

YET, however ruthless and violent Grierson may sometimes seem to be in his ideas and his expression of them, there is always vision behind them; an expanding vision, too, widening beyond national boundaries to the international sphere. And constantly the note of social purpose is sounded:

We were reformers open and avowed: concerned—to use the old jargon—with “bringing alive the new materials of citizenship.” “crystallizing sentiments” and creating those “new loyalties from which a progressive civic will might derive.” Take that away and I’d be hard put to it to say what I have been working for these past fifteen years . . .

The documentary idea was not basically a film idea at all, and the film treatment it inspired only an incidental aspect of it. The medium happened to be the most convenient and most exciting available to us. The idea itself, on the other hand, was a new idea for public education: its underlying concept that the world was in a phase of drastic change affecting every manner of thought and practice, and the public comprehension of the nature of that change vital. There it is, exploratory, experimental and stumbling, in the films themselves: from the dramatization of the workman and his daily work to the dramatization of modern organisation and the new corporate elements in society to the dramatization of social problems: each a step in the attempt to understand the stubborn raw material of our modern citizenship and wake the heart and the will to their mastery. Where we stopped short was that, with equal deliberation, we refused to specify what political agency should carry out that will or associate ourselves with any one of them. Our job specifically was to wake the heart and the will: it was for the political parties to make before the people their own case for leadership.

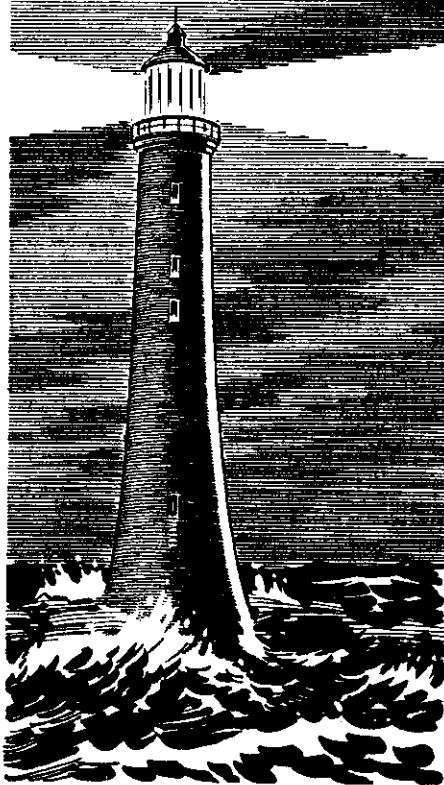
THESE articles by Grierson take us through the war and into peace; and his preoccupation now with a world view of the problems of education, and the use which the film should serve in producing educated “world citizens,” is reflected in his decision, in October 1945, to resign from his position as Canadian Film Commissioner, and in 1946 to launch two enterprises, International Film Associates, and The World To-day Inc. for the production of 40 films a year—films with a world outlook for world distribution. “What determined my decision to extend the range of documentary,” he says, “was the realisation that our work could not depend on a single national sponsorship, however strong, but only on the international reality created by the common interests of the common people everywhere.” This conception of documentary as a force for internationalism is perhaps even more precisely stated in the following quotation:

I have been for a long time interested in propaganda and it is as a propagandist I have been from the first interested in films. I remember coming away from the last war with the very simple notion in my head that somehow we had to make peace exciting, if we were to prevent wars. Simple notion as it is, that has been my propaganda ever since—to make peace exciting. In one form or another I have produced or initiated hundreds of films; yet I think behind every one of them has been that one idea, that the ordinary affairs of people’s lives are more dramatic and more vital than all the false excitements you can muster. That has seemed to me something worth spending one’s life over.

I suppose there is a likelihood that anybody as interested in the film as I am will tend to exaggerate the stature of such a man as Grierson. Even so, I suggest that this book reveals him, not only as one of the most vital forces in the cinema to-day, but also as an important world figure and as one of the men likely to play a dominating part in shaping the new age. He is still only 49 years old. What he is doing at present is well enough in its way, but there would seem now to be only one job big enough for him; he should be given control of the cinema section of United Nations, or, perhaps, of UNESCO. For some such task his experience, his commonsense practicality, and his idealism eminently fit him.

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