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Go easy with

ANTISEPTIC

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WE:-You are indeed harsh in your judgment on our motion pictures, but perhaps deservedly so on the majority of them. But have you seen none which appealed to you as having been constructed with some respect for truth as well as with some appreciation of art and good taste?

PLATO:-Indeed, I have seen several such, two of them but recently by a man named Orson Welles. They were obviously made by somebody with an adult mind for the purpose of stimulating other adult minds. Yet I could not help noticing with some satisfaction, since it proved my case, that many members of the audience became increasingly restive during these films, laughing most inanely where no laughter was required, talking together, rustling bags of confectionery, and eventually rising from their seats and leaving the theatre long before the performance was at an end. It then became clear to me that your people have, over a number of years, become so accustomed to seeing a conventional, glamorised, and artificial representation of life upon the screen that now they cannot recognise truth and reality on the rare occasions when they see it. Consider for a moment what real life would be like if what one saw in the cinema were a true representation of it. Almost the only sort of people consistently short of money would be the ambitious producers of musical shows! Few couples would hamper their social activities with children, and yet the race would be in no apparent risk of dying out, in spite of the drain of constant homicide, whether from national or private causes. Most men would be great lovers, most women would be as dangerous as sirens; and would be as dangerous as sirens; and yet in spite of this, nearly all their romances would end happily. Crime would be rampant and intriguingly varied, but crime would never pay; cheats would never prosper—except once, I recall, in a very advanced French film with an actor named Sacha Guitry; the wicked would always re-Guitry; the wicked would always receive their due measure of punishment, and righteousness and virtue would never go unrewarded. That is the pattern of behaviour which audiences in your cinemas have come to regard as being "true to life." And now perhaps you will understand better why I have commended the motion picture as a worthy modern example of the "noble lie," which is designed to keep the common man in his place and destroy any desire in him to rise above it. I do not think that the cinema has yet been put to its fullest use in this direction, but its possibilities are there.

WE:-Well, sir, we thank you for your opinions. We respect the sincerity of your intentions and admit that there is much in your outline of our attitude towards the cinema that is true, while at the same time, we abhor and reject the obviously Fascist nature of your outlook. You have shown us where the danger lies in our great invention of the cinema—only you do not regard it as a danger but as an asset. What we now need is the spirit of your great master, Socrates. He would not be content to leave the situation as it is, but would attack it with patience, humour, and unyielding courage.

-G.M.