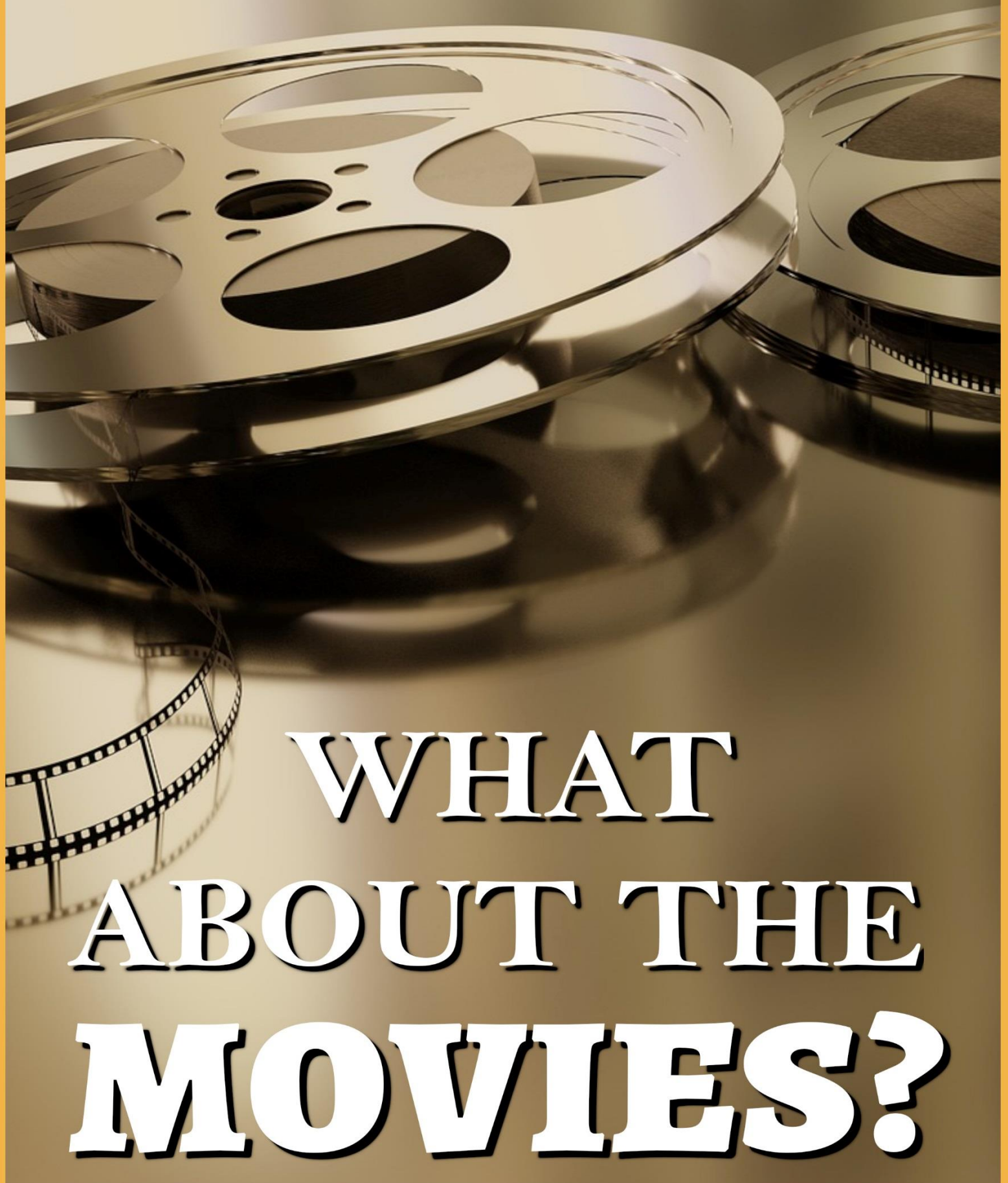


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WHAT ABOUT THE **MOVIES?**

WHAT ABOUT THE MOVIES?

By M. E. KERN
1943?

Pictures must be nearly as old as the human race. Through pictures on stone, clay tablets, or parchment, the ancients portrayed the deeds of their heroes and preserved the memory of their dead.

The photographic art in these last days has made it possible to preserve in marvelous detail the likenesses of individuals and scenes of nature. And through the making of transparencies—photographs on transparent films—we are able, by the use of the stereopticon projection apparatus, to show pictures in quick succession to an audience.

It would seem that the mechanical climax for reproducing pictures on the screen was reached with the invention of the moving-picture projector, which makes use of a succession of transparencies that constitute a ribbon film. These photographs of moving objects, which are made in very rapid succession, are shown on the screen in such a way as to produce an optical illusion of a moving photograph. But now to make these presentations still more realistic we have the reproduction of accompanying sounds. So today we can preserve and transport from place to place, not only still likenesses, but the activities of the subjects photographed and even the voices or other sounds produced by such activities. The life habits of wild animals are brought to us from the jungles of Africa by the camera hunter. And likewise, we can sit in comfortable seats in semidarkness, watch an idol procession in India or China, and hear the chants of the worshipers to their gods.

Possibilities for Good or Evil

The mechanism for producing moving pictures has been brought to such a state of perfection that the moving picture is said to be

"by far the greatest substitute for personal experience that the world has ever known."

This being true, it can be seen at a glance that the moving picture brought with it great possibilities for good or evil, according to the character of the activities portrayed.

It was at once recognized that this invention furnished a means for making a cheaper theater. Reels of films, without limit as to number, can be made from a single negative of a theatrical performance, and shown in the moving-picture houses all over the world. For years this was the *"silent drama,"* but now the *"talkies"* bring to these cheap theater houses a very vivid reproduction of all that is presented in the *"legitimate theater."* And although considerable use is made of the moving picture in educational institutions and by educational lecturers, this wonderful invention, sad to say, is used largely for theatrical purposes.

The direct appeal of the moving picture is undoubtedly greater than the appeal of the printed page, and requires much less effort on the part of the individual. One may learn of an event through reading, and not receive a very vivid impression, unless by special effort of the imagination; but to see a thing acted out vividly by trained actors, is to receive an impression that may form a mental image for years to come.

When we think of the tremendous influence of the moving-picture theater on the individual and on society, well may we inquire into the character of this influence and raise the question, Is it wrong to patronize the movies, and why? I will discuss this question under seven heads.

Effect on Ideals of Life

Youth is the age of ideals. There is nothing quite so important to adolescent boys and girls as the formation of high and noble ideals of life. We need to learn, at the very entrance to manhood and womanhood, the elements of right and successful living.

The actors and actresses that appear on the screen become the heroes and heroines of childhood and youth, and do more, by their ideas, attitudes, and actions, to fix the ideals of young people than we realize. This type of hero worship is observable in any community.

It is no wonder that boys think it manly to smoke when their screen hero always does it. Those engaged in the tobacco business know the power of such influence. It has been said that one actor was paid \$1,000 a week by the tobacco trust to appear always in the film smoking a cigarette.

When their favorite actor keeps late hours, scorns the advice of parents, hoodwinks his employer, and evades the police, is it any wonder that boys are lawless and disobedient, and seek to live reckless lives?

When the heroines of young girls

"wear fine clothes and costly jewels, live in luxury and idleness, are courted by men and envied by women, and ape the 'fast set,' is it any wonder that the girls want to dress in the most extreme styles and think that wealth without toil or a life free from care and full of pleasure is the ideal?"

"The girl who gets her training in the school of the movies, cannot be expected to understand the sacredness of her person, the sacredness of life, or the sacredness of a kiss or a caress. For these things are all made common and cheap inscreen presentation. Very few pictures present the appeal of the noble character or a lovely personality."

It is the right of every young person to know the elements of right and successful living. Every youth should understand the law of life, that *"whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap,"* **Galatians 6:7** that to sow the seeds of sin means a harvest of sorrow to the individual and others.

Dramatic art, generally speaking, paints life in false colors. While an effort is sometimes made to show the retribution that comes from an evil course, it is more often that *"a life of license is pictured as a life of liberty and joy."* Looseness in morals is made to seem *"not so bad,"* and even permissible *"under certain conditions."* The awful remorse and lifelong suffering that come to the individual and to others as a result of transgression are usually hidden from view.

More than this, the presentation of life is always exaggerated and extreme.

"Not only do its plots consist of assassinations, poisonings, and illicit loves and intrigues, but every passion is overdrawn. Anger is madness; ambition, frenzy; love, delirium. It does not hold the mirror up to nature except in her very worst aspects and her most de-graded moods. . . ."

"The theater thus presents a different world from that in which nine hundred ninety-nine out of every thousand live. The majority of people

do not live in the atmosphere of intrigue, illicit love, deception, murder, and other vile crimes. Most people have never seen a real burglary or murder. If they have ever been forced to do so, it has been a shock from which they have been a long time recovering, nor is it an experience to be desired a second time. It cannot be said that its effect upon them was in any way beneficial. Then how, in any way, can its mimic reproduction on the stage be beneficial,"

The **National Board of Review Magazine** reports an address given before a meeting of the board by **Bosley Crowther**, motion-picture critic of the **New York Times**, a man who certainly has no prejudice against motion pictures. He spoke on "*Hollywood as an Expression of America.*" He said:

"But I do not believe, ladies and gentlemen, that the motion pictures of today, or of any time for that matter, have in the majority of cases reflected life as it is actually lived. I doubt that you believe they have either.

"Last night I made a very careful check on the pictures which I have been seeing this year. There were close to 200 of them. I could not find more than four or five which I felt gave a true and accurate approximation of the segments of life which they pretended to represent.

"Literally speaking, therefore, I am convinced that Hollywood does not express America."

Pleasure Ideals

There is a longing in every normal person for pleasure. This desire comes from God, and He approves of the true expression of all normal impulses. It is Satan's studied purpose to pervert these impulses, and lead us to seek enjoyment in ways that are out of harmony with life's noblest aims. The truest pleasure and the keenest satisfaction come to us as by-products of a worthy life purpose. They are found in useful employment, in relaxation from toil, in the study of the mysteries of God in nature, and in contemplation of His love. But those who seek pleasure as an end in itself really miss that for which their hearts yearn.

"Sport is at an end when sport is made the end of sport."

The whole theatrical business is based on a wrong conception of proper amusement and recreation. The extreme and unreal presentations of life in the theater overstimulate the sensations and lead the individual to depend on excitement. The tendency to seek pleasure for its own sake is strengthened, and the serious business of life is forgotten.

"The spontaneity of playful activities and the originality which creates them are being lulled to sleep by the habit of being amused."

Think of the millions of spectators at the movies every day in the United States alone, with only a few actors as active participants in the drama. It seems to be out of fashion today to *"make your own fun."* The people are suffering from *"spectatoritis."* Just as some inactive people prefer to have a masseur take their exercise for them, so thousands seem willing to forgo the joy of devising their own recreations, choosing rather

to crowd the houses of commercialized entertainment where they are fed on sensationalism.

"Sport has become a business today, and pleasure is for sale."

"The desire for excitement and pleasing entertainment" is pointed in this book as "a temptation and a snare to God's people. . . . Satan is constantly preparing inducements to attract minds from the solemn work of preparation for scenes just in the future. . . . There are shows, lectures, and an endless variety of entertainments that are calculated to lead to a love of the world; and through this union with the world, faith is weakened."

—Counsels to Teachers, p. 325.

Influence on the Sense of Sin

It was sin that opened the floodgates of woe upon the world. Pain, sorrow, sickness, and death follow in its train. Sin banished Lucifer from heaven, it drove our first parents from Paradise, and turned this world into the valley and shadow of death. Sin nailed Jesus to the cross. Is it right—can it ever be right—to laugh at sin? Did anyone ever go to the movies and not laugh at sin? The Bible says that *"fools make a mock at sin."* **Proverbs 14:9**. It also says that God *"hath no pleasure in fools."* **Ecclesiastes 5:4**. Do we?

Dr. Winfield Hall, a leading authority on social ethics, while recognizing that not all films are bad, said, however, that in every moving-picture show there is some ignoble suggestion.

"By sly hints and cunning innuendos the imagination is inflamed and evil thoughts are awakened. There is scarcely an incident, however debasing, that may not be learned at the theater, making it a university of vice and immorality for the youthful mind."

In response to the widespread condemnation of the rottenness of the moving-picture business, there has been a great stir in the last few years about reforming the movies. Finally the **National Board of Review** was formed. This board is paid by the movie industry, and is therefore in no sense a public censorship committee. In answer to the claim that the pictures have been improved, **Mrs. Robbins Gilman** said,

"The pictures have not improved morally, though they have improved photographically and artistically. They are not so flagrantly and shockingly immoral, but they are more subtle and suggestively

degenerating, and therefore more dangerously injurious to public morals than formerly."

"By beholding we become changed." Attendance at the theater breeds familiarity with sin, and dulls the conscience. **Alexander Pope** said:

*"Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,
As to be hated needs but to be seen:
But seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace."*

But the wonderful art of moving-picture production has so interwoven the net of beautiful action pictures with thrilling and subtle dramatic plots, that vice and immorality are made attractive from the first; and in the tender minds of children and young people especially, those finer spiritual and moral sensibilities which are the true heritage of every human being are deadened.

Clifford Gray Trombly, after six years of investigation, said:

"I am condemning the 30 or 40 per cent of the pictures which I regard as salacious, immoral, suggestive, and harmful in their influence, and as constituting a greater menace to Christian ideals of purity and marriage and the home than anything else I know."

Evangelist R. A. Torrey expressed, in the following indictment, the thought of many God-fearing students of this problem:

"There is probably no institution that is doing more in our day to corrupt the morals of both old and young than the movies. A very large proportion of the movie plays exploit vice in its worst forms. They are

attended by young men and women at the most critical period of their life. They arouse the vilest thoughts and passions. Their appeal is increasingly to that which is lowest and basest. They are proving the ruin of thousands of young men and women throughout the land, and are having a thoroughly demoralizing effect even upon men and women of mature years. Of course, there are moving-picture exhibitions of an entirely different character, but the demand of the majority of those who attend the movies is for that which is vile, and the moving-picture companies are in the business for money, and they know what pays. Even when pictures of a higher class are presented, oftentimes something of the viler sort is worked in, and it is almost impossible to tell what one is going to see."

A noted liberal writer of our day has said that *"the sense of sin is being lifted from the world;"* and he goes on to say that the theater, and with enormous force the cinema, is contributing to this decadence of religious convictions. The **Baltimore Catholic Review** has charged that *"the movies have tried to make vice alluring and virtue obsolete,"* and anyone who has a sense of spiritual values and who will make a careful and unprejudiced investigation, will be forced to the conclusion that they are very largely accomplishing this dreadful purpose.

Relation to Lawlessness

The testimony of history is that the theater has always been a menace to morals. It made its appearance five hundred years before Christ, and in its early history received the censure of virtuous people—Jews, pagans, and Christians. The historian **Rollin** affirms that the theater was one of the chief causes of the decadence of Greece. **Schaff** says that the Roman theater became a "*nursery of vice.*" Emperor Augustus was urged by the poet Ovid to suppress it for the sake of national safety.

"The early Christians, in avowing their loyalty to the Caesars, pledged themselves as ready to appear in their service in any place but the heathen temples and the theaters."

Macaulay tells us that from the time the theaters were opened in England they became "*seminaries of vice.*"

The movie is the modern theater for the masses, and it has all the faults of its predecessor, and more. A writer quoted in the **Literary Digest** said:

"We do not know that the morals of the movies are any worse than the morals of the stage. But mischievous movies do more harm, for they reach more people, and especially more children, who are impressionable and imitative."

The universal appeal of the movie is the amorous relations of men and women. The actors realize the effectiveness of this appeal, and have taken pains to have the sex thrill prominent in most of their productions. This appeal is an impulse that needs no stimulation; an impulse, sad to say, which in many is not under the control of reason. The mind is

inflamed by these flagrantly suggestive pictures, and an immoral life is often the result.

A leading man in the moving-picture business frankly admitted that there is so much sex stuff in the movies that the whole business is likely to be demoralized. He spoke of some of the things that are shown as *"literary garbage."*

It has been truly said that

"the sex appeal is one of the most powerful impulses in human life. Refining it and teaching the sacredness of it have always elevated individuals and nations. When it is debased, the inevitable is the crashing of the pillars of society."

It is freely admitted by producers that

"nearly all the comedy films . . . are based on the triangle of the old-fashioned French farce—the wife, the husband, and the husband's false friend."

No wonder that **Mrs. Charles E. Merriam**, of Chicago, *"dubbed"* the film a tool of vice, and said,

"The films are breaking down the standards of civilization and undermining the moral welfare of our youth."

Bishop James E. Freeman, of Washington, D. C., said:

"Much of our literature and drama are freely and flagrantly exploiting the lowest and coarsest in life, garnishing it with the most insidious and fascinating forms of expression. The erotic play that portrays the indecencies of life and that does violence to the most sacred of all

human institutions, is generously patronized by those who profess decency and respectability. In the corrupting atmosphere of such scenes . . . can we expect anything other than moral degeneracy in those, young and old alike, that witness them?"

Evidence that the movies are schools of lawlessness could be multiplied. Scores of clippings from the daily press, like the following **Associated Press dispatch**, could be presented:

"Heavily armed detectives set out yesterday to round up 'a mob' of safe blowers that had turned in seventeen jobs in three months in one district. Their quarry proved to be four grammar school boys from thirteen to sixteen years of age, who said they had drilled all the safes, and had learned how to do it by going to the movies."

John Edgar Hoover, director, **Federal Bureau of Investigation**, has this to say about the movies in an article, *"How Good a Parent Are You?"*

"To-day's movies, many of them dealing with crime, exert a tremendous influence upon pliable young minds. Law-enforcement files are replete with the stories of juvenile offenders who confess to having derived the ideas for their crimes from the movies. . . .

"The arrest of four boys, ages 15 and 16, solved a wave of burglaries. In each case, entry was effected by the use of skeleton keys or keys left under door mats. Each boy had a good school record and came from a home of good repute. Each said he got his ideas from the movies."

According to a recent bulletin issued by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, 31.8 per cent of persons arrested during 1948 were young people under 25 years of age. Their records also indicate that 27.9 per

cent of the crimes against property during 1948 were committed by persons less than 21 years of age. There is no question in the minds of thoughtful observers that the widespread portrayal of lawlessness which has been going on in the movies for years is to a large extent responsible for our present harvest of crime.

Mrs. Ellen O'Grady, formerly **New York City deputy police commissioner**, told the New York, legislators in a hearing on a proposed motion-picture regulation law:

"I know from my own experience that the greater part of juvenile delinquency is due to the evil influence of motion pictures. I could cite you case after case of boys and girls gone wrong because of films."

With such testimonials as these, can any Christian think it right to patronize the movies? Jesus said, *"Blessed are the pure in heart."* **Matthew 5:8** Can we keep pure while beholding impurity?

Effect on Normal Development of Children

Many educators look with alarm at the influence of the movies on the rising generation. As the **Seattle Star** said:

"Many of our young people have acquired the 'moving-picture mind.' All life to them is a series of snapshots, with no chance for a time exposure. Hence they cannot think straight on any subject. They are a bundle of transient impressions and confused ideas."

In the school, in the home, and in the church, one set of standards is upheld, while at the movies an entirely different set is presented in a glamorous and an appealing way. The result naturally is confusion of mind and a definite attraction toward the lower standards.

President Faunce, of Brown University, expressed the same thought:

"Modern life is a kaleidoscope of fleeting impressions. The old-timer had fewer things of interest and got closer to things basic. Ours is a generation of surface thinkers."

Many people habitually absent themselves from the movies because the pictures are below the level of their intelligence. Instead of stimulating its patrons to higher thinking as any educational institution should do, just the opposite is true.

For proper development, the child should live a quiet, natural life in the loving atmosphere of home, and surrounded by the things of nature, which will open to him day by day the secrets of the Infinite. City life at best is artificial, and the moving-picture theaters which have been

established in every aggregation of population have greatly increased these unnatural conditions. The depicting of thrilling and overtense human experiences in quick succession, greatly overstimulates the emotional nature, especially of growing and inexperienced children and youth. Scientific investigation has proved that a child is affected three times as much emotionally as an older person is. If the child is of all excitable nature, the strain on the nerves may be from eight to ten times that of an adult's reaction.

The following report was given by a **nurse** who worked in the **first-aid rooms of theaters** in a large Midwestern city.

She said that during the showing of exciting pictures

"children would scream all over the theater; many of them would dash out, and mothers would leave the theater with frightened and hysterical children clinging to them. At times the children would vomit as a result of their emotional condition."

"Such constant excitation of the nervous system tends to overdevelop the emotions and overthrow the judgment. All the intense emotional scenes depicted in a book are thrown upon the screen and pass before the child's mind in one or two hours."

Children are naturally imitative. The things they see are going to be put into practice. No wonder our daily newspapers are constantly bringing us stories such as this one taken from the **Atlanta Journal, June 21, 1943**:

"Thirteen-year-old Julius Lukus ... confessed to stabbing a 2-year-old playmate 10 times, then rolling him over a hillside, 'just like I seen it in the movies.'"

As the Expositor said,

"The mischief done to young children by the cinema is incalculable, because of its subtle and often untraceable effects upon the character."

The Dramatic Profession

What type of people does the dramatic profession attract, and what is its influence on those who follow it? While there are exceptions to all rules, it is a well-known fact that theatrical actors as a class are unworthy characters. As the **Sunday School Times** said:

"While there are a few outstanding exceptions in its ranks of individual men and women who have not been dragged down by it, its general trail of wreckage in character can be compared to no other reputable profession or life calling."

The reason is plain. As a theatrical critic of the **London Press** said years ago:

"Stage life, according to my experience, has a tendency to deaden the finer feelings, to crush the inner nature of men and women, and to substitute artificiality and hollowness for sincerity and truth; and, mind you, I speak from an intimate experience of the stage, extending over thirty-seven years."

Macready, a well-known theatrical man, said:

"None of my children, with my consent, under any pretense, shall ever enter the theater, nor shall they have any visiting connection with play actors or actresses."

Dr. Charles Blanchard, former **president of Wheaton College**, asks these pertinent questions:

"Is it possible for a man to play, for five years in twenty-five dramas, that he is the husband of twenty-five or thirty different women, without suffering spiritual harm? Is it possible for a woman to play that she has

been seduced and become an outcast, without being morally injured? Is it possible for a woman who is married to play that she is married to other persons than her husband and to act the situation as vividly as possible, so as to awaken the interest and applause of the audience, without harm? Is it possible for a man to play that he is a murderer or a thief, without being injured in character, and is it possible for people to look on while men and women are playing these things, without themselves being injured?"

Anyone who knows human nature can answer these questions but one way, *"It is not possible."*

The theatrical profession degrades its promoters; and

"what cannot be done without a tendency to moral harm cannot be seen without a tendency to moral harm."

These facts force us to the same conclusion as has been reached by the **Sunday School Times**:

"The dramatic or theatrical profession, as such, involves such artificial, unhealthy, and demoralizing factors that no Christian can safely be a member of that profession, or approve and encourage it by attending dramatic performances, whether on the stage or the motion-picture screen."

"Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away."

Proverbs 4: 14, 15

The Christian's Influence

There may be some who are thinking of good films that are shown. The traveler brings back to us from foreign lands the pictures of life as it is actually lived. The naturalist, by clever camera hunting in the wilds, is able to show us realistic pictures of animals as they live in their natural habitats. We are even taken to the ocean's depths to see the myriad forms of life that live in the great deep. It is possible for Christians at home to see the actual conditions of life in the mission fields, and also the work of the gospel missionaries as they endeavor to lead the heathen from darkness to light.

But such pictures have no connection with the moving-picture drama, and when not mixed in with theatrical films, are perfectly proper for a Christian to see. The moving-picture theater is another thing altogether. The character of the institution stamps it as un-Christian. We do not say that there are no moral actors, but we do say emphatically that there is no such thing as a moral theater. No Christian can attend either the legitimate or the moving-picture theater except at the expense of his Christian influence, as well as his moral sensitiveness. Instances are known in which Christian workers have lost all their influence with the unconverted by being seen at the theater. Such persons know that the theater is no place for anyone who professes Christianity to attend.

But aside from our influence on our fellows, for our own sake we must avoid that of which God does not approve. It is said that a **New York minister** who was anxious to see and hear **Edwin Booth**, the great actor, wrote him a letter, saying,

"I am anxious to be at one of your plays, but as I have always been opposed to the theater, and would appear inconsistent, could you not admit me at some private or stage door?"

To this note **Mr. Booth** replied:

"There is no door to my theater through which God cannot see."

"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful."

Psalm 1:1

Shall Christians Attend the Movies?

My sympathy goes out to any, especially the young, who have become infatuated with the movies. Young people want thrills, and that is all right. But where shall we find these appeals to our emotional nature?

"Will it be in the dumping ground of moral garbage, or shall we go to the mountain peak to see the sunrise?"

I know that in many cases it will be impossible to break the movie habit without divine aid. But will you, dear friend, stop and think? You were drawn into the movies without thinking, perhaps. But now think the thing through, in the light of the facts. Intellectual vagueness is one of the chief dangers to any form of temptation.

When you return from the movie, do you feel like having a time of sweet communion with God? Has attendance made you more or less zealous in missionary activity? Would you care to be found in a movie when Jesus comes?

There was a theater in Jerusalem in the days of Jesus. Do you think Jesus or His disciples attended it? When Herod introduced this theater, it was denounced by Josephus, a Jewish writer, as a corrupter of morals. You cannot imagine Jesus patronizing it, can you? Can you imagine Him attending the movies if He were on earth today? No. But rather you hear Him say,

"I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one. Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love

the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."

1 John 2:14-16.

Mrs. E. G. White, in commenting on the Saviour's words, "*When the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?*" **Luke 18:8** said:

"He saw how real Christianity would become almost extinct in the world, so that at His second advent He would find a state of society similar to that which existed before the flood. The world would be engaged in festivity and amusement, in theatrical shows, in the indulgence of base passions."

The conclusion, it seems to me, must be that while there is no objection to natural-life motion pictures, which have no connection with the theatrical profession, no conscientious Christian, who hates sin and loves righteousness, can patronize the moving-picture theater. As **Mrs. White** has said:

"The true Christian will not desire to enter any place of amusement or engage in any diversion upon which he cannot ask the blessing of God. He will not be found at the theater, . . . or indulge in any other bewitching pleasure that will banish Christ from the mind."

- Review and Herald, Feb. 28, 1882.

"Thou wilt show me the path of life: in Thy presence is fullness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore."

Psalm 16:11

Establishing Right Principles

"Among the most dangerous resorts for pleasure is the theater. Instead of being a school for morality and virtue, as is so often claimed, it is the very hotbed of immorality. Vicious habits and sinful propensities are strengthened and confirmed by these entertainments. Low songs, lewd gestures, expressions, and attitudes, deprave the imagination and debase the morals. Every youth who habitually attends such exhibitions will be corrupted in principle. There is no influence in our land more powerful to poison the imagination, to destroy religious impressions, and to blunt the relish for the tranquil pleasures and sober realities of life, than theatrical amusements. The love for these scenes increases with every indulgence, as the desire for intoxicating drink strengthens with its use. The only safe course is to shun the theater, the circus, and every other questionable place of amusement.

"There are modes of recreation which are highly beneficial to both body and mind. An enlightened, discriminating mind will find abundant means for entertainment and diversion, from sources not only innocent, but instructive. Recreation in the open air, the contemplation of the works of God in nature, will be of the highest benefit."

- Messages to Young People, pp. 380, 381.

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