

MOVIE SUBJECTS ARE CRITICISED BY MINISTERIUM

Clergymen Declare Too Much Attention Is Given to Immoral Plots

The report of the Harrisburg Ministerial Association on moving picture shows in this city was made public last night. The clergymen are unanimous that the treatment of subjects is not good and that too much attention is paid to giving the audience a thrill instead of educating it. Alleged immorality in many of the pictures is condemned.

Dr. Lewis Seymour Mudge, pastor of Pine Street Presbyterian Church, is president of the Ministerial Association of Harrisburg; W. H. Dallman, secretary. The committee appointed to make an exhaustive and careful investigation of the moving picture shows included Revs. A. E. Hungen, chairman; S. Edwin Rupp, secretary; Floyd Appleton, E. E. Curtis, W. H. Dallman, A. J. Greene, G. W. Hartman, W. Seibert Houck, Thomas Reich, G. F. Schaum, A. L. Taxis and A. S. Williams.

The investigation extended from November 15 to December 15, 1917, though a few pictures were visited in December and January.

Only Three Good

Messrs. Taxis and Bowman saw eighteen films, of which three were good, four indifferent and eleven

Movie Faults Found by City Ministers

Of 157 moving picture shows in Harrisburg witnessed by a committee of the Ministerial Association, forty-five were found good; sixty had a very good, eight good and bad, forty-three indifferent.

In twenty-seven the clergymen found immorality, marital infidelity, free love, cheap sentimentalism, improper relations with other men's wives.

In thirty-five were one or more suicides or murders; twenty-five showed intemperate drinking and drunkenness; twenty-five exhibited robbery or theft; fourteen showed gambling; eleven showed low resorts or habits of the lower world; thirteen showed kidnapping or blackmail; forty-one showed gun-play.

The committee reports that the "educational plan is very low"; that the "predominating tendency of the plays seen was, on the whole, for evil, decidedly ruinous to the morals of children, and that the cleaning up of moving picture shows is the most important social work that can now be accomplished."

bad. On an average 250 to 300 school children composed the audience. Much applause was given at the exciting points in fighting, street brawls, outlandish parental disobedience and criminal getaways. Four of the films involved or suggested immorality; ten of the films had a great deal of parental disobedience and excitement. In all we feel that the tendency was for evil. The dime novel feature was very strong. Sixty-two per cent. of the films were entertaining, but not elevating. Of the films seen perhaps 66 per cent. should never have come before the eyes of children. Quite astonishing is the fact that we saw only two educational films, each of which was short.

"There is no doubt in our minds that the possibilities in the moving pictures are very great and that, if the right kind of films were shown, a great good could be done. If, for instance, pictures after the order of Rev. Smith's 'The Finger of Justice,' photoplay, could be produced more numerous the good would be great. There is no doubt that the pictures are reaching millions of people. A smashing drama with a sermon punch in it will make men go away feeling like being better men.

"As to what should be done: of course the obvious thing that must first be done is to call attention of the public to the things we, as investigators, saw. Then the public conscience must be aroused so that the people will demand clearer and more wholesome plays."

Six Are Bad

Albert J. Greene and E. M. Ward witnessed eleven films, six of which were bad. They say: "General immorality prevailed. The tendency was for evil, decidedly. They were all entertaining; few, if any, elevating. Not above 35 per cent. should have been shown to children. The educational films were brief. The principal lessons now taught are murder, theft, marital infidelity, immorality, gambling, intemperance, and dancing by nude and seminaude females. We believe that all bad features ought to be eliminated, or, until this is done, the immature minds should be restrained from attending the shows as are now given."

In the eight films and plays witnessed by Revs. Rupp and Shafer it was their conclusion that 75 per cent. were not fit to be seen by children and they observed that the average proportion of children in the audiences between 12 and 18 was about 20 per cent.

Good Power Unused

In the twenty-seven films viewed by W. H. Dallman he estimated the children present from 50 to 75 per cent. The evil that most impressed him was "the improper relation of other men's wives with married men, and vice versa, seems to be the only theme presented as a main attraction." The so-called funny films he estimates as not even entertaining and certainly prone to debase the humorous vein in one's character.

"To sum it up," said he, "I saw not a single reel that would elevate one's character."

Messrs. Hallman and Williams found four good, eight indifferent and six bad films in a galaxy of eighteen. They say: "General immorality appeared most frequently, gun play next, then drinking and theft, murders and gambling being next, the last in evidence. One could not help feel, after having seen these films, a depressing influence rather than one of uplift.

"The influence and power of the 'movie' are unlimited when under proper conditions and censorship; but, until certain limitations of the false, the unreal, the immoral are made, let us not expect any high development of character in the young who see them."

"Murder, suicide and eternal presence of the 'cup'; offering 20 per cent. of good and 80 per cent. of evil" was the characterization bestowed on movies by Revs. Reich and Swengel. They also touched on the constructive side, saying there are unquestioned and unlimited powers for good in the use of moving picture plays. But in the hands of men with sinister motives they work untold evils in the lives of such whose characters are in the formative period.

William Seibert Houck, M. D., gave perhaps the most damning report, after seeing ten films. He said: "Bad Points Exaggerated

"Every detail was much exaggerated to meet the insatiable taste of the public for thrill and the spectacular. In moments of murder, gun play, incendiaryism, dime novel tragedy, or appearance of hero or heroine, the applause was deafening. During those scenes which were rich in immoral suggestions the younger element—12 to 18 years—applauded lustily, and occasionally cried out such sentiments as 'good, good,' 'hold 'er tight!' 'ah boy!' and the like.

"There were a few times when it would have been for better morals had the actresses been more completely clothed; also had the passionate embraces, prolonged kisses and the like been eliminated."

"One thing that impressed me deeply was that so many little children remained—till the very end of the show, 10:45 o'clock. After 9:30 there was a gradual thinning out, but, despite this, many children under 12 tarried till a late hour. The air of the house was very foul and hot.

"On stepping out of the show-house one suffered a severe chill. The movie places are, as a rule, poorly ventilated, and so are physically harmful to those who frequent them. Until these conditions are overcome, first, by a more careful construction of the playhouses relative to proper ventilation, and, second, by a more strict and impartial censorship of the films to be brought before the public, we ought by every possible influence, in public and private, in pulpit and press, in home or on the ways, oppose the business that is so ruinous to both the moral and physical nature of our own and succeeding generations."

The count registered by A. E.

Hungen and M. E. Shafer was almost as severe, but they held out some hope:

"We are convinced this institution contains immense possibilities for good. In the hands of men concerned at least as much for character as for the dollar it can be given marvelous potency for education and inspiration; but with the eye of management on the dollars principally, and meeting the public demand for amusement, it is, on the whole, an institution that, as it now stands, ought to be far more rigorously censored."

The Ministerial Association pledges itself to work for stricter censorship and calls on parents, school teachers and churchworkers to help. This report concludes:

"We are firmly of the opinion that if the Pennsylvania Board of Censors would adhere strictly to the letter and spirit of the seventeen (17) 'Standards Adopted by the Board,' a great part of what we saw in our investigation that was fundamentally objectionable would not have been produced except in violation of the standards by the moving picture managements. (A strong sidelight on the situation here in this state is the disposition of makers and owners of films to sue the Board for damages 'through' to the public, as evidenced by the fact that between June 1, 1915, and November 30, 1915, the Board instituted fines \$3,250 for various violations of the act of Assembly.")

Premier Clemenceau Finds Himself Fit For Work

Newport, Pa., April 19.—"Tell me frankly if I can continue for the next six months in this devil of a way," carried on now, six months, is all I want, Premier Clemenceau, of France told an army surgeon major when he asked for a thorough physical examination recently.

This remark was attributed to the premier in a dispatch from Paris given out here to-day by the official French bureau of information.

"You have more than six months ahead of you," the surgeon replied, after the examination.

The dispatch stated that the premier, on arriving at his office last Thursday morning, asked to see a surgeon, and removed his coat, vest and shirt for the examination which he is unexcusedly demanded. Following the doctor's verdict, Clemenceau dressed and plunged immediately into his work.

ORATORICAL CONTEST

Newport, Pa., April 19.—The oratorical contest, always a big feature in the conventions of the Perry County Sabbath School Association, is attracting more attention in the coming sessions, the fifteenth annual meeting, which will be held in the Methodist Episcopal Church at Duncannon on Wednesday and Thursday, May 8 and 9.

Arrangements for this contest are being made by Miss Daisie V. Kuhn, of Newport, who announces that nine orations will be delivered. D. A. Kline, of New Bloomfield, superintendent of Perry county schools, will be one of the judges.

MRS. GEORGE HAWK DIES

Marietta, Pa., April 19.—Mrs. George Hawk, 72, of Bareville, died Wednesday night from infirmities of age. She was a member of the Brethren Church. Besides her husband, a number of children and a sister survive.



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