

CHILDREN AND MOVIES

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Children and movies by Alice Miller Mitchell

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ALICE MILLER MITCHELL

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AND MOVIES**

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By
Alice Miller Mitchell



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To
PAUL M. MITCHELL

Let our artists rather be those who are gifted to discern the true nature of the beautiful and graceful; then will our youth dwell in the land of health, amid fair sights and sound, and receive the good in everything; and beauty, the effulgence of fair works, shall flow into the eye and ear, like a health-giving breeze from a purer region, and insensibly draw the soul from earliest years into likeness and sympathy with the beauty of reason.

—PLATO

FOREWORD

It is difficult to appreciate the fact that in 1900 movies were commercially unknown. To attempt to re-create in the imagination a world in which there are no motion-picture "palaces" is almost as difficult as to re-create the existence of the people of the old Stone Age. The movies are everywhere: in the city and the country, in the Orient and the Occident, in the two hemispheres. Some say they are too much with us; but collectively we seem to find them almost as essential and certainly as ubiquitous as the newspaper or the milkman.

One hundred million Americans are supposed to have attended the movies in 1928. This mass movement has something of the portent of an irresistible tide welling up and over and into the dark caverns and galleries of a rocky ocean shore, receding only to renew the surge again and again. But with this difference: each human unit of this vast movie tide is swept out from the dark cavern just a little different than when it was swept in.

All America, indeed all the modern world, is thus ceaselessly played upon by the ebb and flow of sight and sound. No one can fail to be deeply impressed by the immense power of this new Warwick in the modern state, helping to form and mold and strengthen the interests, opinions, and ambitions of the voting masses.

What actually the movies are doing to the taste, beliefs, desires, prejudices, and values of the American people has been among the liveliest subjects of con-

troversy now for many years. Critics allege not merely that the movies have ruined the present and future of the legitimate stage but that their substituted influence has been pernicious. Overemphasis of false values, exaggeration and caricature of life, destruction of taste and morality, downright and utter banality, are only a sample of the charges hurled against the movies and their makers. On the other hand, the immense educational and artistic value of many films, the stimulation of ambition and widening of horizons by the revelation of other and better modes of life, the richer compensations of vicarious experience, are set out by the friends of the cinema.

At two points the potential influence of the movies is universally granted to be of especial importance: their effect on the relations of one people to another; and their effect upon children. Professor Gaus in his work, *Great Britain, a Study in Civic Loyalty*, is only one of the most recent commentators speaking the alarm felt by statesmen of other countries concerning the influence of American films on their respective national, or colonial, cultures. Back of the natural opposition of foreign cinema producers lies a real and understandable concern of thoughtful men and women over the impact of American culture as portrayed in the films upon other and different cultures; and, on the other hand, no one who has lived in Great Britain can fail to remember, often with misgivings, the many queries as to whether American civilization is really like its movie version.

But for us the problem of the child and the movie is at least more immediate. What are the movies doing to