produced.

Hale's Tours were sold all over the United States, and the importance of this success lies in the fact that, unlike the vitascope, pure and simple, and the kinetoscope, the Hale Tour device necessitated a special place wherein it could be shown. The kinetoscope had usurped the phonograph parlour, and the vitascope had won for itself a precarious footing within the confines of vaudeville; but neither of these things could happen to the Hale Tour. The Tour depended for its success on the railway-carriage atmosphere; without that it would be nothing, for the views shown were of the same faulty technique and spasmodic calibre as were the pictures shown in the music-halls. It was to Hale's idea of linking the pictures with the illusion of travel that the new enterprise owed its success: and it was out of the Hale railway coach that the cinema theatre materialised. It happened quite simply, and in just that same commercial "try-your-luck" spirit that characterised all the early ventures in the cinema world . . . a small outlay and a possibility of large returns.

Two citizens of Pittsburgh found themselves with a vacant store-room on their hands; one perfectly good room that was not making money. Something, of course, had to be done about it! This was in 1905, when the Hale's Tours were raking in the dollars. To fit up the store-room as a railway carriage would be an expensive venture. There was money in it, of course—but the outlay. . . . There was also an empty store-room with seating capacity for one hundred and twenty-five: everything pointed towards the pictures. The pictures, in fact, were clearly indicated. "The Great Train Robbery" . . . it came as an inspiration! Only the cost of a few hired chairs, a projector, the film, and the thing was done! Since 1903 "The Great Train Robbery" had been famous

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more than exaggerated Jingoism. All this we shall have, and with unconscious irony Colonel Hayes announces his intention of selling us this poison.

Against this menace, for it is literally a menace, a menace beside which things such as the yellow peril and the Communist terror sink into insignificance, there is but one method of defence. The world that is not America must make for itself its own films. Germany and Russia have shown us the way; Sweden is not far behind, and even France is producing films which, although worthless in themselves, will, on account of their spectacular nature, act as an antitoxin. The French film tends always to the superfluous in costume, and for that reason it will always be popular. It has that one great advantage over the militarist films to come. For militarist films cannot, in virtue of their nature, do more than touch on "the superfluous". The American peril must be fought at all costs; at all costs it must be kept in check. So let us have "superfluous" films. Let us have sex films, lovers, cowboys, anything and everything, rather than militarism. This militaristic campaign has only just been launched (1927), and it will take a year at least before the fruits of his labours become apparent. We in Europe have time; we have a year, perhaps two years, and during that period it is for us to build up a cinema industry of our own, so that when in 1929 Colonel Hayes and Major Zukor come with their newly made goods to the market, they will find that market already supplied. If we make our own films there will be no demand for American Jingo pictures, and so the menace will have been checked—for a time at least.

"War lust" is the most easily aroused of all emotions in mankind; and one can only say that if Major Zukor and Colonel Hayes succeed in their state-appointed task, that they will destroy them-

"IS IT PEACE, JEHU?"

selves and their films in so doing. The Great War helped American films. It gave them the world market which they now possess, but the greater war, or possibly the greatest war, will, it is needless to say, be a very different matter.¹

III

Systematised militarist propaganda by means of the films is still in the studio. It cannot burst upon us before 1929, and for that reason all speculation on the subject of its achievement cannot be more than the merest guesswork, and cannot, therefore, fail to minimise the extent of its final achievement. However vast, however ominous, we may visualise the terror, the imagination cannot but fall short of the full horror of the project when realised.

IV

With the exception of "The Four Horsemen" and one or two unimportant British pictures, the films have assumed a tolerably intelligent attitude towards the war in particular and warfare in general. We have had "The Big Parade", "What Price Glory?" and "Barbed Wire" from America; "The Emden" from Germany; nothing, as yet, from France, and worse than nothing from England, which makes a total of four pictures in which the case against the follies of statesmen has been well and clearly demonstrated. And even "The Four Horsemen" itself, loaded with excessive and unpleasant anti-German propaganda, possessed the salient merit of presenting the essential unpleasantness of war in a really graphic manner—a statement which I know

¹ See H. G. Wells's *War in the Air* for an account, fantastic though probable, of what will happen to all of us, and to America in particular, in the event of another war.

CHAPTER I

“LOOK HERE, UPON THIS PICTURE, AND ON
THIS”

LOOKING at the films—and looking also at America—for this last is inevitable, if we are to look at the films, that is—one is confronted with the realisation that there is about these very films much that is far from perfect, and at the same time, a certain amount that is “not so bad”. At times, then, the films are “not so bad”, and at other times (rarer of course) they show a very real merit; and as anything that shows no matter how small a degree of merit, merits also a proportionate degree of consideration, it will be sufficient for the moment just to “look at the films” . . . but the films are in America: not all the films, it is true, but a sufficiently large proportion of them is on the other side of the Atlantic, to invest the statement with a semblance of truth. Whether we like it or not (and to many of us the idea is repugnant), we must perforce admit that three-fourths at least of the film industry is in the hands of America. America no longer possesses a monopoly, for other countries ARE producing films. “They”, the other countries, are indeed producing films, but America is producing MORE films, and a consultation of statistics serves only to emphasise the tremendous ascendancy of America in this line of production. Germany may, and probably will continue to produce masterpieces, and France spectacles on the best Drury Lane model, and even England may be goaded in time into producing something that is not merely

sounds fantastic, for how, the reader will rightly ask, can any sane man, much less a film producer, present war as being anything but—well, “unpleasant” is a mild term. Either there is a lack of sanity among film producers or else they are indifferent as to whether or no they create another world war, so long as the process of creation proves lucrative. As the former view is obviously the more charitable, we will assume that it is so. A great many film producers, then, are just insane. That is our conclusion, and certainly there is no lack of evidence, should anyone see fit to dispute the point.

Of all the insane films “Mademoiselle from Armentières” was, without a doubt, the most insane. “Armageddon” is a good second, with “Ypres” and “Zeebrugge” tying for third place. These films are “all British”. “Mademoiselle from Armentières” told a story of the early days of the war; it told it well, and was on the whole competently directed, and well acted—but, it was undoubtedly what, for the sake of kindness, we have decided to call an insane film. War, it gave one to understand, was a picnic . . . just a lot of jolly boys together, a pretty little girl, a great deal of fun, and a minimum of pain all round. Technically, of course, it was a distinct triumph for British cinematography, but ethically, it was insane.

I have said repeatedly that no one but “me and H. G. Wells” understands how easy it is to raise the fighting spirit in the human race, and the praise that has been meted out to the above-mentioned films confirms me in the maintenance of this view.

We are to-day creatures of habit, just as afore-time we were creatures of magic. Magic, imitative or contagious, has always ruled our lives to a greater or lesser degree. In the early days it was called magic, and to-day results of this magic pass under the name of habit. The whole of modern advertising,

or very nearly all of it, is based on the results of that age-old custom which Frazer calls “imitative magic”.

There is very little difference between the mentality of the savage who, in order that he may become strong, rolls himself in an elephant wallow, and the modern city man who eats “Force” for breakfast, because he sees all around him pictures of large and healthy human beings who are also eating Force. The savage and the citizen both hope to attain strength by imitating—the one the elephant, and the other the healthy people of the posters. And, as human nature is so essentially imitative, is it not madness to let it see anything, picture, film, or play, in which war is represented as being in any way not unpleasant? And if war is represented as being a “picnic”, will not the imitative man feel moved to create just that state of affairs from which he sees that the happy-go-lucky atmosphere originates. And if, as in the case of the film above mentioned, that state is war, then mankind, in search of a picnic, will rush into war.

Of “Ypres”, “Armageddon,” and “Zeebrugge” there is little more to be said. They were all verging on the insane, though not one of them was quite so mad as “Mademoiselle from Armentières”. They all gave one to understand that war was a glorious game! The sport second only to fox-hunting but which, unlike fox-hunting, was open to the rich man and to the pauper alike. A sport for which one was paid; a sort of professional footballing, only vastly more amusing. *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*, which may be all very well for the dead, but not quite so sweet or yet so glorious for those who are left behind.

V

“ . . . This film¹ does everything that ‘The Big Parade’ and ‘What Price Glory?’ pretended to do.”

¹ “Roses of Picardy.”

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throughout America: true, many people had seen it, but there were as many who had not. "It was a windfall", argued the Pittsburgh venturers; and so it proved itself to be.

The news of the success of the Pittsburgh venture swept like wildfire through the amusement world of America. The cost of a projector, and the hire of a few chairs, and anyone could make a fortune. It was better than Alaska, and not nearly so dangerous. In Pittsburgh a rash of store theatres came at once into being. The disease spread, and in less than two years' time the whole of America was similarly pock-marked. Nickelodeons, these new amusement houses were called. . . .

VI

Having traced the inglorious though interesting evolution of the film, from kinetoscope through vitascope to Hale's Tours, "The Great Train Robbery", and nickelodeon, we are now in a position to survey the fully grown product, and to speculate on the reasons for the almost unbelievable success of the nickelodeons, or Nicolettes, as they came later to be called.

When the Lathams made their first prize-fight for the kinetoscope, it was the beginning of the end for the cinema. By "the end" I mean that the Latham prize-fights were the first step in that policy of slavish toadying to the tastes of the American public, which is still most effectually impeding the progress of the cinema as an art. The kinetoscope, vitascope, Tour, and nickelodeon, all came into being as an easy means of extracting money from the public: they had no other intention whatsoever. . . . The cinema, then, was born to make money, and as it was born in America, it was inevitable that it should be used to make money QUICKLY. There was only one way of making money quickly, and that

was to show films which would entice the majority of the public to pay out the required price of admittance. We have seen that the majority of the American public was composed of the descendants of disappointed European revolutionaries, and we have seen also the sort of things they thought; from which we are in a position to conjecture, with tolerable accuracy, the sort of thing that would entertain and amuse them.

There was still a stream of immigrants entering America in 1905 (the year of the Pittsburgh venture). The immigrants of 1905, although they were not essentially revolutionary in temperament, had come to America in search of the same phantom of easily made wealth as had lured Pete fifty years earlier. They had found that there was not room for them in their own country; that they were not wanted there, or that they were wanted by the police. . . .

They came to America in thousands, and in thousands they spread themselves over the great industrial towns—Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, and New York. The majority of them were unable to speak English, and were, in consequence, denied the pleasure of the theatre and the music-hall. Now some of these immigrants were making money, and even those that were not dazzlingly successful had a small surplus of their weekly earnings which they would like to have invested in amusements of a more economical nature than sex and drink. To these men, strangers in a strange land, the cinema, with its universal language of vision, and its ten cent admission, must have appeared as a godsend. It was an entertainment that they could both appreciate and afford; it was all that they asked for. A little relaxation after a tiring day in the iron works, ten cents' worth of pleasure after a day in the factory—nothing intellectual or in any way difficult, just a simple story simply told, a

(*Daily Mail*, 1927.) What "The Big Parade" pretended to do I cannot rightly say, but there was for all that a widely spread school of thought which announced, through the megaphone of the Press, and through its own trumpet-like lips, that "The Big Parade" was attempting to prove that America won the war. There was of course a tremendous outcry, and the penny papers, ever in search of slogans, demanded of an astonished public whether "our brave boys have died for this". "This" was, presumably, "The Big Parade", and, if my interpretation is correct, I have no hesitation in saying that they did die for "this". Literally this is not quite true, but what is really meant is that, if there had been no war there would have been no "Big Parade", a fact which in itself can hardly be considered sufficient justification for the world war 1914-1918. However, there was a world war, and one of the good things that came out of this Nazareth was "The Big Parade". "The Big Parade" was decried by certain hysterical newspapers because it dealt exclusively with American soldiers. ("The Four Horsemen", which confined itself entirely to French soldiers, was, it is interesting to note, uncriticised in this respect. . .) This, it was stated, was a crime! A crime against our own troops; an insult to our brave boys who had died. And if there was an insult, it was most certainly these very journalists who were conferring it. The heroism of the men who fought in the war is an established fact: we all realise it, but we realise also that it needs no further vindication. The earth moves round the sun; we are all aware of this, and yet this established fact is rarely, even in astronomical circles, a subject of conversation. . . . But to infer, as many newspapers did, that a film or any form of propaganda, could dim the memory of that past heroism—that surely was an insult. . . .

"The Big Parade" ran for twenty-four weeks at

the Tivoli,¹ and is now (1927) enjoying a very successful provincial release. Even insults, it seems, make good publicity.

The real objection to "The Big Parade" is to be found in its pacifist moral. This, I know, is a surprising statement to make, and one that calls for a certain amount of corroboration. Those who objected to "The Big Parade" were journalists, financiers, and to a large degree people who had a certain vague distrust of America, which the well-conducted Press campaign was only too successful in inflaming. The soldier, the man who had been through the war, was never once heard to raise his voice in indignation. The soldier realises only too well the full horror of modern warfare. The soldier understands the imminent danger of another war, and understands also, more clearly than anyone else can, the disastrous consequences of another such struggle. To the soldier,² then, anything that seems to work, however remotely, for the abolition of war, is not only acceptable, but definitely good. To the business man, however, and to the newspaper owner in particular, war is a godsend; it is just so much heaven-sent "copy", so many marvellously alluring headlines. Newspapers must, of course, be sold, and when the sale is flagging, there is nothing like a dash of the war spirit to act as a stimulant. The war spirit, and consequently war itself, is, therefore, a highly desirable state of things, as far as the newspaper magnate is concerned. The anti-war feeling, pacifist feeling, the international feeling, or any kind

¹ "The Big Parade" holds the record for the longest run of any film in London, except, of course, "Ben Hur".

² By the soldier I do not mean the professional slaughterer who has grown grey in his gold braid, not the staff officer whose living is war, but the ordinary conscript who has borne and will have to bear the brunt of war. The man who has had to leave his own congenial environment to indulge in a struggle of whose origin he is often ignorant.

so much celluloid covered with so many pictures . . . but for all that, unless some unforeseen catastrophe engulfs Wall Street with a tidal wave or swallows California with an earthquake, the real control of the cinema will remain on the other side of the Atlantic, and the film as an art will have to fight tooth and nail for its existence. And because of this transatlantic domination, if we are to understand the reasons for the present state of the cinema, sad or otherwise, we must have some idea of what the man in the street of New York, Cleveland, San Francisco, St. Louis, and Buffalo is thinking. For it is this "man in the street", and this woman also, who "goes to the movies". If this man is in sufficient evidence when a film is being shown, then the said film is a success; and if he, and she also, do not appear, then the film is accounted a failure. It is for his pleasure, and for hers also, that films are made; it is their likes and dislikes that are consulted, their tastes that film-makers study . . . and we must do likewise.

CHAPTER II

"IN THE BEGINNING . . ."

I

SINCE the signing of the Declaration of Independence, an act that is only a bare hundred and fifty years distant from skyscraping New York, America has been far too occupied with matters of internal expansion to have any time to think intelligently on matters artistic or even cinematographic. To begin with, there was a new constitution to be set in working order, and then almost immediately another war, that of 1812, close followed by the era of industrial expansion. And then, just as though the young country had not enough to worry about, must needs come the Californian gold rush, bringing in its train a crowd of undesirables drawn from the dregs of the European capitals . . . and finally, in 1861, the crowning disaster of the Civil War. . . .

When in 1865 the Civil War ended with the extinction of all that was most promising in the new country, America was at last free to look around her. What this "looking around" has resulted in is shown in modern New York, in Hootesville (Iowa), in Washington, in Cleveland: in fact, in any one of the great metropolises of the United States.

II

By the end of the Civil War, America was no longer the nebulous and inaccessible Land of Promise that it had been a bare fifty years earlier.

of feeling that makes for the abolition of war, no matter how remotely, is consequently to certain people highly undesirable¹: it is quite definitely a non-paying proposition, and therefore fit only to be squashed whenever and wherever it shows its head.

"The Big Parade" told the story of a young American who went to the war. The young American in question came from the monied classes; he joined as a private. In the same regiment were a former bar-tender and ex-riveter: these three, the rich young man, the riveter, and the bar-tender, were thrown together, and it is their fortunes that we follow throughout the film. The soldiers arrive in France, and the first thing they have to do is to clean out a filthy cowshed.

For some time the regiment was behind the front; follow days of boredom, days without anything to do except to get drunk on what wine can be stolen, and to wash in what little water can be procured. The hero, just to pass the time away, indulges in a flirtation with a French girl, the daughter of the house where his section is billeted. It is a very nice flirtation and one that ends, of course, in a quarrel, and here the producer calls in the arm of coincidence, for, immediately after the quarrel, the regiment is called up. Then follow scenes of hectic confusion—lorries crashing along the road, dust, mud, men forming up. A Catholic priest blessing a small party of men—more lorries—hurried good-byes, and men climbing into the motors. Aeroplanes overhead, lorries starting up, a rattling of chains, and then the departure. . . . A long line of bumping motor trucks rattling across the white road, and overhead a convoy of aeroplanes. The Juggernaut of war is carrying all before it: the little flirtation is swept away, the quarrel is forgotten, and, seen through the

¹ Note the continued and persistent hostility of a certain section of the Press to the League of Nations.

agony of this sudden parting, the whole affair looms large and assumes for a moment the guise of love itself. Mélisande, looking for her soldier, the hurrying men, the noise and dust, the inevitable departure. . . . Her agonised face as she pushes through the hurrying crowd, and the final parting just as the lorry is starting off. The small crumpled figure weeping over an old boot while the line of lorries lumbers on to the front. . . . Warfare sweeps everything aside. Nothing can stand up against it; there is no fun in it, no sport: it's just dirty cowsheds, drunkenness, and sex, which, under its disturbing influences, develops into an agonising parting. . . . Small wonder, then, that "The Big Parade" found itself unpopular in Fleet Street.

The lorries lumbered on to the front, the men were "detrained", shot at by an aeroplane, scattered, reformed, and set out to advance through a wood in the face of enemy machine-guns; wounds, and destruction, ending, as night fell, in a water-logged shell-hole where even smoking was impossible because of the enemy aircraft. A wet night in a shell-hole, and one of the three men, who is sent out to reconnoitre, is killed—and then the advance. The bar-tender and the rich young man, vowing vengeance against every German, crash madly into No-Man's-Land. One is killed, and the other, wounded in the leg, drags himself into another shell-hole, to curse with impotent despair the Germans who have killed his friend, the Germans who had ruined his leg. No quarter for a German, he vows, and then, beside him in the shell-hole, he sees a dying German soldier; a boy barely eighteen years old. . . . A heaven-sent chance for revenge. Still cursing, he drags at his bayonet. The German, half unconscious, opens his eyes and with pathetic gestures asks for a cigarette. . . . The young German dies before the cigarette is lighted. The advance sweeps on, and

comfortable seat, and no more of this still incomprehensible English.

The immigrant type was in the majority; there were one thousand immigrants to one intelligent person in America. And it followed, therefore, that if the cinema were to prosper, and if it were to prosper quickly, that it must, above all things, appeal to the immigrant, rejoice the heart of the tired docker, and soothe the jangled nerves of the weary iron-worker. "The Life of an American Fireman", "The Great Train Robbery", and their successors were all designed for this purpose. They all told simple stories; they offered close-ups of alluring heroines, presented a certain footage of very real thrill, and inevitably closed with the satisfying picture of a hero who had made his pile, and got his girl.

The film as an art . . . the idea was preposterous! The film was good for making money: it made money; it made lots of money—certainly it would be dangerous to interfere with the ways of the goose that was laying such very large and very golden eggs.

VII

If there is one thing that emerges with striking clarity from this confused web of finance and intrigue that comprised the early history of the cinema, it is the greatness of Griffith.

It is the fashion to-day to abuse Griffith; to say that he is a sentimentalist; that his plots are commonplace, and that his sub-titles are execrable (questions that will be discussed at greater length in a following chapter). But all that is beside the point, and what really matters is, that Griffith was the first man to realise that the cinema could be used as a medium for artistic expression, and that in 1907. He had the brains to see that underlying this web of finance was a form of expression that, once brought

to light, would rank in importance with the printing-press, and the alphabet itself, in the annals of history.

One is told that Griffith produced "The Sorrows of Satan", but never mind! He made "Isn't Life Wonderful?", and "The Birth of a Nation", in spite of its faults, could rightly be called "The Birth of the Films".

the next thing we see is our hero in an ambulance car. Another "Big Parade": a convoy of ambulance cars.

The war is over; two of the friends have been killed and the other has lost a leg—and that's about all there ever has been to say about warfare. The films say just a few words more, but they were so obviously superfluous, and said for commercial purposes only, that it is not worth while discussing them. It was all due to the inevitable happy ending without which the box-office receipts are never quite certain. The hero, minus a leg, returned to France, found his French girl and married her. But, if we look into it, what a tragedy. . . . A wealthy New Yorker married to a French peasant girl. . . . To use the words of an enthusiastic admirer of "The Big Parade", ". . . If they love each other, what does it matter?" I find myself in total agreement with this statement—if they loved each other. But there was, unfortunately, no evidence to show that such a state of affairs was in any way probable. Jim Appleton met Mélisande and flirted with her because there was nothing else to do. He was sorry to leave her, and circumstances, already enumerated, conspired to invest that sorrow with all the semblance of grief, but after a few hours he had forgotten her altogether. And she, living in France at the time of the war, and near the fighting line at that, must have met and flirted with at least a dozen soldiers before the Armistice put a stop to all that and she married and lived happily ever after with Jean, or Jacques.

VI

"The Big Parade" had the essential merit of showing war as it was, and not war as we should like it to be, or rather as our war-mongers would have us believe that it is. Just mud, manure, and wounds,

and a liberal ration of unhappiness all round. And it showed also the essential folly of the whole thing. The unreasonableness and idiocy of supposing that, just because it has been declared that England and Germany, or America and England, are at war, there should be any feeling of animosity between the INDIVIDUALS of either nation. Why should an Englishman hate a German, or an American an Englishman, just because a decree has gone forth? We would, all of us, fight in self-defence, that is natural, that unfortunately we cannot help; but when it comes to cold-blooded murder, a dying German, a dying Englishman, American, or Frenchman, asking for a cigarette, we should all act as Jim Appleton did, for we are all men. And, because we are mere men, it is well-nigh impossible for us to sustain any degree of definitely hostile feeling for people of whose very existence we are unaware. We may hate our too persistent creditors; we may dislike our families and feel that the murdering of our relatives would be beneficial to us and to humanity. These people we know; we have felt their unpleasantness only too keenly; our creditors and our family have dogged us all our lives. But just "Germans"—Germans in the abstract, Frenchmen in general. . . . The human mind is too small a thing to harbour so vast a notion.

VII

We have had films dealing with the actual fighting in the war; they have been many, and their merits have been varied. But so far we have had only one film that has dealt with that unhappy section of the community, prisoners of war. Unhappy men kept like animals behind an impassable fence of barbed wire. Strangers in a strange land, bearing on their individual shoulders all the hatred supposedly felt for the belligerent nation. The belligerent nation is

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It was still a land of promise, but it was both concrete and accessible. The Atlantic voyage had become, thanks to the steamship, an undertaking on which a man could embark with a reasonable assumption of safety and speed. A matter of three weeks, at the most, and one could be in America. America was exhausted: one half of the United States was ravaged by war and incapable of any further action, and the other half, although nominally victorious, found itself in hardly a better plight. Its man-power was reduced by half, its exchequer depleted, and there was no longer "a great man" at the helm. And all the while the steamships were plying between Europe and America. Now steamships do not sail without some reason for their sailing; the reason in this case was that there were people who wanted to be conveyed to America. People were coming into America; they were coming in their hundreds and their thousands. America, exhausted and war-ravaged, received them. They became Americans, and their grandchildren are the Americans of to-day.

III

Nineteenth-century Europe presents a dismal picture of labour disputes, of revolutions, counter-revolutions, and abortive national risings. We see Hungary and Italy struggling for a nationalism that is already an anachronism, France, under its most able ruler since Louis XIV., weighed down by the clumsy trappings of a mediaeval empire. There is Russia, with serfs and censors, still completely mediaeval. And in England we have the first Reform Bill, Robert Owen, and the beginnings of Trade Unionism.

To study the history of nineteenth-century Europe is to study the history of revolution; sometimes peaceful, but more often bloody. And revolu-

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tion, we know, brings with it two things, and these two things it leaves behind, no matter what else it fails to achieve. It leaves behind it the idealist and the disappointed fortune-hunter. The nineteenth century had more than its fair share of revolutions: it had also more disappointed fortune-hunters than it needed, and as many idealists as any age could reasonably be expected to handle.

With the idealists we are not greatly concerned; for the most part they stayed in Europe. Those who survived their revolutions lurked in picturesque cellars and plotted further bloodshed . . . for the good of humanity. Of those that died, history has enough to say. It is with the disappointed fortune-hunter that we are here concerned, for it is he and his like that have been largely instrumental in the formation of modern America.

Before proceeding further, it will be well to define the term "disappointed fortune-hunter", so that there can be no doubt as to the meaning suggested by these words.

IV

Whenever there is a great social upheaval, be it a revolution, a war, or merely an earthquake, there is a certain sort of being who becomes at once strikingly prominent. In war time he is called the profiteer, though the profiteer as profiteer is outside our present circle. It is with the man who would have profited, if he had had the brains, that we have to deal—the man who has succeeded in making a fortune overnight, only to lose it on the following morning; the gambler, the bully, the looter: in short, the man who has made himself thoroughly unwelcome in his own country. Of course, this last applies also to the man who, for want of a more expressive word, I have labelled the Idealist. It is an unhappy truth, but

too vast and indefinite a thing to be the recipient of any concentrated hatred or love. Concentrated hatred, or love for that matter, must be focused upon something smaller, and for that purpose the prisoner of war is the ideal thing. He is an individual and he is accessible. He is visible and tangible. He is a man like anyone else and capable therefore of being hated by anyone else. It is easy and pleasant to hate one person, and if that person be a prisoner of war the task of hating becomes a duty; a duty both easy and pleasant.

In "Barbed Wire" we were introduced to a prison camp in France and were shown a love affair between a French girl and a German prisoner. This love affair killed the girl's father, who was suffering from a weak heart, and made the girl's name worse than dirt in the village. The girl had lost her brother in the war . . . he had been killed by the Germans—and here was she taking a German to her heart.

At the same time it happened that the German prisoner lost his sister who was killed by a French air raid on his native town. "How could he", his mother wrote, "ever think of loving a French girl? If he did, she would die of shame." All the hate of the French village, and all the hatred of the bereaved German family was concentrated on two persons. Here were two individuals whom they knew and who had violated the standards by which they were supposed to live. The French girl in love with "a filthy Boche"—it was unthinkable. If she married him, she must leave the village. If the German married the French girl, his mother would die of shame. . . . He must not marry her; it was unthinkable. And if he did, he should not bring her to his mother's house. Patriotism at its worst, and at its most futile. Each side proudly convinced of its own rectitude, wilfully ignorant of its own guilt, focusing on two individuals whom it knew the hate that it was

incapable of feeling for an abstraction of which it was ignorant.

The girl's brother returns from a prison camp in Germany; he is not dead, but blind, and asks a passer-by in the village where he is. The passer-by recognises him and pours out the story of his sister's shame. The brother gropes his way to his house; he finds his sister faced by a mob of enraged villagers. . . . "Here! See what they've done to your brother! Filthy Boches. . . ." There is a movement of satisfaction in the crowd. The girl, they feel, cannot be so shameless as to continue her wantoning in the face of her brother's blindness. The soldier, however, knows better. "Where is this man?" he asks. He is confronted with the German. "I feel not a German or a Frenchman, but a man like myself. . . ."

The crowd, disappointed of its hoped-for denunciation, looks on in blank amazement. A soldier, and one who had been blinded, to speak like this. It is incomprehensible—and they disperse in amazement. He is a soldier, and he has fought. He has lost his sight, and he speaks like that. . . . Perhaps, after all, there is something in it. Perhaps—but even so they cannot understand it.

That is how the film should have ended, but as that would have left the eventual happiness of the lovers in doubt, it was found necessary for the brother to conjure up a vision of "All the dead that ever died". All the dead that ever died walked solemnly across the sky. Why they were walking, and where they were going, one was not told. They just walked, and they were dead. The vision acted like magic. The solemn crowd became an enthusiastic mob; they cheered and threw up their hats, and the brother, still blind, blessed the now happy union of the lovers.

This ending, and more especially the afore-mentioned vision, was a decided mistake. It was, to begin with; definitely ugly, and psychologically it was

CHAPTER IV

THE STAR IN NEBULA

I

FAR be it from me to criticise the art of Miss Mary Pickford, for that art is something incomprehensible! Like the Houses of Parliament at Westminster and the water front at Buda Pesth, it is so very much better than it has any right to be. It is, however, not Miss Pickford's art, but her appearance that I intend to discuss. And here again let me guard myself against misunderstanding. I have no intention of questioning the purity of her complexion, or the length and veracity of her ringlets; for both these things were established some time ago, along with her popularity. It is the cause for this popularity that we must seek.

Let us visualise Miss Pickford. . . . Small, blonde, tastefully beringletted, and possessed of a haunting, wistful expression. Appealingly frail, and exquisitely tender; just calling out for a strong man to take her in his arms and shield her from the perils of the world . . . and there we have the secret of Miss Pickford's popularity.

Is there anything calculated to appeal more strongly to the Spaniard, the Italian, or the Irishman than Miss Pickford's wistful, though very real, charm? What better could the cowboy desire than this frail creature, whom in imagination he could clasp, love, and clasp again?

But this is not the whole battery of Miss Pickford's charms (a subject on which volumes might

well be written), for she is possessed of one unfailing weapon, sure in the end of capturing the masculine heart. It is not her ringlets and it is not her wistfulness, for she numbers among her admirers those who abhor ringlets, and those to whom wistfulness is abhorrent, but it is something resulting from a combination of the two which, for want of a better word, I will call an air of innocence. It is to the emanation of this "air of innocence" that Miss Pickford owes ninety per cent, at least, of her success. She embodies the idea of the "sweet pure little girl" that every cowboy, gold-digger, and profiteer hopes some day to win for himself; the final and supreme reward, worth any amount of any man's toil . . .

The same, of course, might be said of Lilian Gish, who is also frail, tender, and innocent in the extreme. She is possessed, too, of that same haunting expression, but, because she lacks vitality, she will never rival Miss Pickford in popularity. Miss Pickford is innocent, frail, and appealing, but she is always alive. A real girl is Mary Pickford, and one who could mend her husband's socks without pricking her fingers. No one would doubt Miss Gish's willingness to mend socks; it is her ability to do so that would be questioned. It is easy to visualise the tearful Lilian sitting up nights over her needlework. We can see the bleak fireless room, the brave tearful eyes . . . and the lamentably mended sock! If Miss Gish started needlework there would be no time for cooking, and if, by dint of a miracle, she did manage to do both, there would be a continual trickle of picturesque tears. But not so Mary Pickford: she would bend smiling over her cooking pots, to pass singing to her sewing. And when, in the evening, her husband came home, a bright smile of welcome, a palatable dinner, and a fine durable pair of socks. Innocence combined with efficiency. Lilian Gish could give the innocence; she could give as much and

far from correct. The sullen temper of the villagers transformed in a moment into radiant enthusiasm was, what Aristotle would have called, "an improbable possibility".

In "The Big Parade" the happy ending ran counter to the theme of the film—war was useless, nothing ever came of it, least of all happiness. This idea the ending did its best to belie. In "Barbed Wire", however, the ending, although unfortunate, was still consistent and needing only a lapse of time to make it both credible and probable. The soldiers who fought in the war, it said, realised only too well that they had no personal spite against individual Germans. They might have lost their sight, or their legs; that was war, and for that reason it was absurd to saddle one individual with the blame. In war neither side can plead "not guilty" as far as atrocities are concerned; that again is war. "And so, for God's sake," said the brother, "let's put an end to this thing which mutilates us, kills us, and makes us miserable. For that is war. Let's put an end to it, and let's forget these silly prejudices. We're men first, and Germans, Frenchmen, Englishmen, Russians, and Italians second." All that the film said quite clearly, and it was only the unfortunate treatment of the last 500 feet that made an otherwise beautifully presented plea for peace an example of the crudest sort of pacifist tub-thumping.

The moral of the film is, however, of such essential importance to our civilisation, and one that is so rarely realised, that we should not grumble at its being presented crudely. Let us rather be thankful that it is presented at all. Better a crude presentation than no presentation. And, under the circumstances, perhaps a crude presentation is the more desirable. The cinema-going public is by no means "bright"; its vision is clouded with sentiment and confined within the limits of S.A. A subtle and artistic pre-

sentation of this very important point would, in all probability, have passed unnoticed, whereas the film as it now stands cannot fail to make its message obvious to the most intent of lovers, and to the most ardent seekers after sexual stimulus—in short, to the cinema-going public at large (which, be it remembered, is about one-quarter of the total population of the world).

From a consideration of "The Big Parade" and of "Barbed Wire", it is well to pass to "The Four Horsemen", for otherwise we might become too optimistic and be tempted to suppose that the film was everywhere the sworn enemy of war and the ardent herald of peace. "The Four Horsemen", however, tells a very different tale. Instead of war, futile and miserable, we have war, miserable indeed, but glorious. We see the young hero, redeemed from a life of meandering diletantism and transformed into a real popular hero by the simple act of enlisting. The keynote of "The Four Horsemen" was, we—the Allies—were right. We strove with the beast and we prevailed. Glorious is our name and still more glorious our sacrifice. The Germans were the beast in multiple form: they were beasts through and through, just as surely as the French and the English were angels pure white to the core. The Germans were shown shooting innocent civilians; it was the Germans who desecrated the castle on the Marne. The Germans who got drunk, the Germans who lusted, and the Germans who dressed in petticoats; made themselves a laughing stock. . . . Our soldiers, it was inferred, "cared for none of these things".

The discerning reader may by this time have surmised that I am a convinced pacifist. That much is true. And how did "The Four Horsemen" affect me, a convinced pacifist? I went in and, having thrilled to Valentino's superb tango, found myself plunged all of a sudden, and in direct contradiction to all my

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none the less a truth, that the man or woman who tries to better the lot of his fellow-men is always looked upon as an unwelcome intruder. But, although the idealist has usually made his own country an unpleasant place for himself, he has not, so far, been guilty of abandoning his country and his work for that reason. Louis Kossuth spent a few years in America, but he never became an American, nor did he or his kind have any influence on America or on its affairs. Kossuth, and other men like him, came to America when their lives, and consequently their work, were in real danger in their own countries. They stayed in America just long enough to let that danger die down, and for a sufficient time to recuperate their strength and energy. . . . Kossuth and his like had, unfortunately, no share in the making of the American mind of to-day.

There remains now only the disappointed fortune-hunter, the profiteer who has not profited, and him we must consider at some length, because it is he and his like that have made America what it is.

There is something about the state of mind created by a revolution that, while it produces some of the noblest of men and of ideas, produces also something more than humanly unpleasant. Men enter a revolution for one of two reasons: either for the furthering of their own ends—and this class is in the majority—or, as is the case with the minority, in the hope of realising altruistic dreams. Those who “revolve” for their own ends will seem as good revolutionists as any. They will appear enthusiastic over the dictatorship of the proletariat, and more than enthusiastic over social equality. Invariably they will support bloodshed, and any scheme seeming to have for its goal the redistribution of wealth. In short, they will act like good revolutionaries. . . . But, once the revolution is over, be it a failure or a success, you will hear no more of them. Those who

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have been fortunate enough to accumulate the desired amount of wealth will settle quietly in some neighbouring state: perhaps they will not even change their state. But whatever else they do, or do not do, they will one and all become rabid and implacable foes of any movement, reasonable or otherwise, that seems to threaten the established order of things: the order under which they live, and from which, parasitically, they grow fat. . . . And those who have failed in accumulating the desired fortune . . . ? What will become of them? One of two things: they may, that is if they are unusually foolish, continue to cling leech-like to the figure of revolt, and so do their utmost to foment further discontent, from which they still hope to reap golden harvests. Or they may abandon their countries, and this is more often the case, in search for other and less dangerous ways of becoming rich.

Consider the revolutions of the nineteenth century—France, Hungary, Belgium, Austria, Italy, Poland, and misgoverned Ireland—and consider also the alluring prospect which the vast and still unexplored continent of America must have held out to these disappointed men and women. . . . Great rivers, and living by the side of these rivers natives to be exploited. Towns, so new that the grass was still growing in their streets, and where law had in all probability never been established. . . . Vast tracts, undiscovered, and without the arm of the law. To the hunted revolutionary, with a price on his head, America must have presented itself as the ultimate realisation of his wildest dreams—safety from the law that was hunting him—safety in a land where there was no law.

In 1845 came the California “gold rush”, and in 1848, the year of revolutions . . .¹

¹ In 1887, just as the cinema was being invented, came the Klondyke gold rush.

views; into a welter of shouting patriotism. I thrilled with the French crowd in the tango room, vibrated in sympathy with every chord to the Marseillaise, hurled epithets of scorn on the skulking hero who, because of his Argentinian birth, felt no desire to fight for the "right"—the right, the just, the true cause—all this I felt. And when at last Julio had expiated his sins on the battlefield, I felt that he was a hero indeed. And when amid the final array of crosses the Four Horsemen were seen disappearing into the sunset, it was with a feeling of relief and credulity that I viewed the scene. The slaughter and the sacrifice had not been in vain; the beasts had been mastered and the right had triumphed. And it was fully twenty-four hours before I was again able to see things in their true perspective. Everything stated in the preceding paragraph I know perfectly well to be untrue. I know that the war achieved nothing. I have no illusions concerning the beastliness of the Germans, and I am not in any way convinced that the right has triumphed, and least of all can I think of the world as now safe for peace. But, so well did Rex Ingram state his case, that I was persuaded. I was more than persuaded: I was convinced. And what is more, I was excited and would willingly, at that moment, have rushed to battle against all Germans.

If the war spirit is so easily aroused even in a pacifist that he is willing to ignore his better judgment and plunge blindly into war, what must be the effect of such a film upon the ordinary spectator? By "the ordinary spectator" I mean the man or woman who believes vaguely that war is a natural state; knows that the Germans were beasts, and is convinced that the right is on "our side". Would they not from being passive believers become active propagators? veritable breeding grounds of infection? They would, and they did. All Americans had just

that attitude of propagating self-righteousness with regard to the war. They were "right" and the Germans were "wrong". They won the war because they had the right on their side. The prevalence of this attitude in America can be traced to two main causes: firstly, the fact that the Americans were distant by a seven days' journey from the seat of war, and were therefore under no compulsion to see anything other than what they wanted to see of the war. And, secondly, to the influence of "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse", which proclaimed so loudly just the very things that every good American was feeling. This attitude of blaring self-righteousness is the exclusive property of the civilian, of the person whose daily life was hardly affected by the war, and for that reason it is found in greater quantities in the United States than it is in Europe.

Two years ago I was discussing with an American lady the comparative inability of the New York Symphony Orchestra to deal with a Wagner score. "Oh yes," she said, "but then they have had so little practice." On asking why a prominent orchestra should have had so little chance to practise Wagner, I was greeted with the following amazing statement: "We never give very much Wagner here, and, of course, there was no German music at all during the war, not even in the churches". This story should need no comment.

We in Europe were too painfully near the war to indulge in such mock heroics. We had, it is true, our mad patriots, and since the Armistice they have increased in number. With each year the memory of all that was futile is being dimmed by the remembrance of all that was glorious during the war. On either side of the Atlantic the gospel of "The Four Horsemen" is gaining converts daily.

Technically, "The Four Horsemen" was very nearly perfect; but morally and ethically it was about

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more than any man could do with, but she could never, even in her most care-free moments, manage anything but a "wan smile". . . .

I have dwelt on Miss Pickford's obvious charm as opposed to her more subtle talents as an actress, because it was this "charm" that won her fame. It was not until she was famous that Miss Pickford was able to demonstrate her powers as an actress—but "Rosita" was not the success that it should have been. The public wanted Mary and not a Spanish singing girl, and so Mary, always obliging, and a trifle out of pocket, returned to them.

The public had a far greater share in the "making of Mary" than had Miss Pickford herself.

II

It is a mistaken idea, and one current among vagrant humanity, that woman is the highest reward that man can ever attain. The films got hold of this idea when still in their infancy, and they have exploited it ever since. The reason is, of course, obvious. This misconception, or rather this misplacement of woman's worth, is a product of the cowboy type of man. The sailor, the cowboy, and that general nuisance known as the rover, are all men who, from the nature of their ways of livelihood, are denied the company of woman for at least two thirds of their time. Most of their life is spent alone and in the "great open spaces"—the cowboy on his mountains, the sailor on the sea, and the rover a little on both. They are miles from the civilisation to which they are used, and there are long periods during which they have comparatively little with which to occupy themselves. During these periods of enforced idleness the sailor, the cowboy, and the rover fall to thinking. They ponder on the civilisation which they have left, and in their thoughts it takes on

fantastic proportions: it assumes a new shape, and becomes woman—then something happens: a storm or rustlers, and the man's thoughts are cut short. He must be up and doing; it is his life, and for another three weeks he has no time for thoughts of women. Once more a lull, and recurring thoughts of women, magnified this time by a separating stretch of time. . . . No wonder, then, that when the sailor, the soldier, or the cowboy returns he goes on what is called "the loose". That is only natural and to be expected, the point being that he DOES NOT STAY THERE. In a few days, a week at the most, he must be off. He does not wish to be womanised any more than he can afford it. The cowboy man is not as he is made out to be, entirely sexual. Sex for him is a relaxation to be taken when he can afford it.

The film shows us the "he-man" on one of his periodic returns to civilisation. It shows us his woman, his rival, and his final triumph, and there it stops. And in so stopping it falls very far short of the truth. After the final close-up the man inevitably leaves the woman. If he is a sailor, he goes to sea; and if a cowboy, he returns to his mountains. The soldier must live in barracks, and the rover can never stay long in one place. Always the woman will be left, and always the film will hide this from us. And why? . . . Is there anything to be ashamed of in the fact that men find things more important than sex to occupy their minds?

The woman likes the strong man, the "he-man" he has been called, every bit as much as the man is supposed to like the golden-haired little girl, and so, of course, the cowboy has become the model on which film heroes are made: that much was inevitable. But the films were made in America, and so it was equally inevitable that the cowboy should, in the process of remodelling, become distorted.

The descendants of the gold-diggers and the

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as pernicious as the Ganges water at Benares. It proclaimed to millions that war was a glorious state of things, and it did a great deal more than hint that "eternal peace was only a dream, and a bad dream at that".

Such things are more dangerous than playing with matches in a powder magazine, for the powder magazine is but a powder magazine and limited, therefore, in its destructive capabilities. But the war spirit is everywhere, from the Himalayas to the Andes, from the Andes to the Urals and on to the Pacific Coast. . . . It is everywhere, and it is highly inflammable; so inflammable that an explosion, no matter where, is bound sooner or later to lead to universal catastrophe. If ever there was any justification for a censor, it could be found in the function of expurgating such films as "The Four Horsemen".

From the gloomy prospect evoked by the spreading gospel of "The Four Horsemen", it is with real pleasure and with no small degree of optimism that one can turn to "What Price Glory?" which, like "The Big Parade" and "Barbed Wire", proclaims with a clarion note the futility of war. "What Price Glory?" was, to begin with, a very successful play. It enjoyed a run of nearly two years in New York, thanks, to a large extent, I am told, to the liberal use of profane and obscene language which the author had very considerably provided. The play does not read well, and with the exception of the one line in the second act when the wounded officer cries out, "What price glory now!" there is nothing that sticks in the memory. And this is perhaps as it should be, for, on putting down the play, one is confronted with the words, "What price glory now . . ." which enigmatic statement goes a long way towards summing up the whole absurd situation. The fact that there was a French girl in the play, and that she was engaged in a practically

"IS IT PEACE, JEHU?"

simultaneous affair with an American officer and an American sergeant, is really of very little importance. The girl is swept aside, the captain and the sergeant forget their quarrels and rush to battle like enraged bulls. Such is war; such is human nature—what price glory, indeed? The girl is left; the men go off to war and, presumably, they get killed. The girl is left—at last the "cowboy" is unmasked. The cowboy, who for two decades has been hiding behind the dazzling veil of constancy, has appeared at last in his true colours. A great sensual brute, as inconstant as he is sensual, and as pugnacious as a bull. The veil has been lifted for a moment; we have had one glimpse; it remains now for a strong hand to rend the veil from top to bottom and to expose once and for all this absurd fallacy of the "constant cowboy".

There are two more war films that should be discussed, but which in view of their nature must be held over until a later chapter. They are "The Emden" and "The Battle of the Somme" (shown by special permission of the Army Council). They are both good films—"The Emden" is one of the best that I have ever seen—but they both deal with one particular phase of the war and are therefore historical films, and so have no place in the present discussion which claims to deal with the films on the war in general.

VIII

The films have only just discovered the war, and similarly the war has only just discovered the films. During the last two years we have had an unprecedented rush of war pictures. There have been "The Big Parade", "Barbed Wire", "Hotel Imperial", "What Price Glory?", "Convoy", "Wings", "War Hawks", and "Seventh Heaven" from America. From Germany, "The Emden", and another film which has been considered unfit for showing in

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From the foregoing survey it is, I think, obvious that the type of immigrant entering America during the middle and latter half of the nineteenth century was not of the sort best fitted to help in the construction of a reasonable and intelligent state of mind. He was, on the contrary, the type of man calculated to create just the opposite, namely, an unreasonable and unintelligent state of mind.

Imagine the political exile, the refugee, or the oppressed Irishman landing in America at the close of the Civil War: what would be the thoughts uppermost in their minds? Firstly, "I haven't got a penny in the world . . ." and, secondly, "I must manage somehow to get some pennies. . . ." And then, when, no matter how, the necessary pennies had been obtained . . . "I have made my pile, and now I'm going home to enjoy it."

To the immigrant America presented the last refuge of necessity. It was a country where he might hope to escape the law; a place where there was a reasonable chance of making money: an unpleasant place, and one to be left as soon as the necessary money had been acquired. It was an unpleasant place, and it was far removed from home, and therefore if the money were to be made at all, it must be made quickly: the quicker the better. And here we have the nucleus of the modern American mind—hurry, hurry, hurry . . . ! All good Americans to-day are engaged in making their pile, or in "making good" as they prefer to call it. And the only way in which one can account for the almighty hurry in which they are, one and all, engulfed is by supposing that they wish to get the unpleasant process over as soon as possible!

Suppose, then, that our immigrant lands, and that somehow or other he manages to live, and also that in a few months' time he accumulates a little money. Let us suppose that he is one of the gold-

"IN THE BEGINNING . . ."

seekers, and that bravely he has fought his way to California. What then? He charts a claim and begins to work it; it yields a little gold. Not much, but a little. . . . What will he do but spend it? And on what should he spend it other than on sex and drink? Our immigrant (whom for the sake of brevity we will call Pete) returns on "the morning after" to his claim. Pete gets to work and digs and washes assiduously, or does whatever one does to a claim, only to find that there is no more gold. It is by now evening, and Pete has got a splitting headache. . . . What can he do? He can, of course, take to the hills, and, as a bandit, eke out a precarious though profitable existence. But such a course requires courage; more courage than that with which I have endowed Pete. There is only one thing that he can do (that is, if he will not starve), and that is to take service under some one of his more fortunate fellows who has realised his "claim" in the form of a cattle ranch. So Pete becomes a cowboy, spending long months in the wilds alone with his cows and his fellow-cowboys. At times he and his companions have occasion to descend on a town: some cattle to be sold, the master to be interviewed, stores and supplies to be bought: any or all of these things will bring the cowboy into periodic contact with the town. And what then will be his thoughts on entering a town after so many months of enforced continence and sobriety . . . ? Naturally, incontinence and insobriety. And here we can leave Pete the immigrant, for from now on he becomes Bull the cowboy, and, to all intents and purposes, Bull the American. He will spend the rest of his life in America, alone with his cows. And after years of solitude enlivened by periods of sporadic debauch he will, in all probability, meet a premature end under the hoofs of some enraged steer. But till that day comes, and if life is to be short, then let it also be merry. . . .

England.¹ From Great Britain we have had "Roses of Picardy", "Mademoiselle from Armentières", "Mons", "The Battle of the Somme", "The Battles of Coronel and the Falkland Islands", "Remembrance", "Poppies of Flanders", "Blighy", and "Land of Hope and Glory", and "The White Château" is, I hear, imminent. Nine war pictures in eighteen months: Great Britain has indeed excelled herself.

And, along with this discovery that war pays, we have the realisation by the war offices that the films are good propaganda. The film kings want to make war pictures because they pay, a desire which has given us "Barbed Wire" and "What Price Glory?", but now the war offices find that their armies are in need of recruits, and so they, too, want war pictures. They are willing to co-operate with the film kings: they will co-operate heart and soul, or, more helpfully, in the shape of men, tanks, ships, guns, and all the rest of it. All this they will do, and, furthermore, they will add the prestige of their name to all films so produced—"With the co-operation of the Admiralty", "By special permission of the Army Council", etc. etc. We are all well acquainted with these legends. The war offices are willing to co-operate; they are willing to lend their name and the prestige carried by that name, but they will only do so on one condition—there must be no more pacifism, no more of the "Barbed Wire" type of film. Down with "The Big Parade"; up with "The Four Horsemen".

All this, of course, is very reasonable, or rather, very logical, for pacifism, if carried to its logical conclusion, would do away with war offices, and would, in so doing, oust several elderly gentlemen from a series of highly lucrative and highly respected posi-

¹ The said film has since the time of writing been shown publicly in London.

tions. True, there is no immediate danger of any such drastic happening, but there is a certain amount of talk about pacifism. And so, just to make certain, Will Hayes becomes Colonel Hayes, and to make assurance doubly sure, Adolph Zukor, Major Zukor.

The deed is done, the war offices are bound with all the ties of an unbreakable *entente* to the celluloid. They are tied up in it. What fingers, one wonders, are capable of straightening out this tangle?

settlers, having made themselves homes, and having attained a certain degree of comfort, developed aspirations towards becoming what they would probably call "really nice people". They cast longing eyes towards Europe, with its royalties and its old-established families, and began to look askance at the easy amours of their fathers. They made frantic efforts to identify their mothers. The second generation, and the third and fourth were born and brought up in the full knowledge of their paternity: great-grandmother's little indiscretion with a cowboy was transformed into a legend of lifelong constancy and devotion. She had waited and worked for great-grandfather, who, in his turn, had lived only for her. Thus in a scramble for respectability, supposedly European, was born the figure of the constant cowboy. How later he developed into a great lover, we shall see in a following chapter.

Women always have, and always will, like the man of action. He is beyond doubt attractive, but he is also rare. He exists in a ratio of about one to a thousand of ordinary mortals, and when he does exist he is NOT pre-eminently sexual. He is a man of action and has, in consequence, many—too many—things to think about, to allow sex to play a dominant part in his life. A relaxation—a pleasant pastime, but no more. The really sexual man, the man who should by rights supply the model for the screen hero as he exists to-day, is the city dweller: the man who goes to his office in the morning and spends his evenings with a prostitute: the man who plods through the day's work in the warehouse, sustained by the thought of the bed waiting for him at home. This type of man abounds in cities and in agricultural districts. He is small, rarely handsome; has seldom any conversation, and is pre-eminently and selfishly sexual.

The sailor may have a wife in every port, and the cowboy a sweetheart in every village in the West,

but it takes a long time to get from village to village and from port to port. Ships do not stay long in harbour, for business can be done quickly, and the distance to the next port may be half-way across the world. . . .

Take the ordinary young woman, expend a certain amount on peroxide, cosmetics, and hair-curlers. Train her until she can smile or look wistful at a moment's notice, and, finally, divest her head of any intelligence with which it may have been invested, and then (and as though the foregoing were not enough for any young woman!) emplant in her emptied head the idea that she must get, and, having got, must keep, her man. Endow this puppet with a name, a simple name for preference, set it in motion, and the film heroine is created.

Take also a young man and, having endowed him with the semblance of good looks, encase him in the form of a baroque Hercules: then, having removed his brain, fill the gap with sex, and so arrange things that he is in a continual state of desire. (For the celluloid man can never be permitted to set eyes on a woman without falling into a frenzy of lust.) Name the puppet, set it in motion, and the film hero is created. . . .

Heroes have appeared so subtly disguised as to be taken for villains, and heroines also, but this is the exception to the general rule, which ordains that the heroine shall be the little blonde girl, and the hero the muscular Adonis. This is the rule, and it is in accordance with it that the "stars" have grown up. And as it is a necessity that every picture have a star, it is not to be wondered at that the majority of pictures display a certain sameness of story. The stars are all made on one model, from which it follows that there can be no very great divergence in the subject matter of the pictures themselves. Variations on an original theme . . . ?

CHAPTER XV

THROUGH THE MAGNIFYING GLASS

I

ZEULIKA DOBSON's Cleo was always quarrelling with her servants. She found them dull, inadequate, and often unreadable, we are told. Herodotus, so the story goes, amused her and so, to a degree, did Gibbon, but even they fell far short of perfection. History, even in their hands, was history still, and Cleo knew all and everything there was to know about it. As a result of the dullness of historians, she developed an insatiable taste for novels, which she cultivated, until Zeus, her too ardent suitor, found in this weakness a means of courting her favours afresh. Cleo, justly indignant, retired behind a fortification of Buckle, Morley, and Herodotus. Here she felt safe; here only was her Olympian suitor incapable of penetrating.

But all this happened in the 'nineties. To Cleo, not a very long time ago, but to us mortals, quite a considerable period. There was in 1890 no cinema; there was only a kinetoscope, and it was unthinkable to suppose the immortal eyes poring over one of those small black boxes. And equally unthinkable is the transformation of Olympian Zeus into a kinetoscope peepshow! But things have changed since 1890, and to-day, in the year of grace Nineteen hundred and twenty-seven, it is not unthinkable to suppose the sudden metamorphoses of the fiery god into, say, twelve reels of "Robin Hood". The thunderbolts would curl themselves neatly around the form,

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and the eagle, wings pinioned, would pass with its master into twelve neat round boxes to descend by way of Iris's ever-present rainbow to the feet of Cleo, who would, I think, be ravished. . . .

All the dullness of history swept suddenly away. All the tedium, all the truth, and in its place a side-splitting romance of laughter and thrills with just a suspicion of truth woven ingeniously into the whole, and—starring Douglas Fairbanks. What matter, then, if in reality Robin Hood was a surly devil who robbed always the poor that he might win favour from the rich? What matter if he and King Richard were sworn enemies? What matter what history said? Cleo was sick of history, and so she would revel in the innocent mendacity of Robin Hood. But Cleo was also the muse, the special keeper, and the warden of history, and for that reason she could not fail to be intrigued by the name Robin Hood, which is, when all is said and done, historical. And so it is with all of us: we are, or we think we are, historically minded. We have dim memories of being tickled by the redundant wit of "the father of liars".¹ The memories are necessarily dim, for all that happened in our school-days, and so we have perhaps a clearer recollection of certain Latin footnotes with which Gibbon embellished his incomparable narrative. That much we remember with pleasure; it is the lighter side of history. But just as we linger lovingly over the memories of Gibbon and his footnotes, so does our imagination quail before the prospect of Kinglake on the Crimea (six large volumes, even on India paper!). All that is history, and that is just what we don't like about history. And so we, like Cleo, take to reading novels. But reading requires an effort, and are novels, we ask ourselves, worth that effort? History appals us, novels cloy, and yet with a contrariness truly human

¹ Herodotus.

"Death is the end of life: ah, why
Should life all labour be?"

Imagine then our cowboy entering a small western town after months of enforced virtuous living: Bull is all dressed up; slouch hat, check shirt, bright handkerchief, jingling spurs, and perhaps even ear-rings—the typical peacock sunning himself for the benefit of his mate. A cloud of dust forms on the horizon, a small cloud which increases rapidly in size. In the scorched streets of the little western town people look up and, having looked up, point, nudge each other and whisper, "They're here again . . . !" The publican hastens to remove his shutters, and the vendors of trinkets to arrange their wares. For these wild men from the hills are above all things sentimental, and count a small gilt heart or a brooch displaying two clasped hands as a thing of value, and prize it beyond its real worth. Dimly is heard the clatter of horses' hoofs. Lights appear in the shop windows and in the street a girl walks with swaying hips, the better to display a gaudy red shawl . . . to the accompaniment of a guitar, or perhaps a harmonium, someone is singing. The setting sun is level with the prairie, and there, standing before the public-house, is the sheriff, his star of office red, not with blood, but with the light of sunset. A loud whooping shout, punctuated by the rattle of spurs . . . the street has become suddenly full of girls and, as the horses are reined almost to their haunches, the air is alive with flying particles of dust. Every man to a girl, and *vice versa*. Red shirts and redder lips, . . . and sometimes perhaps, standing far off from the noisy crowd, a little blonde girl with bright curly hair. She is looking for someone who is not there, and it may be that there are tears in her eyes. . . . The scene is doubtless familiar to all patrons of the cinema.

If we consider for a moment our returning cow-

boy, we shall see that, as far as sex is concerned, he is not very far removed from the primordial ape. Unlike a city dweller, the cowboy has no regular outlet for the force of sex: every three months or so he returns to his mate. The whole thing becomes purely animal, from the dazzling accoutrements of the male to the actual consummation of the physical act. Like the ape, his ancestor, he has now certain periods during which he is "on heat": for the rest of the time he must perforce remain "off heat".

Having seen that the returning cowboy is, to all intents and purposes, an animal during the period of his recreation, let us consider the ways of animals when under the influence of sex. The first fact to present itself is the possession of the female by the male. The male insists on his mate and is prepared to fight for his possession if necessary. And the female, for her part, is ready and willing to remain with her male so long as he can vindicate his right to hold her against all comers. And here in this purely animal and absolutely primitive instinct we have the keynote of ninety per cent of American films.

That this should be so is not remarkable. It would, in fact, be more remarkable if it were not so. There are still cowboys in America, though, to a large extent I understand, they have been tamed, and the days of the great gold rush are little more than three generations removed from the Woolworth building and modern New York. Therefore, in considering the American mind, one cannot be surprised to find there a preponderance of the cowboy mentality, overlaid though it is by the money-grubbing "culture" of three to four generations of the cowboy's successful descendants.

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we hanker after history—and then, like some new planet, Robin Hood swims into our ken. . . . Robin Hood the gay, delightful, and irresponsible. Robin Hood, nominally historical, tremendously fictitious and, best of all, requiring no effort to be appreciated. And for that reason a certain type of historical film will always be popular; it is the same reason which has made and will continue to make admirers for Herodotus.

There are four main types of the historical film: firstly, the Herodotus type, mendacious, cheerful and amusing, to be seen at its best in Robin Hood. Secondly, the Lytton Strachey type, enthralling, but truthful, as exemplified by "Armoured Cruiser Potemkin" and "The Emden". Thirdly, what I have called the Kinglake type, truthful but tedious; a history text-book in pictures, represented by "The Battle of the Somme". And, fourthly, the Sienkiewicz type, magnificently bespangled, gloriously unhistorical, and not more than moderately entertaining: this type of film is seen at its apotheosis in "Ben Hur".

"Robin Hood" is essentially a film. It is rhythmic first and last, and through it all runs (the word "runs" is used in its literal sense) Fairbanks. We see him first at the tournament, seated firmly, terribly firmly, on what might well be called an heraldic horse—for rarely does it deign to touch the ground with its forelegs! And what a tournament—how vast are the lists, how dense the crowd, and above all, how overpowering the neighbouring castle. At least 600 feet sheer up into the air. Six hundred feet of solid stone wall topped with a line of frowning battlements. A crushing monolith of stone and mortar around which poor humans crawl—and crawl. This structure, this man-made mountain seeming to out-top the pyramids, represents an English feudal castle. Could Herodotus himself

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have improved on this? But even in these early stages of the film we are not shocked, nor do we feel inclined to say "That's all wrong", or "That's preposterous", because it just isn't—it's all in keeping. The dashing Doug., the heraldic horse, the dream heroine shining through a mist of golden hair and pearls . . . with all these things, and with more, is the mammoth castle in keeping.

And before we have had time to look round, we are off to the Crusades—off to Palestine, off to have a hit at the Turk! The whole thing is reminiscent of a body of champion heavyweights setting out for the Olympic Games. Off goes the cavalcade, up capers Doug.'s horse. Marian waves from her turret, the trumpets blare, and we're off to fight for the Cross! Good King Richard is off to the Holy Land, leaving his wicked brother John to rule the land. Good King Richard, mark you—and then things happen, thick and fast. The army trails on across France, flags flying and trumpets blowing, still in the very best holiday spirit. "*Le roi s'en va-t-en guerre*", and in those far-off days warfare was indeed a sport. No tanks, no gunpowder, no filthy gas, just strong men hacking at each other until one or the other has lost too many limbs to be able to go on hacking, the one with the majority of limbs remaining being accounted the victor!

But, so intoxicating is "Robin Hood", and so irresistible its appeal, that we forget the loss of life and limb, and find ourselves rejoicing with King Richard and his merry knights, and swinging along with them to play our part in the great game against the Arabian infidels.

Doug. is trussed up, tied together, gagged, and left in a barn. The army proceeds without him and he, having broken his bonds, returns to England. England is in a sad state indeed: John is misruling to an extent almost incredible; Doug. grinds his teeth, and

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III

And this confronts us with another situation of interest, namely, that as far as the American market is concerned, there is no money in a picture unless there is a star in that picture.

The theatre has passed beyond this state: a great many people may go to see John Gielgud in "The Constant Nymph", but there are enough people who wish to see "The Constant Nymph" itself to make it worth the producer's while to present an all-round adequate cast. The theatre has outgrown the star system, but not so the films. Very few people would go to see "The Black Pirate" or "The Gold Rush" were it not for the name of Douglas Fairbanks or Charlie Chaplin. Many people are, in fact, ignorant of the names of the film which they have paid to see until that name is actually flashed upon the screen. They have gone to the cinema to see Fairbanks or Chaplin, and so long as there is plenty of Fairbanks and plenty of Chaplin, they will be thoroughly contented. . . .

In the cases above mentioned they will also have stumbled upon a good film, but that is incidental, and a fact of which the greater part of the audience will be ignorant.

In the early days, when Griffith was working for Biograph, there was little to recommend even his pictures, except the presence of Mary Pickford. Having seen one film, one had seen them all, and there was nothing remarkable about any of them except Mary Pickford—Mary Pickford, or just plain Mary, as she was called. With the other stars it was the same: Maurice Costello, Arthur Johnson, and Francis X. Bushman: their good looks presented a striking contrast to the tediousness of the pictures in which they appeared. A moment's reflection will show that this must have been so.

A stage actor, however beautiful, can never be seen at really close quarters by his audience: the same is true of an actress. On the stage a good figure is essential, also a certain presence, and, above all, a sympathetic voice. All these things must play their part, because the face, however beautiful, can never be seen clearly by the audience, and, however handsome may be the actor or actress, at certain moments the drama will have its way and the players will be forgotten. But, with the cinema, it is just the reverse: for the screen the figure can be faked; so also can height, and the matter of voice does not enter into the question. It is, in fact, all face, and what could be more helpful to the face than the close-up? The tenser the drama the thicker the close-ups—Mary in tears, Owen Moore denouncing the villain, or both of them engaged in a kiss. . . . For the elucidation of any of these situations, the close-up is invariably employed. And if the drama is weak, and we have seen that it was, it is not to be wondered at that the audience should follow Mary or Francis X. rather than the story, and that their next visit to the movies should be prompted by a desire to see Mary or Francis, irrespective of the story in which either of them might be appearing. They wanted to see Mary as they had first seen her, and so Mary had to be Mary. She is still being Mary, and is as great a success as ever. Later on, as the screen audiences became more varied, people realised the merit of D. W. Griffith, and so it became a paying proposition to put his name on the posters. But as yet Griffith and Cecil B. de Mille are the only producers whose names have a box-office value.

The public wants, among other things, to see Chaplin and to see Fairbanks; a very natural desire, and one that may prove of itself of inestimable value to the cinema as an art. For, although both Chaplin and Fairbanks are forced by their admirers to appear

goes to find his love. His love is, however, not to be found. Her tracks lead to the edge of a precipice, where they stop abruptly. It looks very much as though all were over. "To God, to Richard, and to Her!" Doug. holds his sword out over the gulf, and that's the end of Part I.

Part II. is similar; it is a little more acrobatic, and a great deal more preposterously amusing. It is Robin Hood the dashing, the chivalrous, Robin Hood plaguing the wicked regent. Robin Hood the master bowman, and his arrows are everywhere. Marian is found, lost and found again. Doug. is captured, Doug. escapes, and Doug. is finally tied to a stake and condemned to be shot, when out steps a knight in black armour, and catches ALL the arrows intended for Doug. on his own enormous shield. Those who know their *Ivanhoe* will have little difficulty in identifying the black knight with good King Richard, and so all ends happily. King Richard is his old happy self; years of crusading, shipwreck, and prison had left no trace upon his jovial countenance. And the same applies to Doug. He is the same Doug., and ten years of outlawry have done nothing but rejuvenate him. And as for Maid Marian, she is quite definitely younger and more beautiful than she was at the beginning of the film—what an advertisement for the open-air life.

Merrie England is Merrie England still. King Richard, the fighter and the crusader, is the good king, and John, the stay-at-home, the wicked regent. Robin Hood is a chivalrous outlaw, the darling of the people, and his merry men are like unto him. On the whole, not a bad way of looking at history. The Fairbanks-Herodotus way of looking at history has the great advantage of never being tedious. It is never tedious, because it is so full of surprises.

II

Truth may be stranger than fiction, or it may not be, but it is at least every bit as entertaining. A truly historical Robin Hood would be as entertaining as the Fairbanks version of the same, but to be entertaining such a film would need above all to be well handled. Very few know even how to turn the glories of an exaggerated legend to good screen account, and fewer still can take the truth itself and make out of it an enthralling narrative. "Robin Hood" was grossly untrue, and so was "A Royal Divorce", and yet the former was amusing, and enthralling even. "Robin Hood" went at such a speed that the watcher had no time to pick out, even if he was conscious of them, any of its gross inaccuracies. It was speed and rhythm, and therefore enjoyment. But in "A Royal Divorce", a Napoleon film, in which Josephine, presented throughout as a pure, abused woman, was endowed with seven extra years of life, in which the Battle of Waterloo was represented as a series of aimless cavalry charges, where inaccuracy was piled on inaccuracy, one was acutely and continuously conscious of the mistakes. Never for a moment was one convinced of Josephine's innocence, and, similarly, it was impossible for the watcher to feel with any degree of conviction that the divorce of Josephine was the turning-point of Napoleon's career. The producer of "A Royal Divorce" assumed the long bow, only to find that he was incapable of drawing it. In "Robin Hood", Fairbanks seized the long bow, drew it at a venture, and then broke it—the result was magnificent.

The "Royal Divorce" failed because it adhered too closely to the truth in matters unimportant. The clothes, the furniture, the people, and the happenings, the unimportant ones that is, were all very nearly correct. Upon this moderately correct foundation

V

Just as the cowboy mentality forms the basis of the American mind, so also it constitutes the keynote of what that mind produces. The result is the American film as we see it to-day . . . sex; and the woman to the strongest. I will not go so far as to say that America is the only country in which the "law of the strong" is appreciated; for such a statement would be a manifest absurdity. The "law of the strong" is the fundamental trait of the animal. It rules the lions of the African jungle, the savages of Greenland, and it plays havoc with the more enlightened peoples of modern Europe. In Europe, however, there are two thousand years or more of culture between the primeval savage and the cinema. In America there are only four generations, and culture, such as it is, is inherited from Europe.

With the exception of the emasculated southerners, the mass of America is "cowboy" at heart. They may talk about women's rights; they have even carried their talk to the practical point of enfranchising women, but let anyone so much as mention the word "free love", or let him infer, no matter how mildly, that a woman should have equal sexual privileges with a man, and he will have the whole hornet's nest about his ears. "These things are all very well in theory . . . but when it comes to marrying a girl, she's got to deliver the goods!" The delivery of the goods, I take it, implies the presentation of an intact virginity. . . .

VI

The American film is not, however, quite so simple in theme as I have perhaps made out. There are three generations between Hollywood and Bull the cowboy, and Bull's descendants, although

possessed of their sires' primitive psychology, have erected thereon a crazy superstructure of distorted patriotism, exaggerated religious sentiment, and a certain insane idealism—and that is the American mind of to-day.

The reader may wonder why I have spent so much time in tracing the history of the American immigrants, in delineating their chief qualities, and in defining their state of mind, when the whole thing could have been said in three, or at the most four lines. It was only necessary to say "The American mind is hypocritically religious, extravagantly patriotic, in a sense idealistic, and primitively sexual . . ." for that is what the foregoing survey amounts to. But, on the other hand, it must be remembered that such a statement as we have now reached, although clear, concise, and true, is a statement of such vast dimensions as to require a certain amount of substantial proof, hence Pete the gold-digger, and later Bull the cowboy. . . . But lest some other reader should say, "The American mind is a big subject and you have dismissed it in ten pages. . . . Why?" I will answer that the purpose of this book is to discuss the cinema, and that I have only touched on the American mind in so far as it is related to, and reacts upon, the cinema.

Before proceeding to survey the beginnings of the cinema, we must take a glimpse at the descendants of Bull, at his children, and at his children's children; for only then shall we be in a position to see why the films, in America, are what they are. . . .

VII

A person or persons who has accumulated wealth quickly (no matter how respectable the means of accumulation may have been) will never tire of trying to impress on their neighbours the fact that they

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was built a superstructure of glaring falsehood; the foundation served only to show up the absurdity of the flimsily built structure, and the result was collapse. . . . Had the producer of the film, however, been really capable, had he drawn the long bow and broken it in the approved Fairbanks way, I have no doubt that we should have been temporarily convinced—Napoleon at the foot of the guillotine, Josephine trembling under the knife, a sensational rescue, a dash to Egypt, a sudden return just in time to rescue his love from the machinations of the dastardly Duc D'Enghein. (The Duke's execution would then have been satisfactorily accounted for.) Triumph following triumph, a son born to the happy pair, and so on in this strain until Napoleon and Josephine took ship for St. Helena, with the world well lost for love! . . . This would have made excellent entertainment. Either "this", or else the truth pure and simple, for Napoleon's life was by no means uneventful.

To succeed, the historical film must be one of two things: purely truthful or absolutely fantastic. "A Royal Divorce" was neither truthful, nor yet was it fantastic. The result, as might be expected, was lamentable.

III

The truthful film falls under two headings. Firstly, the Lytton Strachey and, secondly, the Kinglake type: the one interesting and the other uninteresting.

Of what for convenience I have called the Lytton Strachey type of film, there are as yet only two examples, "Armoured Cruiser Potemkin" and "The Emden". "Potemkin" is a Russian film, and so, of course, cannot be shown in England. "Potemkin" is without a doubt the greatest historical film that has yet been made. Its producer, a certain Jacob Eisen-

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stein, is still a very young man and there is no knowing to what heights he may not attain.

The film told the story of a mutiny that happened on board the cruiser *Potemkin*. The men, we were shown, were all badly housed and disgustingly fed. The meat was crawling with maggots. "Maggots!" says the ship's doctor. "Nonsense! They're only flies' eggs, and can easily be washed out with salt water." The men look at each other and discontent simmers. Then comes the dinner hour; the men refuse to touch the food. A sullen temper prevails—a mutiny is obviously imminent. The crew is called up on deck; the officers have decided to take a firm hand. This mutiny shall be crushed; the ringleaders are ordered to be shot. The marines are called out and the condemned men, covered with a sail, are faced with a firing party.

"Fire!" . . . Again, "FIRE!" shouts the officer. The ranks waver. . . . "Fire, you ——!" and the mischief is done. The men break their ranks and rush upon their officers, who are all thrown overboard. Shots are fired, and in the general confusion the sailor Waluckchuck, leader of the mutiny, is killed. The *Potemkin*, preceded by a launch bearing the corpse of her lost leader, steams on to Odessa. A small shelter is erected on the water front and there the body of the dead sailor lies in state. The night passes, and with the morning comes the crowd. The rumour has gone round Odessa that the dead mutineer is lying in state on the quay. Down the streets and across the breakwater comes the crowd, all marching together, all marching to see the dead hero. The quayside is full, all around the streets are choked with people. From all sides they are coming, sad, sullen, and eager. Very slowly they file past the corpse. Some leave flowers, one woman lights a candle and places it in the dead man's hand. The day brightens, the crowd thickens, and as it thickens

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always in the same rôles, they both contrive to make this repetition not merely "not tedious", but positively interesting. Both these men have a real comprehension of the film; they neither of them confuse it with the stage, and they both produce films whose average level of excellence is high.

Quite unconsciously the public has picked up a good thing.

CHAPTER V

FROM COWBOY TO "GREAT LOVER"

I

THAT Don Juan was a great lover few people will deny, but that he was also a great lecher is a fact that is hardly realised at all. In the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary it seems peculiar, to put it mildly, that the idea of a "great lover" should have established itself so firmly in people's minds. A man may be a great lecher, or he may be passionately devoted to one woman, but not by any conceivable stretch of the imagination can he ever become a "great lover".

The "great lover", I take it, is the Don Juan of fiction plus one extra quality, and this quality, unnamed as yet, renders him capable of LOVING all the various women with whom he comes in contact. (Coming into contact, where a Don Juan is concerned, can only mean one thing.) The word LOVE is brought in to throw a cloak of respectability over what would otherwise be termed extensive lechery. And so, because he "loves" we are expected to admire this modern Don Juan. Personally, I feel much more inclined to pay homage to the Byronic original who was at least honest about his seductions in so far as he made no pretension to love in any form whatsoever.

The Don Juan of fiction may be taken as the perfect type of rover, and as a rover he falls under the heading of a man of action: for screen purposes, however, he has become a romanticised cowboy. He

its temper changes. From being sullen it becomes querulous. "Why —, why is all this?" An orator springs up—his hair is falling over his face, and he is shouting. The crowd surges round another orator, and this time a woman. Arms are raised, caps thrown into the air; the first orator in a frenzy of passion tears off his shirt. "Why? . . . Why? . . . Who are they to oppress us?"

In a storm of indignation against his murderers, the dead leader is forgotten. The crowd is worked to a fever pitch: they know the whole story. The men of the *Potemkin* were brutally used and starved by their officers. "Down with the officers! . . ." and then the *Potemkin* steams into the harbour. All eyes are turned to the sea. "The *Potemkin*!" A rush to the quayside, sails are hoisted, and immediately the bay is alive with little fluttering white boats—hundreds of white-sailed boats sailing out to the *Potemkin*. Cheering from the *Potemkin*; cheering from the shore, and the boats, loaded with provisions, arrive. The crowd is ecstatic; it is ready for anything—and this in 1905, the year of the disastrous Japanese War.

"The Cossacks!" A rumour runs through the crowd. "The Cossacks! The Tzar's Cossacks!"

A company of white-coated Cossacks appears at the top of a flight of steps leading down to the water. At the bottom of the steps is the crowd: the crowd is on the steps; it is half-way up the steps. The crowd is inflamed; it will stand its ground. The Cossacks advance, they raise their rifles and fire. They advance and fire—step by step and bullet by bullet. The crowd wavers and breaks, the steps are cleared and the Cossacks advance over the dead and dying. "And then the cruelty of the Tzar's Cossacks was answered by the turret guns of the *Prince Potemkin*." The *Potemkin* sends a few ineffectual shells into the town, and then, very wisely, decides

to leave Odessa. On the *Potemkin* are scenes of enthusiasm and gaiety. The men, freed from their officers, are having the time of their lives. They are on the rigging, in the crows' nests, astride the guns, lounging in the cabins; they are everywhere, talking and laughing, and nowhere are they doing anything. They leave Odessa. The Grand Fleet, so the news is brought, has heard of the mutiny and is coming to take the mutineers in hand. On one side the Grand Fleet, and on the other an officerless cruiser, without even a leader. The position is desperate and admitting only of desperate action. It is only a matter of days, of hours almost, before the mutineers will be blown to pieces. "Why prolong the agony—death is certain, so let's go to meet it!" Full steam ahead towards the fleet: two hundred men sailing blindly to their death. A night of suspense, of troubled dreams and broken sleep. A night of repeated and hurried awakenings. Each man trying to sleep, trying to smoke and to laugh, and in the morning it will all be over. No more laughter, no more cigarettes; just darkness and the sea.

Dawn—and the horizon smudged with the smoke of the oncoming fleet. . . . "Full steam ahead! And man the guns!" Behind the advancing keel of the *Potemkin* the water bubbles and seethes—the *Potemkin* is forging ahead, and already the funnels of the Grand Fleet are topping the skyline. "Man the guns." This is really the end. . . . The engines are throbbing, the whole ship is vibrating to the rhythm of its furied progress. The sun is up, and the fleet is in full sight. . . . It is getting nearer every moment. Full steam ahead. Another mile and the *Potemkin* will be within range of the Tzar's guns. "We've had a glorious day, and it was worth it! . . . So, good-bye," and the crew turn with redoubled zeal to their work. Shells, shells, shells, guns and hurrying feet: another half-mile and it will begin. The water slips

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are "really nice people". . . . In most cases they are, and, except for this one failing, delightful company. Witty, intelligent, and generally pleasant, one would like them immensely if only they would refrain from telling one how "really NICE" they were. The successful docker apes the small tradesman, who, in his turn, tries to be as like the city magnate as possible, while the successful stockbroker or profiteer pays slavish adoration to the phantom of the "country squire". And, similarly, the descendants of Bull in America turned longing eyes towards Europe with its age-long traditions, and towards its general antiquity, a thing in which they were sadly lacking. The European is to the American what the "country squire" is to the successful financier: something to be emulated; something to be emulated as quickly and as thoroughly as possible. Bull's descendants turn a hurried glance towards Europe and see perhaps half-a-dozen strikingly conspicuous features . . . cathedrals, titles, flags, and kings. These things are of their nature conspicuous: anyone looking at Europe could not fail to notice them. These things, monarchy and the rest of them, are so dazzlingly conspicuous that the hurried observer may be pardoned for thinking that in them he has found the keynotes of European life. Though they shine fitfully, they shine with such brilliance that the eye of the observer is blinded, and so unable to detect the less brilliant, though more constant, lights that continue to shine, irrespective of these erratic comets. The American had no time for more than a cursory glance, and so, naturally, he was dazzled, and naturally he thought that in these gaudy abstractions he had stumbled upon the root principles of our existence.

Kings, cathedrals, nations, and armies, all relics of the Middle Ages: like the feudal castle, they are one and all anachronisms. . . . Toys, museum pieces, relics interesting only to the student of the nine-

"IN THE BEGINNING . . ."

teenth-century history. For what are the cathedrals but wrecks of an age that is passed? And what can one say of the nobility of to-day except that it is the ultimate goal of the successful financier? The next war will have no use for armies, and flags have already been abandoned.

Now, as all these things, cathedrals, armies, and the rest of the glittering paraphernalia were so strikingly prominent in the Europe of yesterday, and because they are equally PROMINENT to-day, it is not to be wondered at that the hurried American should hit on them as being the keynote of our everyday existence. The itinerant American would be in too great a hurry to look further and to discern in the opera, the cafe, the trade union, and the race-course, factors more truly representative of the inner life of Europe. . . .

The result of this hurried survey is the bewildering show of exaggerations as represented by modern America. The Americans have noticed that in Europe they have flags. "Very well, then," they say, "we will have flags too!" Europeans they see are patriotic. . . . "We must be the same. And by God we'll do it thoroughly!"

I remember that once I saw a small and unpretentious American film: like many others I was lured to see the film by the skilful use of the name Rudolph Valentino. The film, "The Isle of Love", dated from the days before Valentino was famous, and consequently he played but an insignificant part . . . sweet are the uses of adversity. I cannot remember the full details of the story of this film, which dealt in revolutions, adventuresses, and hundred per cent Americans, but somehow in the course of the story it happened that two men were left alone in a room. On this occasion one of the two men immediately produced the "star-spangled banner" from his waistcoat pocket. (Do even Americans, I wonder,

away behind them, slips away and away. The gunners adjust the range-finders and point their guns. . . . Full steam ahead—FULL STEAM AHEAD. The pistons are pounding—full steam ahead.

A grey, sullen sea, and the Grand Fleet facing the cruiser *Potemkin*. They are within range, and still the *Potemkin* splashes on—surely they are in range . . . they must be—but why, then? . . . A shout from the sailors of the Grand Fleet. “Brothers,” the signal runs up the masthead of the flagship. . . . “Brothers . . .” and so the cruiser *Potemkin* passed through the centre of the Grand Fleet. . . . The sailors of the Grand Fleet had refused to fire on the sailors of the *Potemkin*, and so the film closes.

“ . . . The *Potemkin* reached Constantza, where she was interned by the Rumanian Government. A year later, however, the crew, trusting the word of the Tzar’s Government, which promised them a free pardon, returned to Russia. The Government, however, broke its promises. The ringleaders were shot, and the remainder of the crew exiled to Siberia. . . . THE END.”

The preceding paragraphs represent an attempt, necessarily unsuccessful, to convey in words what the film “*Potemkin*” said in more than pictures. To state the fact baldly and simply would be insufficient. It would read like this:—In October 1905, the crew of the armoured cruiser *Prince Potemkin* mutinied and threw their officers overboard. The ship then proceeded to Odessa, where it was welcomed by an enthusiastic crowd, which was dispersed with some brutality by a consignment of Cossacks. The *Potemkin* then sailed out of Odessa to meet the Russian fleet: the sailors of the fleet refused to fire on the *Potemkin*. The *Potemkin* sailed on to Constantza, etc. etc. . . . For that was what the film showed, and that, I admit, does not sound very interesting. And what is more important still is that such a

bald description conveys no idea of what the film was really like. My own description, slashed with dots and scarred with repetitions, is not a model of prose writing, but does, I think, give some idea of what “*Potemkin*” was like. It was not so much what the film showed, as how it showed it. The ungainly struggles of the officers being pushed into the sea, and the beautiful way in which the sailor Waluckchuck, when wounded, fell over the rigging and remained hanging above the water. “A trick!” Yes, but what a clever trick, for did it not capture one’s sympathies immediately? Silly fat officers falling like frogs into the sea . . . and then the wounded sailor hanging beautifully above the water. To see the officers thrown into the sea, just thrown in, and to see the sailor shot and to see him fall into the sea would indeed be a statement of fact. It would be history without a doubt. We should see it; we should remain unmoved. It would be like reading Sidney Lee’s *Life of Queen Victoria*; all very correct, very long, very true, and withal very dull. . . . “In December 1861 after a serious illness the Prince Consort died.” Compare this with Lytton Strachey. . . . “His features became perfectly rigid. She shrieked—one long wild shriek that rang through the terror-stricken castle—and understood that she had lost him forever.” “*Potemkin*”, or rather Eisenstein, followed in Strachey’s footsteps, and the result was a truly historical and, at the same time, a gloriously interesting film. He made his characters live, and that, without the help of a hero or heroine; without a love interest and without a star. The whole crew of the *Potemkin* was the hero of the story, and in every one of these men one was interested.

(I have detailed the plot of “*Potemkin*”, because it is a story that is probably unknown to the majority of my readers. In itself it is nothing more than one of the many heralds of the 1917 Revolution; a

is endowed with all the attributes of a Scott hero, brawn, good looks, temerity, wit, and money. He is, in short, a very nice young man, and were it not for the fact that he must needs seduce any and every woman he meets, he would be as nice a son-in-law as any father could wish to possess.

The idea of a universal seducer is both exciting and attractive: in a word, it is good for the box-office. Perhaps even a little too good. There is a danger that the public, in assuming a position of outraged dignity, may see fit to deprive itself of its own enjoyment, and the box-office of its lawful spoils! But the idea is good; it is too good to be allowed to let slip. There is too much money in it! Somehow it **MUST** be put across, and for this purpose the idea of "the great lover" was evolved. A person who, under the mask of love, might carry on his seductions without giving offence to the most sensitive audiences—and American audiences are notoriously sensitive. . . .

At first sight it may seem peculiar that, if American audiences are really so sensitive, they should tolerate the presentation of such wholesale seduction, and the figures of such sex-ridden heroes and heroines. But then they are not really sensitive; they merely think that they ought to be. They become shocked because, for some reason or other, they think it correct to be shocked. Only one generation removed from the cowboy, it is obvious that one need not look for any sincere degree of refined feeling. There is no refined feeling in America as a whole, but there is a very large showing of it.

I have shown the descendants of the cowboy endeavouring to become respectable: we have seen how they romanticised the cowboy, and now it only remains to show how the Americans, in possession of their newly won refinement, became disgusted with the outward trappings of their ancestor. The "Wild West", so near to most of them, became, on account

of its nearness, abhorrent, coarse, physical. . . . "We aren't cowboys any longer," they said. "We're civilised men and women, and we should like to see films about men and women like ourselves, and not always great hulking cowboys!" What they really wanted was a cowboy in fancy dress: a figure possessed of all the cowboy punch and drive, got up to look like an ordinary city man. But there were complications, and not the least being that America found that it was right to be broad-minded. All at once it dawned upon her that other people, the very people whom she most desired to resemble, had openly acknowledged that there was such a thing as sex, and that it was nothing to be ashamed of. Some countries had even taken steps about prostitution . . . but that was going too far. That was not broad-mindedness; that was merely pandering to sin!

The constant cowboy, on the other hand, the then young ideal of America, was certainly not broad-minded. He owed his existence to the fact that Americans thought that sex was not "quite nice", and conjugal fidelity an essential pillar of civilisation. But, as time went on, it appeared that this was not so: Europeans, it transpired, thought differently. It became noised about America that a man and a woman could live together without the sanction of Church or State, and still be "quite nice" people. . . . Very novel; very interesting; but for all that it was going a little too far! But it was European, and, above all, it was **PARISIAN**. . . . If it was good enough for Paris, it could not, of course, be altogether wrong. But, on the other hand, it could not be altogether right. But it was interesting, terribly interesting, and its interest depended on the fact that "it" was just what half America was spending half its hurried life in concealing from the other half.

The Americans may have a genius for mechanical

straw, indicating the nature and direction of the rising wind. And also, as the film is not likely to be shown in England for some time to come, and as it is such an important film that it must be discussed in the present volume, I have found it essential to give some slight idea of its plot, so that my readers might be in a position to appreciate the ensuing discussion.)

By far the most remarkable achievement of "Potemkin" was the fact that it definitely inspired interest in a "mass" of people, as opposed to individuals. The Bolshevik creed proclaims that man as the individual must submit to the mass; that man as the individual must be absorbed into the machine of the mass. "Potemkin" was not actually a piece of Bolshevik propaganda, because it did not in any way show this absorption of the individual. It showed, on the contrary, the triumph of one individual personality, that of sailor Waluckchuck, who had the brains and the energy to inspire and to lead the mutiny. The whole mutiny was Waluckchuck, and, similarly, the cheering crowd at Odessa was the result of Waluckchuck's actions—the result of one corpse lying in state. With Waluckchuck dead, the *Potemkin* was lost. She had no leader; she had indeed her "mass", but without a leader it was helpless. It could do nothing but sit on the guns, laugh and smoke, and finally steam straight ahead to certain destruction. That the destruction was averted was in no way due to the crew of the *Potemkin*.

But in "Potemkin" we saw, for the first time on the screen, that the "mass", as represented by the individual, was a living thing. The "mass", it is true, was only a handful of sailors, but that handful of sailors lived for us; we suffered with them and we rejoiced with them. We felt also the fury of the crowd at Odessa; we sensed the brutality of the

Cossacks—the "mass", the revolutionary crowd and the mutinous crew, was very definitely alive. It lived more intensely, a great deal more vividly, than any individual hero that the screen has yet shown us; but it lived, not because it was a "mass", but because of its component individualities. It was the close shots of the various sailors, the marine with his hand on the trigger, the sailor spelling out the words "Give us this day our daily bread", a young girl wounded in the stomach by the bullets of the Cossacks, the old woman with an odd face and glasses, a frenzied orator tearing off his shirt, and, above all, the face of Waluckchuck, the dead leader, lying in state, and the mourners—individual after individual—some sad, some amazed, and others flippant. The whole thing was a tremendous *tour de force*, a colossal welding of a thousand facets of individual stress into one great mass of emotion. Without the individual close-up, without the dying girl and the lady with the glasses, or without Waluckchuck, the film would have been dead, dull, and uninteresting. Nothing more than a series of pictures strung together with subtitles, a sort of elongated Pathé Gazette, or, worse still, a sort of "Ypres" or "Zeebrugge". It would be like a last-minute rescue, minus "the detailed close-up". Something too vast and too quickly moving to be comprehended by the human mind. No matter what Bolshevik philosophers may say, the "mass" will always be a collection of separate individuals, and comprehensible only as such. The way in which "Potemkin" was produced left no doubt as to this fact. It showed us the "mass", impersonal and solid, and by means of the individual made it both personal and lucid. "Potemkin" has preserved for posterity a trifling and relatively unimportant piece of history, but it has preserved it in such a way that it will always be attractive, and will therefore always be well known. It has invented a

carry their national emblem always with them?) The flag, having been extracted, was laid out on the table, whereupon both men seemed suddenly at a loss for an appropriate gesture. They stared at the flag until a merciful sub-title came to their relief. . . . "Can't you recognise a good flag when you see one?" (I use the exact words of the caption.) And in the next picture the two men, having stiffened into the semblance of ramrods, were saluting; the crumpled flag, I suppose. . . . Here the picture faded out. And I have no doubt that when the said film was first released the above-mentioned incident caused every American heart to beat a trifle faster. I can imagine the whole audience rising like one man to its feet and, like one ramrod, saluting. I wish I had been there to see.

Naturally this sort of thing seems childish to us in Europe. It is the sort of thing that we associate with the pilgrim and with the knight-errant. It is what we should expect either of them to do when confronted with a portion of the true cross, or with a fragment torn from the clothing of some idolised lady.

The whole conception of patriotism, as held by Americans, is preposterous and mediaeval, and Christianity has suffered the same fate. It has been re-mediaevalised. Christianity is to an extent mediaeval in Europe, but at least we have no society which, inquisition-like, aims at the extermination of Jews and Catholics. There is such a society in America, and its influence is considerable.

When considering the mind of America as it is today, we must remember that it is only three generations removed from the cowboy, and that what there is of it is constructed from the outworn traditions of a mediaeval and pre-revolutionary Europe. The first means the misplacement, or rather the glorification, of woman until she becomes the ultimate goal; the highest reward that any man can ever hope to

receive. And the second, an exaggeration of those sentiments which were prevalent during the crusading era, and of which we have since begun to tire.

Having surveyed, though hurriedly, the American mind, we are now in a position to understand that most typical of its products, the film.

new technique, a technique of the impersonal *via* the essentially personal. A technique bound ultimately to have its effect on the film world at large. For personality, except in the very rarest cases, is a small, cramped thing. It is tied down to the individual, is marked with his narrowness, and restrained within the limits of his own particular little ambitions. This is more especially the case with heroes and heroines, shadowy sex-ridden creatures, all of them, and bearers of the smallest and narrowest personalities. But take this same small, cramped and narrow personality and, in conjunction with another personality equally small and equally narrow, spread it over three or four hundred people, enliven the whole with a spirit of bravado, sorrow, resentment, or any sort of feeling, and what by itself is a silly, narrow little thing becomes, when magnified to the 300th power, interesting as the reflection of what one is tempted to think as a definite mass personality. We see one individual in the "mass" fearing, another suffering, a third laughing, and immediately suffering, fear, and laughter, three ordinary emotions, become the soul of that vast thing, the "mass". All at once it lives for us. In our imaginations we endow it with every other conceivable emotion, from courage to contempt—and why? Just because we have seen three separate entities suffering, fearing, and laughing respectively. Seen separately it is unlikely that any of these emotions would move us; they are ordinary emotions and, as represented by the individual alone, would picture someone joyous, someone timorous, or someone beaten. There would be three separate individuals, each one the victim of a separate emotion—for we never suspect an individual of an emotion which he does not demonstrate—but once let the individual become part of a crowd, and let him for that reason assume a certain incomprehensibility, and immedi-

ately we are ready to fuse the three separate emotions in one.

We will go further; we will supplement these three emotions and in that way make up a complete human being. The human being so created will differ from ourselves in that he is 300 times magnified and that in our mind's eye he has become a crowd, and not merely an enlarged individual. One person, one emotion; several people, several emotions. A crowd of people, a crowd of emotions. In short, it is only when we see ourselves through the microscope of the crowd that we realise the quantity of seething emotions innate in every one of us.

Everyone, we have seen, likes history. Some like "the real thing", and some like to think that they do; everyone likes it to be thought that he finds pleasure in things historical. History is supposed to be "so interesting! . . ." and so, anything that deals, however remotely, with a certain phase of the past, be it a book, film, or play, will surely have its followers. Take an ordinary love story; a hero and a heroine, a vamp and a villain. Put it down in the fifteenth century, call your hero Giovanni, your villain Caesar Borgia, the heroine Beatrice D'Este, and the vamp Lucretia Borgia. Then rebuild mediaeval Rome, employ a thousand or so supers, dress them in the costume of the period, and your film will attain at once a certain unique prestige. (The same is true of a play or of a book.)

From being a mere film, it will become a "really good film". Children will be taken to see it, and with them will come parents and guardians, lured there by the hope that the tremendous spectacle "The Man in the Mask" will dispense an equal ration of education along with a liberal dole of entertainment. We all want to be educated, but we want entertainment more—but if there is a chance of getting entertainment and education at the same time, we

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invention, for refrigerators in the home, and electric fires in the office. In such things they are certainly ahead of Europe. But, in the matter of culture, that thing most dearly prized by the half-cultured, they are a full five hundred years behind modern Europe. They have taken Ibsen to their bosom, and have fused him with Walter Scott. This mixture, as might have been expected, is not altogether convincing, but it satisfies America. It has introduced into the film just that taint of "sin" that was wanted to give it real spice, without robbing it of its husk of respectability.

The Scott-Ibsen hero stands for broad-minded America. He shows by his existence that America is a place where people are not afraid of realities: that it is a place where people live and know life, and where they are prepared to look with indulgence on a man who is sowing his wild oats. But, they are not going to smile for ever. Sin may be all very well, and a spade a spade: Ibsen may have his place, but the output of Sir Walter was considerably more copious, and to this even the great lover must bow. There must be an end to his caprices, because there is an end to American patience. And, like his cowboy counterpart, the great lover must fade away into a close embrace of all-redeeming love.

The essential difference between the cowboy and the great lover is that, while the former's sins are non-existent, the latter's HAVE existed: there are sins, but they are of the past. The lover is allowed and even encouraged to have his fling. Vamps sprawl across his path, and he succumbs to them. Temptations appear, and he falls; he has a choice and he takes the wrong road, and this brings him to the sixth reel. . . . The film is nearly at an end, and so also is the patience of "broad-minded" America. There remains one reel, or two if the hero has been really wicked, and in the course of this

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reel, or reels, must ensure a speedy and complete regeneration. . . .

The film lover usually begins his career by patting a dog, or consoling a weeping child. This he does just to show that he is really good at heart, and to impress on the audience that, whatever his ensuing sins may be, they are of no account. He is good at heart; there can be no doubt on that subject, for has he not patted a dog? And so, whatever trials beset him, and to whatever temptations he succumbs, we need entertain no anxiety as to the welfare of his soul. He'll come through all right . . . and, of course, he does.

First, the "good-bad-man", immortalised by William S. Hart, and it is only a small step to Barrymore and Valentino.

II

By way of confirming what has been said about sin and the cinema, let us glance for a moment at a certain film called "The Road to Mandalay".

The hero of this story is a one-eyed bruiser known as Singapore Joe (admirably played by Lon Chaney). Joe, a native of Singapore, runs a house of doubtful reputation: so doubtful, in fact, is its reputation that it is visited by the police in the very first reel. But Joe also keeps a daughter, but not in Singapore. . . . Instead of stroking a dog, he keeps a daughter in Mandalay. He keeps her in Mandalay so that she shall be free from the evil influences of his precarious, though profitable, existence. Joe keeps a daughter: Joe is all right at heart. Like the dog or the weeping child is to the ordinary hero, so this daughter is to Joe—a sort of licence to sin. . . .

It happens then that Joe, who is sentimentally inclined, pays a visit to his daughter in far-off

are by no means averse to taking it. "The Man in the Mask"—that might mean anything, only we have heard, through the devious channels of publicity, that it, or he, is Caesar Borgia. Poison—of course there will be poison and murder, but it will be true historical murder. And love—but real love, historical love that is, and so we will educate our children at the same time as we entertain ourselves. We shall have a sight of the "great past", and therefore we shall see a crowd, for somehow crowds and the "past" have become inextricably linked together in our minds. We want a glimpse, just a glimpse of the great men whose names have filled our history books—"Benvenuto Cellini and Boccaccio and others walk across the stage, making conversation highly appropriate to themselves"¹—just that and no more. A nice love story, bound within a reliable historical setting, punctuated with the frequent appearance of great men, liberally illustrated with crowds, a little Gothic lettering, and a happy ending, just to show that the people of the past were human like ourselves, and you have the ingredients of a successful film.

This type of film I have called the Sienkiewicz film: firstly, because of its length; secondly, on account of its magnificence; and lastly, because of its historical flavouring. In short, because in essentials it resembles the world-famous novel *Quo Vadis?* In "Ben Hur" one can see this sort of film at its best and at its worst. "Ben Hur," adapted from "General Lew Wallace's immortal story—a Tale of the Roman Empire at the Height of its Grandeur and Depravity", the tale of a down-trodden nation struggling against brutal conquerors; a tale of simple love between a boy and a girl, just like any boy and girl to-day. A villain, and an Egyptian vamp, and frequent, though dissected, appearances of the most famous of all historical characters.

¹ See "Savanavola Brown".

"Ben Hur" was just such a simple boy and girl story, moving through a series of gorgeous sets to a predestined ending. First a few appropriate words about Rome—"Grim, clanking, relentless, came the conquerors"; a statement which was utterly and completely false as far as the Roman rule in Judea was concerned. Ben Hur was, however, a Jew, and the fact that the Jewish nation was writhing under the heel of a brutal conqueror was found to be the best way of gaining sympathies for an otherwise not-very-well-thought-of people! The Jews are not held in high esteem in America, and even in Europe they are not thought overmuch of—an unfortunate state of affairs, in view of the fact that the hero of "Ben Hur", Ben Hur himself, must needs belong to this ill-starred race. The fact that the Jews were fighting for their liberty against brutal conquerors would of course arouse the sympathy of American audiences. For would they not see in the struggling Jews the likeness of their own ancestors of the revolution, and in the form of the obese Gratus a likeness to the tyrannical ministers of George III.? The appeal would not be limited to American audiences only; it would, and it has, found sympathisers the world over. In Europe, as in America, we pay lip tribute to the down-trodden nation; and so, on both sides of the Atlantic, cinema audiences swelled with sympathy for the oppressed Jews, while they palpitated with fury against the relentless, sensual, gluttonous, and tyrannical oppressors, the Romans. Roman soldiers barging their way through the streets of Jerusalem, beaten Jews stepping quickly out of their way. Poor unhappy Jews, kicked, buffeted, insulted, and struggling to be free. "To be a Roman is to rule the world; to be a Jew is to crawl in the dust." At that time the Romans certainly ruled the world, but if the Jews crawled in the dust, and it is possible that they did, it was

newest of the arts, has so far had little time for anything else. Art for money's sake is a comparatively modern idea that dates from the Periclean era in Greece.

CHAPTER III

EARLY HISTORY

I

THE arts of painting and of sculpture made their first appearance in the days when our hairy ancestors were still battling with mammoths and extracting a meagre existence from the foetid tangle of the primeval forest. Money was in those days unknown. There was probably some rude system of barter by means of which our ancestors managed to exchange what little surplus of commodities they possessed. There was probably some system of exchange, but there was as yet no idea of commerce. Each man produced for himself, and if it chanced that there was something over, he was only too glad to exchange it with some one of his fellows who happened to possess a surplus of that in which he himself was deficient. Money was unknown, and so the man endowed with artistic talents was free to employ his gifts just as he liked and just when he had time. So arose the art of painting, and also of sculpture. . . . They were born as arts and were practised by the artists for their own sake.

The coming of civilisation, and with it the advent of commerce, had little effect on the arts which were already established and independent. With the art of writing it was the same, for copying in the early days was too slow and too uncertain to lead the author to expect anything but a pittance in return for his labours. Music, a later development, has been more affected by commerce, and the cinema, the

II

When, towards the close of the last century, Edison invented his kinetoscope, he intended that it should traverse the same golden path as that taken by his previous invention, the phonograph. The phonograph had transferred the popular song-hits of the music-hall and the opera-house to the comparative cheapness of the arcade and the "phonograph parlour". It became a sort of purveyor of canned goods for the benefit of patrons who were unable, through the force of circumstances or finance, to see the real thing. So far so good: the phonograph sank at least no lower than the music-hall, and was at times, I feel sure, enlivened by an aria from *Trovatore*, or a selection from *Tannhäuser*. It left the popular taste where it found it, and any revolutionary effect that it may have had was probably for the good. The phonograph must have brought music, though of a sort, within the reach of thousands who, living in the wilds of the West, had hardly heard of, and much less listened to, an orchestra.¹ But not so the kinetoscope, an ingenious toy which, for the purely nominal sum of five cents (inserted in a slot), displayed various figures in motion. The motion imparted to these figures of bears, acrobats, dancers, and contortionists was jerky and, to a large extent, unconvincing; but it WAS motion, and, what is more, for the first time in history, a practicable form of motion in pictures. For there had been previous attempts at endowing pictures with motion: these attempts had, however, more interest for the

¹ The phonograph of the '80's and '90's must not be confused with the gramophone of to-day: it was a very inferior article.

from choice and not from compulsion. With the triumphal entry of the new Governor into Jerusalem we were regaled with the sight of not one, but twenty Roman eagles, being carried through the gates of the holy city. Now, it is a well-known fact that, out of respect for the Jewish abhorrence of graven images, the Roman eagles were always left at Caesarea, a seaport at least sixty miles from Jerusalem. This small incident demonstrates very clearly that the Roman rule in Palestine was certainly not oppressive and above all not insulting. It shows also to what lengths of falsehood this type of film can travel without outstepping the bounds of the popular conception of the word "historical".

And so "Ben Hur" winds through its twelve reels of love, suspense, and history. A maximum of love, a very exciting chariot race, and over all a veil of distorted facts doing duty for history.

And "Ben Hur" was "magnificent", by which I mean that it was expensive, the hire of the crowds alone representing a small fortune. And then there were the sets—vast, colossal, immense . . . the walls of Jerusalem towered pyramid-like into the air, and as for the stadium at Antioch, its size defies description. "Antioch, the Rome of the East—gay, pagan, colourful—famous for its games. . . ." And (this we are not told) immense beyond the wildest dreams of any Antiochian of the past. It was like the castle in Robin Hood—wonderfully exaggerated—but in "Ben Hur" the leaven of Fairbanks was lacking. Splendour poured on splendour; in many ways it was reminiscent of a very rich chocolate cake, smeared all over with cream and sugar, sprinkled with crystallised violets, and then put into the oven without any baking powder. Thick, rich, and sweetly cloying, one slice was more than enough—twelve became positively nauseating.

I have chosen "Ben Hur" as being the most

"perfect" and, at the same time, the best-known example of the Sienkiewicz film. It is the veritable apotheosis of the magnificent and the distorted; the grand culmination of all that money can do—and admittedly it can do a lot. But there are other films like this; there was "Quo Vadis?" itself, the original production, and its recent repetition partially redeemed by Emil Jannings' Nero, "The Fall of an Empress", featuring the Comtessa Luigi Lungano and a fine reconstruction of ancient Rome. "Nero" passed before us in twelve reels of classic splendour and a strong flavouring of volcanic virginity. "The Queen of Sheba" and also "The Queen of Scots"; "The Last Days of Pompeii", "Sodom and Gomorra", the last days of—"Michael Strogoff", "The Prince of Adventurers", and a host of others, all mildly historical, all fabulously expensive. Of "The Prince of Adventurers", said a certain film critic, who shall be nameless, that it was so magnificent as to make the National Gallery look like a collection of postage stamps. As far as actual size is concerned, he is no doubt "quite right", for with the help of the megascope the film can swell to almost any dimensions. But if it is size he is after, let me recommend the above-mentioned critic to study the works of Paul Veronese—the larger ones of course—and, having done so, to pay another visit to "The Prince of Adventurers".

Velvet is not worn much to-day, and the female costume of the twentieth century tends always to the "inadequate" rather than to the "superfluous"; for the film producer a sorry state of affairs, for inadequacy is not enough. There must be superfluity, and equally imperative is the demand for films. What, then, can the producer do but turn from the hopelessly inadequate present and plunge with the whole camera and cast into the dim recesses of the "superfluous" past? The farther he ventures into

Mandalay. She, Rosemary, has always been well equipped with money from her father. . . . Joe may keep a brothel, but he's all right really . . . and is in possession of a small shop called Bazaar. This shop is a charming place where Rosemary, in the cleanest of frills, flits daintily between cases of lace, cabinets of curios, and crucifixes. To this place, the home of Rosemary, lace, and cleanliness, comes Joe, dirty and begrimed, to gaze on his daughter, and also to make a few purchases as an excuse for his presence. One day, however, he brings with him a friend, picturesquely described as "the Spider of the Seven Seas". The Spider is a young man whom we have already seen in the process of sowing his wild oats in Joe's Singapore den. He falls in love with Rosemary and, of course, reforms. From the unshaven, foul-mouthed sailor the Spider becomes Jim, an immaculate young man with sleek hair and white trousers. He becomes also Rosemary's prospective husband.

Imagine, then, the feelings of Joe, who all his life has striven to keep Rosemary away from just such people as the Spider. . . . Of course he will not hear of the marriage. Joe kidnaps the Spider and takes him away to Singapore, and we need not follow the story further. It all comes out all right against a full moon, when Rosemary's honour is saved at the price of her father's life (for Joe was good at heart!) and the Spider's sins are finally forgiven and forgotten.

The motive of sin being forgiven through love is here used with double force. The lurid Joe keeps his daughter pure, so he is all right. The even more lurid Spider meets the girl of his dreams, and so he is also all right. On the whole, not a bad idea, but one that is apt to become tedious from repetition. But should the reader still feel dubious, and should he wish to probe deeper into the mystery of the

great lover, let me refer him to "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse", "The Enemies of Women", "The Wanderer", "The Spanish Dancer", "The Lucky Lady", "The Merry Widow", etc. etc. . . . and last, but not least, to the recently produced "Don Juan", featuring "the world's greatest actor, as the greatest lover of all ages".

III

The last, and by no means the least, considerable product of this "sin-hunting curiosity" is a creature known as the vamp. The vamp is the female counterpart of the great lover, with one essential difference, namely, that she always comes to a bad end. The vamp's sins are all of the present, though it is always inferred that there have been as many in the past. She is usually the cause of the lover's wild oats being sown, and never is she allowed to pat a dog, or to manifest good-heartedness in any way. She is bad all through, from the first puff of her drugged cigarette to the last defeated wriggle of her satin-sheathed legs!

The young man is allowed to sow his wild oats: it is even thought proper that he should do so; but when it comes to the young woman, things are very different. . . . The idea of a woman sowing her wild oats is "not broad-minded, but merely pandering to sin". America, we are told, is the home of women's rights, and, if this is so, then the unhappy vamp is still unenfranchised. The vamp has no rights except to sin, and even so she is never allowed to taste for long the joys of victory. Sooner or later her prey will tire of her oriental writhings; will long for peroxide instead of genuine black hair, and, bursting into a torrent of imprecations against her and women of her sort, will rush off in indignant repentance to the arms of the awaiting heroine.

antiquity, the better it is for him, and the better for his audience. With each step into the past the mists of ignorance arise and hide him. The farther he goes, the thicker the mists, and consequently the greater his licence. And so it is Greece and Rome, Babylonia, Gomorra, and Atlantis, and wretched Cleo, weighed down by a mass of spangles, is unable to move so much as a finger by way of protest.

IV

We are left now with the Kinglake film, the accurately dull film, "The Battle of the Somme" film, "The Covered Waggon" film.

"The Covered Waggon" was an attempt to tell in a stirring human form the story of the pioneers who settled Oregon. It told the story of these pioneers, and it told it in detail, often unnecessary, but more often tedious. It told also an utterly commonplace love story. The love of a boy and girl—quite simple and quite stereotyped, and also quite uninteresting. The result was what I take to be a tolerably accurate presentation of the hardships endured by these early pioneers, dished out with the same *sauce à l'amour*. "The Covered Waggon" is valuable as an historical document. It shows what a covered waggon is, how it is used, and how it crosses a river; how hundreds of "it" crosses a river, and how "it", again in hundreds, could be made into a fortified encampment. We saw a certain amount of the ways of Indians, a little of the Californian Gold Rush, and a good deal of the ways and manners of those men and women who went boldly out into the West. It was the men and women of the waggon-train that were the heroes of the story. We never saw them except as a crowd, and so they never seemed to live. They just plodded on, dogged and insistent, until they arrived at Oregon, and then, in

quite the most beautiful scene of the film, knelt down and thanked God for having brought them safely to their goal. For this one moment the caravaners came to life; we saw the face of their leader, devout and weather-beaten, as he exhorted his brethren to thank God for their deliverance. We saw, also, the faces of the waggoners as they knelt in the snow. The greater part of them weary; too weary even to pray. A few sad, because on the journey they had lost their belongings or their friends, and one or two really and fervently thankful to have attained their goal. That much was moving; the rest a record of fact, pure and simple, and what remained, a trite love story.

"The Battle of the Somme" (shown by permission of the Army Council) is another of these documentary films; it possesses, however, the saving grace of sincerity. From start to finish it is nothing more than a well-photographed record of what happened on the Somme: it makes no pretences to being anything else. There is no love story, no supposedly human interest; just the facts as they happened—exaggerated perhaps, but facts for all that, and for this reason "The Battle of the Somme" was never offensive. It was not always enthralling, although at moments it was definitely moving. For instance, just before the first big attack a young soldier, who was peering over the parapet, put his hands suddenly to his head and, "Don't seem to feel quite right", he said, and then fell back dead. It was the zero hour, and the attack swept on. It was incidents like this that made "Potemkin" an intensely moving film. "The Battle of the Somme" was as good as a history book and at times considerably more interesting.

scientist than for the general public. For the most part they had been conducted with a battery of still cameras, and depended for viewing on a quick presentation of a series of glass plates. Such was the zoxophrascope (mentioned chiefly on account of its name!), but the kinetoscope was something entirely different: it was the result of the working of one single camera, behind the lens of which a strip of celluloid, coated with photographic emulsion, had been passed. In essentials, the Edison camera differed hardly at all from the camera in use to-day.

The kinetoscope was, however, beset with two great drawbacks; the first being that it was impossible to handle more than fifty feet of film at a time, and the second that the kinetoscope itself, enclosed as it was in a small black box, could only be viewed by one person at a time. This confinement to a single vision was no very great drawback, so long as the kinetoscope remained a novelty. But after a year or so of precarious peeping it was found that the novelty *was* wearing off: the money, it appeared, was not coming in as quickly as it should! To stimulate the box-office returns screen projection was sought for and, for the same reason, after a year or so was found. Edison affirms that he had the secret of screen projection safely locked up in his laboratories, and that it had been there since the first appearance of the kinetoscope. Be that as it may, the fact remains that screen projection was not made public until 1895, and then not by Edison.

That the kinetoscope did not follow the phonograph in producing popular turns was due to the fact that it could not contain more than fifty feet of film; and fifty feet of film, as we know, can be shown in as many seconds. (This difficulty was later overcome by the use of a simple device known as "The Latham Loop", which left a piece of slack film between the two sprockets and the main body of the film, thereby

removing strain which had hitherto made breakages in anything over fifty feet inevitable.) Whatever the kinetoscope chose to present could not last more than one minute at the very most. The phonograph record, on the other hand, is just long enough to record a popular song-hit on one side: it plays from three and a half to five minutes. The phonograph had therefore five times the scope of the kinetoscope.

The kinetoscope was a novelty, and for that reason it was of no importance what it pictured, provided that it pictured something and so long as that something moved. For this reason the picturisation of a certain mechanic at the Edison works, while engaged in sneezing, was the first thing to be photographed by a motion-picture camera. Fred Otts (the gentleman in question) was the jester of the West Orange works: he had, we are told, many jests, but none so famous as his sneeze! The sneeze was a god-send to Edison. It was animated, and, above all, it was short, and for both these reasons it became the subject of the first film to be offered to the public. This was 1893-94. Other Edison productions, for the season of 1893-94, comprised a troop of trained bears, some performing dogs, cats, and monkeys, a solo dancer, a contortionist, a strong man, and a necessarily small slice from a popular stage success. The subject matter was still of no importance: anything from a contortionist to a sneeze would do. It was the kinetoscope that people wanted, and the novelty of seeing pictures that actually moved. And if it was not the novelty, why else, I ask you, should people pay even five cents to see a sneeze?

Owing to Edison's peculiarity, stubbornness, or whatever you care to call it, causing him to withhold the secret of screen projection, the film industry was taken out of his hands. Projection was arrived at independently of Edison, and so the films progressed without him. This dropping of the pilot ranks as

I said in an earlier chapter that the proper function of the film was to express an idea. But, in so saying, I was over-hasty; I spoke without considering the historical film. Through the medium of the camera the film possesses the power of "particle for particle reproduction", and is, in consequence, capable of reproducing any scene set before it, down to the smallest grain of dust. This capability, although deplorable and meet to be shunned where the making of films *qua* films is concerned, will prove of inestimable value in the recording of historical events. The recording of events is, of course, very far removed from the telling of a story. For story-telling, the word spoken or written is the best medium, but for the recording of an event, the written word is certainly not superior to the projected picture. The projected picture has the advantage of representing the whole scene as it actually happened, while the written word can only say that on such and such a date in such and such a year the fifth, sixth, or seventh army advanced from one place in the vicinity of the Somme to another place in the same neighbourhood. There can, I think, be no doubt that the picturisation of the above-mentioned advance will prove more interesting, and that it will make a more lasting impression on the mind of the student than the bare and unadorned statement of fact.

As far as plain and unvarnished history, or, I should say, chronicling as opposed to history goes, the films have a tremendous advantage over the written word. They have the advantage of being able to present a picture, if not of the actual event, at least of an accurate reproduction of that event, while the chronicler has to suggest the said event in as few words as possible. The chronicler of the future will have to be a camera-man and a studio

owner. He will probably write nothing except the subtitles to his film. And in every school there will be projectors. They will find their way into private houses and will establish themselves in libraries.

"Have you seen Mr. X.'s film of the Geneva Congress?"

"No, but I'm going to run it off this evening."

"Be sure and tell me what you think of it. We enjoyed it so much. There is a little bit, about half-way through, where the rhythm rather drags . . . but then he's got such a lovely style with his cuts . . .", etc.

This state of affairs, in many ways desirable, is already upon us. The chronicle film has come to the theatre and awaits only the cheapening and facilitating of the means of projection to become as universal as a newspaper—and, talking of newspapers, the idea of film newspapers is not by any means so fantastic as it may sound.

Television will be upon us before the decade is out, and by the time the newspapers and the public have conquered their inherent distrust of so novel an invention (this process may take forty years), it is quite possible that every house will be equipped with a small televisior, or a large televisior for that matter. The televisior will be run on the system of a telephone, that is to say, it will be hired from a central office and worked probably by the insertion of a penny, or two pennies, in the slot.

No need to prop that aggravating newspaper against the coffee-cup, no more corners sticky with marmalade—just twopence or a penny in the slot, and the day's news passes before you as you eat and drink. All in pictures, all televised from a large central office. One can only read one paper at once, but there is no reason why two televisors should not operate simultaneously. . . . The *Morning Post* and the *Sunday Worker* would, I think, run best in con-

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The poor vamp is left, a broken woman, to wilt upon her sofa, and that is the last we see of her. In some we are allowed the edifying spectacle of her committing suicide (this, if she has been more than usually wicked). The jaws of a lion, the knife, or the river—sin has met with its inevitable retribution. For the vamp, be it remembered, has no fundamentally good qualities: she would not know a dog if she saw one, and as for children, they are quite outside her province.

The lesson to be drawn from the fate of the abandoned vamp is that while sin may be all very well, and even desirable in a man, it most certainly does not pay for a woman. The man, by virtue of some hidden fount of good, is allowed to sin, and is capable of regeneration. But the vamp, who has no good qualities, is incapable of anything approaching regeneration, and good only for abandonment or suicide, or both. The public, always shy of the truth, will not stand for sin without retribution. The unrepentant sinner, whether man or woman, is supposed to be unhappy, unsuccessful, and, finally, suicidal—so much for equal rights.

IV

The vampire tradition, with its incense and its satin, its cigarettes and its sofas, owes its origin to a certain enterprising juggling with the names of Theodosia Barranger. The result was Theda Bara, and no less than forty pictures in three years.

As Theda Bara, the demure Miss Goodman became a world-famous vampire, a universal mantrap and trafficker in souls; she acquired also a mythical past. It was rumoured, and rumoured loudly, that she was the daughter of a French artist and an Arabian houri, born amid the dust of desire! A newspaper then discovered that the word "Bara" was

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nothing more or less than "Arab" spelt backwards, and from then on it was easy going. "Theda" was only a rearrangement of the letters composing the word "death". . . . And so on, and so forth. And so the American-born Miss Goodman became metamorphosed into a sinuous Arab girl, a crystal-gazer and fortune-teller possessed of the secrets of fate. The skull and crossbones became her inevitable concomitants, and always she affected trailing draperies in lieu of dress. She, of course, never went out of doors, but spent her waking hours in passing from divan to divan in an atmosphere that was heavily laden with incense, and perhaps with opium. . . .

A wonderful, exotic creature, as irresistible as she was attractive, as sinful as beautiful, and as mysterious as she was concrete. No wonder that America, and after America, Europe, vied with each other in pouring epithets on her already overloaded name.

The chance thought which inspired an enterprising reporter with the idea that there was a similarity between the words "Arab" and "Bara" drew upon Miss Bara and upon her successors all the unknown, and therefore tremendously desired, potentialities of the "East". The vamp became at once the materialisation of the houri of the Arabian nights—the new Scheherazade who wiled men with the sinuous graces of her body in lieu of the weighty complexities of a thousand and one nights wasted in story-telling. All that was mysterious, all that was unknown, the magic of the conjurer, the penetration of the crystal-gazer—everything, in fact, with which the western mind had dabbled and, finding beyond its scope, had relegated to the mysterious "East"—found expression in the vampire. Miss Bara had but to raise an eyelid and audiences were spellbound. "How eastern . . . how sinister! . . . What grace! . . ." and, with baited breath, they watched her tortuous progress. The westernised houri, the living realisation

junction. And when at a future date the machines are endowed with lungs—when, in fact, they learn to speak . . . but that is too terrible to think of. One can only hope that when this occurs, as occur it will, that the vocal and cacophonous part of the machine will be so arranged that the distressed listener can, when his ear-drums are splitting, become, at a moment's notice, a watcher once more. . . .

CHAPTER XVI

SPACE

I

THIS chapter is in no way mathematical, nor yet is it even remotely concerned with Einstein, and it is not, as one might suppose, in any way astronomical. The "space" of which I am talking is just an ordinary finite sort of space; a space where parallel lines will not meet, and in which the word "simultaneous" is not an anachronism: it is, in short, strictly confined within the limits of the camera.

Nine films out of ten have something of the spacious about them, and the tenth, even if it does not appear spacious, has usually tried to attain this effect, and failed in the effort. There is something about space that we all love; it may be the open space or the enclosed space, but space it is, and the more spacious the better pleased we are. All of us, patrons of the cinema, are a city-dwelling race. We live on top of, and underneath, each other. We live in small rooms and work in over-filled offices. We proceed to and from our work along the straight confines of the streets, and occasionally we walk in a park which is relatively spacious. On rarer occasions still we penetrate into the country; we trundle along straight or winding roads in motor-cars, or in charabancs (the more adventuresome prefer the motor-bicycle), and come finally to rest in some town or village nestling in a sheltered valley. We never come in contact with space; we never survey anything bigger than a park or more spacious

the first of that long chain of calamities culminating in Cecil B. de Mille, which have since beset the progress of the infant art. For, although Edison showed no very marked talent in producing films, his imagination soaring as high as performing bears and no higher, I cannot but think that the film would have been safer in his hands than in those of fur dealers, clothes spongers, and retail and wholesale grocers. But lest, in view of the preceding remark, I should be thought "snobbish", let me state that I have a wholesome respect for furriers: that grocers, retail or wholesale, are estimable people, and that the spongers of clothes are indispensable to society. They are all "honourable men" . . . and further, they have shown themselves to be men endowed with sound business capabilities. But most certainly they are not, and I think they would be the first to join with me in endorsing this assertion, artists. . . .

The arts of painting and sculpture were born by and through the artists and have, to an extent, been commercialised since. The film, on the other hand, born of an inventor and of financiers bred, is now beginning to be taken up by artists. Will this complete reversal of the normal process of development, one wonders, result in anything more remarkable than the process of reversal itself?

III

So far the film has developed independently of the American mind. It has relied on its novelty to bring it success; on its novelty, and on the name of Edison. Success came: six months of it came and went, and at the end of the sixth month came also the American mind in the shape of the Latham brothers from Virginia. . . .

An afternoon in August of the year 1894 found the Latham brothers in New York. Probably they

were on or near Broadway, and certainly they must have been at leisure. Near by was a kinetoscope arcade, and the Lathams, having nothing better to do, joined in the crowd that was flowing to see the new wonder. They went in and were, one presumes, regaled by the antics of the performing bears, the "gaiety girl", and the others. They came out, and as they came out two things struck them (I speak metaphorically, of course), the first being the necessity of obtaining screen projection which, when attained, would enable the same picture to be shown to hundreds of people at once, and the second was that the wonderfully commercial business of prize-fighting could easily be photographed. To photograph a prize-fight it would be necessary to enlarge the containing capacities of kinetoscope and camera alike, but this, they thought, could be managed.

"There! That's some business!" said Grey Latham to his brother, "and all we've got to do is to get Edison to photograph a prize-fight, and we can take it out and make a fortune! And then, if we can link it up with a magic lantern . . ." And it is just this spirit that dominates the film activities in America to-day. There's money in the war . . . there's money in the circus. . . . The public like train pictures, or they don't like costume pictures. For the first twenty years of its young life it was used exclusively as a means of wringing money out of the public. Actors, producers, scenario writers, were all dominated by the same idea, which amounted to this: "Will the public like this (film or actor or actress) enough to pay for it?"

Here I must cite D. W. Griffith as being the one conspicuous exception to this rule. Griffith was the first man to realise that there was an art in the making of pictures; and further he was the only man, in those early days, who had the patience and the brain required for the evolution of a screen syntax.

than a main city street—and so we are space-starved.

Civilisation sits very lightly upon most of us. A tense situation, a situation in which our interests are threatened, a love feud or a bugle note and we revert without any difficulty to the ways of our primitive ancestors. Blows and growls in place of words and sweet reasonableness. The primitive instinct is still uppermost in humanity. Nine human beings out of ten would prefer to settle a dispute by fighting rather than by a discreet use of words—that much we know to our cost. And if there is so much of the primitive in man, it is only natural that we should find still surviving the essentially primitive desire for space. The primitive man sees in an open space, not a thing of beauty, but a thing of utility. A camp pitched in the middle of an open space is immune from the perils of a surprise attack, whereas the camp in the mountains or in the valley, although sheltered and well protected, is always open to an attack from above, or to an inrush from around the neighbouring pile of cliff. Space is an object of great utility to primitive peoples. It presents, firstly, a certain immunity from attack and, secondly, good grazing for cattle. The people who have domesticated cattle have attained also a certain degree of civilisation. They have found for themselves an employment other than war, an employment in fact that is definitely unwarlike. Cattle will thrive in a time of peace, in a time of slow-moving from place to place, and not in a time of excitement, of hectic advances, and hurried retreats. Cattle breeding requires space, and is by nature a pacific occupation. It is a leisured occupation, and one that provides ample time for watching—watching in the noonday heat, or watching under the stars. The ability to watch implies a certain amount of leisure, and from leisure is bred thought. And so it came

to pass, having become aware of the great utility of large open spaces of grassland, that our ancestors came, after a time, to a realisation of the beauty inherent in these spaces. That was hundreds of thousands of years ago—two hundred thousand years of instinct set against a bare two thousand of training—and so it is not surprising that to-day we find mankind still primitive at heart, still hankering in his inmost heart after space—the open space, which in the early days spelt immunity from sudden attack, which became later a thing of beauty, and which is to-day one among a number of things after which we vainly strive. We are striving after space to-day, but we have forgotten the reason for our strife.

Our civilisation is essentially unspacious. From its very beginnings it has tended to draw men closer together, to centralise and not to distribute. Centralisation offers us so many and such varied advantages that we have followed it; unwillingly and sparsely at first, but in greater numbers and with greater willingness as the years passed on. Family by family we have been drawn into the tribe, and tribe by tribe has become assimilated into the nation, and at some future date we shall see nation by nation being merged into the world community. We have come together, and we have left the doubtful security of the open space for the more solid assurance of concerted action. We have abandoned our nomadic ways, but our nomadic instincts are still with us. And of all these instincts which we have brought with us out of the past, none is more clearly discernible than this our desire for space. In our larger towns we keep parks, poor imitations of the plains where once we lived. We preserve these parks, so that in our leisure hours we may escape from the cloistered recesses of our everyday life. We pour into these parks of an evening;

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of their dreams of vice diffused and made respectable by all the trappings of a legendary Orient. For it is generally accredited that Orientals are born immoral: they can't help it. . . . And so, because of its essential unreality, Miss Bara's career of celluloid sin was allowed to pass unchallenged, provided always that she came to a bad end. . . .

Miss Bara has disappeared, but the vamp tradition is as strong to-day as it was in 1914. We have Nita Naldi, with a touch of the Chinese; Greta Garbo, soft and sinuous. There was Barbara la Marr, beautiful and irresistible; while Pola Negri, Lya de Putti, and others are still with us.

Nita Naldi has been shot and deserted times without number. Pola Negri has been strangled, heart-broken, beheaded, knifed, and lion-handled. Barbara la Marr met many fates before death finally took her, and Lya de Putti is only beginning her career of screen vamping—heart-break, murder, suicide—and this is but a tithe of what is in store for her. . . . Poor vamps, it is indeed a hard life. But is that of the heroine any easier?

CHAPTER VI

THE BACKER

I

By the "backer" I mean the man who has made the appearance of the constant cowboy, the great lover, and the vamp financially possible. The backer is the man who realised that there was great money in "this Film Idea", and who, having realised, set out to exploit this new thing systematically and successfully.

In most cases it was mere chance that brought the magnates of to-day into the films. Adolph Zukor, a prosperous furrier, went to New York to see about the collection of a debt. Three thousand dollars was the amount of the sum involved, and it was invested in a penny arcade that was not prospering. It was the effort to salvage this loan that first put Zukor into the arcade phonograph and peep-show business. Later it developed into the store theatre, and, later still, into the world-famous organisation of "Famous Players". A pure chance, and nothing more. Zukor, like everyone else in those days, had no interest in pictures as pictures: to him they figured merely as a possible means of salving three thousand dollars, and even to-day there is little evidence to show that his point of view has in any way altered.

Carl Laemmle, another magnate of to-day, saw in the pictures an easy way to wealth. He followed that way, and it has led him to the presidency of the

we look up at the stars; we hear the wind° and the primitive in us is stirred. Some vague memory of something we have now forgotten makes these small open spaces infinitely dear to us—our parks and our squares.

To-day the motor-cars enable many of us to escape from the cloisters of city life into a space which is larger than the square and vaster than the park. We rush out into the country and there, amid larger spaces than our towns can afford, remember the still vaster spaces which we have abandoned. Why is the seaside so popular? Not because of its sand and its bathing facilities (for as a race we are afraid of water), but because it affords us an unbroken view of an apparently limitless open space.

Mankind is always hankering after space, and in the gratification of this desire, we find the fundamental reason for the popularity of the "Wild West"

The "Wild West" film tells always the same story, features the same, or very nearly the same, but it draws a very mixed audience. There is, of course, the usual complement of fans and seekers after excitement, but there is also a larger percentage of people who go seldom to the cinema, and then only to see "Wild West" films. These people are usually intelligent: I myself am one of them. They, or I should say we, are too intelligent to take much interest in the Western story, and we are none of us devoted admirers of any of the famous riding stars—and yet we go to see these "Wild West" pictures. We go, of course, because the western picture does much to satisfy that innate desire for space, which the conditions of modern life have rendered so singularly difficult of attainment. We, and the same applies, though to a lesser degree, to all patrons of the "Wild West" film, go because we delight in seeing vast unenclosed spaces. We like to see cattle grazing in the middle distance, mountains rising like

mist from the horizon and fading cloudlike into the sky: to be able to look and look, to look for miles without seeing anything but grass, sky, and an occasional cow—it is what our ancestors did, not so very long ago. It is what we all want to do, though when it came to the point of doing we should find ourselves hopelessly out of place—so strong and at the same time so weak are the ties of civilisation. We live in a city, and we pander to our instincts by making parks. We go to the cinema and we gaze with rapture at the shadow of the prairies; but put us on those same prairies and we should immediately begin to build houses. Cut us off from the city, from its life and from its comfort, and immediately we should long for it, and long for it a great deal more ardently than we now long for the prairies. No newspapers; that would be our first complaint. No books, no people. . . . "Haven't seen a soul for the last week." And one and all we should return weary, sore-footed, and not a little disillusioned to the cloistered comfort of the metropolis. Few of us have had the chance of realising these desires for real space, and so the desires remain. We long for space: like so many sponges we absorb it in the form of films and novels, and we play with the idea in our parks.

There is open space, and there is enclosed space. The former is necessarily the larger, but the second, the enclosed space, representing all that the majority of us know about space, is equally popular. Our civilisation has forced us to become denizens of an enclosed space. We enclose parks and, those of us who can afford it, enclose small spaces so as to make large rooms. We love large rooms for the same reason as we love space. A large room is a relic of the space that we once lived in, and here again the films are not slow to satisfy our desires. The films just love to show us large rooms. "Large" is perhaps an inadequate word with which to describe these miniature

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Universal Pictures Corporation. But, or perhaps because of that, like Zukor, he thinks that pictures have only one use in the world.

The same applies to Lewis J. Selznick, an unsuccessful diamond merchant, and the only dangerous rival that Zukor has so far encountered.

In the eyes of the "backers" the film is still just so much celluloid, cheap enough in itself, but possessed of a marvellous capacity for making money. It has already made millions for them, for their wives and for their children. Most certainly it is not in human nature to place anything higher than the acquisition of money—it may be in human nature, but it is not in the nature of the American.

To nearly all of us, myself included, money is the source of 90 per cent of our happiness: to the American it is a full 100 per cent, and to film magnates, apparently, 120 per cent, or more. It is to be regretted, but there it is. . . . And, in view of the circumstances above related, it could hardly be otherwise. If "The Ten Commandments" rake in the dollars, then they and their like will continue in strength. Very natural . . . and one can only hope that the film talent, so conspicuous by its absence in America, will take root and flower in the more congenial soil of Europe or Asia.

II

From a consideration of the American mind, and of the products of that mind, as evidenced in the cinema, we are now in a position to survey the cinema as it is to-day. And if the reader is of the opinion that I have spent too much time in digging up the past, and in speculating on the future, I can only say that it was necessary, and therefore I make no apology.

THE BACKER

With a clear comprehension of how the cinema arose, and of how it was exploited, we shall be able to perceive why it is what it is to-day, and how far, in being "what it is", it falls short of, or approaches, what it ought to be.

prairies enclosed in four walls—they are more than large; they are colossal. A seemingly endless stretch of dazzling floor-space; four, five, or six soaring walls, a window embracing the entire circuit of the heavens, and in the middle of all this vastness a minute figure. A human figure, looking very much alone, and looking very much the same as a man or a woman would look if put down in the middle of a prairie. We may complain that these prairie-like apartments are not homelike, but then how could they be? How could they in all their vastness of dazzling acreage be anything but reminiscent of a prairie? We may have lived on unenclosed spaces, but always we have had a space enclosed set apart for our habitation. The vast wastes of the prairie accentuated the "snugness" of our own little enclosed space, and so we became lovers of the prairie. But with the prairie in the home it is a very different matter; we may marvel before it, but we can never love. The vast rooms that Hollywood provides for our edification are nothing if not spacious, and because of this very spaciousness we are, for a minute or so, captured. And when all is said and done, there is something essentially amazing, essentially captivating about an acre of floor space: it is, to say the least of it, unusual. The great spaces of Pharaoh's palace in "The Ten Commandments" were certainly amazing; so also were the rooms in "Breakfast at Sunrise", but after a time they became irksome. Space in the home is all very well—up to a point, that is; one must have room to move; but space for equestrian exercise in a drawing-room is not essential.

The Pampas-like room can never be a success, because it implies a contradiction. It links two things that are essentially foreign—the plain and the home. The Pampas itself, the prairie, the steppe, or the open sea, these will always thrill; they are the

real thing, or as near to the real thing as the majority of us can ever get.

There are two ways of getting space across on the films; the first and obvious way is by photographing it and projecting it, as was done in "The Covered Waggon", and as is done in all Westerners. The second, more subtle method, is by suggesting it. In "The Ten Commandments" de Mille took a space, enclosed it and photographed it. In "Caligari" Dr. Viene put a line of roof-tops and chimney-pieces against the sky-line, and the effect was of infinity. A line of roofs and the black figure of the sleep-walker silhouetted against the sky, his victim's trailing draperies; nothing more, but the effect was colossal. It suggested a giddy height of hundreds of feet facing a space more illimitable than the prairies themselves. The entire set was constructed in a studio; it was not more than 50 feet long, it was barely raised from the ground, and was backed with a perfectly ordinary "flat".

The suggestive method is hampered by being unsuitable for use in the majority of films. It was the right thing for "Caligari", but it would have been ridiculous in "Greed". To suggest the death valley would, I think, be impossible—to suggest it realistically, that is. Stroheim could have given us an idea of space on the "Caligari" lines, but such an idea would of necessity have been fantastic—a thing of sombre magnificence, the space of unexplored depths and unplumbed oceans, an essentially romantic space, a sort of Spanish Main where anything might be expected to happen. Such a fantastic note occurring suddenly in "Greed" would have been worse than discordant.

There must be space, and so long as it is really spacious, we cannot grumble. The prairie-like home is perhaps a little worrying to our domesticated minds of to-day, but even the prairie-like room,

CHAPTER VII

THE PROPER FUNCTION OF THE FILM

I

A FILM is a strip of celluloid covered with pictures. It has been put to two main uses: firstly, that of making money, and secondly, that of telling a story. It remains now to be seen what is its proper function, and whether that function lies within the realms of finance, or even of story-telling.

The film has made money: it is still making money, and will, in all probability, continue to make money for some time to come, and, therefore, one of the functions of the film is to make money. That much one must perforce admit, for the films have proved themselves such able earners that anything else is impossible. Money-making, then, is ONE of the functions of the film. Circumstances make the fact indisputable, but circumstances also lead to a realisation of the fact that there are other functions to which the film is as well suited as it is to the making of money.

Obviously the best way of telling a story is by the use of words, written or spoken. It is only natural that any person or persons, possessed of a reasonable command of language, will find it easier to tell a story by means of words than by the use of any other medium of expression. For the painter, there is canvas, colour, and line, and for the musician, sound. But for the ordinary mortal words must suffice. And yet, what is the film, as we know it, but an attempt to tell stories in pictures?

PROPER FUNCTION OF THE FILM

The idea of telling a story in pictures is as old as Egypt. But even as long as ten thousand years ago it was found that it did not work. Narration by means of pictures could, it is true, be achieved, but it was difficult, the Egyptians found. Too difficult to be practical. Some substitute for pictures must be found if narration were to be carried on in anything like a general manner. The result was hieroglyphics, and later the alphabet.

Just as in ancient Egypt it was discovered that a story *could* be told in pictures, so in modern Hollywood the same discovery has been made. A story can be told in pictures: we have only to look at "Broken Blossoms" and at "Robin Hood" to see that this is so. A story can be told in pictures, helped out by sub-titles. It CAN be done. It can be done with interest, but always the same feat could have been accomplished better with words pure and simple. Griffith's adaptation of "Broken Blossoms" became on the screen a harrowing melodramatic tragedy, requiring several thousand feet of film before it could express what Tom Burke made luminous and moving in twenty pages. (It takes twenty minutes to read the story "Broken Blossoms": to see the film requires an hour and a half.)

The film was a masterpiece of emotional production; Thomas Burke's story was a poignant study of life: between the two there is a great gulf fixed. . . . With "Robin Hood", however, it was different. "Robin Hood" was a vehicle for Douglas Fairbanks, and Fairbanks is essentially a screen actor. And so it happens that, whenever he appears, all the paraphernalia of story, all the trappings of spectacle, fade into insignificance, and we are content to watch the movements of a personality that is expressing something that is not a story. For Fairbanks's stories are all the same; they may be set in Spain, France, or mediaeval England, it makes not the slightest differ-

when in the proper hands, can be made very effective indeed. Towards the end of "The Two Brothers" we were shown a vast room, a really vast room, and right in the centre of this room was a small crumpled white figure—a woman. Large, black, and near the front of the picture—a man. "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world . . . ?" and one by one the lights were turned down. . . . The huge silhouette of the man looming black in the foreground, and very far away the pale heap of white; it was as though an ocean separated those two.

CHAPTER XVII

THE ABSTRACT FILM

I

THE camera's inherent capacity for what I have called particle for particle reproduction has been its commercial godfather, and at the same time its artistic shibboleth. The camera can, and does, reproduce the thing as it is seen, and in so doing it has not failed to awaken in its audiences a responsive thrill. It is the same with any art. The artist presents, the spectators penetrate; the deeper the penetration, the more popular the work. We admire Frith's "Derby Day", and our admiration is heightened by the fact that we can pick out and recognise every one of the little incidents shown in the picture. We can recognise them—from the juggler's boy to the dandy with the veiled top-hat—we know them all; we know them well, and we are delighted to see them before us in a picture. To raise and to satisfy this feeling of recognition is one of the functions of the artist and, therefore, of the film director. The artist's work is by no means easy; he is by nature incapable of accurate reproduction, and is in consequence compelled to fall back on suggestion as a means for achieving the illusion of accuracy. A blob of white paint will resemble a light in the eye, and similarly a streak of black will do duty for a shadow, but examine these things closely, and what has appeared to be light will resolve itself into white paint, and that which looked for all the world like a shadow will take on the appearance of a black smudge. Remove the

ence. There is always the same young gallant, active, attractive, and disreputable (a variation on the great lover). There is also the blonde heroine, and there is, among other things, a plot. The plot shows how the gallant and the heroine meet, separate, and finally meet again. But all that is of no consequence, and if it were we should long since have tired of Fairbanks. There is always in a Fairbanks film something more essential and far more vital than this trite plot concerned with triangular intrigue.

Douglas Fairbanks is an unconscious expressionist, and one who is, or seems to be, devoted to the idea that life is really very wonderful, and that this jolly old world is without a doubt the very best spot in the whole universe! In spite of the manifest fallacy of this idea, Fairbanks compels us, while we watch him, to believe that it is true. To see him slit the sails of the pirate galleon with one gash of his knife; to watch him as he hurtles through space while that knife rips the sails from top to bottom—that is wonderful! The whole thing is, of course, manifestly impossible, which only goes to show the absolute unimportance of “story”.

Consider for a moment. Is it conceivable that a man should be able to insert the blade of a six-inch dagger into the top of a sail, and then, throwing the weight of his body on to the handle, descend in a ripping curve over the sail's surface, WITHOUT FALLING? Obviously it is impossible. But the fact that this makes no difference to our pleasure, and that, while watching, we are never tempted to cry out “Fake!” shows that there is something far more interesting than the mere recording of facts in pictures which is holding us. To see Fairbanks at his tricks is to see the whole joy of effortless motion through space. It is supreme, wonderful. It comes nearer than anything else to satisfying my desire for bird-like flight.

In a Fairbanks film everything is subservient to this idea of exuberant happiness, to be attained through pure and effortless motion. When Fairbanks jumps into a cart, it is just another delightful curve: there is no effort attached to the action. He rides a horse, and never is one tempted to think what an effort it must be to retain one's seat on the back of such an abnormally frisky animal (for undoubtedly it would be an effort for the ordinary mortal), but one thinks rather, what a joy to be moving thus, and to be in such perfect harmony with everything. . . . And then he's away and off, jumping walls, flashing down drain-pipes, and capering over cobbles in a series of the most exhilarating and inspiring patterns. . . . For the moment one becomes forgetful of the cinema, of the smoky atmosphere, and of the whirring of the projector. And while the film lasts one is carried on wings, far more real than those of song, into a new and incredibly dazzling world—our own world with all the rose leaves smoothed out into a series of delicious curves . . . “THE END”—and suddenly one is conscious that the knees of an excited fellow-spectator are pressing firmly into the small of one's back!

The genius of Fairbanks lies in his ability to communicate his own incurable optimism to his audience. Friction . . . ? What is it but a thing of which scientists talk? And in the joy of watching, the onlooker becomes convinced that the world is a place of joyous leaps and bounds, that all motion is effortless, and that all is for the best in the very best of possible worlds! . . . A wonderful achievement, but let it not tempt you to try descending even a prosaic rope with a “Fairbanks” sweep! For in the world we live in there is, unfortunately, a thing called friction, and it is, moreover, the sworn enemy of all effortless motion.

The Fairbanks idea of motion is something that

magnifying glass and lights and shadows will take the place of black and white paint. The illusion, for such indeed it is, will be successful. The film director has, however, no such difficulties to contend with. He has his camera, and has but to choose his object and turn the handle to achieve ninety-five per cent perfect reproduction. Cameras are easily obtained; there is no paucity of objects, animate or inanimate, and developing rooms are found almost everywhere to-day. The same applies to projectors and to screens. All these things are easily procured; they are within the reach of anyone possessed even of moderate means, and to the director, with the wealth of the Indies at his back, they appear in bewildering abundance. In short, anyone with money can take up a camera and awaken in masses of people all the thrills of recognition.

The ease with which the film can arouse this state of emotion has led all directors into a trap, and it has led also a great many utterly unsuitable people into the paths of directorship. And so the film progressed on a path of mistaken realism, until it reached the quagmire of stagnation. It was realism piled on realism, realism utterly and entirely devoid of any sort of imagination. If a room was desired, a room was built, and it was photographed. If a large room, then a large room was built and photographed. The whole thing was absolutely mechanical: space was just space, and it never occurred to anyone to suggest it. A room was a room, and time was time. To show the extent to which this misconception had grown, it will be helpful here to refer to a certain incident in early film history. As early as 1908, the company of the Comédie Française got, or was got, together, and it was decided to photograph certain plays. The idea was to take the most popular subjects, to photograph them, and then to distribute them throughout the country. This, it was anticipated, would prove both

lucrative and artistic. A number of famous scenes were accordingly selected, and a number of famous actors and actresses detailed to enact them, and the work went ahead. (It was from this organisation that Adolph Zukor drew his idea of "Famous Players and Famous Plays".) The subjects selected for photography were chosen because of their fame, or on account of their intrinsic popularity. It was "Famous Players and Famous Plays", and yet never did it occur to anyone that the result of all this promiscuous photography would be films and not plays. The actors passed and repassed before the camera; they acted, they used gestures, and they spoke. The whole battery of their very efficient stage technique was focused upon the camera, an instrument totally incapable of appreciating it. The gesture was used in so much as it referred to the spoken word, and so, likewise, the expression, the grouping, and the scenery. A scene from "Phedre"; a scene from "Tartuffe" was acted, and while it was being acted it was "taken down" by a camera—the result was, as might be expected, a failure. The experienced artistes of the Comédie Française never achieved screen fame. The Famous Plays never penetrated even to the outer husk of the film-going world, and just at this time a sixteen-year-old girl, utterly inexperienced in matters theatrical, became "America's sweetheart". Mary Pickford succeeded because of her inexperience. She had no preconceived ideas about gestures, no views about words, deportment, or voice production. She was utterly free from the stage superstition, and therefore completely receptive to what the film, through the medium of D. W. Griffith, could teach her.

But the warning of the Famous Players went unheeded, and the films continued their realistic way. They have, indeed, abandoned the Famous Players, but this has only made them cling the more closely

could not possibly be expressed through the medium of anything other than the cinema. The preceding pages will show very clearly the total inadequacy of words to express the true nature of this thing. It is something entirely new: to most people unknown, and therefore unnamed.

We all know the Fairbanks story; we know it too well, and yet we all go to see Fairbanks. And we go to see him because he has something to say which appeals to all of us, and that is the important thing. Why worry about the story, then? . . . Why indeed? . . . But then Fairbanks doesn't! A change of dress is all that is necessary, and for the rest—Fairbanks.

One has only to think for a moment of "Broken Blossoms", and then to compare it to "The Black Pirate". "Broken Blossoms" would make a magnificent play. On the stage it would lose nothing, and would gain a great deal. As a picture it is moving, but it is infinitely finer as a short story. The actual story is far better than any of Fairbanks's, and yet imagine "The Black Pirate" on the stage.

II

A film, then, that is really a film, is in no way concerned with story. A story, as we have seen, is best expressed through the medium of words. It can, it is true, be expressed in pictures, but always it would be more satisfactory if the medium of words had been used in place of pictures. It remains now to be seen what then is the true function of the film. What is it that the film is best suited to express? Obviously, then, those things which cannot adequately be expressed in words. And the things which words are most inadequate to express are IDEAS. I use the word "ideas" in its unphilosophic sense, as referring to an abstract notion, in the formation of which the evidence of the senses has played but a minor part.

The Fairbanks idea is that life is joyful, and motion effortless—an idea in the formation of which the evidence of the senses can have played no part whatsoever!

It is the purpose of art to be, first, universal, and, second, abstract. By which I mean that creations of the true artist would be equally intelligible to people of intelligence in England, India, or South America. Art is universal and can be bound by no fetters, whether racial, national, or commercial. If it is so bound, it is no longer art. . . .

It may be argued that poetry is bound in the fetters of nationalism, in that it is expressed in language, and that there are many languages in the world. The same would apply to literature and drama. But for all that an intelligent Englishman is capable of appreciating Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. And in the same way Shelley's "Ode to a Skylark" would appeal to an educated Hindu, if he knew English. Poetry is undoubtedly one of the finest forms of artistic expression, and yet in so far as it is bound by language it loses the greatness of universality. But this is not strictly true, for although poetry with very few exceptions is untranslatable, if anyone will but take the trouble to master another language, he will then be in a position to appreciate the poetry and the literature of that language. The fact that Racine wrote in French does not in any way lessen one's enjoyment of *Phèdre*, and no more would Goethe's Teutonic origin lessen my appreciation of *Faust*, if I understood German. But, on the other hand, the poems of Henry Newbolt would be absolutely incomprehensible to anyone who was not thoroughly acquainted with the "English public school spirit". I can see the educated Hindu getting pleasure from Shelley or from Keats; provided that he knew English he would enjoy both. But give him even Galsworthy's *Forsyte Saga*, and he would, I think, find himself

to the Famous Plays. Every successful novel, and likewise every successful play, stands a good chance of being turned into a film. The film-producing companies (as I mentioned in an earlier chapter) are not interested in original scenarios. . . .

Into this quagmire of stagnant realism which had reached its zenith or its nadir, whichever way you care to look at it, in the year 1920 came "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari". To say that the advent of "Caligari" was a bombshell to the film world, is to put things mildly—it was not a bombshell; it was a revolution. Here was a film which eschewed realism from start to finish. It featured two very famous players in the shape of Verner Kraus and Conrad Veidt; but there was no famous playing and, what is more, no "famous play". The actors one and all played in a way that would have been incomprehensible on the stage, but which was both clear and lucid on the screen. "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari" was, from start to finish, a film. It expressed, by and through the means of the camera, a very convincing idea of lunacy. It used devices that the camera only could use; devices which were therefore completely foreign to the stage. It was never dependent on the spoken word, and never more than incidentally dependent on its story.¹

"Caligari" told the story of a madman's love, and of his adventures in a small country town. There was a fair in the town, and at this fair there was a certain hypnotist showman who controlled a somnambulist. The sleep-walker answered questions by day and so brought his master a living, while at night he went out into the town and murdered, as his master directed. . . . This sounds absurd, and even fantastic, but it was to this very fantasy that

¹ "Caligari" has been made into a stage play, which is interesting, when one remembers that it is the only film to date that has been so adapted.

the film owed its success. A grim and grisly fantasy, some nightmare fairy tale passing before a background of more than nightmare-like settings. All the sets of "Caligari" were studio sets, and only one of them was in any way reproductive. The first shot of all was a garden, and after that we plunged into the lunatic's brain and travelled along with his distorted thoughts through a prismatic labyrinth of lights and shades. All the scenery was painted on flats, and yet the illusion of space, restriction, a country town and a fair, were absolutely adequate throughout. To attain this effect, Dr. Viene made use of what is called cubist, or expressionist, scenery. This scenery was never realistic; it was never concerned with suggesting primarily a house or a street, but was designed to express rather what the persons in that house, or the people in the street, felt, or were feeling. At one time, for instance, a man was thrown into prison. He was taken down a winding stair. The stairway was black, and on it was painted a diminishing ray of light: immediately it was clear that the prisoner was feeling the effect of the darkness, and that he was dreading the cramped confinement of a prison cell. He was longing for the light which was diminishing with every step he took. Then the cell itself, a very small room, and seated right in the centre was the prisoner. The walls sloped slightly towards him, and on them were painted lines of light and shade which converged on the prisoner. It was as though the weight of the entire universe were pressing upon this small and hopeless individual. The state of the man's mind was as clear as though illuminated by a battery of spot-lights.

The director of "Caligari" showed himself to be an artist in that he was able to awake in an audience the necessary thrill of recognition simply by means of suggestion. "Caligari" was the first attempt at a fantastic and definitely unrealistic film, and as such

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completely at a loss. London, to begin with, is something dim and incomprehensible, and as for the English Forsytes, to the Hindu, or in fact to anyone who had not had a personal experience of them and of their ways, they would be altogether incomprehensible. They are not even European. They are essentially English. And as for their passions, their likes and dislikes, and the surroundings in which they move, they become a mere chronicle of events, interesting perhaps to the student, but as unreal and as shadowy as the exploits of the age of chivalry seem to us to-day.

Even if a Hindu has never heard a skylark, or listened to a nightingale, he must at some time or other have experienced just that feeling of buoyant elation which Shelley depicts. It may have been dawn over the Himalayas, with shadowy peaks materialising from out the mists of deodar forests. A clear air, and all around a sparkling panoply of snow. . . . Whether it is a skylark or the Himalayan dawn, sunset on the Sahara, or a full sea running off the Azores, does not really matter. For every individual, man or woman, the inspiration will be different, and the emotion inspired the same. For some rain, for others sunshine, music, or the crackling of a coal fire. But no matter what the cause, the emotion evoked will be the same the world over.

In the golden lightning
Of the sunken sun
O'er which clouds are lightening
Thou dost float and run,
Like an embodied joy
Whose race is just begun.

The perfect expression of the sheer joy that comes to us at rare moments. The sailor may feel it when he sees the chimneys of Southampton or Swansea topping the horizon; or it may be the flash of a bright jewel in the sunlight; the sight of sea breaking over

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rocks; the screaming of gulls and wind-blown flecks of foam. . . .

All of us at one time or another experience that feeling of sheer joy. We experience also feelings of sorrow and extreme lassitude. Different things will be the causes of these feelings, but the feelings themselves will be the same. And as we are not all artists, for if we were we should express our feelings for ourselves, it is for the artist, the poet, and the musician to crystallise for us these moments of bliss—to crystallise them in some shape that will live to recall these times of sunrise and of midnight, when it is high noon and a cutting wind from the North fills the air with dust and dirt, and when it seems that pounding of machinery will burst our ears.

III

It is just this universal appeal that the film can have. It depends on no language, and it is capable of expressing things which could not be said in words. Like music, it can be understood by all who wish to understand—this, of course, holds true for all forms of art. "He that hath eyes to see, and ears to hear . . .", let him both see and hear collectively.

Both Fairbanks and Chaplin owe their success and world-wide popularity to the fact that they give expression to emotions which have been universally experienced. We have seen the joy of effortless motion à la Fairbanks, and are, I think, agreed that it is something which we would all desire to emulate. It remains now to consider Charles Chaplin. . . .

Let us, to begin with, look at Chaplin himself—Chaplin with his ill-fitting bowler and his comical moustache, his check trousers and enormous shoes, and over all the inevitable cane. Here is the man, even though we see him in caricature, who is to be found from Vancouver to Cape Town and from

it was epoch-making. Since "Caligari" there have been better films of the same sort; we have had "Warning Shadows" and "Destiny", both fantastic and both essentially unrealistic. But it was "Caligari" that led the way: "Caligari" was the first film that added anything new to the technique which Griffith had evolved. Other films have taken the Griffith technique, and they have used it—some efficiently and others inefficiently—but nowhere, until the advent of "Caligari", had anything new been added to it. "Caligari" was in no sense an abstract film, but out of it has arisen the idea of abstract films. It was primarily fantastic and only secondarily representative. Until the advent of "Caligari", all films were firstly and lastly representative: then came "Caligari", primarily fantastic, though still sufficiently representative to awaken the thrill of recognition. Representation, reproductive representation, that is, came second, and from this came the idea that unrepresentative representation (the presentation of unrepresentative shapes) might be achieved through the medium of the camera.

The abstract film, like the abstract picture, seeks to represent nothing, and above all it must narrate nothing. Its model is a Bach fugue, something absolutely cold, and at the same time absolutely beautiful. Just before, and during the early years of the war, a tide of abstraction, commonly known as cubism, swept over European painting. The painters, fascinated by the essential abstraction inherent in the nature of music, rose in a body to declare that they, too, would deal in abstractions. . . . Music was non-representational; it presented a series of sounds so arranged as to be beautiful in themselves. In music there was no label; it was just prelude and fugue, or second, piano sonata—nothing more. Painting, they said, should do likewise. Here it may be interesting to note that contemporary music has

abandoned its pinnacle of abstraction, so desirable to the painters, to descend with all the force of its being into the fields of realism and recognisable representation; e.g. Honnegger's *Pacific 231*. Music went one way and painting another. The result has been the famous sheep-bleating passage in Strauss's *Don Quixote* on the one hand, and the works of Picasso and Matisse on the other. The abstraction movement has swept like a hurricane over the arts. Painting, poetry, sculpture, and now the films, have been caught. Its effect on poetry has proved itself lamentable; in painting it has been partially successful and more valuable for what it has suggested in other fields than for what it has achieved in itself. Only in the films has it appeared with any real semblance of success: in the films, and in music. Music has always been pre-eminently the art of abstraction, and its discursions into realism have been more remarkable for their ingenuity than for their intrinsic beauty.¹ And now the films have found abstraction, and, to judge by the little that has so far been seen, they have at last found their proper medium. The abstract film is still a very rare thing; it is a sort of illegitimate descendant of the fantastic and of the "Caligari" film. It is not so much a descendant as a distant relative, for the film fantastic is as dependent on its story as it is upon the abstract nature of its picturisation, whereas the abstract film, having no story, is entirely dependent upon the beauty of the thing presented.

Take a cubist picture, a Picasso for preference, and envisage clearly the complex design of line and curve. Forget the colouring, or, better still, take such a picture as above mentioned and photograph

¹ It is impossible here to discuss the work of Wagner, or the merits and demerits of Grand Opera in which realism plays so strong a part; therefore for music read "absolute music" for the remainder of this chapter.

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London to Singapore: the proverbial "down and out" who will not be downed. And as the world over many people are down, and not infrequently "out", and as in most cases they are denied the Chaplin courage which would enable them to face it with a cheerful spirit and then come out on top, they rejoice to see Chaplin.

Like Fairbanks, Chaplin propounds the philosophy of a bright world; but, unlike Fairbanks, he makes it a real world. He shows us the discomforts of the immigrant's ship, the hardships of a waiter's life, the trials of a slum policeman, only to dispel the illusion with a whimsical flick of his cane and a set of ingenious tricks. With a little ingenuity, he says, life can be made not only bearable, but positively successful. The pity is that so few of us are endowed with Chaplin's ingenuity! A cheerful theory, cheerfully portrayed, and one that is universally comprehensible. Chaplin's theory needs no language to propound it—and here again let me refer the reader to the total inadequacy of my words to describe the "screen Chaplin". In words it is simply this—life is hard, but if you face it with a smile it'll come out all right!—Absurd and platitudinous! . . . I quite agree. But seeing is believing, and as all my readers must at some time or another have seen a Chaplin film, let me beg them to recall the memories of that occasion, or, better still, to refresh their memories by seeing another Chaplin film. For, when a film is expressing something that it should express, that something cannot be expressed through any medium other than that of the film. It is in the hope of elucidating this point that I have written the foregoing chapter. I cannot hope to create a picture of Chaplin or of Fairbanks, for such a picture, if it is to be created, needs feet of film, a projector, and a screen: it cannot be done, even inadequately, in words.

The proper function of a film is to express an idea,

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and if that much is now understood we can proceed to a survey of the films, and to a distinction of the proper from the improper.

There is, however, a universal delusion as to the proper function of the films—a delusion to which not even the amazing commercial success of Chaplin and Fairbanks has opened the eyes of producers and exhibitors. One and all they seem to think that a film is made for the telling of stories, and also, of course, for the making of money. This last we have seen is true, for certainly the films are good earners. But as to story-telling, all one can say is that it CAN be done.

This delusion as to the story-telling use of the cinema is so widespread that, for the future, when discussing a film or films, I shall regard them all as "story films", and shall judge their merits and demerits by the standard they have set for themselves. The few films that do not fall under this category will be duly mentioned and assigned to their proper places along with Fairbanks and Chaplin.

it. Look then carefully at the photograph, and it will be seen that in place of a blending of colours, there will be a play of lights and shadows. Look at this picture until its image is firmly imprinted on the memory, and when it is so imprinted endow it with motion. Imagine that the segments will move, that shadows will creep across the white surface, merge into a cube and a design of lettering. These two, the cube and the lettering, will move slowly and will scatter the shadows in their progress. The whole effect will not be unlike a black and white kaleidoscope composed of cubes and segments, shadows and letters. In this we have the basis of the abstract film—a cubist picture endowed with motion. A film is, however, a very different thing from a picture: it is confined to black and white in place of colours; it is endowed with motion, and it is made by, with, and through the medium of a camera. The film moves, and the film is a product of the camera, and it is in these two essentials that the abstract film must differ from the abstract picture. Motion is motion, and the word pure and simple implies nothing more than a merging and mingling of various shapes; but the camera, by means of which this motion is achieved, implies a great deal more. The camera implies and supplies the motion; it supplies also mixes, fade-outs, sudden changes, complete reversals of the picture, a complete return to an abandoned subject and an equally speedy departure from that subject. By means of the camera the abstract film can achieve things that the abstract picture cannot even dream of. It can move in a continuous design, and it can call in motion to help in the exposition of this design. And it can, again with the assistance of motion, carry that same design to a conclusion and a climax. It is just this capacity of presenting design in motion that has made absolute music paramount in its own sphere, and it is this capacity which will in time

place the abstract film on a pinnacle no less eminent and not a whit more popular.

The abstract film is still in nebula. We have seen a few short-length attempts at presenting an abstraction in motion; they were very short, very spasmodic and very trying to the eyes. We saw a series of shapes, varying from Venetian blinds to cylinders, that moved, jumped, and moved again across the screen. There was an occasional touch of light, and a very occasional flavouring of beauty; but for the most part it was a mass of movement totally lacking in design. Abstract perhaps, but even an abstraction, if it is to be comprehensible, must be endowed with a co-ordinating design.

But we have had also "Ballet Mécanique", the first serious attempt to construct a full-length film of abstract quality. The "Ballet Mécanique" purported, one presumes, to deal with things mechanical; in fact to create, through the medium of the machine and the camera, a moving design. The attempt was not unsuccessful; it was amusing, and it was possessed of continuity and at times of real beauty. It is impossible to describe this film, for to do so would require a much better memory than my own and much more space than the importance of this individual film merits. There was nothing that the film did not touch on—straw hats, typewriters, an old woman walking upstairs, walking and walking and never reaching the top; wheels, saws, shapes . . . very nearly everything that the mind of man had conceived was utilised in the "Ballet Mécanique". The film was overloaded, and although the frequent reappearance of certain objects did create a vague illusion of continuity, it was lacking in any definite design, and absolutely devoid of climax. There is no fault to find with the idea of making a film on the theme of mechanics. A symphony in a certain key or a film on mechanics—the idea is the same in both

CHAPTER VIII

"THE PIERIAN SPRING"

I

THE phrase "educational film" suggests two things to the picture-goer's mind: firstly, colours supposedly natural and, secondly, a series of pictures ranging from cucumber-farming to the casting of bronze statues. "To see much is to learn much", the first title proclaims. But surely the amount of the learning acquired depends on the quality rather than on the quantity of the things seen! A man might pass his life in a brickyard: he would in consequence see millions of bricks—millions and millions; but for all that we have no reason to suppose that he would know much even about bricks. . . . And yet people still persist in talking of the cinema as an educative force, with reference, one presumes, to these snippets of cucumbers and casting. And even if these "snippet films" are not what our educationalists have in mind, they will undoubtedly be thinking of various natural history films; for a knowledge of natural history has become, with many people, synonymous with the word "education". There are natural history films: always they are dull, and always they are spoken of as being tremendously educational. The object of education is, I presume, the cultivation of the mind in such a way that it shall be capable of enjoying, and taking pleasure from, things beautiful. Are the habits of the tadpole, or even of the golden eagle, calculated to produce such a state of mind? The ways of tadpoles are of interest to biologists, and the

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habits of golden eagles will delight the ornithologist: they will have no interest for the general public. And, when one comes to think of it, why should they have any such interest? Why indeed? What is a tadpole to the man in the street but a memory of his childhood, or the golden eagle but a name. To the ornithologist and to the biologist these nature films have a tremendous interest. They may even, in the cases above mentioned, possess a certain educational value; but to the plain man, the man to whom a tadpole is just a tadpole, and not even a frog in embryo, they will have no interest whatsoever. And if they have no interest, it follows that they can have no educational value. The ordinary man will not even go to see such films, and if it happens that, through some mistake, he is compelled to witness a film of the tadpole variety, he will do his best to forget it as soon as is humanly possible!

Revenons à nos moutons. Very few people, I take it, are interested in seeing a cucumber farm. And even if they are interested, that they should in any way be benefited by the sight I firmly deny. The cucumber pictures, close followed by a few feet of bronze statues being cast, and then rounded off by a "coloured" view of some historic beauty spot, will not even be remembered by the greater part of the audience.

If a thing is to have any educational value it must be interestingly displayed, and it must be connected. Why do we never benefit from reading *Tit-Bits*? An amazing collection of facts, ranging from the names of Mahomet's wives to the number of revolutions that would be described by an orange if anyone were foolish enough to roll it from London to Birmingham. . . . Interesting facts, all of them. But never of any permanent value to the reader because of the disconnected way in which they are presented. And it is the same with "educational films". Cucumber-

cases. So, just as the symphony progresses "from allegro to scherzo, then into andante, to pass to the finale, so should the film, beginning, perhaps, with wheels in motion, pass on to wheels in other aspects . . . wheels stationary, wheels in segments, wheels rotating, and, after having attained a placid andante, carry the whole to a mighty scherzo and on to a finale in all the glory and vibration of a colossal factory working at full pressure. Something after this model would have made a memorable film: something after this model WILL make a great film.

II

Just as to-day we have programme music and absolute music, so in the future we shall have films and abstract films. Narrative films, like programme music, will be the more popular. They will have their own theatres and their patrons. They will be criticised, they will be praised, and they will be hackneyed, but like Grieg's *Peer Gynt* suite they will continue to be popular. There will no doubt be a great outcry against the sad state of popular taste, and the names of masters yet unborn will be hurled against those of producers unthought of to-day. There will be a high- and a low-brow film public; the former voracious and numerous, the latter "refined" and thinly scattered, and these two factors will be always at war—and the old battle will continue.

But there is also the "Caligari" film, the "abstractly" narrative film, and it is not unlikely that out of this type of film will arise something that will embody the essential qualities of these two different types of film. The result will be something very like Grand Opera in the film world—a form of expression that will fuse these two conflicting elements, sometimes successfully and sometimes unsuccessfully.

The ways of genius are inscrutable, and they are as

inscrutable as they are impenetrable. It would have been impossible for the ordinary man in the latter eighteenth century, who was interested in music, to have foreseen the advent of Wagner. Even in the early nineteenth century such a thing was unthinkable. For who, in those early days, could have prophesied the *Nibelungen Ring* as the outcome of "Orpheus" and "Der Freischütz"? And similarly all speculations as to the form and future of this new type of film are brought to a sudden standstill. We of to-day can see as far as "Caligari" and just a little further than the "Ballet Mécanique", but beyond that is darkness, and darkness it will remain until the genius shall disperse these mists of ignorance and speculation with the imaginings and with the fire of his brain. . . . Once it has been done the whole thing will be as clear as crystal, and succeeding generations will trace the evolution of the film from the kinetoscope, in which the foreshadowings of the end will *then* seem obvious, up through a clear and unbroken path to the achievements of——? And that is all that we of the twentieth century can say.

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farming may have its points: I am sure, in fact, that, given intelligent treatment, it could be made wildly interesting. The same applies with equal force to the casting of bronze statues; but when the two are jumbled together and sandwiched between the latest Poirot "modes" and a picture of some puppies at play, the result is a muddle in the minds of the audience. In many cases it is not even a muddle, but just a long twilight interval culminating with a picture of the world revolving in space. This last is doubtless intended to show that Copernicus was right.

Obviously, then, if the cinema is to be used as an educational force, the "to see much is to learn much" way is the wrong way. It leaves in the mind a confused impression of bronze, cucumbers, and puppies, as viewed through a mist of faulty colouring, and also a hazy realisation that Copernicus was a clever "chap" and no more. . . .

If the object of education is to cultivate the mind so that it shall be capable of appreciating things beautiful, then the cinema can be used as an educational instrument. If the object of education is to disseminate a knowledge of natural history, this also the cinema can do; but the same thing can be achieved by means of a textbook, and so we will assume, and not without reason, that the former course is the true function of education.

"To cultivate the mind so that it shall be capable of appreciating things beautiful" is just what the cinema can do, and what, in most cases, it is doing. In view of some of the assertions made in a previous chapter about America, and about the spirit in which films are made, it may seem inconsistent for me to say that the film of to-day is cultivating people's minds. But, nevertheless, this is so. It is being done; but things are so arranged that both the cultivator and the cultivated are ignorant that any

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such process is taking place. The producer has no idea that he is improving the public taste, and, similarly, the public has no idea that its taste is being tampered with. The result of all this, although slow in taking effect, will be eminently satisfactory.

Take, for example, "The Crown of Lies": quite one of the worst films that has ever been, and one that will be seen by tens of thousands before its day is done. It has, of course, Pola Negri to recommend it, but she is kept well in her place, and given as little opportunity as possible to act. . . . That, however, was to be expected. But this film, in spite of its worthlessness, does offer one or two "shots" which are genuinely beautiful. It is the same with most bad films. They are badly acted, vilely produced, and unfold, as they proceed, a preposterous story. But, for the most part, they are well photographed, and nearly always they show one or two beautiful shots.

To the average picture-goer, the man who lives in a depressing brick villa, or to the one who lives in a slum, even the worst type of film is a genuine godsend. For, although these films propound ethics of an antediluvian character, and extol religious sentiments so preposterous that even the Inquisition would have disowned them, they do give to the slum-dweller and to the denizen of the suburbs a chance of seeing something outside their own lives. Some lovely country, a beautiful woman, and sometimes even some good grouping. The music-hall star is rarely beautiful, and never is she well dressed: the film star is usually both. No theatre or music-hall can present a panorama of country that is really convincing, let alone beautiful: the film can do this both convincingly and beautifully. And the sort of play in which good grouping occurs is beyond the means of the man whom we are discussing. The music-hall, the fair side-show, the circus with its tights and spangles, a boxing-match or a dog-fight: until re-

CHAPTER XVIII

"OH, COME AND LISTEN TO THE BAND"

I

"SIR HERBERT TREE has taken the first step"; said Gilbert, "he has made the orchestra invisible. It now only remains for someone to make it inaudible!" This sprightly saying was inspired by the very happy concealment of the orchestra at His Majesty's Theatre by a spread of palm branches, which rendered it most effectively invisible. But times have changed since the great days of His Majesty's, and the orchestra, far from subsiding into inaudibility, has reappeared in a hitherto undreamed-of state of visibility. The orchestra has appeared in close-up—the head of the flute player, the violinist's fingers, the conductor's baton, and then a long shot of the entire body of performers, bending to their work. All this is most disconcerting: it is perhaps more unexpected than anything else, for although many of us will agree with Gilbert in applauding the invisibility of an orchestra, there are few, I hope, who would wish to have it muted. But the orchestra is in no danger of premature muting, for even if its recent incursions into the field of vision have not actually increased the volume of its tone, they have provided it with a means of making itself universally heard. The orchestra, which should be heard and not seen, has, with a fine disregard for our susceptibilities, and with the aid of a machine known as the vitaphone and occasionally as the movietone, become at once universally visible and audible. This

new machine, this vitaphone, is a very peculiar invention. It is a sort of visual gramophone, for it renders the musician at once visible and audible.

When Edison was first probing the secrets of motion photography, it was the established idea that the film when invented should be in some way connected with a phonograph. So closely were the phonograph and the film linked in the inventor's mind that his first discursions into motion photography were connected with cylinders, which very closely resemble the phonograph record. The idea of a visual phonograph has always been the golden dream of all who have dabbled in the cinema; it tantalised Edison and led, in the very early days, to a screen presentation of Flotow's *Martha* to which were added allegedly synchronised phonograph records. The experiment was not exactly successful, and it was not repeated—publicly, that is—until the year 1926. In those twenty years, from 1906 to 1926, things had been happening to the film: it had, to begin with, grown up. From being a lucrative novelty it had developed into something all of its own. It possessed, in the year 1926, something very like a universal appeal, and this widespread appeal it owed to the fact that, unlike the theatre, it was not restrained within the bounds of language. This, then, being the case, the idea of talking films was not even considered (1926),¹ for a film that talked, in English, in French, or in Italian, would of necessity be limited to a certain audience, and it requires no undue penetration on the part of the reader to see that such a limitation would have been undesirable. But, and here we approach the point, the film, during the course of its development, had contracted an unbreakable alliance with the art of music. As early as 1914 even, every cinema theatre had its orchestra and so every film had its

¹ And now in 1928 talking films are being considered—why?

cently these were his only diversions from the humdrum drag of everyday ugliness. This was all there was, say, fifteen years ago, but to-day there is the cinema. The cinema is cheap—first and greatest advantage; it is also dark, and smoking is permitted; and for these reasons it is nearly always well patronised.

Millions of people go weekly to the cinema, and, consequently, millions of people see these incidental scraps of beauty, and in time millions of people will be affected by them. It is a slow process, but better than no process at all.

The majority of film scenes are laid in a foreign country—America mostly, but not infrequently it is France or Spain, Italy or China; and this in itself is something to be reckoned with. The seeing of foreign countries, even in photographs, is the first step towards realising that they exist other than on the map. It will make the dim world of “abroad” real, and in time both the London docker and the Italian peasant will come to realise that the world comprises a great deal more than their own little corner of Lombardy or Limehouse. These foreign parts they see have people in them. Quite ordinary people, too, not painted savages as one might expect, but people who act in a way that would not be altogether unnatural in Balham or Bologna! There are also trees, rivers, and mountains—great big mountains, bigger than the Alps or the Pennines. This “abroad”, they will find, is a real place where men and women live and work just the same as they do in England or in Italy; and at times it’s rather a beautiful place. . . . That there should be beauty, or reality, in anything abroad is a fact that very few people realise even to-day, and if that belief is generally accredited, it will do more than all the labours of statesmen, or all the efforts of the League of Nations, towards the achievement of World Peace.

These may deluge the world with pamphlets, or set the ether throbbing with brilliant and elucidatory speeches, but the effect will be small. Those who know already will not bother to listen, and those who do not will turn off the radio with a click, muttering the while some disparaging remark about “educational bunk!” and certainly the pamphlets will never be read.

Everyone is averse to learning, but no one is averse to going to the cinema; and in the cinema, in spite of themselves, and in spite of the films shown, they may perhaps learn something. Not much, certainly, but enough perhaps to destroy the illusion that the microscopic corner from which they emerge in the morning and to which they return at night is the centre of the universe. Surely the first step towards a realisation that the world we live in is but a speck in the scheme of things. . . .

II

It may be argued, and argued with force, that the doctrines propounded by the cinema are much stronger than any incidental beauty that may be set forth. It will then be said, and with reason, that these doctrines are pernicious, and that in consequence the small particle of good will be swamped before even it gets to shore—this may be so, but it is a question which time alone can decide.

There is so much unconscious good in the cinema, even as it is to-day, that one cannot help wondering what will result when once it gets into the proper hands. Of course, it may never reach the proper hands. Or, again, those hands, even if they are reached, may find themselves incapable of battling with the contending odds. . . . That, however, is pessimism!

musical accompaniment. "The Birth of a Nation" created, among other precedents, that of the specially composed score, and from then on the films were found to be inseparable from music—either a full orchestra and all the horror of an orchestral organ, or the fitful wailing of a battered piano and still more battered violin. There must be some form of continuous sound to accompany a film. If the sound is musical, so much the better, and if unmusical and describable merely as sound, it will serve at least to drown the whirring of the projector. (The inhabitants of Lundy Island, who have occasional cinema shows, found, after repeated showing, that even the wheezings of a far from perfect gramophone were preferable to the utter absence of any accompanying sound. The gramophone in question is very far from good, and the supply of records so limited that repetition, even in the course of one film, is inevitable. But, even so, even with a poor gramophone and an inadequate supply of records, it is found that some form of more or less continuous sound adds greatly to the entertainment value of the film.)

By 1926 the film had gone too far to be endowed with a speaking voice, but it had, on the other hand, gone just far enough to demand the accurate synchronisation of a musical accompaniment. And this is what the vitaphone actually does—it synchronises, by means of some method wholly incomprehensible to the layman, the music with the film. And it does not stop at music; it takes in incidental noises, such as the clink of sword blades in a duel, the rattling of a horse's trappings, and all the thousand and one squeaks, squawks, and screams that have become so essential a part of the super film. This synchronisation of incidental noises is certainly the most important part of the vitaphone's achievement. A blow is struck, and then two seconds later comes the thud.

We are all familiar with this old-time would-be synchronisation—it is painful. But all that is, or will be shortly, a thing of the past. In another twenty years every film, no matter whether it is projected in the Plaza Theatre, Piccadilly Circus, or on Lundy Island in the Bristol Channel, will have the musical accompaniment of a first-rate orchestra and the exact synchronisation of incidental noises.

The aural and the visual are inextricably linked in our minds: we see a blow struck and we expect to hear the sound of that blow—age-long experience, resulting in the subconscious linking of cause and effect, has brought about this state of affairs. The sight of a blow implies, in our minds, the sound of a blow, and so closely are these two ideas bound together now that the mere sight of a blow minus the sound is apt to be unconvincing. With the sound alone, it is different. The sound of a blow, whether real or simulated, can be as moving as the combination of sight and sound. Our minds are very prehensile things: for thousands of years they have linked a blow with a sound. No blow, no sound, we say. No sound, no blow. The sound, the thud, the scream, or whatever it is, is the result of the blow; without it the blow could not have taken place, and so, conversely, we argue that when there is a sound, so also there must be a blow to have caused that sound. The blow in itself is an abstraction; it is just a blow, and so it is that the mere sight evokes no thrill, whereas the sound, which we take to be the result of that same blow, is capable of evoking in our imaginations the vision of a blow which must have caused the emanation of such a sound. We take the effect and we deduce the cause, because the effect is concrete and sensible. . . . From the cause alone, which is abstract and insensible, we can deduce nothing.

By means of a vitaphone the film has been presented with a link that will bind it all the more

CHAPTER IX

D. W. GRIFFITH

I

It is significant, in view of the fame that he was later to achieve, to note that Griffith was the first man possessed of any artistic talent to enter the picture business. Hitherto, as I have shown, the kinetoscope, vitascope, and Hale's Tour had been the monopoly of business-men possessed of the business-man's very natural obsession, to make a profit out of everything and anything. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, see that it is profitable." An excellent sentiment as far as business is concerned; but not the sentiment best calculated to watch over the wanderings of a new-born art.

Griffith had been an actor, which was something. We know little of his acting, but we can, I think, assume that it was at least good. He was also a dramatist, and claims to be the founder of that school of realistic drama which has culminated in Eugene O'Neil. He was at one time a newspaper reporter; he had tried his hand at poetry, and he had heard of Sardou. Not only had he *heard* of Sardou, but he had gone so far as to prepare a manuscript scenario of "La Tosca". By this I do not mean to infer that all those involved in screen dealings in the year 1907 were in ignorance of the fact that there was a play and that it was called "La Tosca", the point being that no one, except Griffith, realised what an excellent film subject it was. The "La Tosca" manuscript was not accepted, but Griffith himself was taken on

as an actor to play in a one-reel melodrama entitled "The Eagle's Nest". (The idea of a Tosca film was relegated to oblivion for nearly fifteen years, whence it was unearthed as a vehicle for Pauline Frederick.)

Having served his apprenticeship as an actor, Griffith was forced into the position of a director. I say "forced", because Griffith had no confidence in his directorial powers, and because it was entirely against his will that he was induced to take up the megaphone. The megaphone was, however, assumed: "The Adventures of Dolly" was the result, and it was also the first landmark in the history of the cinema as an art.

And here I find myself in a difficult position, for I have not seen "The Adventures of Dolly", or "The Lonely Villa", or "One Avenging Conscience", or in fact any of Griffith's early films. My acquaintance with Griffith as a director begins with "The Birth of a Nation", but, although I can therefore have no idea of the merits of these early films in general, and of "The Adventures of Dolly" in particular, I maintain none the less that it was the first landmark in the history of the cinema as an art. "The Adventures of Dolly" would no doubt seem crude if judged by the standards of 1927, for crude it probably was, and bad also; but it was Griffith's first film, and that is enough. For that reason, if for no other, it has a right to rank as a "landmark".

II

Such devices as the fade-out, the cut-back, the last-minute rescue, and the close-up have become so essential a part of the film as we know it, that it is difficult for us to imagine a time when they did not even exist. When, however, Griffith started work for Biograph, these devices were nearly all unheard-of. The close-up was considered, in so far as it was

closely to the art of music. The vitaphone has the same quality as the gramophone and as the film itself, in that it can endow "the thing recorded" with a large degree of universality. The vitaphone holds out a promise of music adequately performed for every film, and with the help of such an ally there is no knowing to what heights the film may not attain. Imagine, for instance, the abstract film, a thing that is already so essentially musical in conception, and imagine also, allied with this sort of film, music. Not just ordinary music that is rendered by an orchestra, and therefore never completely in harmony with the forms unfolding and merging upon the screen, but music, the same music perhaps, but so presented as to fit exactly with every minute change of shadow on the screen. The "tempo" of the film and the "tempo" of the music will be simultaneous. The one will pass from light to shade as the other changes key or swells to a crescendo and drifts into a diminuendo as a climax is reached, passed, and a fresh theme built up. The vitaphone will enable the concurrent development of the films and of music. The one will in time become the inseparable companion of the other. No films without music, and, as the new music develops, it will be very little music without films. This double development of the visual and the aural will, however, only affect what I have called the high-brow film—and here, again, we find ourselves on uncertain ground, for who knows what genius may intervene to accomplish? One thing we can say with certainty, and that is, that the bond now established between films and music cannot possibly be broken. The invention of the vitaphone has solemnised this marriage of the arts, and for better or for worse the two must now continue together. . . . They may make the best of each other, and in so doing may achieve something of which we can see only the dim beginnings to-day.

They may, on the other hand, do something completely unexpected, something far beyond our wildest dreams of good or evil—or they may settle down to making the worst of each other. Contemporary evidence inclines one to think that it is this latter course that will be adopted, but—you never can tell.

The vitaphone is a novelty, and, like all novelties in the film world, it will be exploited, and it will be abused until its novelty has worn off. At the moment it is just films that make a noise, the quality of the noise being immaterial, provided that it exhales apparently from the film. The result, as might be expected, is not altogether satisfying. We are shown, to begin with, a vast panoramic view of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. Now an orchestra is an ugly thing to look at, and a thing that generations of theatre managers have been doing their best to conceal. Wagner sank his orchestra and buried a portion of it under the stage; Herbert Tree concealed it under a spread of palm branches. Both Wagner and Tree realised that an orchestra, although pleasing to the ear, was offensive to the sight, and succeeding theatre-goers have endorsed this verdict. But all that is neither here nor there where the vitaphone is concerned. The vitaphone is a novelty, and its novelty is dependent on its phonetic qualities, and so anything, no matter how ugly, that emphasises these qualities will do. The orchestra is ugly, but the orchestra is above all things phonetic; and so we are shown the orchestra—a large orchestra, displayed before a background of black velvet and a pair of twisted columns, and the music begins, and with it the fun. We see a fine view of the orchestra in general; we see them take up their instruments, the conductor raise his baton, and then the first note booms out—all very well photographed and extremely well synchronised, but why not leave it at that? Why not let the orchestra, once it has asserted

in any way considered, a barbarity. The idea of cutting a person off short was repugnant to contemporary thought. But can we not discern in this attitude towards the close-up the effect of one of the dominant characteristics of the American mind? Surely! . . . For, if one has paid, and paid well, for an actor or an actress, it is only common sense to wish to extract the fullest value from the bargain. The obvious way of getting the fullest value, in this case, is by showing, and showing frequently, the entire person of the actor involved. The entire person must be shown, and not merely a part. To an American the logic of this will be obvious.

The close-up has met with more criticism than has any other form of screen technique. It has been called vulgar, useless, depraved even. It has been branded with the term "inartistic", and has, in consequence, been relegated to the scrap-heap along with Carlo Dolci, Puccini, and other things held to be beneath the level of intelligent criticism.

Those who object most strongly to the device of the close-up are obviously confusing the film with the stage. They (the objectors to the close-up) would be shocked if you told them so. They would, I have no doubt, protest, and would attempt by means of the very best logic to vindicate their intelligences from the slur of such a confusion. They would argue like this: "The close-up", they would say, "necessitates a change of size, and so breaks the unity of the whole. Just as you're getting used to looking at a certain sized picture, suddenly you are whisked off to a mammoth of Mary Pickford in tears. . . ." Why it is always Mary Pickford who is chosen to illustrate the fundamental vileness of the close-up, I cannot conceive. It may be, of course, because she uses fewer close-ups than most actresses, but I think it is more likely that the objectors have seen only Mary Pickford films, and those in days long ago.

For, if one examines these anti-close-up people, sooner or later one will discover that they have not been inside a cinema for years! Nearly always they are proud of this fact; and *always* they consider that this voluntary abstention endows them with more than a right to criticise the films, not of ten years ago, but of to-day.

Now obviously this hankering after a uniform size is a product of the stage mind. On the stage, because there can only be one size, one becomes accustomed to that one size. For the stage it cannot be otherwise. It must, however, be evident to all thinking people that what holds good for the stage will, in all probability, stand in need of complete reversal, if in any way it is to be applied to the cinema. The unity of a film does not depend on a uniform and specified size; it depends on the strength of the idea expressed by the film. The same, of course, applies to the stage, where the idea, or in some cases the plot, is always the essential element of unity. Years of experience have taught actors and dramatists that, as far as stage expression is concerned, unity can only be attained by the rigid adhesion to a uniform size. With the films, on the other hand, a few years of inexperience have made it manifestly clear that a uniform size is by no means synonymous with a united film. Frequent and varied change of size, it has been found, is the best means of expressing something through the medium of the cinema. The logic of the anti-close-up fanatics is what William James would call "thin": the cinema's illogical answer is, because of its illogicality, "thick". To be brief, the close-up "WORKS", and is, in consequence, amply justified.

A few people may have had the misfortune to remember a play by the name of "Angelo". Now "Angelo" was a very peculiar play; it was, in fact, hardly a play at all, but it served most effectively to

its presence with a few bars of crescendo playing, fade quietly into obscurity, only to reappear after the closing chord has died away to receive its well-deserved applause? But this is only a matter of time; it will come to pass, but not to-morrow or even the day after—for the present, it is close-ups: close-ups of the orchestra, varied with further longshots, and rounded up with more close-ups until the piece performed is finished, when, as is only right and proper, the orchestra rises and bows. It is only the middle with its close-ups that must go; and in time it will go. I say *will* go, because I find it hard to believe that people would tolerate the sight of a man, or men, engaged in playing the trombone (and this in close-up), if such a sight were not a novelty. There is no thrill about the trombone player in close-up, no sex appeal, and certainly no beauty. It is only the hitherto novel combination of sight and sound, and as soon as that novelty has worn off we shall be able to progress.

But this is by no means the full tale of what the vitaphone is doing: it has brought the orchestra into close-up and has now turned its attentions to the singer—who likewise appears in close-up. . . . A singer singing in close-up! A gaping hole of a black mouth, distended cheeks, and staring eyes. Heaving chest and a face which, even in the normal, would not be called beautiful, is magnified twenty or thirty times, and, under the distorting influences of song, photographed and thrown on the screen. The soft light of the theatre or the opera house, and, above all, the distance of the seats from the stage, transforms the gaping black mouth into a small dot in a vast expanse. Of the eyes and the teeth we are seldom aware and only dimly conscious of the heaving chest. The impression, though seldom pleasant, is rarely nauseating . . . and so we listen to singers. But the vitaphone, with the gay impetuosity of

youth, cares for none of these things. "Just see how clever I am," says this the youngest of America's inventions. "Here is a singer, and here also is his high note! And I have done all that! The singer is miles away really, but here he is; he is singing, and he is in close-up—just look at the size of his mouth!" It is the story of the kinetoscope all over again. . . .

But this cannot last; it is merely an instance of history repeating itself. The enlarged singer and the orchestra in close-up will, in a few years' time, follow the performing dogs and the sneezing mechanics into the lumber-room of discarded novelties—and the vitaphone, freed from its trappings, will be ready to begin.

II

Grand Opera is the most successful artistic bastard that has ever been produced: its mother is the drama, and its father the ballet. It is related to poetry, and has on its mother's side a close connection with mechanics. A post-Wagnerian Opera demands the efficient co-operation of the mechanic, and in all operas a degree of acting power is desirable. But so exorbitant are the demands of Grand Opera, and so essentially musical its nature, that it is only on rare occasions that anything other than music is adequately represented. Jeritza is the exception and Tetrassini the rule. . . . The opera singer is seldom anything but a singer; in rare cases he or she is also a musician, but even this last is very rare. By a singer I mean someone who, by opening his or her mouth, is capable of emitting a lovely sound. The sound just streams out; it pours out, it bubbles up, it swells and falls, and why it comes or when it should come are things of which the singer is for the most part ignorant. The singer stands and sings, and the opera progresses—a love scene, a duel, or a meditation, it is all the same; the singer just lets

show that, as far as the stage is concerned, a uniformity of size for scenes is not only necessary but absolutely essential. While watching "Angelo" one's eyes were flicked from corner to corner, whisked carelessly from the top to the bottom of the proscenium arch, suddenly dazzled by a glittering piece of spectacle, and plunged as suddenly into darkness while the actors made a shadowy descent by means of a line of ill-oiled trap-doors. A large scene; a minute scene; dazzling light and then semi-obscurity. On the screen "Angelo" might have been moderately successful, but on the stage it just did not work.

The objection to the close-up, on the grounds that it mars by its frequent and gigantic interpolations the unity of the film, is based on a totally false conception of the film's functions. As an argument it is all very well, but as a theory it is worthless. I must ask the reader to pardon me for having drawn his attention to anything quite so obvious as the fallacy of this argument. I have dealt with this, the main objection to the close-up, at such length because, at first sight, it sounds reasonable, and even logical. It is a perfectly logical argument; it is too logical, and that is why, as far as the film is concerned, it does not work. And, because of its logicity, it presents a pitfall which will engulf all but the discerning pragmatist in a mesh of cynicising Pickfordism. I ask anyone, do Chaplin's close-ups spoil the unity of his films?

All this trouble over the close-up, and the general confusion of the screen and stage, is the natural result of the absolute novelty of the film. The film is new in form and new in fact, and because it is an entertainment which can be enjoyed under circumstances similar to those attendant on the enjoyment of a play, people still class it in the same category as the stage, and try vainly to reduce the two things to a common denominator of technique. The stage and

the film have nothing in common except their entertainment value, and they can no more be compared than can a boxing-match and a symphony concert. A straight left to the jaw would find no place in a symphony concert, any more than would a close-up in the middle of a play.

The word "close-up" has come to mean a gigantic picture of an actor's face: this is one type of close-up: the first type that was made by Griffith. But there is also the detail close-up, and for this Griffith is again responsible. The detail close-up is a far more recent invention than the facial close-up, but it is every bit as important.

In the beginning of "The Birth of a Nation" we were shown some pictures of the "South", among which was a picture of some negroes working in the cotton fields, closely followed by a close-up of the cotton flowers themselves. This is an instance of what I should call a detail close-up, and it is also an instance of how it should not be used. We have already had a long shot of the cotton fields and of the slaves picking; we are then given a close shot, and so, by the time the detail close-up appears, we are all of us perfectly aware that the scene then running on the screen is a representation of negro slaves and that they are picking cotton. Nothing is achieved by this further establishment of the fact. The close-up of the cotton pods is not even intrinsically beautiful: it reminds one of tufts of cotton wool fixed to grass stalks: it is absolutely irrelevant, and has not even the merit of presenting good pictorial qualities. This is not an attempt to throw mud at Griffith or to decry his methods of production, for these methods are fixed, and no amount of mud, however skilfully thrown, would be able to obscure their merits. It is because Griffith is so firmly established that no amount of hostile criticism, and least of all my own, could possibly affect him, that I have ventured, and

out his sound, for he or she is usually incapable of doing anything else. There is no attempt at acting, and the attempts to present scenery are usually unfortunate—and so opera is what it is. It succeeds musically, but dramatically it is seldom other than mediocre. The music is undoubtedly the most important of the many components of opera, and so it is by no means remarkable that while we are treated to performances that are musically satisfying, these same performances should be dramatically absurd. It is enough for one person to sing; to expect him to sing as well as act, and to do these two things simultaneously, is asking too much. And here the vitaphone presents a solution. The vitaphone is a visual phonograph; it synchronises sight and sound. As yet, the vision and the audition have been the result of one person's action—the singer sings; we see him sing and we hear him sing, and in nine cases out of ten we have no desire at all to see him, but wish only to hear him. The vitaphone synchronises sight and sound, which indicates that at some future date we shall be able to hear all the beauty of the song while watching the beauty and histrionic ability of some other individual. The singer will sing, but he will not be seen: the actor will act; he will be seen but he will not sing. Imagine a Brunhilda endowed with the physique of a Phyllis Terry and the voice of an Austral. Phyllis Terry or some other actress of equally marked characteristics would take the part of Brunhilda and would appear before the camera, and finally, on the screen, while Florence Austral performed the necessary singing. The result, which would be the synchronisation of the face, form, and gestures of a beautiful actress, with the voice of a great singer, should leave very little to be desired. And think also of the Valkyries, and think of them riding through the air . . . think for a moment of the frightful pasteboard shapes that

are dragged painfully before the backcloth in many an opera house to-day, and think of the way that the Four Horsemen rode through the air. To see the Valkyries riding, really riding in the clouds, and the Rhine maidens disporting themselves in something that really looked like water; to see a consumptive-looking Violetta and to hear the voice of a Tetrassini—to see a Pavlova dance in Salome, a beautiful Ethiopian as Aïda: to see all this and to hear the superb voices of the great singers would go a long way towards reconciling some of the apparently irreconcilable contradictions inherent in Grand Opera. There is hardly an opera but that it makes superhuman demands on the artiste. To begin with, there is the little matter of age—operatic heroines are seldom more than fifteen. Juliet's “thirteen years” represents the limit in the direction of youth and the more mature Salome's twenty-five is the present age limit. With a limit of thirteen one way and twenty-five the other, and an average ranging from fifteen to seventeen, the impresario is severely handicapped in his search for singers to fill these various rôles. As might be expected, the handicap has proved insurmountable; the matter of age has been altogether abandoned, and singing *qua* singing has established itself as the one and only qualification necessary for a prima donna. And this, of course, was inevitable, for the prima donna has so much to sing that it is impossible for her to appear as a prima donna before she is at least five years in excess of the maximum age limit. It takes a long time to train a voice, anything from five to ten years, and as a prima donna's voice must of necessity be trained it is seldom that she appears as a prima donna before she has attained the age of thirty—and then, most probably, she will make her debut as Juliet. . . . Not even the vitaphone will be able to give us a thirteen-year Juliet. But with the aid of that great liar, the camera,

will venture, to criticise. The above-cited incident of the cotton pods is merely an example of how the detail close-up should not be used—and everyone will, I think, admit that even geniuses are capable of making mistakes. But let us now pass over eight or nine thousand feet of film and see how, in the same picture, Griffith has evolved another and a very right use of the detail close-up.

The big thrill of the picture turns on Miss Gish's endangered virginity. Miss Gish is closeted alone in a room with a lustful half-caste, and, some miles away, the Ku Klux Klan is gathering. The Klan then rushes to the rescue—hundreds of white-robed horsemen pouring like a flooded torrent along the roads. They have still some way to go, and there is Miss Gish alone with her persecutor. He makes a grab for her; she avoids him, and the horsemen are galloping on: they are nearer, and so also is the lustful half-caste. We see the horses galloping; we see the hero exhorting them; we see Miss Gish, and then we see the horses' feet—just their feet—galloping, galloping. . . . A remarkably deft use of the detail close-up. This method of showing just the feet of the horses, the wheels of a train, or the slow approach of a knife-bearing hand, is the most effective way of sustaining and intensifying a thrill. Judged by theatrical standards it is, of course, "all wrong", chiefly because on the stage such a method of procedure would be impossible.

We can see a troop of horsemen rushing along, and for a moment we can be thrilled, but if the spectacle is too often repeated it becomes tedious and devoid of thrill. A long train of swiftly moving horsemen is quite impersonal, and after we have seen it once it no longer suggests speed: it becomes just horsemen on the move, and nothing more. We become oblivious of the horses and forgetful of the effort that is being expended to attain that smooth

effect of motion. It is only when we see the horses' feet beating on the road, kicking up the dust and scattering the stones, that we again become conscious of what is going on. This simple device of showing a detail of the whole has the immediate effect of endowing the whole with a personal touch. The galloping feet and then the hero's shouting face, a return to the long line sweeping on, and the effect is magical. We sit open-mouthed and clutch our seats (the less sophisticated do, at any rate!), we sweep on with the advancing clansmen, thrill in response to the hero's exhortations, and pulsate in sympathy with every beat of the horses' hoofs. The orchestra reverberates, and all over the house feet are shuffled, while cigarettes hang unlighted from gaping lips. Hands are clasped and unclasped again, and everywhere sweat is oozing: and all because of this very simple device. The device appears simple because it serves its purpose so admirably that we cannot imagine that purpose having been in any other way—nor indeed could it have been. A long line of rushing horsemen: one hundred feet of unrelieved rush . . . too fast! The audience might give one gasp of excitement, and horses and riders would be away, carrying the thrill with them. The mind of an audience moves slowly: it cannot keep pace with an express train or even with a troop of horses. Without the aid of stimulants it will lag panting in the background in a state of apathy, forgetful even of the heroine's virginity. A little stimulant, however, is all that is needed, and it is just this stimulant that the detail close-up provides. It acts as a spur on the mentality of the audience; it carries them along with the rescue party, and forces them to remember that the heroine's honour is at stake, and that at all costs that priceless thing must be saved. . . .

A very simple device it seems to us now; but for

it will be able to present a very credible illusion of thirteen, an illusion far more credible than even a twenty-five-year-old prima donna could hope to create. A thirteen-year-old Juliet sung by a thirty-year-old Galli Curci, a boyish octavian and Clare Dux's voice, a stately Isolda—played, perhaps, by Alice Terry and sung by Frieda Leider—there is no end to this sort of speculation, and likewise no end to what this alliance may achieve.

As yet, we have dealt only with operas that are, operas that have been written for the stage, but to which the stage is incapable of doing true justice, and even with such stereotyped work the vitaphone will be able to achieve wonders. It will, of course, be hampered by having to deal with things so essentially theatrical as "Traviata" and "Bohème", but undoubtedly it will succeed. For the film can tell the story—we have had "Broken Blossoms" and "Traviata" itself, and both have been moving. But there are no limits to what might be achieved with a material so essentially cinematographic as "The Ring", and it is impossible to surmise just how much will be accomplished when the composer of the future writes operas expressly for the vitaphone.

Of the reproductive powers of the vitaphone I have said little, because, being extraordinarily inefficient, they merit but little comment. The vitaphone of to-day (1927) is reminiscent of a ten-year-old gramophone rather than in any way suggestive of an orchestra. We have, however, only to compare the gramophone of 1917 to the 1927 model to see what can be achieved in ten years. Another ten years and we shall see the vitaphone as good as the gramophone, and in another twenty it will hold its own against the orchestra itself.

CHAPTER XIX

EUROPE OR AMERICA?

I

As a result of the war, America attained the dominant position in the film world. She remained unchallenged in the tenure of this position until "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari" showed that other countries besides America could produce films, that they could produce better films and produce them at a relatively smaller cost. "Caligari" showed the way, and since then Germany has not been slow to follow, and now, for the first time in film history, America is faced with a serious rival.

In 1920 Colonel Hayes was called in to rescue the film industry from stagnation, and since 1920 there has most certainly been a change for the better in the film world. In America it is of course considered that Colonel Hayes is responsible for this general brightening, for this elevation of the moral tone, for artistic progress, and for everything that has marked recent film history with the stamp of progress. To Colonel Hayes is accorded the credit for this advance, but to "Caligari" it is really due.

"Caligari" set a new standard for the films. It showed what could be done with the fantastic, and dealt the death-blow to the old style of unimaginative realism. Then came "Destiny", "Warning Shadows", "The Niebelungs", "Faust", and "Metropolis". These films all came from Germany; they were all to a degree fantastic. They were for the most part commercial failures, and only two of them were

all that it needed a Griffith to discover its simplicity and also its potency.

III

In discussing the close-up, and more especially the detail close-up, I have perforce been drawn into a consideration of the last-minute rescue. The two things are so closely allied that it is almost impossible to say which sprang from the other. Without the detail close-up, as we have seen it, there could have been no last-minute rescue, and *vice versa*. The last-minute rescue got to the screen before the detail close-up: it made its first appearance in "The Life of an American Fireman", and it has been appearing ever since. The baby mewling and puking among the encroaching flames; the heroine strapped to the operating table with the baleful magician preparing to tap her life's blood, and the hero or fire-engine nearing in direct ratio to the approach of the flames or the knife. The criminal with the noose tightening round his neck; the motor and express train vying with each other to bring his pardon. The frantic mother speeding to the "terrain". . . . But why expatiate? The situation is well known to all of us. The orphan at the guillotine, the trembling knife, and the approaching pardon: it is always the same, and it never fails to thrill.

Griffith found this product ready to hand; he worked at it, polished and clarified and strengthened it with the detail close-up, the cut-back, and deft cutting in, until it reached its apotheosis in the waterfall sequence in "Way Down East". It has answered very well, but I doubt if even Griffith will be able to work it much longer. . . .

IV

The fade-out and the fade-in are also products of the Griffith technique. They were no doubt existent in the minds of contemporary camera-men, but before the advent of Griffith no one had realised their dramatic value.

The fade-out is the best way of ending a picture: it does not suit every picture, but it suits nine pictures out of ten: Griffith discovered that. It is the ideal way of rounding off a tender love-scene: this also Griffith discovered. By the simple device of fading out a picture on a sinister device or happening, the sinister atmosphere is increased a hundredfold. Griffith realised this, and used it to advantage.

In the film "America" (discreetly re-entitled "Love and Sacrifice" for the benefit of a patriotic England) there occurs a good instance of the fade-out sinister. War has broken out between the Americans and the English, and the situation is being discussed by some English officers, among whom is Captain Walter Butler. Butler, we have already been shown, is a man of blood, and, moreover, he is hand in glove with the more villainous of the Indians. "I'll show them!" says Butler, or words to that effect, and the sequence ends with a close-up of Butler fairly revelling in the prospect of slaughter. The picture fades out slowly. The effect is incredibly sinister.

Everyone is familiar with what I will call the "fade-out tender". It serves its purpose. The final fade-out is equally well known; it also serves its purpose. It is a very simple device, but for all that Griffith was the first person to realise the uses to which this "very simple device" could be put.

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shown with any success in America. There were, however, two other films from Germany, and both of these were a tremendous success in America. "Carmen", retitled "Gipsy Blood", featuring Pola Negri, and "Madame du Barry", retitled "Passion" and also featuring Pola Negri, were both so successful that American producers, scenting in Germany a dangerous rival, decided on the immediate acquisition of this new and popular star. So Pola Negri went to America, and there later went Ernst Lubitsch, her director.

The departure of Lubitsch for America marked the opening of a new era for American films. It was a fact trivial enough in itself, but one that showed very clearly that America admitted the existence of a rival in the hitherto unopposed domain of film production.

II

In post-war Germany it was found that the film, like everything else, had reached its nadir. There were no German films to speak of, but there were hundreds of cinema theatres in Germany and these theatres were all naturally desirous of showing films. And there were also thousands of feet of American films, all desirous of being shown in those very theatres. The situation was desperate, and it was met with a desperate action on the part of Germany. Had Germany hesitated, then film dominion would have been for ever lost to Europe; but the Germans did not hesitate. Very firmly they introduced and enforced the Kontingent, a measure which insisted that for every American film shown in Germany a German film of corresponding length must also be shown. Then followed a period of bad and hurriedly made films, for the cinema theatres had to show something, and then came "Caligari", and the way was clear. . . .

America, with all her faults, could nevertheless do one thing and she could do it well—and that the Germans realised. She could produce popular films—films that were stupid, inane, and often immoral, but for all that, films that did fill the theatres. "The last-minute rescue", the fire, the flood, the lure of the prairie, and all other things capable of realistic reproduction on the screen, America had taken. These things, these thrills based on super-realism, were essentially America's; she had made them and knew more than anyone else about their making. It was no use trying to fight America with her own weapons, for of those weapons she possessed a monopoly. If there were to be German films, and German films there had to be, they must be German and not American. If the German film were to succeed, it must proceed along utterly different lines from those followed by the American film. The American film had carried realism as far as it could go; realism, then, was out of the question as far as Germany was concerned. For the Germans, then, the path of realism was closed; realism they must eschew as though it were the plague; they must concentrate on the very opposite of realism—upon phantasm. This concentration on the fantastic would not be easy. It would, to begin with, be unpopular, but then there was the Kontingent insisting that German films should be shown, and so affording to the producers a guarantee of at least a certain measure of financial success.

The American film was popular; it was the delight of the masses. Given time, the German film might attain a similar position, but to begin with it must disregard popularity, and, far from seeking to appeal to the masses, it must court the favour of the few. It must seek to delight the critic and the artist, to entertain the intelligent city man, to bring to the cinema theatres an entirely new public—the public

V

The word "abstraction" implies something of the nature of which we are only partly cognisant. An abstraction is, therefore, a subject demanding for its comprehension a certain amount of thought, and for this reason it is not held in favour by the amusement-seeking public. In view of this widespread prejudice, it was unfortunate that Griffith should have chosen so essentially abstract a word as "Intolerance" for the title of his most ambitious film. It was unfortunate from the commercial standpoint, that is; for if we disregard the box-office, we shall find that the word "Intolerance" constitutes a very good title indeed. The word is both euphonic and appropriate. But the box-office represents the many-headed monster: many-headed and many-mouthed, it is in a position to make its demands known and to see to their gratification.

The word "intolerance", although fraught with meaning, would, in view of its abstract nature, suggest very little to the cinema-going public. "Intolerance? . . ." Many, no doubt in ignorance of the true nature of the word thus presented, connected it vaguely with "intolerable"! "Intolerance . . . intolerable . . . yes, the two must be synonymous!" And then, as the name "D. W. Griffith" and memories of "The Birth of a Nation" drew people to the theatre, the suspicion was confirmed. Even if "Intolerance" was not exactly synonymous with "Intolerable", the picture "Intolerance" most certainly was—INTOLERABLE! A hideous mixture all bound up with a blue cradle that recurred after the manner of a troublesome decimal. Ancient Babylon. . . . Who was ancient Babylon? And why was she ancient? Christ? Oh yes, Christ was there all right; but was Babylon, then, a synonym for Mary Magdalene? Perhaps, after all, a sex story:

perhaps . . . but as the film progressed even this last hope was shattered. True there was a bit of sex, and, to judge by the frequent and persistent appearance of the cradle, there were a good many babies! The massacre of St. Bartholomew . . . St. Bartholomew and Christ, too much religion, and in spite of the cradle, not enough, not nearly enough sex.

And so the public, expecting the rebirth of a nation, left the theatre in high dudgeon: Griffith with his cradles had let them down! The whole thing they suspected was "most immoral!" True there was nothing of which one could say that it was definitely degrading: there was Christ, and of course He was all right. But that cradle—so they tightened their stays and concealed their disappointment under a barricade of outraged susceptibilities. . . .

"Intolerance" should, by rights, have succeeded. It had the name of Griffith fresh from "The Birth of a Nation". It had the reputation of being the most expensive film ever made, and that must have had its effect on the American mind. It had also an atmosphere of mystery. The production was carried on in secrecy: vast sets were erected, and still vaster bills defrayed daily. And for what. . . ? No one knew, but everyone was speculating. The mystery film which was to cost more than any other film to date, and Griffith as producer. . . . Then the title turned out to be "Intolerance" and the film itself to be more than intolerable. . . .

VI

"Intolerance" made no attempt to tell a story: it used four stories to express one theme—the intolerance of the world for everything in general and for love in particular. It was the first conscious effort to put the film to its proper use.

It occurred to Griffith, or perhaps the idea had

who had hitherto stayed away because they were *not delighted* with American films. No one in those early days had any idea that there were films that were not American (and even to-day the ignorance as to the German films is positively amazing). It was therefore essential for the Germans to get known. They must be talked about, and they must attain prestige. It must become known that America made films, but that Germany made good films. And this is exactly what happened: the Americans continued with their stereotyped realism and the Germans followed "Caligari" with "Warning Shadows" and then with "The Niebelungs". But the Americans are nothing if not astute. They saw the new films coming out of Germany, detected therein a rival-to-be, and promptly transformed the rival into an ally. Ernst Lubitsch and Dimitri Buchowetzki, two prominent German directors, were imported to America. Lubitsch has done well in America; he has produced "The Marriage Circle" and "Forbidden Paradise", but Buchowetzki, the maker of "Mad Love", seems to have lost his cunning. There is a long list of dreary films to his credit: "Men" with Negri, "Crown of Lies" again with Negri, "The Midnight Sun", and others . . . and these are just ordinary films, and they are utterly devoid of the virtues that made "Mad Love" pre-eminent. But, even so, granted the failure of Buchowetzki, the German invasion of America has not been without its effects. The films of Von Stroheim, and more especially of Ernst Lubitsch, have left their mark on the standards of American production. Film achievement is not limited by realism; that is the lesson that America is learning to-day. There is such a thing as the making of beautiful shots, shots in which light and shade are properly and effectively massed. Composite pictures, that are in themselves pleasing to look upon; scenes like the roof-top scene in "Caligari" and

the garden scene in "Warning Shadows", scenes that would be pleasing in themselves, even if they were not part of a concerted whole—this is what Germany is teaching, and it is a lesson that every film-producing concern must master before it can hope to evolve anything on its own.

III

There is a device, a sort of camera trick, known in professional circles as the "mix", by means of which two or even three pictures can merge into each other, and emerge. The device of the "mix" is a very old camera trick, and one that has been employed in films from the very earliest times, but never until the Germans started producing had it been used to its full effect. A "mix" is made by photographing an object with half the necessary exposure. This having been done the film is reversed until that which has already been exposed is wound once more upon the spool. A second object is then photographed on the same piece of exposed negative. The exposure is, to begin with, very small, but as the negative unwinds, and the "mix" nears its completion, the exposure is gradually magnified, with the result that the object first photographed becomes dimmer, and the second one brighter; this continues until the first object has altogether faded away. The reader has doubtless, at one time or another, been unfortunate enough to take two "snaps" on the same piece of film. And if he has done this, and if it was not a case of over-exposure, he will no doubt recollect the rather pleasing ghostly effect so achieved. This is a "still mix", and in principle essentially similar to the "mix" of the film.

This device for the merging and emerging of pictures, with its fading forms and distorted shadows, was found to be of inestimable value in the cult of

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been forming in his mind during the years when he was producing one-reelers for Biograph, that the world, as a whole, was always averse to anything new; that it had no time for beauty and consequently no use for love; and that Voltaire spoke the truth when he said that everywhere religion had been instituted for good, and that everywhere it was being used to propagate evil. . . . A realisation of the world's intolerance is a realisation that must come sooner or later to every thinking man or woman: it is self-evident in every walk of life, and history is but a record of its machinations. It was this idea that Griffith set out to put on the screen. . . . He took four stories for the expression of his main theme, and so as to show, not only the intolerance of the world to-day, but also the intolerance of the world as evidenced in history,—the fall of Babylon, with its refined civilisation, before the barbarian hordes of Cyrus: the story of Jesus: the massacre of St. Bartholomew, and a modern story set in a Capital and Labour background, with a trimming of corrupt orphanages and East-end dens of vice!

These four stories were all identical in theme, but they were vastly different in period and in actual development. The fall of Babylon was brought about by a priesthood indignant over the young king's disregard for the Gods and the superstitions on which their living depended. The crucifixion was the result of a similar attitude on the part of the Pharisees and the priests. The intolerance of the world brought death to Belshazzar and to Jesus, the one involving the fall of a civilisation, and the other the foundation of a religion. The theme of the stories was identical, but the periods and developments were sufficiently different to call for some connecting link. The massacre of St. Bartholomew, due to the perverted Christianity of Catherine de Medici, was also identical in theme with the modern story

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in which a form of perverted Christianity brought misery to what would otherwise have been a happy home. But still something was needed to connect the four stories: intercutting, however deft, would not be sufficient.

Out of the cradle endlessly rocking
Uniter of here and hereafter. . . .

Walt Whitman's lines supplied Griffith with just the link for which he was looking. "Out of the cradle endlessly rocking . . ." all mankind is born in the same way, and as a result of similar passions. "They all come out of the same cradle," said Mr. Griffith, "and they're all getting at each other's throats." "Uniter of here and hereafter. . . ." Men always have been born and will continue to be born in the same way. There is an elemental brotherhood of man that unites the modern New Yorker with the Babylonian and the Judæan. They are all from the same cradle, but they're fighting each other the whole time. Very remarkable—but it's history.

Walt Whitman's lines materialised in the form of an over-diffused picture of Lilian Gish rocking a symbolical cradle: it left much to be desired, but it served its purpose. It did connect all four stories, and it served also to symbolise the futility of the fratricidal strife which bulks so large in the annals of history.

As a spectacle "Intolerance" was unrivalled. It still stands supreme as an example of what can be done by reproducing "The Ancient World". The Babylonian sets, their colossal walls, their tottering siege towers, and hordes of attacking Persians . . . towers filled with armed men, shouting, gesticulating, and gradually approaching the walls of Babylon. And on the walls the Babylonians, grim and determined, armed with huge mattocks. . . . One of the

the fantastic. It could, if rightly used, produce a certain ghostly effect; this was found out first, and later on it was discovered that, apart from being merely ghostly, the "mix" was in itself a beautiful thing. Without the "mix" we could have had no abstract films, and its use adds a touch of the abstract to any film in which it figures. For the "mix" is by no means limited to the merging of two pictures; it can merge three and even four, and resolve them into a fifth which will in turn mix into another three pictures, and it is when the triple or quadruple "mix" occurs that we verge on the abstract. For when we see three or four pictures merging into a network of lines and shadows we cannot but forget the reason for this happening in our wonder at the intrinsic beauty of the happening itself. Anyone who saw "Waltz Dream" or even "The Two Brothers" will realise the truth of this statement. There were "mixes" in "Waltz Dream", and they did have some bearing upon the story, but they recall themselves to the memory because of their intrinsic beauty and not because of the dramatic effect which they achieved. And, similarly, in "The Two Brothers" there was a series of glorious "mixes" and double exposures. Nominally these pictures suggested one of the brothers' dreams of power—but this was merely an excuse, one felt, and the real reason for the quintuple "mixes", and for the double exposure, was that the producer was longing to let himself go—the result was amazing. A wonderful mixture of trains, wheels, legs, and machines. . . . It did, it is true, symbolise the brother's power lust, but it is memorable on account of its beauty and not because of its dramatic significance. This use of the "mix" is the second great discovery of the German films. It was bound to come; for once the fantastic was in use, the value of the "mix" in expounding it was self-evident.

The "mix", like syncopation, is a thing that can be misused as well as used. The ordinary double "mix", which we all know, is simple and straightforward; it presents few pitfalls, and is, moreover, a convenient means of changing from one scene to another. But, with the triple and with the quadruple "mix" it is a different matter. The multiple "mix" is a thing in itself; it may be used to express other things, but it will always, in virtue of its own intrinsic beauty, retain a large degree of independence. When we see a multiple "mix" we are sure to be distracted, and sure, therefore, to take more notice of the "mix" than of what the "mix" is expressing. And for this reason it is unwise to introduce a "mix", however beautiful, into any sequence dealing with quick action. Quick action demands attention on the part of the audience, and this attention must by no means be distracted: the insertion of a "mix" will distract the attention and, further, it will break the continuity. The multiple "mix" should be used for things fantastic, for dreams and visions. It is also useful when it is found necessary to create a certain atmosphere like the café in "Waltz Dream", or the fair in "Out of the Mists". The multiple "mix", helped by the double exposure, can show three or four things almost simultaneously, and can in consequence create the illusion of a bird's-eye view of the scene in question—a roundabout, a pianola roll, swings—again the roundabout, faces, cocoanut-shies, a band playing, and all these things merging in and out of each other at once suggest a fair. The multiple mix is quite the best way of suggesting the atmosphere of anything like a fair, but it is not the quick way. It takes time, and it distracts the audience's attention. If there is a break during which the action shifts to a fair, then the multiple "mix". But if the action shifts suddenly and without a break, then an ordinary "mix", or

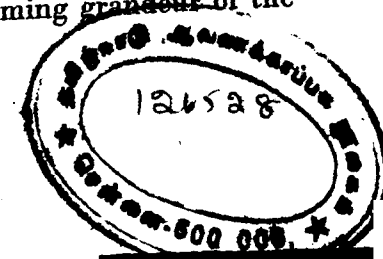
towers is upset; it crashes to the ground, involving thousands in its destruction. Another catches fire, and another, after successful manipulation, is brought right up to the walls. Drawbridges are thrown out, and then follows a hand-to-hand struggle two hundred feet above the ground. The whole thing was an incredible feat of production. Never once did the siege episodes seem unreal. There was no idea of pageantry, or the glory of war as it used to be in "the good old days". It was the grim picture of a civilisation struggling for its existence.

Except for the death of Belshazzar's mighty man of valour, the siege episodes were terribly real, and terribly painful. The man of valour was decapitated right in front of the camera. And at the risk of being called heartless, and even inhuman, I must say that this incident struck me as being incredibly funny! There was the man, and there, right before our eyes, we saw his head cut off and the blood spout out. . . . Funny? It was farcical! Until the man of valour met his unfortunate end, the various props, struts, dummies, and camera tricks necessitated if such realism were to be attained, were all perfectly concealed. Never, even when the towers were being burned and mangled before our eyes, had the idea of faking asserted itself. Subconsciously, of course, one realises that the subversion of a siege tower and the consequent destruction of thousands involved in the falling wreckage must be faked. But all the time, the realisation is subconscious, and if the faking is ingenious, this subconscious realisation will in no way impair our pleasure. A siege tower is a very foreign thing: it is something with which none of us have had any vital experiences. And for this reason we were able to watch with excitement and even with interest while the towers crashed to destruction. In the back of our minds we knew that it was "all a fake", and yet, so foreign are siege towers to the

twentieth-century mind, that we had at the same time a dim feeling that the whole might not have been faked at all, that it might have been real. What, after all, do we know of siege towers, except that they were used in warfare a thousand years ago? Great clumsy things of which we read in our history books. Beyond that we know nothing. And so, because of our ignorance, we can watch and be thrilled while a siege tower bursts into flames, and even though we are all the while subconsciously aware that there must be faking somewhere, this awareness never obtrudes itself until after the picture is over. But a man is a man, and even if he is a Babylonian he is capable of suffering pain just like ourselves. ("Intolerance" was designed to emphasise this fact.) And so it happens that when we see something which we take to be a man collapse in a headless welter of black liquid, we immediately cry out "FAKE!". The body of a man is a thing with which we are all familiar; there is nothing whatsoever that is foreign where a man is concerned. We know perfectly well that if a man's head is cut off, he dies. And from that we deduce that the thing which has just suffered decapitation before our eyes can only be a dummy. (For it is inconceivable that any actor, for any salary imaginable, should allow himself to be decapitated!) And as a result the scene loses its dramatic value, and becomes merely a moving replica of the Chamber of Horrors.

As soon as the man of valour had weltered away in his own excellently faked blood, we were again in the middle of a battle, and very soon the unfortunate incident was forgotten in the joy of the Persian retreat. The Persians have been repulsed, and Babylon, freed from the menace, prepares to celebrate victory. . . . Belshazzar's feast, and, more especially, the hall of feasting, is something that must be seen to be believed. The overwhelming grandeur of the

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better still a title. A multiple "mix" would have the effect of breaking the continuity in this latter case. It would be distracting, and it would take time, both of which things would be fatal to any presentation of quick action.

Producers of to-day, and more especially English producers, realise that German films are good. They realise also that the "mix" multiple or simple is a characteristic of the German film—and it seems that they argue like this:—"German films are good: German films have 'mixes'. We want to make good films, so we will have 'mixes' in our films", which, as any logician will tell them, is a case of arguing from the particular to the general. The result of this faulty logic was particularly apparent in a British film entitled "Roses of Picardy". It was a war film, and I have mentioned it elsewhere as being an insane film, but its insanity need not have detracted from its merits technical or emotional. It was ethically insane, that was all, and there was no reason therefore why it should not have been both interesting and thrilling. "The Four Horsemen", which was even more insane, was both. But the producer of "Roses of Picardy" must have seen a great many German films, he must have admired them, and he must have realised that their salient characteristic was the "mix", and, fired with the mistaken logic detailed above, he must have set to work on his own picture firm in the conviction that if only he put in enough "mixes" it would be a good picture. The result, as might be expected, was a tedious film. The beginning was so mixed as to be almost incomprehensible: feet coming through faces and faces coming through feet. These "mixes" were not even beautiful. They were just "mixes", and as far removed from the German achievements in the same line as is modern jazz from the syncopation of the Leonora overture. The climax of the film was represented by

a big German advance, an affair of quick action and breathless moments, a matter of suspense and thrill—and all this it might have been had the producer not seen fit to "mix" all the shots. If the "mixes" in the beginning were futile, those at the end were enraging. They delayed, they dragged, they distracted and they exasperated. They killed the rhythm, and most effectively destroyed any illusion of quick action. When presenting the sudden attack of an army, it is essential that the illusion of quick action should be sustained. Short shots, shots ranging from the detailed close-up to wide panoramic views and back again to the detail. Shots following closely and quickly one on top of the other.¹ But, instead of this, instead of a sequence of short, sharp incidents, we were regaled with a mass of supposedly Teutonic "mixes". Everything mixed, from rifles to faces, from feet to barricades, and everything, of course, mixed slowly. A column of men advancing were mixed slowly into two men struggling for a rifle, then a "mix" into a motor-car, a slow "mix" out again, and so on. . . . To begin with, it was amazing—but after a very short time it became exasperating. I found my fingers itching for a pair of scissors, a pair of scissors by means of which one could remove those inane "mixes", and so infuse some spirit of speed and continuity into that rhythmless mass of pictures flickering so forlornly across the screen.

IV

Besides introducing a new technique and elaborating it with appliances such as the "mix" simple and multiple, the Germans have opened a new pathway for the spectacle film. They took the spectacle on the American model, and, with a series of deft

¹ For an example of how an attack should be produced, see King-Vidor's "Big Parade".

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carved walls, the soaring steps along which, together with the jubilant Babylonians, we seemed to walk, Belshazzar's throne, and the scenes of revelry: all these things were real. Here was no pageantry of bespangled legs leading to an over-emphasised close-up, but the delirious celebration of victory in which the population of a city was rejoicing in its deliverance from a bloody and indiscriminate destruction . . . and, scarcely a league from the walls, the Persians are preparing for a fresh attack. Hectic merriment in the face of inevitable destruction . . . for already the priests are opening the gates to the invaders. The invaders pour in, and soon the city is ablaze. . . . Belshazzar and his queen awaiting the oncoming barbarians . . . around them the smoking ruins of a civilisation, and before them the triumph of superstition against which they had struggled, but in vain. . . .

Of the two remaining period sequences, there is little to be said. They served to emphasise the central idea, without attracting much attention to themselves. But the modern story, set in a background of factory and slum, was a very different matter. It was even more moving than the Babylonian sequence, and remarkable for Mae Marsh's superb acting in the leading rôle.

The attachment of a last-minute rescue and a happy ending to the modern story could only have been in the nature of a sop to Cerberus. As such, it was regrettable. But when later it transpired that the monster had refused the sop, its offering assumed really tragic proportions. The modern story set out to show the intolerance of society, and, one was led to presume, the triumph of that very intolerance which had ruined Babylon, crucified Jesus, and massacred the Huguenots. This is, of course, what should have happened: it was what Griffith obviously had in mind when first he drafted the scenario.

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For, if the idea of the film was to display the world's intolerance, it seems peculiar that, in view of the more than usually intolerant attitude of present-day society, the modern story should show intolerance defeated. And yet this is what happens. . . . The film draws to a climax of tremendous intensity. The Persians are riding on Babylon; a civilisation is doomed. Our modern hero is being led to the scaffold in expiation for a crime of which he is innocent. We see the tragedy of Golgotha and the carnage of St. Bartholomew's morning. Belshazzar has died by his own hand; Jesus is crucified; the Protestants massacred, and then, for no apparent reason, our senses are jarred by the most illogical and inartistic of all happenings. Just as the noose is tightening, the pardon arrives and the accused murderer is proved innocent. Follows a happy reconciliation, and a few edifying words about the power of love. The thing is too palpably absurd to merit further comment. A slavish pandering to popular tastes most effectually marring what might otherwise have been the greatest of all films. (Even this concession to the popular taste was unable to make "Intolerance" a box-office success.)

The film closed with one of the most beautiful pieces of symbolism that it has ever been my pleasure to witness. I will not attempt to describe this ending, for, were I to do so, it would sound both vulgar and crude. The idea was perfectly crude, but it was so beautifully handled that it became positively inspiring. We have only to look at *Parsifal* to see what genius can do with an outworn theme: Wagner achieved wonders with the grail idea. Griffith used a very similar idea with which to end "Intolerance"; he treated it in exactly the right manner, and the effect, as in *Parsifal*, is magnificent.

touches, made out of it something that was beautiful as well as spectacular.

The first of the German spectacles was "The Niebelungs", and in this film Fritz Lang, the director, achieved magnificence without the appearance of expenditure. Never during "The Niebelungs" did it occur to one that such and such a scene must have been expensive to produce; in "The Ten Commandments", on the other hand, the thought of expense was never out of one's mind. It was hinted at in the publicity, more than hinted at on the programme, and fairly rammed down one's throat in the film itself. It was impossible to define the reason for this essential difference between the German and the American spectacle. The whole thing is a matter of taste and of artistic feeling, both of which things are indefinable. It is like seeing two women who are both gorgeously dressed. Both women wear jewels, and their dresses are, in both cases, made from the most costly materials. You look at one of them, and you think, "That woman knows how to dress", and you look at the other, and you think, "Those diamonds must have cost a fortune, and as for that dress—a hundred guineas at least!" And yet both ladies are wearing diamonds of incredible value; they are both clothed in hundred-guinea gowns, but between them there is a great gulf fixed. In the one costume money seems to be the all in all, while it does not seem even to enter into the composition of the other. In short, one woman knows how to dress, while the other merely spends money. So it is with the Germans; they know how to make spectacles—the Americans can spend the money.

It might, on the other hand, be urged that the superiority of the German to the American type of spectacle is the result of this German cult of the fantastic. This was, I admit, at one time my own opinion: fantasy, I thought, was the one and only

thing fit for the screen. The Germans had found fantasy, and with it they had made good films. All films, therefore, to be good, I argued, must be fantastic. My reasoning, it will be observed, was very similar to that of the above-mentioned producer, who fell into a similar muddle concerning the use of the "mix". It is hardly necessary to mention that this train of reasoning with regard to fantasy was erroneous; it was indeed an aggravated case of mistaken logic. The foundation of this edifice built on too extravagant an admiration of the new German technique was destined, like all such mental Babels, to receive a rude and destructive shock. The shock, when it came, arrived from a quarter utterly unexpected—it was administered by Fairbanks, the irrepressible, and it took the form of "The Thief of Bagdad".

That "The Thief of Bagdad" was a fantasy, no one will deny. It was an Arabian Nights fantasy . . . an Arabian Nights fantasy; what visions the very words conjure up—the thousand nights in one night, glorious, glittering, and fantastic, to be seen through the eyes of the wonder-working camera. The camera, which could convert these tales of giants and dragons into an illusion of living reality, string them together, show them to us as a whole and enliven that whole with Douglas Fairbanks—the prospect was indeed alluring.

Perhaps it was unfortunate that "The Thief of Bagdad" should have appeared so very soon after "The Niebelungs", for there was something so essentially similar in the structure of these two films, that a comparison became inevitable, and comparisons, as we know, are odious. In "The Niebelungs" we saw very little that we had expected, and a great deal, although unexpected, of what we had always wanted to see in a fairy-tale—Brunhilda's castle ringed with fire and backed by the flashing circles of

VII

When "The Birth of a Nation" was first released Griffith was subjected to a very strong dose of the world's intolerance. True, the picture was a success; it is still a success. It has been revived many times, and on each occasion of its revival it has filled the box-office. The picture was a success in so far as it paid for itself at least three times over. . . . But there has always been considerable evidence to show that Griffith valued his pictures as much, if not more, than his money. And so, in spite of the surprising box-office success accorded to "The Birth of a Nation", it must have been very galling to Griffith, the artist, to find that his picture was mistaken for a piece of anti-colour propaganda. It was, and is still, taken as such.

Anyone who has seen "The Birth of a Nation" will at once realise that, although it contained much that might well have been taken as anti-colour propaganda, it contained also much more that is of value to the art of film production. It had many essential faults, but it had also many virtues, and, above all, it had a right to be judged as a work of art, and not to be dismissed as a piece of virulent pamphlet work.

In view of the theme, which is based on negro enfranchisement and the results of same, it is not to be wondered at that the picture received a somewhat stormy reception in America. America is a collection of prejudices; some strong, and others weak. It may be socialism, religion, or nationalism, the mention of any of which is enough to send even the intelligent American off on a screaming tirade of denunciation or approval. But, if such things as socialism, religion, and nationalism are red herrings delectable to the American nose, the word "colour" must then be likened to a lighted fuse, and its mention to the effects of that same fuse when left in a well-filled

powder magazine! The colour prejudice now existing in America is something unbelievable: it must be experienced to be believed. Like death, it is no respecter of persons. It envelops them all in its hideous meshes; high and low, intelligent and unintelligent. If you mention "colour" to an American, he will begin forthwith to assure you that he is not narrow-minded: he may even go as far as to affirm that he is broad-minded; but, for all that, **THE NIGGER MUST BE KEPT IN HIS PLACE**. The baited American will then endeavour to reconcile this surprising statement with the canons of broad-mindedness. He will try for quite a long time, and when he sees that his eloquence is being wasted, and that you are in no way convinced of his broad-mindedness, he will take refuge within the impenetrable fortress of nationalism, whence he will affirm that "the colour question" is a thing that *only* Americans *can* understand! It will be useless, then, to remind him that Americans have spent the last century and a half in misunderstanding just this very question. And so it was not surprising to anyone, except perhaps to Griffith himself, when the whole of America pounced on "The Birth of a Nation" and cited therein the vindication of its own particular views on "the colour question". That the film might be a work of art never occurred to anyone. An influential firm of film distributors refused to stain the purity of its sex dramas by contamination with that "dirty nigger picture". As far as they could see, it was a "dirty nigger picture", and no more. Almost immediately a prominent citizen declared that "The Birth of a Nation" was a deliberate attempt to humiliate 10,000,000 American citizens and portray them as nothing but beasts". A New England association then took up the challenge, and declared that the film in question was a deliberate attempt to subvert "white ideals". And, as if this were not enough, politicians, courting

the aurora, the drawbridge to Gunther's palace, the caves of Niebelheim, and, later, all the exuberant blossom of a European spring. As a fairy-tale, it was perfect; everything was unexpected but everything was as it should be. "The Thief of Bagdad" set out with the same idea in view; its object was to present a fairy-tale, to present it fantastically and beautifully. It started off well enough—twenty minutes of Fairbanks and the rope trick—and then suddenly it went wrong. Instead of presenting a fairy-tale idea of an oriental city, an idea of which we were all aware, but were unable to express for ourselves, it plunged suddenly into the most frightful display of the most stereotyped orientalism. There were domes and towers, palaces, marble floors, everything in fact that we expected to see in the East of Scheherazade—but nothing, absolutely nothing, that we had not expected. It was the apotheosis of the Turkish delight box, dome piled on dome and minaret topping minaret: it was what we all of us knew, but it was twenty times magnified. We all knew all about it, and so we were not for a moment mystified. The very conventionality of the film, its magnificence, and above all its size, dispelled any illusion of unreality or of mysticism that there might possibly have been. The cloud-capped palaces became skyscrapers, and the airy towers took on the semblance of wireless masts, beautiful at times, but essentially real, essentially unfantastic—and without fantasy, and without mystery, what is a fairy-tale? It is "The Thief of Bagdad"—and, similarly, "The Thief of Bagdad" is a fairy-tale without mystery, a fairy-tale of the mind and not of the imagination.

These two films, "The Thief of Bagdad" and "The Niebelungs", told a very similar story. A story of wild and improbable adventure, a story of giants, dragons, and a cap of darkness, but how differently they told it. . . . The cap of darkness, as por-

trayed, by America, became at once an instrument of fun, a feature of slapstick, and what could be more out of place in a fairy-tale than the essentially modern, the essentially American, slapstick? And then there was the dragon, or rather, the dragons—the Fairbanks dragon and the Siegfried dragon—the former expensive and realistic, the latter fantastic and frightening. Both films were more than flavoured with the fire motive, and yet somehow the one was just fire, while the other was magic fire.

In "The Thief of Bagdad" there was, however, Douglas Fairbanks: it was seventy per cent Fairbanks—which left only a bare twenty-five per cent for the purposes of fairy-tale. Slapstick is the peculiar property of the Americans—slapstick and thrill-making. In slapstick and in "grand, bloody thrills", they are unrivalled, but when it comes to the making of a spectacle, they can indeed lay out the necessary cash, but that is as far as it goes. The American spectacle is expensive first, and beautiful second, whereas the German spectacle is always primarily beautiful and never apparently expensive. . . it was something more than fantasy pure and simple that was making the German film pre-eminent. . . .

V

"The Secret of a Soul" (another German film) has shown that even the educational film can be made interesting. "The Secret of a Soul" was nothing but an educational film; it told no story to speak of, but demonstrated quite clearly and concisely the modern theory of psycho-analysis. The film dealt with a man who, for some reason, was afraid of his wife. He could not have children and at the same time he longed passionately for children. One morning the man is trimming the back of his wife's shingle; for this purpose he is using his razor. During the opera-

the negro vote, must needs add their own ill-fitting spoke to the already over-crowded wheels of invective. The whole of America was afire with the controversy, and consequently very nearly the whole of America went to see "The Birth of a Nation", and so everything ended happily.

VIII

It was arranged to form a new company to handle the distribution question; this company was to be called "The Epoch Film Corporation". The name was perhaps a trifle grandiloquent in tone, but it was convenient, catchy, and at least three parts true. The first showing of "The Birth of a Nation" was really epoch-making, for it won for the film a place in the entertainment world that was on a level with the theatre.

But just for once Europe was ahead of America, for from Europe had come the two first super-films: Sarah Bernhardt's "Queen Elizabeth", and from Italy "Quo Vadis?". Both these films were shown with success on both sides of the Atlantic. But the importance of their success is in no way connected with their merit, which was variable, but with the fact that they were taken seriously. They were looked upon as films as opposed to "pictures in motion". They were shown mostly in theatres, which was a pity, and in most cases full theatre prices were charged for admission. Everything was going well with the European film industry. "The Last Days of Pompeii" was already in production when the war broke out. The war threw the European film industry into the paralysis under which it is still labouring to-day.

The idea of the super-film had, however, taken the fancy of American producers. People, it seemed, were willing to pay theatre prices to see a film. So

much the better. This new development of the public taste could be catered for very cheaply. A crowd or two, a view of a columned doorway, and a star were all that was necessary. True, the outlay was considerably more than that demanded by an ordinary film, but for a super-film one could charge theatre prices, and theatre prices, all over America, spelt enormous returns.

But the producers, exhibitors, and the rest of them had reckoned without Griffith, who, in his turn, had very wisely decided to reckon without them. And be it said to Griffith's everlasting credit, he refused an offer of 50,000 dollars a year to direct for Famous Players. He preferred to remain on his own and make pictures. . . .

The idea of a feature picture on the "Quo Vadis?" lines, that is, a minimum of eight reels and a theatre to itself, had taken a very definite hold on America. It repaid what was spent on it. It was the old story of "nothing venture, nothing win", or small outlays, small profits; large outlays, large profits. These expensive super-films repaid what was spent on them. . . . But for all that it came as a severe shock to Griffith's backers when they discovered that he was engaging extras by the thousand! "Extras engaged by the thousand", the bills passed from thousands to hundreds of thousands, and then came the crowning shock: "The Birth of a Nation" was to occupy twelve reels. . . . Twelve reels: the thing was unheard of! ("Quo Vadis?" had been in eight reels.) There was such a thing as venturing too much! . . . Twelve reels, as it happened, was somewhat in excess of what was necessary, but that is beside the point. The real importance of "The Birth of a Nation" lies in the fact that it established as a result of its success a definite standard of length, cost, plausibility of plot, and excellence of acting, to which subsequent feature-pictures have been forced,

tion, a murder is committed in the adjacent house. There are screams for help, and the man, in his agitation, makes a small cut on his wife's neck. It is a trivial matter and neither husband nor wife appears to think anything more about it. The man goes off to his work, and on his way there he passes the scene of the murder. He hears people discussing the crime and learns from them that it was committed with a razor and that the murdered woman's head was shaved clean off her body. He goes to his office, does his work as usual and, among other things, he opens his letters with his paper-knife. That evening a telegram is received from his cousin who has a post in Burma. The cousin is returning, and hopes to be with them very soon after the arrival of the telegram. The wife is delighted, and so, ostensibly, is the husband. He is very fond of his cousin, and yet, for some reason, he is apprehensive of this sudden return. He feels more apprehensive than he likes to say, and yet he knows that he ought to be glad.

The cousin arrives and brings with him, of course, a number of trophies from the East. Among them is a shining Japanese sword and an image of a woman holding a baby. The wife and the cousin are delighted to see each other, so also is the husband, and yet, for some unknown reason, he is filled with foreboding. His wife and his cousin are so friendly—so happy together. He looks at them and then at the image of the woman with the baby, and there, lying beside it on the table, is the bright Japanese sword. He feels a sudden and irresistible desire to kill his wife. The desire, he realises, is wholly unreasonable. His wife and his cousin have known each other for years—before his eyes the sword glitters tantalisingly, and there also is the image and it is holding a baby. He walks dejectedly from the room and goes moodily to bed, and that night he has a strange dream.

The dream, to the uninitiated like myself, was more beautiful than significant. There were trains, and there were tunnels, a town that rose from the earth, a peal of bells, and also a revolving tower—all doubtless very significant to the student of psycho-analysis. This dream was, however, a very beautiful piece of photography and capable therefore of appreciation by the uninitiated merely on account of its beauty. But even to the uninitiated, it was made very plain from the dream that the man was terribly jealous of his wife and of his cousin. For some reason he connected them with a baby (it was a small, stiff-looking baby, and on the whole more reminiscent of a doll than anything else), and yet he was perfectly aware that the behaviour of these two persons was everything that it should be. In his dream he saw himself stabbing at his wife with the Japanese sword, and when he awoke it was with such a fear of knives of all sorts that he was unable to shave himself. The fear of knives grew upon him: he was unable to open his letters with his paper-knife, and in the end unable to sit down to a meal, because of the omnipresence of the cutlery—and with all this was a fantastic desire to kill his wife. The state of affairs soon became unbearable and, very wisely, the man decided to consult a doctor. The doctor, who was a psychologist of the Freudian School, set about his work with a will. He got to the bottom of everything, and finally traced the unreasoning jealousy to a childhood disappointment in which the man, cousin, and the wife had all three been involved. These three had been playing together with a new doll, and the wife, then a little girl, had handed the doll to the cousin and the two had started playing together. The husband, then a boy in a sailor suit, had been left out. The treatment progressed; more and more of the past was unrolled and finally the dream itself was unfolded

in some measure, to conform. There was in fact every reason why *someone* should consider "The Birth of a Nation" an epoch-making film!

IX

When I last saw "The Birth of a Nation", I had three days previously seen "Greed" and also "Waltz Dream", and it must be admitted that, in comparison with these two masterpieces of production, Griffith's "epoch-making film" seemed decidedly crude. That there have been better films since "The Birth of a Nation" I will not deny, but that there was anything better, or even as good, before, I very much doubt. It was the foster-mother of all films, and without it we should never have had the sombre splendour of "Greed" or the intoxicating sparkle of "Waltz Dream".

When thinking of "The Birth of a Nation", we must at the same time visualise the paintings of the early Tuscan and Sienese schools. Giotto, Fra Angelico and Cimabue . . . crude, if compared with Leonardo da Vinci or with Tintoretto. Crude and almost offensive in the rigidity of design and poster-like arrangement of colours. Place the "Meeting of Joseph and Mary" beside the "Last Supper" of Tintoretto or Leonardo, and it will look like the scribbings of a child. Remove the "Last Supper" and then study the "Meeting of Joseph and Mary". . . . Quite suddenly the most lovely little things will appear in the most unexpected places. Gradually the colour, which by comparison had seemed faulty, will lose its garishness, and slowly the whole thing will resolve itself into a pleasing patchwork capable of affording real pleasure to the onlooker.

The cinema, a true child of America, has managed somehow to compress the growth of three centuries into the space of thirty years. It is an event un-

paralleled in the history of art. It is as though the Florentines, who saw and marvelled at the frescoes of Cimabue, should have been able in thirty years' time to stand amazed before the canvases of Titian or Michael Angelo. And yet this is exactly the position in which the cinema has placed us of to-day. Many can remember the first kinetoscope, and many more the first vaudeville presentations of the vitascope; and those among them who are still alive are in a position to go and see "The Nibelungs", or "Isn't Life Wonderful?" almost any day they like. But so unusual is this mushroom-like growth of the cinema, that the foregoing analogy is not properly correct. For if the Griffith of "The Birth of a Nation" is the Giotto of the films, what can be said of the producer of "Isn't Life Wonderful?" One man fabricating in his own mind the genesis and the apotheosis of an art: the Giotto and the Michael Angelo in one. . . . Although my analogy is not strictly correct, I think that it has sufficed to illustrate my meaning.

And Griffith is still alive, and still engaged in film production. . . .

X

"The Birth of a Nation" begins very badly: there is a welter of irrelevant shots, ranging from Lilian Gish on a garden path to an assembly of negroes, God knows where! This disconnected beginning is an attempt to unfold two stories as nearly simultaneously as the laws of space-time will allow! For, naturally, in a drama of the Civil War, it is essential that hearts should be equally divided between North and South. To establish a strong Northern interest, and at the same time a strong Southern interest, is the object of the first thousand odd feet of film. Nothing of the sort is, however, achieved: the result is a colossal and incomprehensible muddle, from the

—and here the film was masterfully handled. All the scenes in the doctor's consulting-room were analytical, and therefore in essence recapitulatory. We had the same scenes re-enacted, the same dream retold and yet the repetition was never tedious. The shots, although essentially similar, were just sufficiently different to prevent tedium. They were the same shots but for the most part they were taken against a dead white background, which endowed them with an essential difference and with a certain vague unreality: it transformed them at once from actions into the recollections of actions.

The incident of the razor was brought to light, and little by little the dream was unfolded. Then came the climax. The man, in detailing his dream, reached the point where he had in fancy stabbed at his wife with the sword—"Like this!" he cried, springing up. "Like this!" and he caught up a knife that was lying on the doctor's table. "Like this and like this—" When he had finished, the doctor smiled pleasantly. "Look what you have got in your hand," he said. The man looked down and saw the knife—he was cured.

I have described the story of this film, because it was seen by a very few people, and because it is unlikely that it will ever be given a general release. The film will never have any wide popular appeal, but it is for all that as important in film history as are "Caligari" and "The Birth of a Nation". "The Secret of a Soul" did not produce a new technique—it used the established methods of the realistic and the fantastic, but it put them to an entirely novel use. It expounded, and expounded clearly, by means of the film, a thing which had hitherto been dependent on text-books for its exposition. After seeing "The Secret of a Soul", there can be no doubt in anyone's mind as to the fundamental principles of psycho-analysis. The repressions of childhood grow-

ing into the obsessions of adolescence, the value and significance of dreams, the effect on the subconscious mind of actions entirely extraneous, and the tremendous part played by sex even in the lives of the most ordinary people. It was essentially an educational film. It presented for our inspection the theory of psycho-analysis, and it presented it with interest, which is more than any text-book could ever have done. This film showed that it was possible to present, through the medium of pictures, a concise account of a certain phase of thought, and, as we have had one "phase" so concisely and so lucidly put before us, is it not to be hoped that the presentation of other "phases" will follow? Why should not the theory of relativity, a black mystery to nine-tenths of us, become a lucid reality as the result of a similar treatment? Bolshevism, an enigma to most of us, and Fascismo, more nebulous still, Materialism and Spiritualism, things which we know by name, but of whose true nature we are ignorant—such things could, as "The Secret of a Soul" has shown, be made lucid by means of the film.

VI

The Germans have discovered a new technique in film production, and the Americans have recognised their discovery. Lubitsch and Dupont, producers who made their name in Germany, are now working in America, and with them is Murnau, producer of "The Last Laugh". Three of the most prominent European directors working in America: three directors who have made their name and learnt their trade in Germany, land of the fantastic and of the "mix". They are working now in America, and are therefore engaged in handling American material, material essentially realistic, and above all things not fantastic. The result has been Lubitsch's "The Marriage

jaws of which one is suddenly swept into a placid view of the South Carolina cotton fields. There is, of course, a certain amount of comedy, but it is comic without being relevant. We then see the Southern family and their friends from the North, and in the background the sinister figure of Stoneham, the champion of negro rights. The stage is at last set, and the story begins. . . .

The film then proceeds conventionally enough until the outbreak of the war: then follow some remarkable shots of which the central subjects are bonfires. As far as photography goes, these shots leave nothing to be desired: they are definitely well photographed, and the composition throughout is excellent. But these shots are intended to express more than the placid beauty of photography and the static joys of composition; they are supposed to be expressive of merriment. I say "supposed", because they do not express anything of the sort. The shots are either much too long or else much too short; the sequence is absolutely without rhythm; it is dead and lifeless.

In the ensuing war scenes Griffith has, however, excelled himself. By this I mean that he has produced one shot of supreme brilliance, and that, I consider, compensates for any faults that the film may have. . . . "WAR!" a sub-title . . . fade-in on a picture of a woman crouched in a hedge sheltering two children: it is night time. Then gradually the camera moves from left to right; it is discovered that the woman is seated on a hillside overlooking a white ribbon of road hundreds of feet below. Along the white strip of the road the black line of an army is crawling on its way. . . . The picture fades out.

In direct contrast to this piece of brilliant production, we have the quite incredibly clumsy scene in Lincoln's office, or whatever the room is. To begin with, we are informed in a sub-title that the set about

to be shown is an exact replica of Lincoln's own study. Now what conceivable difference can it make to the scene that is about to take place, whether the setting is an EXACT replica of Lincoln's study or not? It can make no difference to the emotional value of the scene; but the announcement of the fact in forty or fifty feet of celluloid can have a very distracting effect on the mind of an audience. Hitherto they have been following the story; then comes a title announcing the presentation of an exact reproduction of Abraham Lincoln's own study. Immediately they will forget the story, and, in a frantic desire to see an exact reproduction of the pen which Lincoln actually used, will become temporarily oblivious of the fact that they are watching a film. Obviously a state of mind NOT calculated to produce an enlightened understanding of what is passing on the screen. If a producer has a passion for detail, let him by all means reproduce his sets down to the veriest grain of dust; let him do all this and more, but let him not mention it in a sub-title. If he goes to the trouble of particle for particle reproduction, he does so for his own satisfaction, and not for the enhancement of the dramatic value of the scene involved. For, so long as a reasonable care is taken over the period furniture used (which should be accurate to within twenty years), the remaining particles, so long as they are left quietly in the background, will fall unobtrusively into their proper places. Twice, in "The Birth of a Nation", were we subjected to this facsimile-mongering. The first instance has already been cited, and the second is like unto it, namely, the theatre where Lincoln was assassinated. . . . But, if my reader will endeavour to recollect what we have already seen of the American mind, its passion for respectability, resulting in a slavish worship of the past, he will no doubt discern the reason for the announcement of these "exact historical replicae".

THIS FILM BUSINESS

Circle" and "Lady Windermere's Fan", Dupont's "Love Me and the World is Mine", and Murnau's "Sunrise", as yet an unknown quantity. Both "The Marriage Circle" and "Lady Windermere's Fan" were comedies, and the same applies to "Love Me and the World is Mine".¹ These three films are comedies, but they represent an entirely new form of comedy. They are not the comedy of slapstick, nor are they the comedy of the fantastic: they possess the elements of both and the characteristics of neither. The art of slapstick consists in a palatable presentation of nonsense, and its success is dependent upon the presentation to the eye of what the eye knows to be impossible: the more impossible the thing presented, the greater the contrast between visible possibility and actual possibility—and therefore the greater the laugh. There is no such impossibility in any of the Americo-German comedies, but there is withal a flavouring of nonsense. We have, on the one hand, Harold Lloyd dangling from the hands of a clock at a good two hundred feet above the street—nonsensical and impossible, but vastly entertaining. And, then, also we have the entirely nonsensical situations of which "The Marriage Circle" is made up. Nonsensical, but just possible, and also vastly entertaining. There is also the fantastic beauty of "Waltz Dream", with its wonderful galaxy of "mixes", and in "Lady Windermere's Fan", the racecourse sequence in which Mrs. Erline is seen through the lenses of a hundred inquisitive field-glasses. There is an element of fantasy in this last, for so often and so quickly does Mrs. Erline mix in and out of herself that just for a moment she hovers perilously near the brink of the abstract. But these "mixes" in "Lady Windermere's Fan", unlike the "mixes" in "Waltz Dream", are not completely

¹ And also "The Student Prince", the finest film that Lubitsch has yet given us.

fantastic. Realism verging on the fantastic, and yet it is a long way removed from slapstick. Neither completely realistic nor yet entirely fantastic, this new style of comedy is something entirely on its own, something that has resulted from the fusion of German phantasm with American realism.

The German cult of the fantastic would, if it had been left to its own devices, have worked itself to death. It was too misty, too "kolossal", and, above all, too humourless to prove permanently entertaining: it was as humourless as the average American film was artless. The Germans possessed the talent and the artistic instinct, which led to the production of beautiful films. They had, however, no humour, and without it they must have come to a standstill, for there is a limit, even to the fantastic. The Americans had a *flair* for humour, but they had little or no artistic instinct, and so they, too, must have come to a standstill, for nonsense, like fantasy, has its limitations. Fortunately, however, these two opposites have joined hands. American humour has become fused with German fantasy, and from the fusion of these two is arising something entirely new.

The future of the film lies now on both sides of the Atlantic: it is neither European, nor yet is it American; it has become international, and it now remains for it to become elastic. It must be wide enough to absorb new inventions as they arise, and elastic enough to adapt itself to the absorption.

The Americo-German alliance opens up a prospect of unlimited progress for the films. It means a new sort of film altogether. Already we have seen the beginnings of this new film. They are evident in "The Marriage Circle" and in "Love Me and the World is Mine", but this new thing is still young; it is a baby that must be nursed carefully if it is to survive. And if it does survive, which with twenty years' careful nursing it should do, it is not impos-

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There were several scenes in the film which should have been moving: there was a battle scene of colossal dimensions and very little interest; a last-minute rescue with a double interest; a suicide and the death of America's greatest president, reproduced particle for particle from the original scene, at which, one was led to suppose, the majority of the cast *had been* present! A colossal jumble, a vast hotch-potch of genius and banality. But a remarkable film, because it won for itself a place in the entertainment world that was on a level with the theatre. The Charity Bazaar fire had thrown a blight over the cinema, and productions like "The Great Train Robbery" had served rather to intensify than to dispel this blight. Up to 1914 the film was regarded as a money-making machine, and a dangerous machine at that. It was amusing as a novelty, certainly, but then a novelty when it is no longer novel loses its attraction, and this was just what had happened to the films. Never had they been taken seriously, and now that they were no longer new, they were ignored. "Quo Vadis?" and more especially "Queen Elizabeth" did something to revive the interest in the cinema. "Quo Vadis?" was a world-famous novel, and "Queen Elizabeth" was graced with the presence of Sarah Bernhardt, then at the crest of her fame. If the films were good enough for Bernhardt, then perhaps there might be something in them. . . . And then came "The Birth of a Nation"—a film which stood on its own merits and which, unlike its predecessors, was not dependent on the name of a popular actress or the fame of a best-selling novel. If this was the film, and apparently it was, then certainly there was something in it, said serious critics. And in this lies the greatness of the film's achievement. In spite of its faults it compelled the attention of serious critics and it proclaimed, entirely on its own merits, that here was a new form of artistic ex-

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pression; something more than a mere money-making machine.

XI

The success, or rather the reception, accorded to "The Birth of a Nation" inspired "Intolerance", which, in its turn, destroyed what faith Griffith may have had in the public taste. He made one more attempt to make a picture, which resulted in "Broken Blossoms", and then abandoned the attempt in very natural despair.

"Broken Blossoms" received what contemporaries have been pleased to call "a high-brow success", which was really more than it deserved. It took one of Tom Burke's Limehouse cameos and turned it into a shattering melodrama of thwarted love and cunning. I say "shattering melodrama" because Griffith handled his film with such dexterity, directed the whole so cleverly and obtained such magnificent acting from his cast, that for the moment one was almost persuaded that one had seen a film. The effect of "Broken Blossoms" was utterly shattering; it overwhelmed one's critical faculties in a rush of tearing emotion, but, for all that, it was not a film in the true sense of the word. It was a story told in pictures. It was well told, and for this reason it had the effect of strengthening the illusion as to the story-telling function of the film. It served also to establish Lilian Gish in the position which she now holds in the eyes of an adoring public. It was the first film to create the rickety, beaten little slum child idea, and to link that idea permanently with Miss Gish. Miss Gish has done nothing but play rickety slum children ever since, and she, or her director, even had the audacity to transform Murger's happy, though consumptive, heroine into just such another child. Puccini was guilty of trimming Mimi so as to make her fit the rôle of an operatic heroine

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sible that it will find itself strong enough to struggle, and to struggle successfully, against the bellicose designs of Major Zukor and Colonel Hayes.

And to-day there are signs of an even newer film arising in Asia, a film that promises to be as different from the American film as the American was from the German. And when these two children, the Asian and the Americo-German, have attained maturity?— Another alliance, one more triad, and so further progress.

CHAPTER XX

THE FAMILY, MURDER, AND RELIGION

I

"HONOUR thy father and thy mother . . ." The fifth commandment has been a happy hunting-ground for scenario writers and for producers. "Tell Ma I'm glad she kissed me! . . ." said the dying fireman, his face irradiated with filial devotion. "If there's a letter from Mother, I want you to keep it for me," said the young soldier, as he went off to the war . . . and the mother, frail and bespectacled in the one case, and superb in a tea-gown in the other, floated peacefully about the home, in the one case a mansion and in the other a cottage, and waited and thought of her boy. The film mother always floats about, always she stays at home, and always she inspires unquestioning devotion in the breast of her too numerous progeny. Never is she allowed to do anything more definite than cook a dinner, for if she did she might assume a certain reality that would be fatal to the illusion which she and her kind so successfully sustain. For the film mother is as unreal as is the film lover, and like him she originated as the result of that hectic craving for respectability and tradition now rampant in traditionless America. The Decalogue is four thousand years old at least, and in the Decalogue the honouring of father and of mother is expressly enjoined—can one wonder, then, that such an injunction, grey with the mists of centuries, should appear invested with the halo of sanctity to the children of the cowboys now engaged in

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—he trimmed her a good bit; but even so, she was allowed to retain a small spark of vitality, just enough to let one see that the real Mimi of *La Vie de Bohême* had been somewhere in his mind. For Mimi was a strumpet (I must apologise if I am shattering any opera lover's illusions, but there is no other way of putting it!). Mimi had consumption, but she had, too, a large store of vitality, and a still larger supply of immorality. She was, in fact, a true Bohemian.

Miss Gish, however, was to play the part of Mimi, and in a part played by Miss Gish the public expected to see, not a vivacious strumpet, but a down-trodden "little girl" smiling in spite of, or because of, her troubles. Mimi was accordingly reshaped so as to accord with what was expected of Miss Gish. One has heard of plays being specially written for a famous actor or actress, but one had not heard—not until Miss Gish informed us—of established plays being *rewritten* so as to suit the requirements of a certain actress. I should like to see Miss Gish play Cleopatra: the transformation should be interesting.

After "Broken Blossoms" Griffith produced three really bad films: "The Orphans of the Storm", "Way Down East" and "One Exciting Night". These films were, as it was intended that they should be, great box-office successes, and they were none of them entirely without merit. It was only by comparison with "Intolerance"—but then comparisons are known to be odious. . . .

"The Orphans of the Storm" tells the story of two sisters who became engulfed in the cyclone of the French Revolution. It led one of them up to the steps of the guillotine, and then very obligingly led her away again. It afforded excellent opportunity for the Misses Gish, Lilian and Dorothy, to display their finger-nail-biting technique of acting. It gave

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us also one or two very lovely sets, not a few "actual historical incidents", and very little of Griffith's talent as a director. It was very, very long, and must have been very expensive to produce. It was a great success—commercially, that is.

Of "Way Down East" there is little to be said except that Miss Gish smiled, and was beaten (metaphorically this time), smiled, and was beaten again. She had a baby, and also a love affair, and very carelessly she collapsed on the brink of a frozen river just at the time of the spring thaws. The thaw, of course, set in with a vengeance; the ice broke up, and whirled helter-skelter down stream, carrying Miss Gish towards a colossal waterfall, which could mean nothing but destruction for anyone or anything who came near it, and Miss Gish was getting nearer every moment. . . . The catastrophe was, however, averted by the co-operation of Mr. Griffith, Mr. Richard Barthelmas (the hero), and the camera man (name unknown); Miss Gish was snatched from the very brink of the falls at the very last possible moment, and so all ended happily. It was quite the best and most thrilling last-minute rescue that Griffith or anyone else has ever produced.

"One Exciting Night" was the resuscitation and rehabilitation of one of Griffith's early efforts for Biograph. It was certainly very exciting, and the thrill was in no way impaired by the perfect visibility of the wires used in the subversion of about a dozen trees. It introduced Neil Hamilton and Carol Dempster, and was altogether a good 2s. 4d. worth.

XII

The success of the three thrill pictures partially refilled the Griffith exchequer, so sadly depleted as a result of "Intolerance", and so made possible the production of another film that should again be

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making good? They have seized upon the commandments because they are old, and for that reason they have assumed that they must be right, and therefore as applicable to the standards of the year A.D. 1927 as they were to the year 2000 B.C.

The ten commandments, as we know, were formulated to regulate the ways and the manners of a primitive community. The community in question was nomadic and bellicose and, consequently, the laws formed for its government would be the laws best suited to govern the ways of a bellicose nomadic people. The first four commandments deal almost exclusively with the worshipping of graven images—now obviously if a people or a tribe were to move quickly, to advance with speed and to retreat with equal celerity, it was essential that they should not be encumbered with anything other than the bare necessities of life—and graven images, it was realised, would, if allowed to go unchecked, be a tremendous hindrance to any form of speedy motion. The said images might be small to begin with, just sticks and stones crudely carved and portable, but in time they would become bigger sticks and larger stones, developing eventually into great rocks or into tremendously cumbersome wooden images, objects which because of their very weight and size would most effectually impede the motion of the tribe. So graven images were tabooed by the chief law-giver. (Mohammedanism, another religion that has come from the desert and therefore from the Nomads, presents an equally rigid code of laws on the subject of images graven or otherwise.) And just because the world over people will idolise the past, and because, particularly in America, they will invest it with the trappings of sanctity, this Semitic dogma of the united family continues, ostensibly at least, to govern our twentieth-century existence. And so Mary Carr still draws an enormous salary and “Stella

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Dallas” is followed by “The Fourth Commandment”. . . . (The film “The Fourth Commandment”—featuring the star of “Stella Dallas”—deals exclusively with the subject matter of the fifth commandment. . . . This, one supposes, is good publicity.)

“Thou shalt do no murder”, says the sixth commandment, but it says not a word about holding a murderer in abhorrence. Obviously, in primitive and even in modern society, murder cannot be allowed to go unchecked. In primitive society it has to be discouraged because it would, if allowed to go unchecked, very seriously impair the fighting strength of the tribe. And wholesale murder is undesirable in modern society, because it is frightening never to be quite sure but that one might not be murdered oneself. As murder had to be restricted if the wandering Jews were to retain their fighting strength, it was deemed prudent to taboo all acts which might from their nature be conducive to murder. Theft, adultery, the bearing of false witness, and covetousness . . . the tabooing of these acts followed naturally on the tabooing of murder. For what is a man more likely to fight for than his possessions?—and what does he regard more particularly as his possession than his wife?

This is all very well, and in many ways the prevalent disapproval of murder has in it elements of sound common sense. The murderer is a nuisance, and must therefore be kept in check—but that he is a fool, I find it difficult to believe. We know that at least two-thirds of the murders committed in the course of a year pass undetected; and from this one may rightly deduce that two-thirds of the murderers still at large are intelligent beings, possessed of the wit to baffle a very active and always vigilant police force. But for all this, if the films wish to show us a villain they can devise no better way of establishing

worthy of the name of Griffith. The subject for this film was found in a story by Geoffrey Moss, and the film resulting therefrom was the finest thing that Griffith has yet produced. It was a film again; it was better than "Intolerance".

"Isn't Life Wonderful?" was a study of post-war Germany and of the effects of the food shortage. It has been very aptly christened "a simple story of love and potatoes". That much is true; it is a simple story of love and potatoes, but it is also something else; it is the expression of an idea, that idea being "Isn't Life Wonderful?". And, as explained by Griffith, the idea seemed to contain at least ninety per cent of truth.

The title of the film leads one to expect a sort of Betty Balfour story, in which a bright little girl brings sunshine into a slum home; a story in which amazing difficulties, in the shape of unpaid rent and unsatisfied lovers, are overcome by means of the heroine's cheerful smile; the story of how that smile, triumphing over difficulties, leads the whole family to affluence, and the heroine herself into the arms of a young and handsome millionaire. This, I admit, is what I expected. . . . It is what thousands of "fans" expected, and the absence of this "sunshine theme" must have brought disappointment to all those thousands who went to see the film because of its title, and with memories of Griffith and "Way Down East": for "Way Down East" was just such a story as the title "Isn't Life Wonderful?" would lead one to expect. The film, as it happened, was nothing of the sort. It was the story of the troubles of a family of Polish immigrants in post-war Germany. Food shortage was the pivot on which it turned; food shortage and a promising potato crop, which should have solved the difficulties of the struggling family. A story simple in the extreme, serving as an admirable background for the main idea.

"WAR!"—the first sub-title, flaring in red letters, and then the pitted view of a still smoking battlefield.

"PEACE" . . . and the long muddy road, with its line of trailing immigrants; and from then on the story developed simply and quietly around the love of Hans and Inga. The terrible privations of a famine-ridden area, and the absolute impossibility of Hans and Inga ever being able to marry, without the necessary food on which to support life. Here was no sunshine in a "Mean Street", no miraculous surmounting of difficulties crowned by a final close-up and coronet, but rather a piece of stark realism: difficulties piling upon each other, privation, hunger, and want, and the total inability of either Hans or Inga to surmount any of these overwhelming obstacles. A true picture of the life of millions of people to-day. Just gloom relieved by an occasional fine Sunday out. . . . "Before their eyes, the homeward-going sails. . . ." Hans and Inga, hand in hand by the canal bank, lost in the beatific calm of a blossoming spring evening, perfectly happy for a space in the knowledge that, for the moment, life really was wonderful. . . . Then comes Monday morning: rain, turnips, and illness, and Inga, although she has not the heart to smile, still thinks that life is wonderful.

Whether the idea that life is made wonderful by love is true or untrue, it is not my purpose to discuss. It seems to be Griffith's idea, and also it is an idea which is pretty generally accredited. The truth or falsity of this idea does nothing to impair the merit of the film. Somehow or other Griffith got hold of the idea that, given love, life really was wonderful. Round this idea he constructed a film, and a beautiful film at that.

Hans and Inga, desolate beside their empty potato wagon: the hope of a comfortable winter and a happy married life, made possible as a result of an

his villainy than by making him a murderer. So far so good—murderers, as I have said, are a nuisance—but watch the progress of the film, and you will be amazed to see this very murderer become suddenly bereft of his senses. In all probability he will leave the most obvious clue to his identity, a visiting-card or a cigarette case, in close proximity to the corpse; and so the game is over before it has really begun. "Murder will out", says a satisfied audience, happy in the supposition that the law will avenge them if at any time they happen to be murdered. A morbid satisfaction, but a very real one it seems. . . .

But let us assume that the murderer is not so obliging as to leave his name neatly tacked to his victim's collar. . . . What then? He will pass undetected, you may be tempted to say, but that's just where you're wrong—he will be detected in the last reel, if not in the last but one. It is interesting to watch this process of detection, for it takes the most peculiar form. Usually the murderer in question becomes temporarily insane, that is to say, he makes the most obvious mistakes and supports them with surprising misstatements. He blushes when confronted with a police officer, and is incapable of telling a convincing lie, when such a lie if told convincingly would prove him a perfectly good alibi. He is seldom separated from some form of intoxicant, and for the most part he is partially inebriated—and a clear head, I feel, must be essential to a criminal—and never can he keep his hands still. If there were nothing else to convince the law of his guilt, this continual and jerky movement of his fingers would be sufficient in itself to convict him even in the eyes of a village constable. There is, however, always an ample store of evidence, generally supplied by the murderer himself. Cigarette ash, finger-prints, and not infrequently a signed placard announcing the time and date of the in-

tended crime. And if, finally, in spite of his twitching fingers, and in spite of the mass of clues, the murderer is undetected in the last reel, he will be so weighed down by the heinousness of his crime, that he will make a full and free confession of his guilt. He will acknowledge that he has sinned against God and man, and that his crime must be expiated; and so he will proceed to the scaffold amidst an orgy of universal regeneration and a further strengthening of the idea that "murder will out". . . .

In "Crime and Punishment" Dostoevsky takes an over-sensitive and underfed down-and-out, makes him commit a murder, and then shows how this same down-and-out is driven, through fear of punishment, to a confession of his guilt. Raskolnikoff is a nervous type, he is not the criminal type at all, and is therefore incapable of carrying out his project. It is quite natural that after several weeks of underfeeding that he should succumb to the workings of his disordered mind, and confess his crime through fear of a worse punishment resulting from non-confession. But this is never the case with a film murderer—this person is suave to a degree, well fed and not in the least bit nervous; in all except his actions he is the perfect type of the master criminal, and of these actions even a jam-stealing child would most assuredly be ashamed.

One can only suppose that the great public lives in continual terror of being murdered. And that for this reason it needs from time to time to be reassured of the fact that criminals will always come to a sticky finish, that they are stupid when it comes to facts, and in no way a match for the police force, which is continually watching over the public safety—in short, that murder will out. There can be no other reason, that I can see, for this persistent and deliberate contradiction of facts which we all of us know to be true.

abundance of potatoes, shattered. They have been set upon by others as hungry and less scrupulous than themselves, and they have been robbed of their potatoes. . . . Hans turns to Inga and, cursing heaven, prays for death. There are tears in her eyes, and the moon is shining. . . . "Oh, Hans, you've still got me, and I've still got you. . . . Isn't life wonderful? . . . Isn't life wonderful?"

Sentimental? . . . Hardly—in view of the fact that starvation was staring them in the face. Untrue?—perhaps. For you will say that, under the circumstances, their life could hardly have been wonderful. But how nice if it could have been—an impulse on the part of Inga, an impulse soon to be dimmed in the monotony of a potatoless supper, and the chill of a fireless grate. There is no talk of happiness to come, but instead a certainty of misery—of misery blank and unrelieved. For, even with Hans, life isn't really wonderful. It is just an idea of Inga's, and an idea that one feels will not last long.

And so in the end it all works out to this: life, just life, is not wonderful. Life is cold, hungry, and generally unpleasant—but love, while it lasts, is wonderful. Whether this is the idea that Griffith had in mind, I do not know. But certainly it is the idea which the film impresses on the mind of the spectator.

XIII

It is fashionable nowadays to abuse Griffith; to say that he is old-fashioned and to dismiss him as a sentimentalist and a producer of abominable sub-titles. This last I will not attempt to deny; in the face of evidence the charge is too manifestly true. . . . "So Holden taught Montague that great hearts rise above their stations". . . . Yes, Griffith's sub-titles are decidedly bad! But to say that Griffith is old-fashioned is supremely unjust. People who make

the assertion usually support it by comparing Griffith to von Stroheim or to King Vidor. It may be of interest to note that von Stroheim was trained in the Griffith school, and that, but for Griffith, the genius that produced "Greed" would never have reached maturity. (Stroheim played the part of the Pharisee in "Intolerance".) Both von Stroheim and King Vidor have improved on the Griffith technique. They are engaged in forming a technique of their own; but the new technique, and I am sure that the new technicians will be the first to admit it, is founded on the principles evolved by Griffith. To say that, in comparison with von Stroheim, Griffith is old-fashioned, and that therefore his work is worthless, is tantamount to saying that, by comparison with his gifted pupil, Leonardo da Vinci, the work of Verrochio is old-fashioned, and therefore worthless: an assertion which no one, I hope, would dream of making.

There is as yet no reverence for the cinema; no clique of intense persons who study it, live for and in it, and make its discussion their business. This has not happened yet, but it is in the process of happening. Already in London we have the Film Society and its intensely bespectacled Sunday crowd. This Society shows all sorts of films without any sense of discrimination whatsoever. Films good, bad, and indifferent, chase each other across the screen, while the members of the society watch. They crane their necks, grind out cigarette-ends, pass remarks on the purity of the photographic art, and are generally intense. It is the nucleus, I think, of a pre-Raphaelite movement for the films. It has all the ingredients necessary for such a movement; a strong university flavour, a tinge of communism, and a great deal more than a tinge of intensity. Already this infant organisation is showing a marked tendency for a return to the primitive. At each Film

II

The modern parson in general, and the American parson in particular, pride themselves on making religion bright and interesting. They claim, among other things, that the teachings of Jesus are thoroughly up to date and as applicable in the world of business to-day as they were in Roman Judea. This is all very well, there being nothing, as far as one can see, to prevent the twentieth-century business man from selling all that he has and giving it to the poor: there is nothing in the way of such a transaction, nothing except personal scruples that is. But strange though it may seem this kind of action, expressly advocated by Jesus Himself, is hardly touched upon by His interpreters of to-day. Jesus must be alive, He is alive they say. But if Jesus were alive to-day, there might be a repetition of a certain unfortunate incident in the Temple of Jerusalem which resulted in the expulsion of the money-changers, and a few caustic words about "a den of thieves". That such a scene would occur to-day is inevitable, and its inevitability is nowhere more strongly realised than by those who wish to keep the teachings of Jesus up to date. Now all this is very difficult, for Christianity must be up to date, but at the same time it must, in virtue of its "up-to-dateness", synchronise with all the requirements of twentieth-century civilisation. Even a hasty survey will show that Christianity is in a state of direct contradiction with the canons of modern life; and the closer the scrutiny, the more insistent becomes the contradiction. "Go sell all thou hast and give unto the poor and follow me. . . ." What can one do with such obviously unbusiness-like sentiments? And there is only one thing that can be done, and that is—to explain them away. Explain away these unpractical sayings, gloss them over, remove them from their

context and, finally, present them in such a way that they might mean anything.

So it is that the young man, who had great possessions, is taken as an individual case. An individual case, mark you, and the admonition to sell, and to give to the poor, is said to apply to him only, to this one particular man, for whom, say the commentators, it would obviously have been the best thing. There are, however, a few words about a camel and the eye of a needle, and the difficulty which a "rich man" would experience in entering the Kingdom of Heaven—but these words, defying even the ablest of commentators, are, for the most part, ignored.

And so it is, that Jesus of Nazareth, an essentially vital and practical Person, is hedged around by a maze of ingeniously contrived mysticism. A mysticism that is so vague as to be wellnigh incomprehensible, and above all, indefinable. A mysticism that, in spite of its incomprehensibility, is conveniently elastic, and therefore easily adaptable to the needs of the modern business man who is troubled with a conscience. "In my Father's house are many mansions. . . ." It is on this phrase, with its comforting assurance of a heaven supplied with all conveniences and complete with class distinctions, that modern Christianity is based. Plain, straightforward sayings such as, "If a man smite thee on the one cheek, turn to him the other cheek also"; sayings, which have a perfectly clear meaning and about which there can be no doubt whatsoever, are either disregarded or explained away as being the visionary utterances of a Being who is so far above us that we can never hope to aspire to a similar state of perfection. Such things are not for us; we are not ready for them, we wretched mortals of to-day, we who claim a civilisation that is far in advance of anything that has preceded it. And so, by a long process of elimination, explanation, and diffusion, the Carpenter of Nazareth,

Society show one is regaled with two or three "curiosities", or early films. To-day these films are treated as a laughing matter, but given another fifty years and we shall see Edwin S. Porter enthroned and the intelligentsia bowing before him as once they bowed before Cimabue. Porter, Vidor, and Griffith, and the greatest of these three will be Griffith,—Griffith, the maker of "Sheriff's Baby" and "The Adventures of Dolly". King Vidor's fame will rest upon "The Jack-Knife Man", while such productions as "The Big Parade" and "Intolerance" will exhale the decadence of elaboration in the nostrils of the faithful. It may even come to pass that our own English producers will find a place among the patriarchs of film production, and that "Ypres", "Zeebrugge", etc. will be found to possess intrinsic merit as "folk films"—just the simple and unspoilt expression of a people's ideas. It is only charitable, I feel, to pray that this may come to pass. . . .

There is, perhaps, a certain truth in the charge that Griffith's methods are old-fashioned, for his methods are fundamental: without them, there would have been no film, as we know it. Griffith has, in fact, a certain old-world charm delightfully reminiscent of Mozart's unadorned melodies, and peculiarly akin to Giotto's footless figures. But if he resembles these masters in simplicity, he resembles them also in that, like them, he is a genius.

CHAPTER X

THE KOLOR FILM

I

EVER since the days when pictures first moved, there has been the desire to endow these pictures with colour. The desire was first manifested when the Kinetoscope Company manufactured a film of Anabelle the dancer in her famous serpentine dance. The fame of the said serpentine dance, which was colossal, was due largely to the fact that the ingenious Anabelle wound and unwound from about herself a series of veils; this effect being enhanced by a number of coloured lights that played upon the undulating materials. And so when finally the serpentine dance was reproduced in fifty feet of celluloid, it was found that the absence of colour detracted greatly from the charm of the picture. Anabelle without colour, be she ever so serpentine, was like a loaf of bread without yeast . . . uninteresting and heavy. If Anabelle were to have the success she deserved, and which the company moreover had planned for her, there must be some colour about somewhere. Colour there had to be—and so there was nothing for it but to colour the film picture by picture. For a film of fifty feet, this process was possible, and even practicable; but as films got longer it became increasingly difficult, and very soon quite impossible. If anything were to be done with regard to colour films, it was clear that some sort of mechanical process must be discovered. There is no evidence to show that Edison took any

who called Himself the Son of man, is known to posterity and to the film-going public as the King of Kings.

III

"The King of Kings" is the title of Mr. Cecil B. de Mille's film which presents the life of Jesus. The title itself, with its high-sounding ring, and its suggestion of more than imperial splendour, is tremendously eloquent. . . . It expresses more clearly than a library of commentary could do, the way in which modern man has remade Jesus in his own image. Obviously, if Jesus is to be alive, and if also He is to be up to date, He must be a very different being from the Jesus who was crucified in Judea. This modern Jesus must become a sort of maudlin idealist, a sayer of great unpractical things—in short, a sort of idiot, a crazy reformer, of whom people can say "That's all very well, but you can't change human nature". The immutability of human nature is the claim that is always urged against every new measure; be it Socialism, Bolshevism, Internationalism, or any of the other "isms", it is always the same. Human nature, one is told, cannot be changed. The Jesus, as represented in "Ben Hur", was just such a dreamy reformer, a sayer of great beautiful things, of things which we fondly assure ourselves are absolutely impracticable. Human nature, we know, cannot be changed. This may seem a little peculiar to the student of the Bible who will by now have recalled the words of Jesus to Nicodemus—"Except ye be born again of water and the spirit", a phrase which speaks as clearly as anything could do on Jesus' belief in the necessity, and what is more, in the possibility of a change in human nature. But this is one of those direct sayings, a saying about which there can be no two meanings, and so, along with the other direct sayings of the Gospels, it is ignored.

And so the films, reacting to the more obvious trends of present-day feeling, present us with "The King of Kings" on the one hand, and with a set of animated picture post cards strung together with a few thrills and masquerading under the name of "Ben Hur" on the other. There are two things that are especially noteworthy concerning the "religious" scenes in "Ben Hur". Firstly, that they were always colored and, secondly, that we were never vouchsafed more than a glimpse of Jesus. To say "glimpse" is to exaggerate. For the word "glimpse" implies a vision, however fleeting, of a person or a thing, of the entire person or of the whole thing—and therefore to say that in "Ben Hur" we were vouchsafed even a glimpse of Jesus is untrue. We were shown a hand, two hands, a pair of feet, a headless trunk, but Jesus Himself we were never shown. It was a gross case of unsurgical dissection—a hand, sawing wood, and what a hand! One might be pardoned for thinking that a boy brought up in a carpenter's shop in a country village would have a large brawny hand, a carpenter's hand in fact. One might be pardoned for imagining this, although, according to "Ben Hur", it was not the case. We were shown a hand, a long, slim, white hand, a hand that had never done a day's labour in the course of its existence. Long tapering fingers, curled apprehensively round the saw; they held it lightly and with a hardly simulated air of repugnance. And, equally lightly, and at the same time a great deal more inefficiently, they pulled the saw backwards and forwards. We saw the hand frequently, but we failed to notice any progress in the work of sawing—that hand was eloquent; it seemed to shout at one as clearly as though it were aided by the vitaphone, "Of course, we have known better days . . . but, all the same, we can turn our hand to anything. . . . We have come down in the world, but . . ."

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interest in colour photography, there is in fact no evidence of anyone taking any interest in colour films before 1910. Charles Urban, and an English chemist, Edward Turner, then combined, financially and intellectually, to probe the mysterious question of colour photography. Turner met his death in the ensuing year, as a result of some laboratory mishap, of the nature of which we are ignorant; thus leaving Urban to find another partner in the now definitely alarming search for colour photography.

Urban found in Albert Smith, an English photographer, the necessary partner, and between them, in less than five years, they found a working solution of the colour problem. This new-found process, be it noted, was christened KINEMA KOLOR: it was the beginning of that cult of hyper-phoneticism, destined from then on to denote all processes connected with colour photography.

II

Kinema Kolor flickered its way along (mostly in lengths of fifty feet); it flickered its way across the Atlantic, where it was looked upon with marked distrust, and so was compelled to "flicker back again". "The picture business was going well enough", said the film kings. "So well was it going", they said, "that most certainly it would be rash to experiment with anything in the line of colour. Later on, when the industry wanted stimulating . . . then perhaps!" So Urban returned to England with his process still intact.

It was of course inevitable that colour, or Kolor, should come: and it is equally inevitable that it will have to go. The sooner it goes the better; and if only the film kings approached by Urban had been a little more speculatively inclined, it would in all probability have been dead to-day. This kolorisation of

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films is like a disease; some films get it badly, while others are afflicted with periodic outbreaks; and, like a disease, it is infectious. Each year we see more and more films developing the rash of partial kolorisation; but there is nothing for it now but to let the disease run its course, it has got hold, and it is beyond the power now even of the most skilful physician to stay its ravages. And all this might have been avoided if we had been subjected to a thorough dose of inoculation a few years back; if only the film kings hadn't been such damned good business men!

III

Kinema Kolor followed just the same path as its ancestor the vitascope; it was spared the confinement of the kinetoscope, only to plunge even deeper than its parent into the whirl and sway of vaudeville and novelty. The idea of moving pictures was still novel in 1909, and as for pictures that moved in colour, the idea was so new as to be almost unheard of. Kinema Kolor had all the attributes of a first-rate vaudeville turn; it was sensational, compelling, and, above all, it was brief. It is the same to-day, except that its appearance can no longer be called brief.

Urban's film of the Delhi Durbar succeeded partly on account of the novelty of the Kolor process, and partly on account of its subject. Subsequent Kolor films have been patronised because the idea is still new enough to attract attention, and because even techni-kolor cannot dim the genius of a Fairbanks. And yet people, producers and exhibitors, are still groping after some form of Kinema Kolor—one wonders why? The techni-kolor process is, I am told, extremely complicated and extremely costly, and the results, as anyone can see, are childish. But in spite of the expense, and despite the complications, they continue to grope, and their groping takes the

In this small incident of the hand in "Ben Hur" we have the quintessence of what the films think of Christianity. It is, to begin with, something essentially nebulous, so nebulous and so utterly unreal that it is impossible to present a complete picture of Jesus. But it is not so nebulous as to be altogether ignored. It must be noticed, and, at the same time, it must be befogged. Jesus must be a dreamer, an unpractical dreamer, a sort of pre-incarnation of the visionary of "The Four Horsemen". He must dream, but He must not work, for is He not the King of Kings? But here a difficulty presents itself: in the Gospels it is clearly indicated that Jesus (the King of Kings) was apprenticed to a carpenter for ten years of his life. The King of Kings a carpenter?—Apparently so. If, then, He is to be a carpenter, He must be an inefficient carpenter. A carpenter who dreamed unpractical dreams as He cut His wood against the grain, a carpenter who was making the best of a bad job, and compelling His customers to do likewise. And that is exactly what "Ben Hur", with its cringing white hand, set out to show us. The Jesus of "Ben Hur" suggested a bloodless Individual, an Individual who could no more set the world aflame with His teaching than could a tadpole. But this was what was wanted, for there are certain tenets of Christianity which are quite definitely bad business—the very idea of giving all that he has to the poor is abhorrent to the business man, and therefore to the American. But Americans are professedly and aggressively Christian, and for this reason it is found necessary to reconcile in some measure the conflicting ideas of big business and Christianity—and so the "Ben Hur way" has been adopted. On the whole it is not a bad way, and is one that will stand anything but a close scrutiny. It satisfies the hurried glance of the millionaire who steals a few moments at the cinema: it more than satisfies the public (for

these films are box-office successes), and, apparently, it satisfies the Church. It satisfies so many people, and that, in a world where satisfaction other than of a sensual sort is so rare that one is compelled, though reluctantly, to admit that it is perhaps "all for the best".

IV

Of "The King of Kings", Hollywood's most recent attempt at cellularising religion, there is little more to say. Certain scenes with what Mr. de Mille has been pleased to call a strong physical flavour, such as the scourging in the temple, have had to be rearranged so as to fit in with the idea of Jesus the unpractical dreamer. This much was of course to be expected, and, had there been nothing more, we could have condoned this accepted fallacy on account of the really beautiful photography which the film showed us. But "this", unfortunately, was not all. We were prepared to see a diffusion of what Jesus really stood for resulting in a sort of non-committal statement that could be taken to mean almost anything. This we were prepared for; this we found, but we were not prepared to see the story of Jesus interpreted in the terms of a triangle sex drama. . . . This was more than we had expected. Judas Iscariot as Mary Magdalen's lover, and Mary Magdalen as romantically attracted to Jesus. By means of this simple device, the "greatest story in the world" is made the most commonplace. On the ramifications of this semi-religious triangle it is unnecessary to enlarge. Anyone with even the slightest knowledge of the Gospels will see that in this way the betrayal has been accounted for on thoroughly sound and sexual grounds. And while on the subject of Mary Magdalen, "out of whom went seven devils", one cannot help wondering why film producers and romancers in general have conspired to cloak her in a veil of

form of a garish rash which now disfigures nine out of ten "super-films". For always when Kolor, or even colour, is applied in patches the sequence is ruined; think of "Ben Hur", "Michael Strogoff", "The Fire Brigade", the "Sea Beast", "The Black Pirate", and others. "The Black Pirate" was colored throughout; it was at least consistent in its garishness, and consistency even in vulgarity is not wholly without merit. But of the other films mentioned the gross footage was uncolored, and for this reason the small remainder that was colored stood out in such appalling and shattering contrast. There was nothing that was terribly wrong about any of these films; they were of course bad films, but once that fact was admitted, and they were judged accordingly, they became, by comparison with other and much worse films, almost good. They proceeded along their conventional way, and as conventional films afforded a certain amount of very conventional thrill, when without any sort of warning, and for no apparent reason, they burst into Kolor, returned again to amber or orange, to gather strength, one presumes, for a final, kolorific eruption. This habit of partial kolorisation is so obviously a survival of the process's vaudeville connection, that it is needless to discuss it further. It afflicts us because Kolor is still (1927) a novelty, and it cannot for that reason, I think, afflict us for very much longer. The completely colored film is, however, a different matter; it seems to have taken hold, and so seems to have a right to be discussed.

But before passing to a consideration of the Kolor film, it must be clearly understood that the practice of dyeing strips of film red, green, blue, orange, or amber; is of an entirely different nature, and cannot, therefore, be confused with techni-kolor or any other sort of Kolor. This use of colour as opposed to Kolor will be discussed, as befits it, in a different section.

IV

We are all of us used to seeing coloured paintings; the word painting, in itself, implies colour in some form. And, furthermore, there is a large consensus of opinion that regards coloured paintings as superior to etchings or to any other form of two-dimensional reproduction. Far from being offensive, a coloured picture is definitely pleasant; it is also two-dimensional, and therefore similar in essential to the film. Why then, if coloured pictures present something that is decidedly pleasing to the intellect, should coloured films, which are also two-dimensional, be so decidedly offensive? A picture which is two-dimensional and coloured is also *still*, whereas a film which, in spite of being two-dimensional, is endowed with motion, and colour and motion, if combined, must unite through the medium of a three-dimensional form, such as the ballet. In the ballet we have colour and motion uniting through a three-dimensional medium: in the kolor film we have colour and motion obstructing each other for the lack of a third dimension in which the two can meet and work together. Should three-dimensional projection ever be achieved, then will be the time for the kolor film: then and not before. Three-dimensional projection, when it comes, will bring with it the illusion of depth. It will enable us to look at a film, and to feel that we are witnessing the performance of a play. This may sound odd, but it is what will none the less come to pass. For three-dimensional projection, when it is achieved, will be a rival to the stage and not to the cinema.

To realise how essentially two-dimensional a thing the film is, we have only to visualise for a moment a three-dimensional close-up. Just think of it . . . a vast head, or even a still vaster eye, endowed with all the properties of light, shade, and

"superfluous" magnificence? All we are told about Mary Magdalen is that out of her went seven devils. There were seven devils in Mary Magdalen, and they went out of her; that is all we know definitely. From the sevenfold nature of the outgoing devils we assume, rightly or wrongly, that Mary Magdalen was a repentant harlot. That much is permissible for, although there is no direct evidence, there is just sufficient suggestion to corroborate this assumption on our part. But, on this slender thread of evidence, has been erected a palace of spangled lies. Mary has been endowed with a glittering past of sin. From the reality of an unsuccessful harlot, she has developed into the shade of a prosperous courtesan. In "The King of Kings" she appears in a marble palace, complete with baths and zebras. She has slaves and chariots, and among other things a pet leopard, and, of course, a liberal supply of wealthy lovers. She is a sort of Judean Guinevere, a woman witty, attractive, and successful, who abandons her sin and exchanges her leopard for a donkey at the call of Jesus. Without stating that all this is absolutely false (for we know nothing of Mary Magdalen before she met Jesus), I would like to point out that even if there is no evidence to disprove this state of pre-repentant magnificence, the facts actually in our possession indicate a very different state of affairs. The fact that Mary Magdalen made such a sudden change from a life of harlotry to a life of virtue would lead one to think that her harlot's career was not exactly successful. And the fact that she came into contact with Jesus at all very definitely proclaims that she was not a great lady or a courtesan of the Thaïs variety. Our knowledge of Jesus is drawn entirely from the Gospels, and in the Gospels we see Him moving among "publicans and sinners", and we have no evidence whatsoever that He came in contact at any time with the class from which the glittering Mary

Magdalen of fiction must of necessity have been drawn. "The King of Kings" is, however, Cecil B. de Mille's film (a fact which is in itself eloquent to all students of the cinema). "The King of Kings" boasts of two of the largest sets that have ever been built for the films: one the Judgement Hall of Pilate, and the other the temple of Herod, and for that reason it must present us with a vision of the most dazzling and the most voluptuous Mary Magdalen that has ever been seen.

It is all part of the new game, part of the game that diffuses the teaching of Jesus to make it compatible to twentieth-century business. The game that magnifies Pilate's provincial law court into a mammoth "Palais de Justice". It is a new game, and it is a satisfactory game, but, above all, it is a game; and, provided only that we remember that all this is a game, it is not unlikely that we shall derive from watching it no small amount of amusement.

depth, which we associate with a real head or with a genuine eye. Heads as we know them may vary in size, but for all that this variation is only a matter of inches, and heads are still heads even if the wearer takes size nine in hats. But think of size nine hundred and nine, for there is no limit set to the close-upped head, and think of it then in three dimensions . . . too obviously preposterous. We have seen that the close-up is necessary to the films, and we have seen also that it gives no offence to anyone except to the most pedantic. A close-up is a necessary part of a film; the idea of a film without close-ups is unthinkable, but even more unthinkable is the idea of a film that bristles with three-dimensional close-ups! Size nine hundred and ninety-nine winking at us from the screen! Size nine hundred and ninety-nine, and as real as anything we have ever imagined . . . large, solid, deep . . . again I am forced to conclude that the idea is preposterous!

The idea even of occasional three-dimensional close-ups is, as we have seen, unthinkably horrible. But we have seen also that the close-up is essential to the film, and we are by now, I hope, convinced that the film, because it demands frequent use of close-up, is, in consequence, essentially two-dimensional. Besides being two-dimensional it is endowed with motion, and for this reason it cannot with propriety make use of colours. This, however, does not mean that there is no use for colour photography. Colour photography will be very useful; it will in fact be essential, if three-dimensional projection is to have any sort of *raison d'être*. Three-dimensional projection will then be coloured. Its products will be devoid of close-ups, and as in all probability it will be vocal as well as being three-dimensional, I think that it must be clear to everyone that it can have nothing not even the most superficial connection with the films. It will be a rival to the stage, and not to the cinema.

But three-dimensional projection is at least fifty years ahead, and so anything that is said about its career, and its ultimate contribution to the world of art, can only be of a conjectural nature. Whether it will be steam, silken threads, or some hitherto unthought-of medium that will bring about the realisation of what is at present a dream, we do not know. We only know that sooner or later it will come, a knowledge which gives us a right to assume that this new thing, when it comes, will talk, and a positive assurance that it will be coloured. For motion in three dimensions must be joined by colour, just as surely as two-dimensional motion must eschew it.

The three-dimensional cinema (for lack of a better name, I must call it a cinema) which moves and talks in colour and in three dimensions, will almost surely kill the touring theatrical company. And there is also quite a good chance that it will succeed in bringing the very best of drama before millions and millions of human beings. For, with the best will in the world, the stage star finds it impossible to be in two places at once. The thing just can't be done—and owing to this distressing inability to split, like two aces in pontoon, the stage star finds himself fixed in one place. This being the case, it is not to be wondered at that the place of fixture should coincide with the place where the most money can be obtained. Generally speaking, the most profitable hunting-ground for the star is the national metropolis, or métropole; the town or towns in which there is a sufficiently large monied population to fill the boxes and more expensive seats. There are but few of these wealthy towns in each country, and through them the star circulates and recirculates, and nearly always ends up as a permanent fixture in the capital city. And the other towns . . . for there are lots of them, and they are all as thickly populated as their more favoured compeers . . . are relegated to the

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WE have seen Edison's first gropings after a something which should act as a companion-piece to his newly invented phonograph, and we have seen how, from out these early strivings, came the kinetoscope of the 'nineties. From kinetoscope to vitascope, "The Great Train Robbery", "The Birth of a Nation", "Caligari", and "Potemkin", and, finally, to the arrival of the vitaphone, we have followed the life of the film from its original inception up to its present state of boisterous youth. And now that we see the film of to-day bursting with vitality, and perched on a giddy pinnacle of popularity, with what reflections do the doings of this noisy schoolboy inspire us? For, at the risk of being tedious, I must repeat the outworn phrase, "the films are still in their infancy". I repeat this phrase because it states a fact that is only too likely to be forgotten by audiences of to-day. Those who have been film "fans" for the last ten years even, have witnessed such tremendous changes in the film itself that it is hardly to be wondered at if they, or we, should say—here at last is the ultimate development! The thing for which we have been waiting—the films have grown up; they have arrived.

From "The Great Train Robbery" to "Potemkin", in the course of one generation, represents a stride requiring the use of seven-league boots: the films have donned these seven-league boots, they have made this stride, and for this reason we are tempted

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to say that they have "arrived", whereas, in reality, they have only just cast off their swaddling-clothes.

In less than thirty years the films have passed from babyhood to boyhood, and continuing at this rate it is not unlikely that another sixty years will see them in the fullness of radiant youth and energy, and after that, perhaps a hundred years, and they will have attained manhood. . . . And here my metaphor comes to an abrupt conclusion, for the life of a man, although similar in many respects to the life of an art, in that they both pass from childhood to adolescence, and from adolescence to maturity, differ in this essential—a man attains a zenith, and then, like the sun in heaven, begins to sink—imperceptibly at first, but surely, he declines. Man soars gloriously into the sky, and falls no less gloriously towards the earth from which he came. Sometimes clouds will obscure his homeward passage, and sometimes mists and storms gathering shroud-like around him will hide the glory of the sunset brilliance. Often this is so, but as often—

*Comme un dernier rayon, comme un dernier zéphyr
Eclairant le fin d'une belle journée.*

The glory that was at the zenith will disperse the enveloping clouds and will transfigure the sky, and the air itself with a splendour reminiscent of its noon-day brilliance, before it, too, fades and the darkness envelops it.

But art knows no zenith, and can attain no empyrean. Upwards it soars into the sky, brightly and more brightly its beams fall upon us, until we avert our poor dazzled eyes and cry out that this is enough, that this is the pinnacle after which we have been striving, the supreme height of human achievement. And then, out of consideration for our poor mortal senses, it may seem to halt in its sunward course, and for a moment its brilliance will be dimmed by a

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eternal jangle and click of the music hall and the cinema at its worst. And even if a play does come to one of these thickly populated industrial towns, it is, in nine cases out of ten, in the hands of an incompetent company made up of actors and actresses who are not good enough for the metropolis. And this is all that two-thirds of the world has in the way of drama. This of course may be all for the best in the best of commercial worlds, for undoubtedly if the drama were to show its face in one of the strongholds of the music hall or cinema, it would pass unnoticed, and consequently unremunerated. It would pass unnoticed because it would be unknown to the extent that it would be supposedly dull. It would be unknown without being novel in any way. But three-dimensional projection—talking films, coloured films, films that were like life—it would be the kinoscope and the vitascope all over again. All the playhouses in the world would be insufficient to accommodate those desirous of seeing the new wonder.

We have already seen the sad fate of the vitascope, which has degenerated into the film as it is to-day, and, in view of the foregoing melancholy survey, it is, I suppose, too much to hope that the three-dimensional projector should follow any other course. . . . I am, however, an incurable optimist, and for that reason cannot help thinking that something better may transpire. For it is just possible that the new invention, when it materialises, should fall into competent hands, and if that happens, it is not impossible that it would achieve something that would be of real service to the world at large. With a man or a woman of intelligence at the helm, it is not impossible to suppose that, by the time the three-dimensional projector has exhausted its lure of novelty, it will lure because it presents something good—something that is not to be found in the music hall or yet in the provincial cinema—that people will become

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attached to the three-dimensional projector, is beyond a doubt: it is on the reason for this attachment that the future of the unborn invention will turn.

V

The prospects of the three-dimensional projection are, however, distant, and the desirability of such an attainment questionable. The perfection of three-dimensional projection would afford a *raison d'être* for the kolor film; it might achieve other things, and again it might not, but without it the kolor film is doomed. Unless something in the line of a third or even a fourth dimension happens to help the kolor film, it will very soon become a novelty that has lost its flavour. The reasons for this we have already examined. It is not that the Kolor is remarkably bad, for quite often, as far as colour is concerned, the Kolor is good! This fact is most apparent in close-ups, and in long shots of a soothing and restful nature. In "Ben Hur" there was a scene representing some women washing by a well; the scene as it dealt remotely with Jesus was, of course, "techni-kolored" (and the colours were good). It was a quiet scene with little action and many sub-titles, and for both these reasons it was by no means unpleasant to watch. The combination of green and red, though by no means original, was certainly pleasing, and as the shot comprised no motion to speak of, one was able to regard it as a moderately well composed and quite competently coloured picture. There were in "Ben Hur" other kolored sequences, one of which showed Ramon Navarro being borne in triumph through Rome. There was a superfluity of falling rose petals and a perpetually moving crowd. The effect was as of an animated picture post card. The Kolors in this sequence were no better and no worse than those in the one before described, and the only

passing cloud. But this is a matter of moments, hundreds of years perhaps for us, centuries of twilight during which we may lament the darkness, as bitterly as we decried the blinding light of the starry progress. Then comes a roll of thunder, the clouds are riven with a lightning flash—and once more the world is bathed in radiance, but this radiance is no sunset light, no soft illumination of decline; it is the full glory of the noonday, only it is brighter than it was before. It is as though this star of our imagining had been gathering light and energy from out the very clouds that encircled it, so that when it shines again calm and glorious, it has all its pristine brightness, all the glory accumulated in ages of struggle; all that it has, and more also. . . . And so it climbs—sometimes swiftly, sometimes slowly and painfully, so that it seems hardly to move at all. But always it is climbing, soaring towards an empyrean so immense and so immeasurably distant that to us watchers on the earth it may well seem unattainable. . . .

Living in ignorance of the very nature of that empyrean to which all art is progressing, it is impossible to forecast, with any hope of accuracy, what will be the future of art in general and of the films in particular. The films are still so new, and we still know so little about them—but the films are universal, that much we know. They can appeal to the savage and to the civilised man alike: unlike literature and drama, they are not confined within the bounds of language. The language of the films is vision, and vision is universal. And for this reason I do not think that it is unduly optimistic to forecast for the films a career of good. Even in incompetent hands the films will do good. They cannot, by reason of the universal nature of their appeal, fail to do so. Even the very worst of films, the sort of films of which the story is hypocritically sexual and the

production non-existent, always show something that is beautiful. It may be a piece of country, a woman, or, perhaps, just a dress—the form is immaterial; it is the fact that something beautiful is shown that matters. And consider then these bad films (for there are many of them). Where are they shown, but in the smaller cinemas, in slums, and in isolated rural districts where the inhabitants, worn out after a day's work, are incapable of appreciating the subtle beauties of a wet street in the lamplight, or of the darkness creeping over a country landscape. Both these things are beautiful, but they are not obvious. They are not of the style that is calculated to appeal to the tired docker or to the exhausted farm-labourer: they must be looked for, for they do not obtrude themselves. And where is the labourer who would have the energy, let alone the desire, to seek out beauty in the streets of his slum, or in the countryside through which he must plod on his homeward way? And so it is that the beauties all around us pass unheeded by the majority, because that majority is too tired to look for them. The majority of people, then, pass their lives in a grey darkness, as devoid of ugliness as it is empty of beauty. They just live because they are alive; they drink, because in drink they find forgetfulness, and for the same reason they have children. And those who neither drink nor have children, eke out a mediocre existence enlivened by an occasional visit to a music-hall—such, then, is the life of two-thirds of the people of this world. Denizens of the suburbs, agricultural labourers from Devonshire to Manchuria, slum-dwellers in London and in Bombay, all living because they happen to find themselves alive, and all and every one of them completely unaware of the fact that there is such a thing as beauty in the world.

To these people, the films, and especially the bad films, appear as a godsend. To begin with, the films

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reason why one was pleasant to watch and the other merely ludicrous, was that one was static and the other dynamic. Another instance of the Kolor film becoming a still picture and hence bearable, is shown in "The Merry Widow". Towards the end of the film there is a long shot of the cathedral during the coronation service. It is a very long shot, and there is no motion apparent; the composition is excellent, and the result pleasing. There is an instance of the same thing in "Michael Strogoff", and the same, it will be found, occurs in nearly all colored, or partially colored films. But always when the Kolor presents a maximum of merit, there will be a minimum of motion.

The once popular conception of coloured statuary presents a striking parallel to the idea of colored films. Both ideas are equally preposterous. For just as surely as motion and colour or even Kolor must be joined by a third dimension, so a three-dimensional creation, if coloured, must be endowed with motion. Even if the Athenians did go so far as to paint the Parthenon frieze, and there is I believe considerable evidence to show that they did, let us by way of consolation picture to ourselves Rodin's *Penseur* carried out in "Natural colours"!

VI

There is a trick, and it is not infrequently used by American producers, which consists of coloring a PART only of a picture. It is a dangerous trick, and one that should be used carefully, and then only in cases of dire necessity. It fails as often as it succeeds, but at times it definitely does succeed, and that on its own merit, which is more than Kinema Kolor has ever done. Kinema Kolor "comes off" in spite of itself, and partial kolorisation, when it does come off, does so because of itself! The "Big Parade"

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furnishes an instance of extremely successful use of partial kolorisation. It is after the battle, and following on a title which reads "Another Big Parade". A good title, but one that is somewhat vague in its meaning—for it might signify another advance just as well as a parade of ambulance cars. There was a close-up of a wheel churning up the mud; and a few feet above the wheel was a flaming red cross. In this instance partial kolorisation served its purpose: it established beyond a doubt, and without need of further comment, the nature of the ensuing sequence.

In "The Merry Widow", the hero presents the said widow with a bunch of roses. True it is a very large bunch of roses, but for all that, no one outside Hollywood would have had any desire to see it in Kolors, on account of its size merely. In this case partial kolorisation was as unsuccessful as it could have been; it was just a jar, in an otherwise wholly amusing sequence.

VII

In view of everything we have seen, and with the prospect of what is still to come, looming large before us, all producers would be well advised to leave Kinema Kolor, Techni-Kolor, or any other sort of Kolor, strictly alone.

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are cheap, and, above all, they are easy to follow. They need not be followed at all; they need only to be watched. From the recesses of a moderately comfortable chair the physically exhausted labourer can smoke his pipe and watch—and as he watches, things hitherto undreamed of will pass before his eyes. Great open spaces of country, flecked with racing shadows, horses, and men riding; streets that are broad and clean, tall houses and spacious rooms, beautiful women and lovely clothes; and as the cinema houses are comfortable, as they are warm, and as the films themselves are so pleasant, the labourer will return again and again. Evening after evening he will dream away in a state of semi-conscious warmth, and evening after evening he will see beautiful things passing before his eyes. To begin with, he will notice these things as being different, just things different from the everyday routine, and therefore things attractive. And after a generation or so of cinema-going, will arise the desire to implant some of these "things different" into his own life. It will be a vague desire, and one that will only be dimly comprehended, and to begin with it will almost surely take the form of active discontent. "Large rooms and beautiful women exist in the world," he will say. "Why haven't I got them?" and later, "I want them". And later still he will reach out his hand, and he will take them. He will take the beauties of the world for his own. He will compel those who have hitherto monopolised them to relinquish him his share. It will be a revolution, but, as distinct from all revolutions that have preceded it, it will be a revolution to attain beauty and not money or power.

When the day comes when every man and woman is at last conscious of the beauties of this world, and is acutely desirous of being in a position to possess that beauty which is the common property of all of

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us, then, and then only, shall we be ready for that great change which must come. Only a universal desire for beauty; a widespread hatred of the sordidness and dirt of slums and of leaking cottages; a realisation on the part of mankind that all these things are ugly, and therefore insufferable—a universal hatred of the ugly, followed by a universal desire for the beautiful: it is such a state of mind that alone can change the injustices of our present social system and readjust our outworn codes of values, and such a state of mind only the films have the power to create.

LUNDY ISLAND, *March-November 1927.*

THE END

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CHAPTER XI

VON STROHEIM IN GENERAL, AND "GREED"
IN PARTICULAR

I

THERE are many people who say that it is a misfortune, nay even a calamity, that eleven out of the twenty-two reels which comprised "Greed" should have been destroyed; I cannot, however, bring my ideas into accordance with this school of thought. For "Greed", existing as it now does, in eleven reels, is so nearly a perfect film, that I cannot but think that the addition of another eleven reels would have sadly impaired its merit. There is a limit to human endurance, and as far as "Greed" is concerned, that limit is set by eleven reels. Twenty-two reels would have been more than any human being could have borne . . . twenty-two reels is too much for any film—twenty reels of "Dr. Mabuse" was in excess of what was necessary, and twenty-two reels, even with Stroheim at the helm, would have been too many by eleven. And so really, for once, it is not to be regretted that the commercial shrewdness of the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation had its way, and that one-half of "Greed" was relegated to the cellar and to the incinerator. I am, of course, speaking from an entirely prejudiced standpoint; for I saw "Greed" at 9 A.M. on a November morning in New York city. I emerged from the projecting-room at somewhere around eleven-thirty, and wondered vaguely whether I was still alive! I narrowly escaped destruction under the wheels of a passing "street

car", and lit a cigarette, cork tipped, at the wrong end—to such a state of mental and physical inertia was I reduced. But then it had begun at 9 A.M., and it was the hour that was no doubt largely responsible for the state of nervous prostration in which I found myself. Had it started at four o'clock in the afternoon, or better still at nine in the evening, I could no doubt have viewed the prospect of another eleven reels with equanimity. This might have been the case at 11 P.M., but at 11 A.M., after a hurried and insufficient breakfast, it was nothing of the sort! Eleven more reels . . . the idea was positively frightful! Mentally I quailed, and only recovered my self-possession on being told that the remaining eleven reels were no longer projectable. First impressions are unfortunately (and sometimes fortunately) strong impressions, and their effects are lasting—and so I fear that I shall always applaud the action which curtailed von Stroheim's masterpiece by half. . . .

II

There was, it is true, some sort of story that ran through the eleven sombre reels of "Greed"; it was a very grim story, and one that was depressing in the extreme. It was, however, not the story presented by "Greed" that counted, but the idea which that story set forth.

It was the Director's idea to demonstrate the full horror of a human being's absorbing passion for gold—to show how it reacted upon the said being, and how it affected those with whom it came in contact. The effect in this case was a double murder, and an agonising death from thirst and exposure. Now no one, not even von Stroheim himself, is under the delusion that greed for money, one of the fundamental traits of human character, will always lead to murder and misery. For the economic determination

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of mankind, although responsible for a large proportion of the world's misery, is also the cause of a small quantity of good. What, for instance, would be the fate of our hospitals were it not for the assistance of the competent financier? And who would assist the impoverished genius, were it not for the notoriety-mongering business man? There is something of good even in greed, although in most cases the good operates through indirect channels. But there is more good in not being greedy; or, to be less negative in assertion, there is virtue in being generous.

It was this idea that "Greed" set out to demonstrate; namely, that there was virtue in being generous, and that this virtue was superior to the purely negative quality of not being greedy.

"Greed" was one of the most sordid things that it has ever been my lot to witness. It was depressing in the extreme, and about as miserable as anything possibly could be. It has been criticised on these grounds, and has been condemned by some as being subversive to religion and to morality. And yet "Greed" was one of the most moral films that have ever been made. It set out to portray what is known as the "seamy side of life", and the fact that it did what it set out to do so amazingly well, was, I suppose, sufficient to make public-minded men and women dub it immoral and subversive. All through its eleven drab reels there was not one ray of hope, not one bright patch or cheerful incident; it was stark squalor beginning in the depths of middle-class respectability, and ending in cold and unromantic crime. It was true to life, and it frightened people . . . here was no heroine smiling through her troubles, no sinuous vamp to display satin and seduction, no Don Juan-like hero whitewashed with sentimental Christianity. There were no extenuating circumstances even, no chance for the audience to say

"... the poor dear! It's not her fault really! (or his), she or he could not help it. . . ." There was no chance for any of this. The heroine was an ordinary middle-class woman, just like any of the thousand that abound in the great cities to-day. She had a passion for saving, soon to develop into a passion for money as opposed to the uses to which money can be put. Through the indulgence of this passion she drove her husband to murder her, and ruined what might otherwise have been a humdrum respectable bourgeois life. The film showed more clearly than anything else has ever done that gold is a positive danger to humanity. It showed, also, the universal dependency of humanity upon this ogre, and the results of this same dependence when once it is allowed to get the upper hand in any person—male or female. Money—the film demonstrated very clearly—is in itself worthless. Small wonder then that "Greed" was not appreciated in America. Money, it went on to say, is that on which we are all dependent for a means of livelihood; to procure for its owners a sufficient quantity, and, if possible, a surplus of everyday commodities, is the very important function of money. Had McTeague been allowed the use of his wife's hoarded gold, things would have been very different. Certainly they would have been far from perfect even then, but at least they would not have been so bad. There would have been no murder, but in its place the prospect of a rising standard of comfort as both McTeague and his wife spent and earned more money. This might have happened had the hoarded gold been disgorged . . . but it was not disgorged, and filthy rooms, unwashed dishes, beds unmade at three in the afternoon, and sordid drudgery for both husband and wife resulted therefrom. A little judicious spending, and all this might have been averted—that was the lesson of "Greed".

Those who condemn "Greed" as sordid, subversive, and immoral, do so without any justification whatsoever. They condemn the film because it shows a wretched family living in misery and squalor. They dub it immoral because a man is shown murdering his wife, and return to their homes in a state of satisfied indignation, without having reflected on the reasons for those very happenings which have so disgusted them. A little inquiry, and infinitesimal amount of perception, is all that is necessary to make the whole thing luminous, and even moral, if you will. Let those who condemn "Greed" consider for a moment the meaning of the word itself, and having done that, I cannot believe that anyone will be so dense as to say that "Greed" is subversive to any standard of morality past or present.

"Greed" was too true to life; it displayed the sentiments of too many people, with too accurate a knowledge of the prompting motives, and for that reason it was not liked. For we are all three parts greedy. The trait of greed is so strong in us that when we see the ends to which this trait may lead us, we become hysterical. We whine and we weep, and try vainly to assure ourselves that with us at least, it is different. "WE", we assure ourselves, "would never behave like that"; but in spite of these reiterated assertions, there is at the back of our minds the haunting fear, that perhaps we might—the idea even, that WE might behave as did the characters in "Greed" is terrifying. We must therefore do something to lay this growing hydra, something that will strengthen our assurance in our own powers, and so redeem our self-respect—there is only one thing that we can do, and without a blush we do it. . . .

A genius, as far as technique is concerned, von Stroheim is at least a century behindhand as far as his ideas are concerned. His moralising in "Greed",

in "The Merry-Go-Round" and in "Foolish Wives", is, to say the least of it, mid-Victorian.

"Greed" was the manifestation of a colossal truth; it was so true as to be almost platitudinous in its blatant obviousness. The idea of taking two hours of time to tell people that money lust is a bad thing . . . what is it but Victorian? This sort of treatment is reminiscent of those grand old days at the Lyceum, when our hearts were stirred with a few simple words concerning the respective merits of kind hearts and coronets. When we quailed to hear that hell knew no fury like a woman scorned, and thrilled in response to the lofty sentiment that a man's best friend was his mother . . . the greater part of these sayings is true: two of them are wholly true. They are, in fact, so true that any insistence upon their veracity becomes at once platitudinous.

He who doth his money hoard,
Knows not the love of Christ the Lord.
He who doth it wisely spend,
Knows that all right well will end.

There we have the moral of "Greed". True . . . ? It is obvious to anyone! But what about Christ the Lord, you will say? That, of course, is only put in so as to rhyme with hoard. Quite! And furthermore, this simple and obvious truth is insisted on throughout the course of eleven reels, in the very best Victorian manner. And yet "Greed" is a great film; one of the greatest films which have ever been; which only goes to show how much you can do with a platitude if only you do it properly! It was because "Greed" was not framed in any tawdry silver-gilt jingle of rhymes dealing with hoard and Christ the Lord, that it became a work of art. Truth in some form or another is the essential element of a work of art, and the truer the truth, so proportionately, the

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greater the work of art. There is a great deal of truth in the statement that . . .

Kind hearts are more than coronets,
And simple faith than Norman blood,

and yet no one, I think, would think of asserting that the above-mentioned couplet is a work of art. Everything that it says about hearts and coronets is absolutely true, and it is only because it is said so crudely that we smile on hearing it. Our sense of humour is indeed tickled by the setting, but the idea remains as fundamentally true for all that, and if only someone would express it properly, it would become at once a work of art. "*L'homme est né libre, et partout il se trouve en fers . . . !*" That is the right way of saying it, and this the wrong way—

I am as free as nature first made man,
Ere the base laws of servitude began,
When wild in woods the noble savage ran!

The sentiment is the same in both these instances, and the only reason why one "comes off" and the other becomes comic, is because Rousseau did his job properly, while Dryden did not!

"Greed" was handled in the grand manner, in the Rousseau manner, in the von Stroheim, and as a result of such competent treatment it developed into a work of art. It stands to-day on a par with Rousseau's monumental statement, as a supreme example of what can be done with a platitude, provided only that is done properly. I have no doubt that Stroheim could produce an equally affecting film on the subject of the respective worths of hearts and coronets—the truth is there and awaiting only the proper treatment.

The Victorians had an hitherto unrivalled ability for getting at truths; von Stroheim is possessed of just this ability. But unlike the Victorians he is possessed also of the ability to use a truth when once

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it has been acquired. His Victorianism is typified in his insistence on truths, and apotheosised in the knowledge of how the said truths should, after their acquisition, be employed. In short, he is a great artist.

III

Of the story of "Greed" there is very little to say: we have examined the main idea and have seen it for what it is worth, namely, a platitude, something which we all knew only too well before we had ever seen or heard of "Greed". It remains therefore to study the production, or the brain which made possible the presentation of this nursery proverb, in terms of such startling reality.

"Greed" was above all realistic: from start to finish it was a reproduction of just such a life as just such characters would have lived under just such circumstances. The dingy rooms with their heavy gilt picture-frames, the unwashed dishes weltering in a dust of tea-leaves—even to the cracked sands of the death valley, it was absolutely and exactly as things would have been under the circumstances portrayed. The wallpaper, the chair coverings, the food and the knives and forks with which it was eaten, the dresses, and the automatic piano—all correct to the veriest detail. This degree of accuracy in reproduction, so essential to the theme of "Greed" could not have been achieved except by means of the camera. An accurate presentation the stage could have given us, but dirty dishes and unmade beds it could not have achieved. It may seem that things such as dirty dishes can have had but small significance as compared to the main idea. Actually this is true; the dirty dishes were in themselves a trifle, but they were so arranged that their appearance served to intensify the squalor of the room in which they appeared, without attracting undue attention to

themselves. Like the fourth harp in an orchestra, their presence was by no means as remarkable as their absence would have been.

It is at once the advantage and the shibboleth of the film, that it is possessed with the power of ninety per cent at least of perfect reproduction. The camera has the power of producing a thing or things as they are down to the last particle of dust but one. This the camera can and does achieve: and at times it reproduces with a minuteness of detail that becomes positively wearisome. Now quite definitely, to reproduce a thing, things, person or persons, down to the last stitch on the sole of a new boot, is not the function of art. This of course is just what the camera is so well suited to achieve. So obvious is this, its phonographic, or canning potentiality, that for some time it blinded all those who came in contact with it. Here they thought was a visual phonograph; and they were right; but "here" was also something else—here was something which possessed all the powers of a phonograph, and was endowed also with the accomplishments of a Chinese juggler. For just as surely as the film can present the thing as it is, so can it also present the thing as it is *not*.

"Greed" most certainly showed us the thing as it was, not a speck of dust or a soiled handkerchief were we allowed to miss. From beginning to end it was stark and undiluted realism; the veritable apotheosis of particle for particle reproduction. But Stroheim's production has always been marked with genius, and so it was that "Greed" is not merely an accurate presentation of a certain phase of life—incidentally it is that—but this accurate reproduction of certain things was made to serve as a background, and a background only, to vehicle the main idea of the film. If realism in the sense of particle for particle reproduction is to be used at all in the film, this is the use to which it should be put.

In "Greed" Stroheim used the reproductive powers of the camera to their full, but at the same time he took care that these powers should never obtrude themselves outside their proper place of a background; a background for his main idea. Towards the end of the film we were shown several pictures of the sun in a burning sky; now these shots were photographically excellent and consequently correct in detail, but need I say that the fact that they were accurate reproductions of the sun, was not the reason for their being included in the sequence? The picture of the sun, and the pictures of the cracked sand under foot were used to convey the illusion of heat. It was because they did suggest heat, that they were included in the film, and not because they were accurate reproductions of the sun or of the sand!

IV

I spoke in the last chapter of partial kolorisation, and I even went so far as to censure von Stroheim's use of this device, as manifested in the "Merry Widow". It is not my intention to withdraw this censure, but rather to confirm it; for the above-cited incident most certainly showed partial kolorisation at its very worst. It did nothing, it expressed less, and it was besides both ugly and garish—one hilariously colored bunch of roses introduced in close-up, into the middle of an ordinary uncolored sequence.

The use of partial kolorisation in "Greed" was, however, entirely successful; there was throughout a definite reason for its use. From the very beginning of the film, when we saw first the crushing mill, then the crushing mill nearer, and finally the crushers themselves as they forced the gold out of the grey colourless ore, the gold was colored. A very dull grey sequence, vast pounding hammers, and

issuing from under them a brightly colored trickle of gold. Gold, it was immediately evident, was to be the keynote of the picture. And as the film proceeded we saw more gold. . . . teeth stoppings, the canary cage, the gilt bedstead, the heavy gilded picture-frames, and the moving mass of yellow coins as they passed and repassed through Helga's fingers. Everything, even down to the brass bedstead, that was in any way reminiscent of gold, was colored . . . the greyness of the pictures and the brightness of the surrounding gold, the drab empty room set in flaring contrast to the bright yellow bedstead. Dirty teeth mixed up with glittering stoppings . . . someone, it was clear, had got gold on the brain.

In this case partial kolorisation served its purpose; in emphasising the goldenness of the gold, it emphasised also the diseased state of Helga's mind. For who but the veriest miser would retain a useless and cumbersome set of gilt picture-frames when confronted with penury and starvation? Anyone else, anyone not interested in gold to the extent that Helga was, would have seized on them as the first things to sell, as the things most likely to bring in money. But Helga kept the pictures: she kept them up to the last possible moment—by the judicious use of partial kolorisation, the whole situation was made manifestly clear.

v

Von Stroheim's ability as a comedian has been severely criticised, and "The Merry Widow" in spite of its obvious merits has been termed a bad and often a worthless film. Certainly it was not possessed of the brilliance that characterised "Greed": "The Merry Widow" had many mistakes, and "Greed" had none; "The Merry Widow" was a comedy, and "Greed"—well "Greed" certainly was not comic! In other words, it is impossible to compare the two

productions. "Greed" presented an idea, "The Merry Widow" told a story: the former was a film, whereas the latter, although not properly a film, was remarkable for the display of one or two really excellent pieces of film technique.

"The Merry Widow" is famous for having introduced Lily Elsie, and for having been the most popular musical comedy to date. First produced in England by George Edwardes as a stop-gap pending the negotiations for another and supposedly more popular piece, it took the public by storm. Its music is still popular to-day, and even the overworked "Ruritanian" tradition in which its story moves has many staunch admirers. All of which only goes to show how very careful producers should be in choosing suitable subjects for filming! Because von Stroheim poured his very able technique on to a threadbare and outworn story "The Merry Widow" was an entertaining film; but even the excellence of this concealing condiment was unable to hide some very bare bones, or to deaden the creaking of some very old joints. . . . "c'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas le film!"

Mae Murray acted better than she has ever done before, John Gilbert was as good as he could be, and the same was true of Roy D'Arcy. The photography throughout was excellent, so also were the court settings, and the jewels so lavishly displayed—and von Stroheim was directing. A little characterisation, a neat touch concerning Parisian post cards . . . Sonia's ankles, and the general dowdiness of the court at Montebianco, a certain amount of humour and not a little charm. And there were all these charming incidents, all this wealth of photography and excellence of composition, and why, one wondered, were they there at all . . . ? For at first sight it was almost impossible to discern the slender thread binding these various incidents together.

Was there any such thread? Apparently there was, for "The Merry Widow" was anything but an abstract film! A Crown Prince's intrigue with a chorus girl; State craft and a loveless marriage for Sonia; a duel; an assassination; a reconciliation, and a Coronation (in Kolors); was this really all? This posterously silly little story, the like of which we have heard at least a dozen times already . . . ? It was—the story was as well handled as von Stroheim could handle it; but even so one could not help wondering whether it was worth handling at all.

Why, one is tempted to ask, did it occur to anyone, and more especially von Stroheim, to make a film out of Lehar's operetta? To begin with, probably it did not occur to Stroheim. Stroheim was at the time under contract to the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation, who saw fit to schedule the production of "The Merry Widow" to him. And to continue, either Metro or Goldwyn or Mayer, or the trinity in unity, decided to film "The Merry Widow" because it was an opera by Franz Lehar, and because it had broken the box-office records in a greater number of the world's Capitals. "The Merry Widow" had been a tremendously successful musical comedy, and so, the M.'s argued, it should be a tremendously successful film. It was tremendously successful, but was it quite a film?

This habit of filming anything that has made a success in the theatrical or the literary world, is quite in accordance with what one would expect the film magnate to do. For obviously if a novel or a play has won fame on its merits as a novel or as a play, if in fact it has excited criticism both widespread and favourable, what is that but so much absolutely free publicity, and that being the case, is not half the battle already fought and won, as far as the success of the film is concerned? That the novel or the play in question should be suitable or un-

suitable for filming, has never entered the case, the point always being, has the novel or the play met with a success in its own sphere. If it has—then well and good—for if it has succeeded once, argue the M.'s, it will succeed again. And, furthermore, it is sure to succeed, for will not all those who were unable to see a famous play, or incapable of reading a much-discussed novel, welcome the chance of seeing this same play or book at a quarter the cost of a stall or of a library subscription? Of course they will: undeniably the M.'s are right. Unfortunately, however, the rightness of their surmise is unable to change the unsuitability of most of the subjects chosen into suitability—for filming that is.

The film industry is the third largest in America, which is, I suppose, the reason for these otherwise unaccountable happenings, which attain the zenith of unaccountability in an announcement recently made by the big producing companies. The announcement was something like this . . . "We are not interested in original scenarios. . . ." Not interested in things written specially for the screen . . . ? (for that is what this announcement amounts to). A fact which seems decidedly odd when one considers that these same companies are engaged in making things that will be shown exclusively on screens. They are engaged in the making of films, and yet they are not interested in films . . . let us, however, recollect that there is a plethora of Irish blood in America!

And so "The Merry Widow" was made—von Stroheim did his best, Mae Murray also did her best, and no doubt the M.'s contributed towards the film's success by launching an energetic publicity campaign. And last, but not least, there was Lehar's music, tuneful, sensual, and always popular—musical comedy, drama and a little film . . . a peculiar mixture, but one that was on the whole not unpleasant.

CHAPTER XII

"METROPOLIS" OR FILM CRITICISM

I

"I HAVE never abused Mr. H. G. Wells, and never have I received the slightest sign of gratitude for this extraordinary behaviour! Everyone abuses Mr. Wells except myself!" Mr. Wells is a novelist of no little merit, and he is also, as the *Sunday Express* assured us fortnight by fortnight, "one of the greatest thinkers of the age"—but for all that, he is not a film critic.

Now the film, as I have said repeatedly, is an entirely new form of artistic expression, demanding therefore an entirely novel form of artistic criticism. A film cannot be judged by standards relative to the dramatic absolute, nor yet can it be compared to a novel or even to a treatise on economics. But the film art is young, and film criticism is even younger: so young in fact that there are as yet no supposedly absolute standards to which other films can be related. Everyone has his own views about the cinema—there are those who extol, and those who decry "The Big Parade", a few no doubt are enthusiastic over "Roses of Picardy", and there is a great number that abhors the "divine Chaplin"; no two people think alike on the subject of the films—no two intelligent people, that is.

With the solitary exception of "Greed" there is no common ground on which film critics can meet, and from which they can sally forth on their excursions of destruction. The situation is remarkable; it is unique. In the case of Drama, one will find that

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nine critics out of ten will agree that *Othello* is a better play than, say, *The Silver King*, and in painting the vote will be unanimous in favour of the *Mona Lisa* as opposed to the *Golden Stair*.

Because the arts of painting and drama are old and established, there are in both cases certain fixed standards to which subsequent plays and pictures are expected to conform, and in the light of which they must appear to have merit. In artistic, as well as in dramatic criticism, there is something "to go on", something which transforms divergences of opinion into differences of taste. And for this reason it is possible to disagree with someone as to the merits or demerits of a long-established play without him thinking that you are a benighted idiot, and *vice versa*! "It's a matter of taste . . .!" is the mutual verdict, and one agrees to differ. But once let criticism approach the films, and all such stability will seem to melt into the very thinnest air; for where films are concerned everyone is his own "absolute"! The admirers of Chaplin fulminate against the upholders of Lubitsch, and similarly the supporters of Griffith denounce, and denounce with vigour, any school of thought but their own! In truth a Babel, and as it is "absolutes" that are in question, each party maintains that his opponents are not merely wrong, but definitely heretical! "Greed", say some, is a good film, and others possessed of a faith that is almost touching in its blindness, refuse to see merit in any film unless it hails from the U.F.A. studios; certain daily papers can see nothing but British films, and others are aware only of American productions, and so on and so forth . . . never in film criticism is it a "matter of taste", everyone is right, and everyone else is wrong!

In another twenty years things may be different (they are sure to be different), but for the moment they are just as I have sketched them, an irrational

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and distracting welter of conflicting opinions. . . . Let us look for a moment at "Metropolis", and at the treatment it received from film critics in general, and from Mr. Wells in particular.

"Quite the silliest film!" a headline, and a striking headline at that! So far so good, for it is the business of a headline to strike. One looks further and the word "Wells" prefaced by the letters H. and G., swims into one's ken: so far still so good, but a headline does not after all take one so very far. "Quite the silliest film!" . . . one then proceeds to read what H. G. Wells has to say on the subject of "Metropolis" and to one's surprise one finds that "Metropolis" is weighed in the balance, and that it is found wanting, BECAUSE, in the light of probable economic evolution, it is preposterous.

Let us forget for a moment Mr. Wells's wholly understandable "pique", aggravated in this case by the flagrant plagiarism of such early works of his as *A Story of Days to Come*, and *The Sleeper Awakes*, and let us turn to film criticism. But before proceeding further, let me warn the reader, that like any other film "Fan" I consider that my own views are "ABSOLUTE"! All other opinions savour of heresy to me!

II

To begin with, "Metropolis" is condemned, because its story, apart from being taken (without acknowledgements) from *The Sleeper Awakes*, is in the light of probable economic evolution, manifestly impossible. So far I am in agreement with Mr. Wells—the story of "Metropolis" is absurd; it is also well sprinkled with incidents drawn from what Mr. Wells calls "a young man's immature imaginings". *The Sleeper Awakes* is, however, a very readable novel, a fact of which Mr. Wells, with very charming

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modesty, affects an utter ignorance. But, to continue . . . skyscrapers, says Mr. Wells, are a peculiarity of Manhattan Island, which fact one presumes accounts for their appearance in such places as San Francisco and Detroit, where land is at anything but a premium. There is no reason to suppose, he says, that they will be anywhere in evidence in, say, two hundred years from now. Here again I find myself in agreement with Mr. Wells: the skyscraper is an architectural peculiarity of the twentieth century, and one which improved means of communication in the shape of aeroplanes, elevated railways, and television will render an anachronism.

The aeroplanes, we are told, that figured in "Metropolis" showed no advance on the models in use to-day. But as the aeroplanes (or airplanes, as Mr. Wells will have it) in "Metropolis" were so obviously the "airplanes" of to-day, the fact that they were not the "airplanes" of two hundred years hence does not strike the writer as being remarkable. . . . Babel, it appears, was not built by BALD men—granted that Babel WAS built, is there any reason to suppose that some, at least, of the workers so employed should not have been bald? And this brings us to the vexed question of the catacombs—How, indeed, could they appear in Metropolis? Metropolis, one presumes, was well drained; it was lighted by electricity, and it was not at all improbable that it should have possessed one or two underground railways. But, despite these obstructions, the catacombs flourished! "Deep down under the ground, was the workman's city"—a manifest absurdity. On all these points I find myself in agreement with Mr. Wells.

III

I agree with everything that H. G. Wells said about "Metropolis", the trouble being that he said

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so little. H. G. Wells has arisen in righteous economic wrath, and as an economist and as a philosopher, has damned "Metropolis" up and down, and that is as far as it goes. But when one considers that the film was not an economic survey, nor yet a treatise on philosophy, it is not very far. This sort of treatment is very similar to that which was first accorded D. W. Griffith's "Birth of a Nation". With Griffith's film it was colour, and with Fritz Lang's it is economics, that has been seized upon by the critics, and in both cases the discussion of these relatively irrelevant points has prevented the discussion of the film as a film.

Let us begin with the skyscrapers—that they will not survive two hundred years, we have agreed; but what does that matter when the skyscraper, as handled by Fritz Lang, was such a really beautiful object? Anyone who saw "Metropolis" will remember the pictures of the city itself—massive, cube-like buildings topped with fantastic curves, that formed the most exquisite design against the sky. Rows and rows of minute windows, light and shade, great masses of both, and over all an intricate network of elevated roadways.—These shots were beautiful, and there is little enough beauty in the world. It is the same with the aeroplanes, and with the baldness of the men who built Babel. We have no historical evidence for or against the baldness of the Babel-builders; that, however, is irrelevant. The point being that the sight of six thousand or so bald men all moving up a stairway or down a stairway, or striving to move a vast mass of stone, created an atmosphere of servility. For some reason one associates baldness with servility: the reason is not really very far to seek, but as it has no direct bearing on the point in question, we will ignore it, and concentrate on the fact that baldness does suggest servility. But the Babel episode was

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beautiful (a fact which Mr. Wells forgot to mention)—the background of stars, the masses of frowning masonry, the lines of slowly moving workmen, and the vast stairs up which they moved. And finally the great array of bald heads, all bowed, all cringing, all moving in absolute unison; it conveyed very vividly the impression of utter and helpless servility. Babel was a state founded on slave labour, a state in which there was no place for individualism, except among the favoured few. The workers in Babel were all dressed alike; they all moved together, and they were all bald—slavery and compulsory conformation to type, the worst evils of a system that is passing.

Having previously warned my reader that I consider my views on the cinema to be "absolute views", I assert fearlessly that without the use of the six thousand bald men, this suggestion of hopeless servility could not have been achieved.

IV

In the film "Metropolis" there is a scene in which a scientist, heavily disguised as a mediaeval alchemist, transfers life, and the likeness of a human form, into a steel machine of his own making. This process of life transference, as shown in "Metropolis", defies my powers of description; it is one of the most lovely things that the film has yet given us. The strange, still form encircled by blazing sparks and glorious with rising rings of light—if "Metropolis" had had nothing else to recommend it, this one short sequence would have been ample justification for the time and trouble spent in its production.

V

I have dwelt at some length on "Metropolis", and at even greater length on H. G. Wells's views on

the subject, and if this seem irrelevant, I must ask the reader to pardon me. In writing this book, it is my intention to show that of which the art of the film consists, and H. G. Wells's criticism of "Metropolis" showed very clearly that of which the art of the film does not consist. One can, of course, deduce too much; but on the other hand, the statement of a simple negative will often help us to attain a clearer comprehension of the positive. Wells criticised "Metropolis" from the standpoint of an economist and a politician. Others criticised it from the dramatist's standpoint: of the two H. G. Wells's attitude is preferable, but only because it is H. G. Wells's. (This is the statement of our negative and from this we are now in a position to deduce that the function of a film is not primarily economic or even political, and for this reason it is manifestly impossible to criticise a film as though it were an economic textbook or even a treatise on politics.)

The purpose of a film is firstly to express an idea in terms of motion, light, and shade, and secondly to express the said idea beautifully. "Metropolis" did, it is true, express an idea, but so futile was the idea, and so beautiful the means used for its expression, that we became oblivious of the former in our admiration of the latter. "Metropolis" was a superb piece of screen virtuosity; it was a case of the most exquisite technique being squandered on the most futile of subjects. If the subject was futile, what then can one say of the technique which, because of its own perfection, compelled and retained our interest throughout? It was like hearing Galli-Curci sing "Lo, hear the gentle lark!" A silly song—but when sung by a Galli-Curci—still a silly song, but a wonderful instrument for the demonstration of a perfect coloratura technique. And so it was with "Metropolis"—a silly story, an even sillier idea, but what an instrument for the demonstration of Fritz

Lang's technique! If Fritz Lang had produced nothing but "Metropolis" we might perhaps have tired of him, but as has he given us "Destiny" and also "The Nibelungs", we must accord to him the latitude which we accord to the prima donna. Every artist likes to display his or her virtuosity, and so Galli-Curci indulges in Bishop, and Fritz Lang produces "Metropolis", and, provided always that these discursions into the technical are periodic and not permanent, we can pardon, and we can enjoy. . . .

There was nothing of the photographed play about "Metropolis"; from beginning to end it was a film. One lovely picture after another. . . . And furthermore, it did things which only the film could do—the creation of the mechanical woman, the building of Babel, and the shots of Metropolis itself. All these were beautiful, and not one of them could have been achieved through any medium other than that of the cinema. The film was pleasant to watch throughout: at times it was really beautiful, and for that reason it is unjust to dismiss it as being merely a piece of plagiarism based on a faulty knowledge of existing economic conditions. It was a piece of plagiarism, and the plagiarism was made possible as a result of insufficient economic knowledge, but it was also a film; and this last seems somehow to have escaped the notice of Mr. Wells. The fact that a film is a film has escaped the notice of a great many critics, and at times it seems that very few producers are aware of this fact. . . .

Just as transcendental questions admit only of transcendental answers, so things cinematographic must be treated in a way that is cinematographic. In other words, cinematographic questions admit only of cinematographic answers.

CHAPTER XIII

ACTOR *versus* PRODUCER

I

THE greater number of film studios, whether in Europe, Asia, or in America, are situated a little way outside the big cities. This may sound all very well, for the phrase "outside", as applied to cities, conjures up immediate visions of the country; of fields, flowers, streams and sunshine: in short, of something mildly and Victorianly Wordsworthian.

When thinking of a film studio and, having heard that the majority of studios are "outside" the big towns, the casual observer may be pardoned if he pictures some such idyllic scene as the following—Bright sunshine, a collection of happy people and a beautiful camera placed beside a little stream. A genial, round-faced camera-man, and a happy producer passing from actor to actor as he discusses some knotty point of technique, some forthcoming piece of acting, some sort of desired effect, with his laughing troop of players.—All this and more one might imagine, on being told that film studios are situated outside the towns. . . .

But, if we examine the matter more closely we shall find that in twentieth-century Europe and in America, the fact of being outside a town, far from implying country, implies rather that strange thing, a product of the bus, the electric railway, and the small car, generally known as suburbia.

On the merits and demerits of suburbia, it is not necessary to expatiate here, so let it suffice to say that,

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although it may appear all glorious when an enterprising poster artist has caught and plastered a certain phase of its being on the boards of a hoarding—although Kent rhymes with content, and a residence in Surrey implies freedom from worry—we know that neither Kent, Surrey, Potsdam, or Hollywood are in any sense of the word "country". They are all suburbs, all blatantly claiming to combine the advantages of town and country, whereas in reality they succeed only in aggravating the disadvantages of these two spheres. . . .

To be in a town implies being among people: there are people above, people below, people in the street, in fact nowhere in a town can one get away from people. They are all around one—they are the town. In suburbia, on the other hand, one is free from people; free to the extent of one's own garden but no freer. There is all the disadvantage of being cut off (for after all a garden is a garden) and at the same time one is deprived, by the propinquity of Laburnum Villa, of any sense of space—Woodhurst is cramped in: Woodhurst is cut off. In a town Woodhurst would be cramped in, but it would not be cut off. In the country it would be cut off without being cramped in, but, standing as it does "outside a town", it is both cramped in and at the same time cut off: and there we have the quintessence of suburbia. Grimy fields, stagnant water, a great deal of smoke, and a still greater quantity of advertisements. Some real country mud, and some real country rain; the clatter of inbound trains, and the dismal array of villas—red brick varied by yellow brick—a splash of lilac and a smudge of laburnum; in truth a depressing district, and one that is by nature depressing. It is in such an atmosphere of half and half, in such an array of mediocrity and drabness, that the film studios are placed.

And the studio itself . . . ? What of the studio?

If it is not a converted airship shed, it is built to resemble one of these derelicts as closely as possible. For, in a film studio beauty has perforce to give place to utility, and art to ferro-concrete.

The roof of a studio is, for obvious reasons, usually of glass. The walls, such as they are, are made for the most part of some unnamed and at the same time peculiarly repellent grey substance. The floor is also grey, and the same is true of the network of props, struts and girders serving as supports for the roof and walls. Then there are the lights, strange glowing monsters that move from corner to corner and from set to set, as the camera-man and the producer require. They squeak as they move and, in passing, strew the floor with a tangled array of twisted cable. Some of them appear to have taken wings, for they are high up on the walls and wink at one from between the girders.—These are the spot-lights, known familiarly as “spots”. They get into the walls, they flash out from corners, and are not by any means above going out in a hiss of evil-smelling blue smoke just at the moment when they are most needed. And there are other sorts of lamps: mercury lamps, known as “mercs”, odd masses of twisted glass, mildly reminiscent in their contortions of an incandescent serpent coiled neatly into a pattern. There are also “broad”; these creatures are used for close-ups, and are more erratic in temperament than any other sort of lamp, for they are apt, even under the most careful handling, to dissolve in smoke and evil smells, at least once in every ten minutes! Having so dissolved, they have then to be coaxed back into life with a series of bangs and a judicious use of forceps. . . . There are sunlight arcs, but they are better behaved, as far as continuity of burning is concerned. The sunlight arcs are just unpleasant in their unsunlike garishness.

Lights, a roof, anything from four to eight walls,

an iron staircase or two, and the film studio is complete. There are, of course, the sets, but they are by no means essential parts of the studio. Without the sets the studio would continue to be; without the studio there could be no sets.

II

Of the sets themselves, there is very little to be said. They vary, of course, for films, although desperately conservative in matters of story, are inclined to develop almost radical tendencies where time and place are concerned. And so Rome gives place to London, and London is in its turn ousted by Versailles—Mecca, Lhasa, and Constantinople raise their stucco minarets into the grey fog of the girders to glitter for a space in the uncertain but brilliant light

The story of the set is one of continual change, of continual painting and plastering, and of intermittent reconstruction. For Mecca, it has been found, can, with the aid of a coat of paint, and a judicious placement of the camera, do duty for London, and likewise Constantinople for Paris; Central Park for the Sahara, and so on *ad infinitum*. But even into film studios the unexpected occasionally enters, and it enters in this way: it may happen that a producer will so far forget himself as to erect sets of a somewhat durable nature; solid sets possessed of definitely marked characteristics, and when this happens, the transition from Babylon to, say, modern New York, is beyond the powers of a coat of paint, or the ingenuity of a camera-man. The sets are there; they are permanent, and in no way plastic. . . . In fact, they encumber the ground. Now, for anything that “encumbereth the ground” there is but one remedy—cut it down—BUT, and here the mind of the American business man steps in, “Cut it down”

says the financier. "Tear it up! Blow it to pieces! But let the process of tearing or blasting, whichever it is to be, be immortalised in the celluloid!" The offending set is accordingly demolished (in most cases it is torn down, but that is beside the point), and the process of destruction is enlivened by a crowd and caught by a camera. The result is two or three thousand feet of superbly animated wreckage, both ready and willing to do duty for an earthquake, an invasion, or a symbol of divine wrath, and destined eventually to round off a spangle film of the most spectacular nature. Six or seven reels of close-ups, couches, thrones, and legs, and then a grand finale . . . fire from heaven, fire from the earth (it is immaterial which!), a final close-up, and the dollars will roll in So once again America leads the world: even wholesale destruction, she teaches us, can be made profitable!¹

III

In a district that is neither town nor country, amid a terrifying welter of greyness relieved here and there by an occasional patch of crudely framed and even more crudely painted stucco, under the persistent glare of the lamps, shorn of the emotional stimulus of an audience, as often as not in complete ignorance of the story that is being filmed, must the film actor work . . . and this does not complete the full tale of his troubles. As though it were not enough to expect him to act under such circumstances, *sans* audience, *sans* atmosphere, *sans* smoke,

¹ Should the reader feel any doubts as to the veracity of the above statement, let me recommend him to see a film called "The Wanderer". I have, indeed, no direct evidence to prove that the climax of the said film was the result of such wholesale destruction as that above mentioned, but all I can say is, that it looks very much as though something of the sort must have happened!

sans everything; as though all that were not enough, fate and finance have combined to place yet another obstacle in the actor's way. There is no sort of continuity in film-acting, and this, for the actor, is the most unkindest cut of all!

No continuity . . . ? It sounds impossible. It is impossible, you will say. But if we examine this statement more closely, we shall see that, peculiar though it sounds, it is in its very peculiarity an integral part of film-making. It is a peculiarity against which the actor is powerless to contend, and before which he must give place to some other being or beings, if the film when completed is to achieve any artistic unity whatsoever.

The actor must become a puppet, and if there are any who would question this statement (and some such there must be) I will say, how otherwise can anything be achieved? (Under the circumstances, that is.) The process of film-acting being something like this: early in the morning the actor steps into his car and, having stepped in, is transported to the studio where his contract tells him that he is to act. On arriving at the studio, he is confronted with grey passages alive with forms of hurrying extras; it is early morning, and a pale grey light hangs over all. He then finds his way to his dressing-room, where he dons the costume planned out for him. So far so good. The actor arrives at the studio; he dresses and, having dressed, is ready to act; so far the procedure is perfectly normal. He is, then, ready to act . . . but from now on everything goes wrong. For it is only reasonable to suppose that the film, which is being made, should be made from the beginning: by which I mean that the first scene should be taken first, the second second, the third third and so on. . . . This is what one might expect, for not only does it sound reasonable, but also practical. But, as it happens, this apparently reasonable and

practical course, is neither reasonable nor yet practical. And so everything goes wrong!

Let us imagine that the film that is to be made begins, on paper that is, in Fifth Avenue in New York City, and that several long shots are required in which the hero and the heroine are both clearly visible. These two meet, as has been ordained, and then we will assume that the scene shifts to an Atlantic liner. The liner, bound for Europe, sets sail, and on the voyage complications, in the shape of a jewel theft and espionage, follow thick and fast upon each other. The liner arrives at Southampton, and the hero and heroine are no longer on speaking terms. The lady's diamonds are missing, and she, with the density inherent in film heroines, is convinced that they have been stolen by her future husband. They part, say, on Southampton docks; the hero vows that he will reinstate himself and restore the jewels and she, forgetful for a moment of the mass of evidence against him, comes obligingly into close-up and says, with the aid of a sub-title, that she has always believed in him, and that she knows that he will make good! Then follows a chase after the jewels, which have returned, let us say, to America, *via* the Panama Canal, with the hero in hot pursuit. In California the thief is run to earth. To California the heroine, now an impoverished victim of her father's unsuccessful speculations, returns. There, in California, who should she meet but a rich financier, moustached and beringed. The said financier is a trusted friend of her father's. He is trusted, but he is not a friend! for it is he who, by his cunning, has brought the father to his present precarious financial position, so that in the critical moment he may appear in the guise of a good angel with an offer of solvency for the father, and marriage for the lady! The situation is tense; for the lady, as we know, has already lost her heart, and, yet duty

points to a loveless marriage. "O! if only I had my jewels!" says the despairing heroine, and then of course the jewels appear and love triumphs, to the satisfaction of all present.

Now, in dealing with the above example, we must assume firstly that the company is located in California; that the studio is in California, and that the actors, actresses, extras, and all the rest of the necessary paraphernalia, are also in California. Everything, therefore, is situated in California, everything except the opening of the story to be filmed, which, as we have seen, is situated in New York. Under the circumstances above detailed, it would, of course, be madness to transfer the whole company to New York, move them on to Southampton, and finally reinstate them in California to shoot the closing scenes, when those very scenes can be taken on the spot. So, very naturally, it is decided to begin with the end. . . . The Company is in California, and the film ends in California. What else is there to be done? So the actors are called; they are painted yellow, and greened about the eyes; they are placed in front of a small block of scenery and there, in the full glare of a battery of lights, are told that they must act. (And as likely as not all this may happen at 9 A.M.) A tense emotional scene to be acted—say the final *dénouement* when the hero, diamonds in hand, unmasks the villain who has hitherto been considered the trusted friend of the family; all this to be acted, and nothing but lights and a camera to act it to. . . .

Now, a scene such as the one above mentioned should involve a large amount of tense emotional acting. We have, to begin with, a father trusting his friend. The father, on the verge of a debtor's prison from which only the intervention of his old and trusted friend can save him. Then there is the daughter, bound in duty to save her father, but

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hating the act which will procure the necessary salvation. The daughter is young, and, as we have seen, her heart is already disposed of . . . but she loves her father, and, furthermore, she is prepared to save him. The other man, the villain masquerading as the old friend of the family, she has known from her infancy upwards. She may not love him but, for all that, she is assured of his worth. And yet something, some subtle instinct inherent in film heroines, warns her against this marriage which alone can save her father from disgrace, and herself from penury. Into the midst of this whirlpool of emotions comes the hero. The girl recognises him; she recognises her first and only love—the man who stole her diamonds. She sees her father old and helpless, and she sees the rich man gloating on the verge of his triumph; and then she sees her love, young and handsome, and in his hands the diamonds.

Now, if the above-mentioned scene is to be acted, and acted convincingly at that, it is above all essential that all the actors should work up an atmosphere of tense emotion. But how, under the circumstances, can they do this? To begin with, they start work early in the morning, and then they are thrown suddenly into this emotional scene. The remainder of the play, the parts leading up to this grand climax, exists only on paper; nothing exists except the glaring lights, the awkward set and the clicking camera, and yet the scene has to be recorded, and recorded convincingly at that. How is this to be done? Not by acting, for, with the best will in the world, and with the greatest talent at one's command, such a thing is impossible. A long shot, a close shot, a wait while a mix is engineered, another long shot, more close shots, lights, a continually clicking camera, highly amused floor-hands grinning from the girders, and finally each scene to be repeated four times at

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least! Under the circumstances acting, which comes from the actor, is manifestly impossible.

For the word "acting", as we know it, implies the portrayal by an individual or individuals of a certain consecutive phase of emotions in a manner similar to that in which they would occur under the circumstances represented on the stage. And so, from what we have seen, it is obvious that nothing could be further removed from the above definition of acting than the process known as "acting for the films". There is no continuity, nor are there any circumstances; it is merely a case of registering hate against one background, scorn against another, and love against a third. The whole process resolves itself into a series of disjointed registrations, a form of mimicry which someone must take in hand and cement into a lucid and continuously moving drama. . . .

IV

Acting, then, as it is generally understood, is impossible where the films are concerned: there is no acting; there is only mimicry, and disjointed mimicry at that. So far, in fact, everything connected with the films, from the sets to the scenario itself, seems to be disjointed. How then, one may be tempted to ask, is any coherency ever achieved? That such an achievement is beyond the powers of the actors, we have seen; that is not the business of the camera-man, we know; it is in no way the concern of the lighting expert, nor does it, except in the vaguest and most indirect way, infringe on the field of the publicity manager. One wonders, or by this time the astute may have guessed, the name of the person on whose shoulders this Herculean labour of bringing order out of chaos devolves. This person is, of course, the producer.

By a process of simple elimination we have