

# The Daily Movie Magazine

Open Evenings

1017-1019-1021 Market St.

HE'S PLAYING ANOTHER VILLAIN



THEODORE KOSLOFF

shown above in his costume as Lord Carnal, the well-remembered evil villain of Mary Johnston's "To Have and to Hold"

### THE MOVIE FAN'S LETTERBOX

By HENRY M. NEELY

Open Confession is good for the soul. I hereby do a complete right-about-face and declare that I am convinced Cecil de Mille is the greatest director in the world, and Ernest Lubitsch is one of the worst. And it can be proved. What is the first duty of a director? To make money for his employers. That is the question to be asked. It is not following that, then, it is an inevitable assumption that the director who attracts the greatest number of patrons to the box office is the greatest director. We have been fortunate here in having simultaneous showings of the latter's efforts of Lubitsch and de Mille. The Lubitsch film, with ancient Egypt as a background, and the Pharaohs in their retainers acting through a very human story, made a bid for popularity on the absurd assumption that movie-goers' patrons really want something good.

The de Mille film, based on a story that was fairly good in book form, totally changed the story to rob it of all its beauty and injected into it all of the gaudy absurdities of which he is such a past-master. It was frankly made on the assumption that de Mille and his employers know what the fans want and are giving it to them.

And de Mille is right. The Lubitsch film has not done more than an ordinary business. In fact, in the vernacular of the street, it has "starved to death."

And the de Mille film? I've passed the theatre half a dozen times both day

and night and every time there were two double lines extending from the box office up and down the street and around both corners.

So it is just about time for all of you to quit writing to me and asking indignantly why the directors don't give us better pictures. There's the answer. The Lubitsch picture ranks in my own ignorance as perhaps the greatest film I have ever seen. It is stupendous—overpowering—almost humiliating in the greatness of its simplicity and the simplicity of its greatness. And you don't want it.

The de Mille picture is—a de Mille picture. It is just a fair-acting and outside of that, it is de Milleism raised to the nth power, whatever that is. And you simply gurgled over it in all the intricate beauties of a delight and happiness that defy verbal expression.

All right; we'll start out on a new platform. It's this:

Cecil de Mille is the greatest director in the world and Lubitsch one of the worst. And what about the future of the movies?

Oh, pouf! Quitcher kiddin'.

Raymond Brennan writes: "Last night 'me an' me gal' went to see 'Hurricane's Gal,' and now me 'gal' ain't no 'gal.' I meant no harm. 'Hurricane's Gal' sounded lively an' all, an' I thought she'd enjoy it. I knew that I wouldn't. You see, she thought that I should know that she wouldn't, too. It's very conf-

licated, and while the incident is closed, it has caused me unutterable pain.

"During the argument in the Put and Take after the show, we both agreed on one thing: Dorothy Phillips was so startlingly bad that had she been any worse—could she have been any worse—she would have been as good as Signora Duse would be as Letta Pepper. Just such a sinister, uncouth, unkempt, as for the film in its entirety, we know nothing we both 'arise' en masse. There was so much smoke, rain and whirling and swirling—oh, pshaw—why is it that the people will support such rot as this? The only way to protest against such a flagrant insult to intelligence is to 'fast' from going to the box office.

"Smilin' Through' was an exquisite thing. That's something, at least, that 'Hurricane's Gal' convinced us of."

I don't know how to begin an answer to this letter; honestly, I don't. I wonder if you have ever been to sea, it, H.? I don't mean as a passenger on a luxurious liner, I mean as a member of the crew of a dirty, wallowing, workaday tramp, with the scum of the earth for your shipmates. I have. Spent the best part of two years beating it up and down from the South Shetlands to Leguat, and from the sugar land in the Cape Verde to the Rio Plata, through the Tamesi, and all the flat monotony of the Gulf Coast. And, as I sat watching 'Hurricane's Gal,' I forgot the theatre and the people, and the music, and I was back at sea again.

When a picture can do that to an old, hard-shell crab like me, either there is something in the picture superlatively good or there's something in me that hadn't orter be there. On the unproved assumption that I'm not much less intelligent than the average fan, it must be the picture. 'Hurricane's Gal' as superlatively good.

I'm sorry you've told me it wasn't. You might at least have left me in my blissful ignorance. I was so happy in thinking that here, at last, the real tang of the sea and the shriek of the wind, and the loom of the ominous, battering waves had been transferred to the screen. And I got so much enjoyment from my evidently mistaken notion that, in it, Dorothy Phillips rose to supreme heights as an actress, and that Wallace Beery did not merely show a bit of character-acting, but actually, vividly, convincingly LIVED as just such a sinister, uncouth, unkempt hard-fisted square-head as I've gone a-hore with a dozen times in a dozen different holes in the earth. Perhaps the fact that I couldn't find a single flaw in directing, acting, photography, continuity, casting, or anything else, and that I really rated over the sea-shots, was due entirely to that peculiarly dull and lethargic state of self-hypnosis which sometimes obscures the senses of men who look too long and steadily at flickering lights.

But, now that you and your 'gal' have shown me how entirely wrong my viewpoint is, I'll have to see 'Hurricane's Gal' all over again. Perhaps 'have to' is not the correct expression. 'I'm going to' is better.

Yes, I'm going to see it two or three times more. It wouldn't miss the chance for anything.

Just One writes: "Your and your correspondents' work for the betterment of motion pictures is highly commendable. We have come to consider the production of pictures as an art and as such we rightfully expect better and better results as time goes on."

Even to me who is not so closely associated with the production of pictures, it is evident that great changes and improvements have taken place in the short history of film production.

"Technically, many more crudities remain to be eliminated. For instance, what I think is known as a 'close-up.' Now, I know that immediately a lot of people will disagree with me, but perhaps they will have more sympathy when they understand exactly what I mean.

"I will allow that using the 'close-up' is permissible when endeavoring perhaps to portray and accent expressions on the actor's face, but it is often used for far different purposes. I do not exaggerate, as you and all movie fans know, when I say that often a director will show an enlarged arm, leg or what not which occupies the entire screen for the moment. This is an obvious effort of the director to make you look, whether you wish to or not, and his excuse would apparently be that he can get more attention and interest on points which he wishes to stress. To my mind, however, it is an insult to a person's intelligence.

"I remember William Gillette doing some little bit of acting which required moved his hands, and in which he only distance from the stage at the time, yet I and the people throughout the theatre watched Gillette closely and he did not have to have his hand enlarged say about fifty times as they do in the movies for us to look at it.

"I believe that the size of objects or persons should never be so exaggerated as to make us feel that an idea is being, I might say, shoved in our faces.

"When there comes the much more difficult task of putting more beauty into the pictures and, regardless of what some of us say or write, at times we are really all back of this idea.

"If you say to a fellow after a meal, 'Well, that was a good steak, but I can take you to a place where they make it a little better,' the chances are that the place that makes it a little better will have two more customers next day. And that's the way it is with everything. We try to make this Halloween party better than last year's and (some of us) even our pay better than last week's, and so I could go on giving plenty of examples of everybody trying to do a little better than before."

"Therefore some of your readers should not get sore when we slam this or that actor or play (often they slam our favorites), but they should realize that they as well as we, are after the same thing—more enjoyable pictures."

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