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CINEMA CENSORSHIP

(continued from previous page)

No child can discover these things for himself, for selection is a quality that comes with years. But the responsible adult can, and should, discover them for him. . . ."

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THE trouble would seem to be that there are not enough "responsible adults" in Miss Lejeune's sense in this country, judging by the number of children who are given sixpence on Saturday afternoons and allowed to go where they like, usually ending up at the cheapest double-feature show in town, which is, in the nature of things, more often than not the cheapest in quality, too. Where our system of censorship fails particularly, so far as children are concerned, is that its effect is negative rather than positive. Generally speaking, a film either gets a blanket approval from the censor, indicating that it is not considered unsuitable for either children or grown-ups, or else it is "recommended for adults." (Sometimes, as I have said, you find the two gradings on the same programme!). Occasionally the theatre management may back up the censor's recommendation and indicate that some film is likely to be harmful to children, and that they will not be admitted.

Yet surely what is needed is something in the opposite direction: a positive indication to parents (and children) that certain pictures are definitely suitable for juvenile consumption. Give them if you like, a "recommended as particularly desirable for children" certificate. Such an innovation, which would almost certainly be welcomed by a large body of parents and teachers, might be beyond the Censor's present function and ability—it is not everyone who knows the kind of films children should see, though there are plenty of people to tell you what kind they should not see. I would seriously suggest, therefore, that it would be worth our Education Department's while to attach someone with that knowledge to the Censor's office. His job would be to see all likely films, and publicly recommend those which children, if they are going to the movies, should be encouraged to see. And let teachers in the schools get busy and back him up.

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THE alternatives to this suggestion are to continue the present vague and negative system until the pressure of resolutions from social welfare societies and the weight of magisterial comment force a more repressive form of censorship upon us, or else to bar children under a certain age from attending the cinema except for occasional selected films. The latter would be too drastic, though it is the course followed on the Continent, where children under 14 or 16 are not admitted to picture-theatres except for specially approved matinees. But in this country, the effect on our young people, reared in the habit of frequent and unrestricted movie-going, would be simply to make them stay away in scorn from the films thus made available to them (they would resent the suggestion of "education" and "uplift") while encouraging them to seek every opportunity for worming their way into those which were forbidden.

Only in one way might such a restrictive policy work satisfactorily: by following the Soviet example and setting up special children's picture-theatres, plentifully supplied with films specifically made for juvenile patronage, to which children could go by themselves, but from which adults would be excluded unless accompanied by children. This proviso, though it may seem trivial, is really vital to the Russian system. It gives children a sense of responsibility and of equality with grown-ups: a feeling that they are important people in their own right. They may not be permitted to see many grown-up films, and only then if their parents take them, but that seems fair enough if their parents cannot see the children's own films unless the children take them.

However, this system would demand such a wide measure of public control of theatres, and such a degree of co-operation by the industry to produce a large supply of special children's films on a basis other than that of pure profit-making, that we aren't likely to see it operating here yet. In the meantime, the suggestion that certain of our ordinary films should be recommended as being specially suitable for children, might well be considered.



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