

Should Films Make Us Think?

IN "G.M.'s recent review of "The War Against Mrs. Hadley," he stressed the need, "in the cause of realistic thinking and common sense" for an attack on "the phoney tribe who dwell in the ivory towers of Hollywood." We have since received a letter from Roy A. Evans (Christchurch), giving the following quotations on the subject which, he says, show that our critic is in good company:

BERNARD SHAW: "The cinema is unconvincing and unreal — and that's because it lacks expert story tellers."

SIR HUGH WALPOLE: "Behind the majority of films there is no artistic perception. They are made with the express intention of arousing the cheap emotionalism of the multitude. They do not widen the scope of human understanding, but serve only to deaden it. They are intended as nothing more than an escape from the realities of life. When I leave the cinema after seeing the average Hollywood picture, my mind is a complete blank. The film was probably quite slick and amusing, but I might just as well have gone to the nearest restaurant and had a cup of tea and a scone. The effect on my mind in both cases is exactly the same. This is because most films are artificial from beginning to end, and beneath their flamboyant emotionalism there is not one grain of perception or truth. The incidents and characters are confused and second-hand like the incidents and characters in a novelette. The reason one so often encounters these half-formed characters on the screen is because the film industry has never really grasped the true nature of the cinema. Why continue to under-estimate public taste? Why not use some of the money which normally goes to the "stars" (a label with which to sell an otherwise uninteresting commodity), to secure the services of some of the major visionaries of our day. The handling of Stokowski in *100 Men And a Girl* was a step in the right direction. When the film industry as a whole is willing to co-operate in this way with such men, it will soon lose its artificiality and quickly become an accepted art form."

DR. CYRIL BURT (Professor of Psychology, University College, London): "I do not deny that in films as they are at present, there is often a powerful element of photographic beauty and skilful treatment. I think, nevertheless, that producers, naturally keen on obtaining a mass appeal, generally under-estimate mass intelligence. Or, at least, if they do not definitely under-estimate public intelligence, they 'play for safety' by producing films of a slightly inferior quality. The cinema

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fast with this live new story in it (Circulation Managers please note), and all ends well.

A good team, Mr. Aherne and Miss Russell; especially, of course, Miss Russell. Not that I'd suggest that *My Sister Eileen* is a landmark among comedies, another *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* or anything like that to blow me down. But I laughed and the audience laughed, and our little man was very glad to give it a clap for being a trouble chaser.

to-day tends to mould public taste rather than cater directly for it. I am very interested in the popular conception of the public mentality because I am aware how sadly it is misrepresented by many popular forms of entertainment. The cinema to-day definitely needs some uplifting influence."

WILLIAM WYLER (Director of *Mrs. Miniver*): "I like making a picture with an idea behind it. Of course a point is far better made by not pointing it, letting it be implied. But a picture to be really entertaining must have something to say. The plot is secondary to the characterisation and theme. People say that they don't want to be made to think. But they go to the cinema to be made to feel. And if they feel deeply enough, that starts them thinking. In the end, that's what counts in a picture, more than what you put in or leave out, what you make people think."

MICHAEL POWELL (Director of *49th Parallel*): "Films are made for the entertainment of men and women who, whatever their station in life may be, have none the less to work, and work hard to earn their living. These people live lives rich in all the elements of strong human drama, but how lamentably seldom their lives, loves, hopes, and struggles are brought to the screen. I do not care whether they toil by hand or brain, or a combination of both, but surely you cannot expect such people to be thrilled by the superficial vapourings and petty squabbles of what is called "high society." Films have been turned out at a rate which approximated to mass production—many of them were terrible — quality was sacrificed to quantity with inevitable results. To make a worthwhile film you must have a worthwhile story or theme, and there are not enough of these to satisfy the colossal demands of such a system. Mass-production and the mentality which produced it must become a thing of the past."



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