

**THE MOVIES ON TRIAL; THE
VIEWS AND OPINIONS OF
OUTSTANDING PERSONALITIES
ANENT SCREEN ENTERTAINMENT
PAST AND PRESENT**

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The movies on trial; the views and opinions of outstanding personalities anent screen entertainment past and present by William J. Perlman

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WILLIAM J. PERLMAN

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Compiled and Edited
by
WILLIAM J. PERLMAN

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INTRODUCTION

WHY THIS BOOK?

A LITTLE over a year ago a storm of protest swept across the country against the kind of movies the motion picture industry had been offering for public entertainment. Civic and religious leaders, alarmed by the films' exploitation of indecency, exhorted a movie-going public to withhold its patronage from picture houses until the screen had been made safe for the "family." From the pulpit, from the rostrum, from the floors of legislation chambers, accusers pointed menacing fingers at Hollywood. A bill for national censorship of the movies was introduced in Congress. States and municipalities proposed fanatical laws which would have barred ninety per cent of the moving pictures produced. Clubs and organizations of various complexions and denominations pledged themselves to stay away from picture theatres. The general economic upheaval had already somewhat depleted the attendance of movie theatres, and a boycott, now imminent, threatened to cut down the attendance still more. Truly, the motion picture industry faced the greatest crisis since its inception.

Whether all the censure heaped upon the movies was justified is a moot question. We are of the opinion that

it was not—at least on the grounds generally advanced. But, as in the case of most reform movements, the pendulum had been allowed to swing too far in one direction. Similar attacks have been launched, from time to time, against the stage, books, paintings, sculpture, and other artistic expressions. The trouble with the movies is not that they are indecent but that they are generally vapid and inane. If the screen had offered entertainment not quite so asinine, the agitation against it would have never gained impetus, all the charges of immorality notwithstanding. However, it must be admitted that the agitation, regardless of its justification, has achieved beneficial results. There have already come out of Hollywood pictures that have some sense to them. "One Night of Love," "Richelieu," "Les Misérables," "Ruggles of Red Gap," just to name a few at random, are a credit to the industry. The question is, how long will this good work be kept up?

Now that public indignation against the movies has subsided, an attempt has been made to present, between the covers of this volume, the issues involved in the recent controversy. With no intention other than to obtain a crystallized view of the various currents of opinion, outstanding personalities of the stage, screen, pulpit, press, bench, and classroom have been invited to participate in the discussion.

The influence of the screen for good or evil cannot be overestimated. As a propaganda medium it is the most powerful of agents. Napoleon said he feared one newspaper more than a thousand bayonets. What would he have said had he lived in the age of the cinema? Prob-

ably, that he feared one newsreel more than an army corps. Upton Sinclair admits that it was movie-propaganda that cost him the Governorship of California. The business of making movies can no longer be considered the private concern of a few individuals. It may be their private property but not their private concern—not with seventy million patrons visiting the movies weekly. The business is, potentially, too dangerous a weapon to be entrusted to any group of individuals without some sort of supervision. By supervision we do not mean to suggest legal censorship; but the powers-that-be of the industry should heed the wishes of the intelligent minority, now and then, and not always try to cater to the tastes of morons.

The studio executives whom we invited to join the symposium referred us to the Association of Motion Picture Producers (a subsidiary of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, Inc., whose president is Will H. Hays, former Postmaster General of the United States). The Producers' Association viewed our project with suspicion and distrust. After weeks of negotiations and conferences, the matter was referred back to the studios. After further discussion, four of the major studios consented to contribute articles by important executives. However, these had not been received when the date of delivery of the manuscript to the publishers approached; and requests to the studios for a definite promise of delivery of the articles brought a final refusal to be represented in a book thought to contain "much material . . . that is derogatory to the motion picture industry."