

CINEMATOGRAPHIC CRITICISM OF TOMORROW

The real cinema critic has only begun to appear since the seventh art, after a brief period of flowering, has initiated its epoch of decay. Today the outstanding fault of our cinematographic critics is that they judge films in the same way as their colleagues used to judge pictures, novels or comedies. During the fifteen years of the development of the art of the motion picture, the critics ought to have taken the chance of following, observing and commenting the stages of a rare and moving event, the birth of a new form of art. From what was, to begin with, a purely mechanical system of representation there came into existence, bit by bit, a means that permitted an artistic characterization of reality, a means which, however, with the coming of the talking film, has lost the necessity and possibility of existing and tends to fall into disuetude. This was an evolution in an art form that was worth more attention from the critics than it received.

In not perceiving that the lowering of the level of production is not so much the fault of the producers and film directors as it is of the talking film, criticism has shown itself as ridiculous as those seventy year old actresses who live in the memories of their splendid past turning over faded, yellow photographs. The critics' theoretic-

cal studies would have a much greater interest if they were consciously directed towards historical and theoretical research, whereas, in reality, they are ridiculous in view of the attitude they take towards the producers of today. Formerly, good films were only distinguishable from the others by their quality. Today there are some exceptions, remains of the past, things quite different from what is ordinarily seen on the screen.

Instead of indulging in irony and attempting to be funny with more or less success, and minutely criticizing the actors, criticism, deprived of its aesthetic function, ought seriously to attack its second great task which has, unfortunately, been too much neglected. This is an examination of the film, both from the point of view of commercial production and as expression of ethical and political doctrines. In becoming more and more a matter of industry, production tends to eliminate individual factors such as the personal taste of the film director. Today, it is more essential to know the name of the producing firm of a film than to learn that of the film director. It is a mistake to judge a film made in this fashion as if it were an independent artistic manifestation like a novel, or a painting. In criticizing historical films it is an er-

ror to speak of misrepresentations of history as if they were the result of mere caprice or subjective interpretations, whereas, in reality they are the result of commercial considerations intended to render the picture more magnificent and spectacular, more attractive, and more affecting for the big public whose taste is determined by a quantity of ethical and political factors.

Whether a film is turned out by the producer in a way to flatter public taste, or whether it is imbued with political ideas and suggestions for propaganda or educational purposes, the critic ought always to look for the political and moral content of the film if he is to pass a fair judgment upon it. The cinema is one of the most characteristic means of expression and the most efficacious propaganda instrument of our time. It is less the expression of individual activity of peoples or political regimes. Criticism ought to take due cognizance of this fact. Whereas, as a matter of fact, our modern critics, for the most part, seem to consider the motion picture as a sort of little theatre de luxe where a group of independent artists act for the amusement of a group of art lovers. That is the kind of cinema criticism we had yesterday and have today.