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OUR MOVIES AND OUR MORALS

(Continued from Page One) standards of conduct—they have an excellent moral code. They have it, but they do not live up to it. Signed But Not Kept Several years ago, in the glow of youthful enthusiasm, the movie moguls got together and freely accepted and freely pledged themselves to a moral code. It was a noble lofty code and they signed it with all the abandon of an intoxicated man making New Year's resolutions. It began: "Motion picture producers recognize the high trust and confidence which have been placed in them by the people of the world, and they recognize their responsibility to the public because of this trust. No picture shall be produced which will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence, the sympathy of the audience should never be thrown to the side of crime, wrongdoing or evil. Brutal killings are not to be presented in detail. Theft, robbery and safe-cracking should not be detailed in method. The sanctity of the institution of marriage and the home shall be upheld. Pictures shall not infer that low forms of sex relationship are the accepted or common thing. Adultery shall not be explicitly treated nor justified nor presented attractively. Obscenity in word, gesture, reference, song, joke, or by suggestion, is forbidden. Scenes which emphasize indecent movements are to be regarded as obscene. Salacious titles are not to be used."

On March 31, 1930 this code was solemnly adopted by the Association of Motion Picture Producers of Hollywood. A year later they met in council and signed their code a second time, so we are in a position to judge them not merely by our standards but by their own, to which they, big, bluff business men of the West, have affixed their sacred signatures.

No Denial Now let us look at a newspaper review of a current picture: "A novelist is found dead at his desk on the morning after his publisher, a peculiarly slimy person, has arranged a surprise party at which the guests are the novelist's former and present mistresses. The star plays well in this role, winning rather more sympathy for it than it deserves." Oh, rich, rare, rather! But there is no need to waste time indicting the criminal whose crime is public, flagrant, reported, and indeed, acknowledged. In all the land, no sane person could be found to deny that the producers have been found wanting according to the terms of their own code, not even the producers, themselves deny it.

However mere honesty compels the willing and grateful admission that two articles of their code they have honorably observed and to a very high degree; namely, the pledge not to betray Patriotism, or loyalty to our native land, and the pledge not to assail religion nor appeal to the spirit of bigotry. Apart from the moral issue, few of us can claim ever to have seen a picture offensive to the spectator or to the score of his particular creed.

For this thing, and it is no small

Moral Issue Imperative

But the moral issue is one with imperative claims, and so it is not to be wondered at if those who are answerable to God for the souls they shepherd feel called upon to challenge the successful process of the work of corruption. Some one evidently had to do it and just as evidently, Mr. Hays, who is paid a juicy salary by the producers to look after their purity, was not quite equal to the job. The nation has been very patient with Mr. Hays. We felt that he, however irreplaceable in his own life, would need time to master such a delicate job as looking after the movie magister's morality, and then perhaps it was a new line of work for Mr. Hays anyway. The great financial interests of the nation had previously paid Mr. Hays a large salary in another position and a citation reading of the new appointment was trying to recall the nature of Mr. Hays work in that previous office. A friend said helpfully, "His new job is to uphold purity and innocence" but the pensive ponderer said, "No, it wasn't that." Well, it is that now, and we hope in passing, that he'll be properly grateful to us doing it, if possible, for him.

Bishop Joseph Schrembs fired the opening shot of the campaign. To fifty thousand Catholics gathered in the Cleveland stadium, he said: "I read a quotation from a Hollywood film producer's recent utterance in answer to a demand for clean films, in which he said, 'Horsefeathers! We're giving the public what it sells for.' The bishop paused and 50,000 growled. 'Do you resent the answer that Hollywood is giving you? What you want?' he asked. The answer was near from 50,000 throats: 'We do.' 'Then do you accept the pledge of the Legion of Decency?' 'We do.' And the good work was on, swelling quickly to a monster interfaith movement of Catholic, Protestant and Jew in behalf of decency.

Naturally, Hollywood was stunned. After getting away with a colossal bluff for years it is quite a shock to realize that your victim is not quite the pious idiot you had taken him to be. And then, incredibly farcically, there went up a great whine on the score of fairness,—of fairness—from those who had violated their own promises, their own pledges, their own code, in order to deluge the land with filth and rotteness. Hollywood had, over night, developed a conscience with which to condemn its opponents.

Irrelevant Answers

The surest proof of conscious guilt is for the culprit not to dare to face the charge, for him to misrepresent the accusation so that he can make some kind of answer. And this is exactly what Hollywood has done. Through their spokesmen, they have pleaded that censorship would be an evil, when they know perfectly well that the Legion does not ask for nor want censorship. They have pleaded that they must not be confined to children's themes when they know perfectly well that there is no desire or demand that they be so restricted. They have pleaded that they are the victims of professional reformers when they have the spectacle of a great national popular movement before their eyes.

Let us look at some of their answers. The most formal and authoritative to date is that put out on Wednesday by the Author's League and the Screen Writers Guild. It characterizes the protest of the Churches as an "open attempt to regiment and standardize creative expression to the standards of immaturity or of obvious special interests." Now, just how do these literary gentlemen manage to read all this into a simple pledge not to support flagrantly indecent pictures? If they had an answer to the real issue they would not have to manufacture a false one. But they have more to say: "Much of the present attack springs from the ranks of those whose profession and whose only profession is to attack." Who can they mean? Surely not the obvious leaders of the crusade, the Catholic bishops, or if the bishops, then where in the name of Heaven is the long list of victims of their previous attacks? "The zeal of the reforming bodies always remain unsatisfied until it reaches the point where it may order the American people as to what it may or may not see," concludes this remarkable document. Surely this is a little premature, at a time when nothing more menacing than inviting people to pledge themselves to support decency has been attempted.

Or let us turn to the theatrical paper, Variety, and see what has to offer. Here we have the spectacle of an intelligent man making the best of a bad job. He does not attempt to defend the producers nor to malign the motives of the crusaders, but to win sympathy on a side issue. "It is unjust," says this writer "for Cardinal Dougherty to have commanded an outright boycott of all pictures, good and bad in his diocese. — 'There is no condoning his action in Philadelphia.' And this attitude of righteous indignation is widely copied. A local paper during the past week said the same. 'By a boycott of all pictures, good and bad, indefensible injustice is being done to the movies.'"

Cardinal Justified How plausible an objection, and how easy to smash to bits. These gentlemen know quite well that a feature picture is never shown alone, that the comedies, the two reels, are often more offensive than the feature and that in consequence, as we have all known for years—it is impossible to enter any movie theatre whatever with anything like positive

assurance that one's sense of decency or morality will not be outraged, and therefore it was a perfectly fair and just thing for the Cardinal to call upon his people to stay away from what was only too probably an occasion of scandal or of sin. If other bishops did not do likewise, that was not out of their justice, but out of their charity.

Would these gentlemen feel it unfair for themselves to persuade or order their children to stay away altogether from a drug peddler's quarters on the score that candy was there offered for sale as well as opium? And on the drug peddler's place one could choose what he would order: there is no choice possible once one had entered the movie palace. In like fashion, during the past week Mr. Warner, one of the great Hollywood executives, said in an after dinner speech, "The action of Cardinal Dougherty was un-American." If his movies do not violate decency, the Cardinal's action was more than un-American: it was unjust and unchristian: it left us to violate decency, then to call his action un-American to reflect on America not on the Cardinal.

Let the friends of the industry face the fact once and for all, that if they come to a real struggle for decency, the fight will be not against bad pictures, but against bad producers whether at the moment they are offering a harmless product or not. Why should we swell the coffers of the producers to indécency by patronizing his good pictures so he will have resources to carry on the work of propaganda for his bad ones?

Are We Accessory?

It is not such a fight as yet. The gesture of the bishops up to now has been scarcely more than a playful warning, carried in the direction of Hollywood. If the producers wish to see the Church driven to extremity by the evil of the stage let them turn the pages of history to the evil days of the decline of Paganism, back in the sixth century. Then actual blood was shed on the boards, and life was sacrificed for amusement's sake, and the Church cannot be blamed for seeing the actors' life of that time as necessarily a life of sin, which led her to excommunicate any who followed that career and to treat as guilty of mortal sin against Christian morality any who patronized the theatre. Our theatre of today has not come, thank God, to that pass, but no one can deny that it has been traveling pretty fast. And merely mention in passing what surely must finally be recognized as one of the great issues at stake in this concern, namely, the effect upon the minds and hearts and souls of the actors of the present regime in Hollywood. We have no right to amusement if it is bought at the price of a blotting out of thousands of the young and defenseless. If the little head star witness in a movie moral case picked up a few days ago on the streets in a state of collapse after writing a suicide note, in only a individual instance, we can ignore it, but if we can suspect and fear only too fairly, that she is not the hundredth, nor the thousandth, and perhaps not the ten-thousandth to have cause for grief after contact with the pictures then we may well pause and ask just what in the long run we're paying for when we lay down our quarter on the little glass slab.

Can the pictures afford to flout the Church? We all know they are here to stay, but there so is the Church here to stay, and it is bad business policy to make it an act of piety, for twenty million people, merely to stay away from a theatre, bad business policy to make it an act of conscious impiety, for the twenty million people, to enter a theatre's doors. Add to this that the Catholic population is largely a city population and that the movies are largely a city concern, add to this the prosperity of the industry depends largely on France and Spain and Italy and Ireland, all Catholic populations, add to this that Protestants and Jews would be most unwilling to see Catholics take a more austere stand than themselves in a matter of public decency and you've got something to give the producers to think about.

If they would but dare to consider the alternative, that is, the supplying of healthy entertaining amusement, they might find strong motives of profit for at least giving it a trial. Have they no idea how many they have been curing of an affection for the movies, not by offending them morally so much as by boring them, by disgusting them? I wonder if I might give them a hint in regard to a subject in which they consider themselves specialists,—in regard to the nature of human love. In this matter I speak, to use St. Paul's phrase, as one less wise and yet I would suggest that in human love, the love of a man for a woman or of a

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woman for a man love is a powerful element of reverence, and that the producers must often have distorted the young and the innocent, by abuse of vulgarity and cruelty to the point of avoiding a repetition of that distress.

It is a Distinction. If they cannot possess the meaning of this, it might help, if they would recall the distinction, to be ignored by some of them between love and lust, and by again.

What are the chances of the Crusade being successful? There have been some attempts at conciliation on the part of Hollywood,—for instance Diamond-Lill is no longer so prompt and green before the eyes of the nation with the least "It Ain't No Sin", not even "The St. Louis Woman", nor the "Belle of New Orleans", but to be presented decorously as "The Belle of the Gay Nineties". An intense little divorce is hunted away, for a while from impersonating Joan of Arc, and the organs of the Barbary Coast in France are put off for a year or two.

Makes Progress

But all this means little. The industry is not so quick to change its spots as that. In fact, there can be but a few who even hope to see the day when it would be fully purged of offense, but it would be a great gain, one within the realm of possible achievement, if the day came when a division were made between the sheep and the goats, when there were picture houses showing intelligent appealing pictures, suited to both children and adults, as well as those meant to appeal to a madman sitting in double darkness with lurid eyes turned toward the screen, and spiritual slaver sipping off the chin.

Moved by a spirit of tolerance, that sweet virtue so often born of the union of Catholics and Protestants, I would like to posit a feature for this struggle which should be reasonably satisfactory both to the churches and to the producers; and I think I truthfully can, by predicting a complete and permanent victory over this moral menace for the Church, but a victory to take place only at the crack of doom on the day of judgment. This should content the Church; after all, fighting such battles while the world endures, is but divinely appointed; and the schedule should also satisfy the producers, because when defeat overtakes them they will be immune to worry, or harm or solicitude, or injury altogether, since they will have gone to their own place where there will not be any box office anymore, thenceforth forever. Amen.

Auburn K. of C. Names Edward Secaur, Trustee

Auburn. — Edward E. Secaur of Burt Avenue has been chosen county trustee of Auburn Council No. 207, Knights of Columbus. Mr. Secaur succeeds Harold J. Wright of Hoffman Street who has been elevated to the position of financial secretary. At a meeting of the Board of Trustees held last Sunday afternoon at the Knights of Columbus Home in Genesee Street, Mr. Secaur was named chief accountant, Grand Knight Raymond J. Wall announced.

"Anything that you do for the CATHOLIC COURIER, I will consider as having been done for me." — Archbishop Mooney.

10 French Catholic Students, Teachers Will Tour America

Washington. — (NCWC) groups of 10 university students and young teachers from the National Union of French Students and Teachers in America will be visiting the United States from September 1 to October 15. The group will be headed by Miss Marie-Claire Gagnon, a member of the National Union of French Students and Teachers in America. The group will be accompanied by a priest, a nun, and a layman. They will be visiting various parts of the United States, including New York, Philadelphia, and Washington.

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