

## THE PHOTOPLAY WORLD AS SEEN BY AN OUTSIDER

An Industry of No Past, a Prosperous Present and an Apparently Bright Future—Shortcomings Criticised—Censorship in the Making

By EDGAR MELS

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MOTION pictures have no tangible past. They are too new to be classed with the hoary drama. They are of today, ultra modern and, as a direct consequence, as yet unformed and intangible insofar as their artistic status is concerned. But this does not alter the self-evident fact that the photoplay is here; that it will stay and that it has established itself firmly in the hearts of millions.

But—and this "but" is all important—the photoplay, to keep the enviable position it has won for itself in half a decade, MUST not stand still; must not retrograde. The photoplay must advance in scope, in its mummery; in its artistry; its photography and, above all, its cleanliness.

When the motion picture was born a dozen or more years ago, there was no standard by which it could be measured or guided. It was then merely a pleasant diversion, with no financial or commercial standing—a babe in arms, with no past and a very problematical future. Then, with amazing rapidity, it grew into a youthful giant, larger than its mother, the drama. Soon it became a thing, long in legs and arms, sinuous of body, but with little brain to direct its erratic movements.

The result was that fly-by-night film companies sprang up in all directions. Many corporations were mere stock-jobbing schemes to mislead the gullible public. But worse than this, films of dubious value, inartistic, vulgar, and even bordering on the obscene, were produced. As a matter of natural sequence, there came censorship, and with censorship an abuse of restrictive powers on the part of the censors.

Now the photoplay world is on the threshold of big things—its future is absolutely in its own hands. If it so wills it will live and prosper. If it chooses it will commit unjustifiable suicide. No one man can stay the verdict. The entire film world—manufacturer, exchange man and exhibitor will be responsible for the final judgment of the great amusement-loving public.

### Some Weak Spots

Nothing is perfect; neither is the film. Few films pass the muster of critical scrutiny. Stanley Mastbaum, who controls the bookings of 6 theatres in Philadelphia, demands just criticisms of films produced in his houses. He is one of the few managers wise enough to realize that the photoplay must be treated as is the spoken play. Honest criticism cannot hurt any film, but tinctured praise is more than apt to cause the producer to continue along the wrong pathway.

Following Mr. Mastbaum's suggestion, let us pass into the beautiful Arcadia Theatre. The Famous Players' "The Moth and the Flame" is on the screen. Why does the audience laugh at the most pathetic scenes? Because of bad stage management. Every time the villain is foiled, the hapless heroine drops into the ready arms of the omnipresent hero—ever in the right spot to receive her fairylike form.

Let us pass into the Chestnut Street Opera House (closed through misjudgment of what the public wanted). There we see "The Heart of Maryland." Mrs. Leslie Carter, old, feisty and amateurish, enacts the role of a 20-year-old girl. More bad casting—bad type—bad judgment.

And so we might visit every theatre in the city and find that the photoplay is smooth as yet—unformed, with rough edges.

But it is not always bad stage management. Often it is bad taste. Scenes of horror are too long drawn out. Take Griffith's "The Avenging Conscience." There is one succession of horrors, with no relief. Take the Chaplin comedies. Many of them are vulgar in the extreme—but "the public wants it," says some one. The public does NOT want vulgarity. Many an auditor has laughed at Chaplin's antics, slapstick though they may be, only to end up with a deserved criticism of "humiliating" moments.

### The Question of Censorship

This brings us to the censorship question. Every manufacturer with whom I have spoken agrees that some sort of sane censorship is useful in curbing the average director. But such censorship must be sane and fair and free from the personal animosity which has actuated many boards of censors in the past. Sigmund Lubin, in discussing this matter at Reading on Tuesday last, declared that he for one favored fair, honest censorship, provided the censors were broad-minded.

Where, though, is the censor who is broad-minded? Is a censor who sees wickedness in everything the right man in the right place? Tolstoy's "The Kreutzer Sonata" has been shown in this city on the speaking stage half a dozen

times and no one raised a word of protest. Yet the Pennsylvania Board of Censors refuses a license to the film version. WHY?

That more or less epic of other days, "The Clemenceau Case," has been played many hundreds of times on the speaking

## CENSORSHIP: ITS REASON AND WHAT IT IS DOING

Protecting the Public; Cleaning Films; Preventing the Showing of Unfit Pictures—The Ban Placed on Twenty-five Big Productions

By J. LOUIS BREITINGER

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THE State of Pennsylvania has taken a leading place in protecting the interests of the people on the subject of motion pictures. The first law was passed at the legislative session of 1911, but it remained inoperative until at the next ses-

be taught how to steal. Crime is fostered by suggestion. The work of the home, the school and the church would conceivably be undone in a little while by this insidious means.

So many subjects may be pictured, vice, seduction, vulgarity of a thousand kinds find their way into films, and without some oversight it is difficult to say to what lengths the makers of the photoplay might go. The manufacturers who are most careful of their output should, and do, welcome the establishment of suitable standards. Already some effect has been produced upon public sentiment, and with the passage of laws similar to that of Pennsylvania in other States and the arrival at some uniformity of view the production of corrupting and degrading films will cease.

No one who has not viewed film as it comes to a censor's screen day by day can quite understand what is the volume of the pictures which, if they do not contravene the principle of good morals, border dangerously upon the impermissible. Indeed, this is in very many cases the ostensible aim of the manufacturer. The exhibitor seeks such a film so that he can plaster the front of his house with a lurid poster and attract the public by appeal to some prurient taste.

When the methods of the Pennsylvania Board of Censors are understood and the purposes which they have in view are considered public co-operation will be accorded them on all sides. They welcome suggestions in regard to their standards and from any part of the city and State, if men and women will address the office on the subject of pictures running in their neighborhoods, their letters will be gladly received. In this way the board can attune its work to public opinion and inform itself as to the course of exhibitors in remote places, which may not be easily reached through its regular agencies.

The process is very simple. The films when they are brought in prior to their exhibition in the State are sent to the projection rooms. Here they are thrown in turn upon the screens. If they are duplicates or travel pictures which are certain to contain little to fall under the ban they are run through rapidly. Photoplays particularly of the vulgar, slapstick comedy type and those dealing with sex problems and the like are subjected to careful examination. The board aims to arrive at its judgments in all fairness and proceeds along the lines laid down for it by the law without fear or favor. Rather than condemn a film in its entirety it will, if possible, recommend eliminations of scenes or incidents in order to save to the manufacturers and distributors property which has cost them in many cases very large sums of money.

In this way it has recently proceeded with reference to "The Clemenceau Case" and "Ghosts." These were perilous subjects to introduce into film, and from some points of view many who have seen them may have supposed that they might better be condemned in toto. But both these works by Dumas and Ibsen, respectively, are nearly classics, and the opportunity for the public to become acquainted with them, through appeal to the eye for the small price which is charged for an admission ticket to a motion-picture house, is unusual. The films represent the picture-taking art at its best, and, with objectionable scenes eliminated, the board believes that it has made no mistake in lending them the seal of its approval.

For the week ending May 15 the board ordered eliminations to be made in 40 different films. During the next week objectionable legends or scenes were cut out of 37 separate films. For the week ending May 23 excisions were found to be necessary in 45.

From the organization of the board on June 1, 1914, up to this date, therefore during a year, 35 films have been condemned absolutely and may not be shown legally in the State. They may be named for the information of those who are interested in the administration and enforcement of the law. They are as follows:

Exposure of the White Tie Firebug	Tainted Blood
Slave Traffic	Return of Maurice Donnelly
The Suicide Club	Willard-Johnson Fight
Horrors of White Slavery	Slider, No. 1
Victim of Sin; or, Damaged Goods	Back to the Farm
Life of Evelyn Thaw	Willard-Johnson Fight
Great Mysteriest of New York	Slider, No. 2
Traffic in Souls	The Highlanders
Outside the Gates	The Darkening Trail
Struggles of the European War	True Love of the Mighty Prince
Wooded by a Wild Man	Spirit of the Poppy
The Nigger	Lights and Shadows of Chinatown
Kreutzer Sonata	The House of Bondage
The Bishop's Silence	Twilight Sleep

The censors feel that they have the support of public opinion; that the need of their interposition is great. They will go forward during the coming year in the spirit which has actuated them in that one just past.



THREE OF A KIND

Arthur D. Hotelling, director; May Hotely and Billy Reeves discussing a Lubin comedy.

stage, and has been shown in film version in this city for more than a month. It is recalled by our censors for reviewing. WHY?

That sloppy love story, sickening in its mushiness, "Three Weeks," received permission to be shown only on condition that Elinor Glyn's name be not attached to the photoplay version. WHY?

The list could be extended to columns. It is an unjust arraignment of censorship, however. It is an arraignment of individuals. Still, as there is no human perfection, the photoplay world will suffer, for even censors may be classed as humans.

### What the Future Has in Store

Predictions are dangerous things, for they usually come home to roost—despite the mixture of metaphors. But it seems tolerably certain that the future of the photoplay is bright. Better things are coming—better themes—better actors—better photography—better marketing—better houses—perhaps even better audiences.

Some day we will be surprised with the perfect photoplay, minus throw-backs and titles. The acting will be natural and the theme unhackneyed. And the stage management will be rational and alive to absurdities. Then we will not have to criticize, honestly—the other kind does not pay.

Viewed impartially and by an innocent bystander, who is apt to get hurt in consequence, it may be said that today the future of the photoplay looks bright indeed, provided that competition does not kill the golden-aged goose and that the industry does not get a setback through financial crookedness.

### EMILY STEVENS A STAR

Emily Stevens, niece of Mrs. Fiske, this week became affiliated with the Rolfe concern for a period of two years, during which time she will make her appearance in eight other screen productions.

Miss Stevens, last seen in "The Garden of Paradise" and before that in "Today," proved herself so admirably fitted for screen work that Mr. Rolfe immediately signed her for a long term of years.

Weak places in the armor were strengthened in the new law and an increased appropriation will make it possible to open offices in Pittsburgh and to appoint traveling inspectors. Thus the possibility of violations of the law, i. e. the exhibition of pictures which have not been presented to the board for its approval, pictures which have been condemned and pictures containing objectionable parts, which have been ordered out, but which have not been eliminated, has been diminished.

In the performance of its duties the board needs and asks for the co-operation of the public. Assistance which they can give us in seeing that films do not offend against public policy can be of the greatest value. While many and, it is to be hoped, most of the manufacturers, distributors and exhibitors wish to further the interests of the State, the business is so widely diffused and so many persons of so many points of view are engaged in it, that in the nature of the case constant care and oversight are necessary.

The word censorship implies a superintendency which those who fall under its ban sometimes will not like. The facts are that the motion picture occupies an unusual position. It exerts the widest influence. It affords amusement at a very low price to all classes of all ages. Children crowd the film theatres. A story is told in a few minutes vividly and impressively. The ideas are gained in an instant through the eye, character is altered, habits are formed. Children may