

ordinary movie entertainment, who get into a corner to comfort one another and talk knowingly about documentaries and montage; for inside the general membership there are special self-operating groups to study such aspects of the cinema as censorship, films for children, film criticism, scientific films, and the technique of production.

In the event of some aspect of the cinema becoming a public issue (for example, censorship, or the licensing of 16mm. screenings), the organisation hopes to be in a position to present an informed viewpoint from a body of "consumers" who have taken the subject seriously.

So far, the most popular of these internal groups has been studying criticism. The members do not stay in a high-brow corner, but apply themselves to the ordinary week-by-week shows at the commercial theatres, attending one or two shows each Friday night and meeting afterwards to discuss them together. Later, and if possible in conjunction with other New Zealand film societies, they hope to produce a regular bulletin about all types of films available to the public in this country, on the lines of what is done by the British Film Institute in its monthly bulletin, by the U.S. National Board of Review of Motion Pictures, and by other American groups.

THE Wellington Film Institute actually developed out of W.E.A. activities. Although it only got under way at the end of last year, and in spite of several handicaps (of which the chief ones are the difficulty of securing films and a meeting-place in Wellington suitable for screening and discussing them), the Institute already has a membership approaching the 300 mark, and the enthusiasm of members has been well maintained. An Auckland Film Society started about the same time; it also has a big membership and an ambitious programme of activities. Meetings have been reported from Dunedin to form a similar organisation there, and interest in the project has been shown in Christchurch and other places. All this would seem to indicate that in New Zealand, as in Britain, America, and other countries, there is a growing body of picturegoers who are taking their entertainment more seriously than ever before, and by directing attention to what the movies in their best moments are capable of achieving are trying to raise the standard of public appreciation; and through that ultimately to raise the standard of production.

WHAT has been done in Great Britain is the model for what is being attempted in New Zealand. However, the British Film Institute is in a very favourable position, for it enjoys official Government recognition and status. According to the letter from the Deputy-Director of the B.F.I. received in Wellington, this organisation was founded in 1933 as the result of a Royal Commission set up to report on The Film in National Life. During the past 13 years its main objects have been "to encourage the use and development of the cinematograph as a means of entertainment and instruction." For this purpose the B.F.I. receives a grant from the Privy Council out of the Sunday Cinematograph Fund (a fund subsidised by contributions made by those cinema theatres

in Britain which open on Sundays). It works under a Board of Governors, three of whom are appointed by the Government, three by the cinema industry, and three by educational interests. The present president is the Duke of Sutherland.

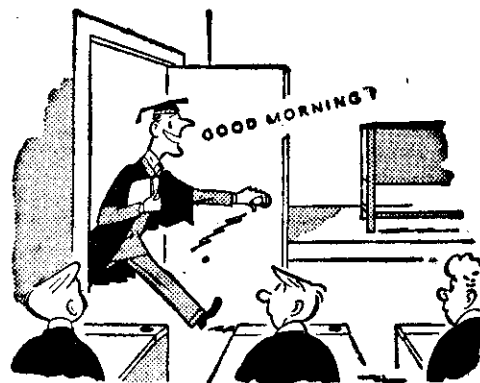
The letter continues: "After 13 years of work we have managed to increase the interest in visual education to such an extent that it will shortly be undertaken by the Ministry of Education direct, and we shall be free to concentrate on our other object: 'the use of the cinematograph as a means of entertainment.' We also run the National Film Library, subsidised from the same fund and which, in brief, preserves films for posterity for their artistic or historical interest. We have managed to secure the co-operation of all film companies in this country, who give copies of any film that we require for preservation; and also as a side-line we make available to interested bodies such as film societies' reprints of film classics."

ONE other quotation will emphasise what is now being done overseas to arouse public interest in the capabilities of the cinema. In a BBC broadcast a month or so ago, Sewell Stokes spoke about "Films of To-day and Yesterday." He reviewed current London attractions, but reserved most of his enthusiasm for several classics of the silent screen which are being revived by the New London Film Society. He mentioned *The Birth of a Nation*, made by D. W. Griffith in 1935 ("it caused something of a sensation when I saw it again the other night at the Scala Theatre"); *Intolerance*, another classic Griffith production; *The Story of Gosta Berling*, a film made in Sweden in 1922 featuring a new young actress named Greta Garbo; *Robin Hood*, starring Douglas Fairbanks; *Greed*, made by Erich von Stroheim in 1924; *Potemkin*, the great Russian classic; and the German masterpiece of 1921, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*.

Then Sewell Stokes said: "I wish you could see these films. I am sure you do, too. Londoners are seeing them because the demand has been great enough to make it worth while getting them sent over from the Museum of Modern Art in New York. They are masterpieces which ought to be shown throughout the world. And perhaps if enough enthusiasts got together, this priceless collection might be shown wherever in the world there were people who wanted to see them. Copies of these films I have mentioned, and many others, will one day, I expect, be in museums in every large city. That is looking ahead, I know. But now that a start has been made, it can only be a question of time."

THE idea of film societies is not, of course, by any means new to New Zealand; but they seem to have a much better prospect of success now than in the past, thanks to the development of the 16mm. film which enables the societies to draw on various free sources of supply (such as our National Film Library and the U.S. Information Service) instead of having to import or hire the much more expensive—and inflammable—standard 35mm. film.

(continued on next page)



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