

# What About Tomorrow's Movies?

By ALLAN DWAN



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ALLAN DWAN.

A believer in clean, intelligent motion pictures.

AT LEAST once every twenty-four hours a newspaper reporter, club woman in search of data for a "paper," or an educationalist, asks me two seemingly stock questions.

"Why can't we have clean, intelligent motion pictures? Just what do you think of the future of the movies?"

I used to tell them—but having become tired of hearing my own voice recite statements that to me, at least, are bromidic—I, like the knight of old, accept the challenge, and hasten to defend my honor and the honor of the cleanliness, the intelligence, the future, of the motion picture industry.

To begin with, the motion picture industry really has a future. Many of our industries grow in size, but they cannot grow vaster in importance. The motion picture can, for there is no greater medium for good influence than the silent drama. It is all-reaching—more democratic than the stage, far more so than the novel which many cannot read, and others cannot afford, and for which one must develop a decided taste. The motion picture is a form of recreation, and of what incomparable value it can be if it, at the same time, can be educational—either for Americanism, or just good manners.

One of the reasons for the inferior type of motion picture of the past, which justly gave the industry an unsavory reputation, was that ten years ago it was a new toy—only a few steps advanced from the magic lantern. As the method of throwing pictures on the screen was perfected, a type of daring investor was attracted to the industry. With cheap stories, cheap players and cheap admission, these men who cared nothing for the morals and ethics of the public made fortunes from the curious who were insatiable and in search of only one type of film play—thrills. We had train wrecks, wild animals, murders by the wholesale, shipwrecks—anything to "thrill." The story, the acting, were secondary. The movie of that day paralleled the dime novel at its trashiest state of being.

Then came the star system—hundreds, thousands of stars, who flourished in distorted pictures arranged to show the features of the featured one, and the story was still in the background.

Up to this time it must be admitted that those who cried that their intelligence was insulted by the comedies and dramas of the film, were making no false statement.

But, in the last five years the industry has been changing. How many vampire pictures do we see today? Very few, and then they are largely reissues—that is, old pictures sent out a second or third time in order to earn a few extra dollars. And even the most severe critic must admit that a better type of story is being thrown on the screen, and that—an item of vast importance—the screen version resembles the original story. I am aware that people who have enjoyed a novel, and actually looked forward to seeing the screen version, have left the theater in disgust because of the liberties taken with the author's script. I also admit that on numerous occasions in the past the motion picture rights to a book have been brought only because the producer needed the title of the story and the author's name to attach to a script already in his possession—a script which "suited a certain star" and was, incidentally, remotely like the book in question.

VANDALOUS? Yes, such treatment of a book really was, and the public suffered. Not in silence, however, for the motion picture industry has been tried by a refining fire, and the fire of public opinion has gradually driven out the dross!

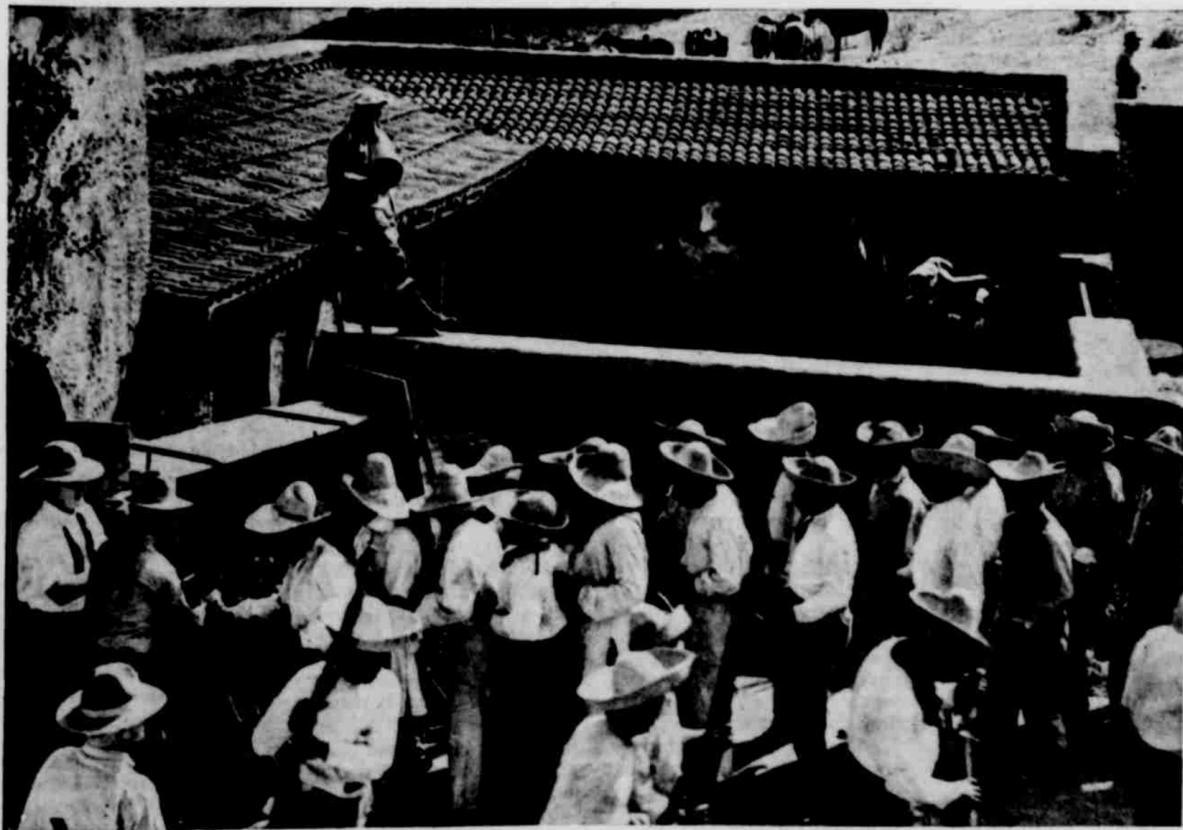
If I may inject my own story into this article I should like to use myself as an example of the changing character of the motion picture industry. In college I studied engineering, and the day I found myself with a diploma, I also possessed a job in a mining camp. I went West with big hopes, and for various reasons I discovered most of my hopes being realized. I liked the open life, the hard work. But unfortunately,

I could not work at night. The nights are just as long in Colorado as they are in any other state, and we all, from the superintendent to the miners, and all our families, had to be amused. An enterprising native knew this and erected a rickety motion picture house. We all went—it was something to do when we did not want to stay at home. The result was that the place was always crowded. I went with the rest, almost every night, for even if the picture was so bad I could not look at it, I could study the attitude of those about me as they leaned forward in their seats, hearing their comments. The pictures were always of one class, best indexed by the popular comment "rough"—rough comedy, rough dramas of sex or murderous adventure. Of course, the hero was always virtuous to an extent, but that extent was often decidedly unclear. And the men in charge of the mines used to relate little incidents which showed the effect of those motion pictures on the people of that little hill community. It was never for good.

Months passed and an idea came to me as suddenly as the proverbial flash of lightning. Why not stop being a unit in an almost over-crowded profession and try and become a leader in an industry where there seemed to be a need for men and women of education? In other words, quit being a civil engineer and go into the movies! It was not the usual lure of the film—I had no desire to play Romeo or a cowboy. It was just that I felt then, as I feel now, that the fifth greatest industry in the United States, catering as it does to ten millions of people a day, needs the best brains of the country.

Excuse that statement if it smacks of personal conceit. It is not meant that way.

I remember vividly the night that I arrived at this decision. I had been re-reading a novel I had enjoyed at college. I finished it, and as it was too early for bed, I wandered off to the movies. The book was Richard Harding Davis's "Soldiers of Fortune." The picture was "Her Mother's Secret Sin." Some contrast! That night, in the uncomfortable seat of the ill-ventilated motion picture house, I knew that I was through with engineering. I was going into the movies! Surely, I told myself, there must be a place for a man who could realize the value of a clean picture—a picture, for instance, of the type of "Soldiers of Fortune." So I went down to Los Angeles. I won't say that it was an easy matter for me to find my place in the motion picture industry, for, while getting a job as an extra man was not hard, it was difficult to learn the



Allan Dwan, on the wall, directing the distribution of rifles for the revolutionary extras in "Soldiers of Fortune."

technique of the industry, when the director insisted on casting me for parts where the hero had to step on my face. However, as months passed, I did learn the technique of the game, and literally, from the ground up.

I did more than that, however. I found that I was not the only person in the United States who was anxious to have clean, intelligent films. I found men and women who were earning large sums of money by acting ridiculous characterizations, which they knew were false, when they were capable of better work if they had been allowed to use their own intelligence. I was sincerely amazed to learn that the real guilt of poor pictures lay with the directors and their scenario departments. The scenario department was giving the producers poor, unnatural and unhealthy stories, but

WHAT is the future of the motion pictures, is a much-discussed question. In this article, Allan Dwan, a director who, because of his clean intelligence, has become, as the head of his own company, a producing power in the film world, gives what he believes is the answer to the question. Mr. Dwan's direction helped Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks win their popularity, and his work has been stamped as highly acceptable by every educational and religious board of censorship the country boasts.

it was the director who made his characters—or—to place a certain blame on the actors—allowed his characters, to wear diamonds at breakfast. They also are to blame for overcrowded rooms filled with teakwood and mahogany furniture. And one picture I shall never forget showed a millionaire home with a piano in the dining room. Little trifles, you may say, but they are what count in the intelligence of the motion picture.

It was by no means an overnight job, but gradually I managed to talk so much and so loud that a few people heard me, and I was allowed to direct a picture. That was my chance. After that first picture I found many people who believed with me that the day of thrills had passed—the day of the star was passing, and the day of the carefully and accurately filmed story was dawning.

Do you really want to know the future of the motion picture? It lies in the transferring from the author's script to the screen of good clean fiction of the type that has been written by our best authors in the past few years, and is now being written, and will be written. When the motion picture industry has a thousand directors who can do that—then there will be few adverse criticisms of the films.

GRANTING that the story to be filmed is perfect in every detail, the next important item is the director. Perhaps he might be mentioned first. He must be a man of imagination, and he must be a man of intelligence. To properly produce a story, a director should read the book or scenario, time after time, until he is able to characterize mentally the various leading rôles. Then he needs the third and fourth attributes necessary for a successful picture—players and background. Do you know why the star system is failing? Because the public is demanding that the little baby-faced creature who used to be featured in a film step aside, and stop hindering their interest in the story. It used to be that no picture was complete without "close-ups," that is, pictures of the face of the star taken very close to the camera. Not any more—the movies are demanding "leading ladies" who are intelligent enough to know that in real life the central character of a drama or comedy often takes the background while others work out her destiny. If the screen cannot mirror real life it can never grow to the place it should occupy in our national life.

In the movies of tomorrow the players will fit the rôles of the story—rôles of the story will no longer be distorted to fit the players. And in the movies of tomorrow the players will have to be of sufficient schooling and imagination as to be able to understand the psychology of the character they are depicting.

Background will, of course, play a part. I remember when I had just started my work with the film being told to report at a certain point for the taking of a picture. I arrived and found we were to take several scenes on the lawn of a big house. What a house! It made me think of a gingerbread building such as the bake shop windows feature at Christmas. And the lawn was sprinkled with stone animals—lions, deer, cats, dogs, rabbits. The man who was taking the picture referred to the spot as "swell."

He thought so, but imagine what a poor lesson in garden decoration that film made. However, even those who still feel that the movies are wholly lacking in good stories, will admit that the last few years have shown great strides in the selection of lovely outdoor scenes, in the harmonious indoor effects, and the camera men are so often real artists, able to obtain remarkable effects in focusing—lighting effects that are truly beautiful and wholly inspiring.

It really seems to me that the history of tomorrow's movies lies largely with the public. It has

been the constant sneers of those who felt themselves insulted that gave the people who believed in the intelligence of the motion picture, the courage to act, and it has been the public who really "cleaned up" the movies. And the people of the Middle West led the attacking army. Do you know of the community spirit that exists in small towns in the West? There are plenty of places of only a couple of thousand inhabitants that are more enterprising than most big cities. In these towns the Grange, or the Men's Club, or the Social Club—one name is as good as another—practically controls the community. The club acts as a censor on community politics, regulating school matters, good roads—any other subject they care to consider. Thousands of these community clubs have noti-

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