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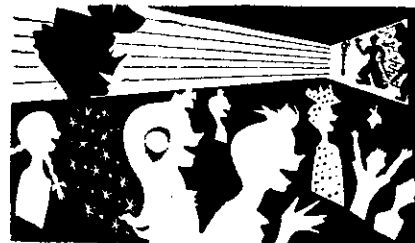
The Films. by G.M.

"RECOMMENDED BY THE CENSOR FOR ADULTS"

IN almost every week of the year, a New Zealander can open his newspaper and read about some resolution that has been passed by a school committee, an education board, a welfare society, or similar group, deploring the influence of the cinema on children and demanding stricter censorship. There was an example last week when a deputation waited on the Minister of Internal Affairs. Every now and then one also comes across some judge or magistrate who has been speaking in the same vein about the harmful effect on children of certain types of movie.

It is a healthy sign that all these people are alive to the potentialities of the cinema to influence the young; but their complaints always appear to me to be rather unhelpfully vague. Exactly what do they object to?

Broadly, their answers would probably reduce to "Too much emphasis on sex, encouraging a looseness in morals," and "Too much emphasis on violence and crime." Now it is true that violence and sex are the basic ingredients of nearly all films, either separately or in conjunction, and psychologists explain the popularity of these themes by saying that the movies, like most fiction, are providing us with "compensation"—a safety-valve, so to speak—for passions that have to be repressed in civilised society. But the objection of the advocates-for-tighter-censorship must surely be confined to sexy and violent situations or single scenes, or perhaps to the precociousness of American youth as a model for our own: they can scarcely object to the general conclusions that



are arrived at, or to the morals that are pointed. For, as every filmgoer will confirm from his own experience, vice is practically never allowed to remain triumphant when the curtain goes down. On the contrary, thanks to the film industry's internal system of censorship, the wicked are punished with far greater vigour and certainty than ever happens in real life.

Anyway, so far as children are concerned, all reliable evidence suggests that the average child is bored by the average love story, and would much prefer something else, and that what may appear sexually shocking to a grown-up usually passes completely over his head. But violence? Well, here the position may be slightly different, though the evidence of the cinema's effect on child delinquency and crime is wholly contradictory. But when our school committees and magistrates express their concern that so much violence is allowed to be shown on the screen to mar impressionable young minds, it would be interesting to know what kind of violence they mean. Would they ban young people from seeing most war films? For nowhere else could you find such a concentration of the more lurid forms of blood-letting, or such incitement to hatred, as in this type of picture, and particularly some recent ones.

* * *

PERSONALLY, I am against our present negative form of film censorship, even for children. I'd let them go to any film if they really wanted to—but I'd try to provide something better and encourage them to go there instead. Yet if you are going to keep children away from anything, surely you should keep them away from realistic scenes of soldiers getting their throats cut and their faces smashed in with rifle-butts, not to mention being shot down or blown up in batches. To give our New Zealand censor his due, he does put his "Recommended for Adult Audiences" certificate on this type of movie; but although I may be wrong, I suspect that many of the very people who pass resolutions deploring the present laxity of censorship (and certainly a great body of parents) might be just as likely, for emotional and patriotic reasons, to encourage youngsters to see such pictures as *Commandos Strike at Dawn*, *Went the Day Well?* and *In Which We Serve*. Considered objectively (which is hard these days, I know), there would seem to be little difference, from the

(continued on next page)



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