

FILM DANGERS

RECENTLY in *The Catholic Times* Captain Curd called the attention of his fellow-Catholics to the dangers of the films. The financial power behind the films may be gauged by realising that the capital invested in them is some eight hundred million pounds. And the dangers to even the morals of the onlookers, especially the child-onlooker, may be gauged by recalling that in a recent cinema disaster the film last seen by the children was one passed by the Censor for adults!

Captain Curd's moving, indeed disconcerting, truths about film dangers receive corroboration from an authoritative quarter. The following facts we take from 'The Report of an Experiment conducted in October 1929 by a Special Committee of the British Institute of Adult Education into the educational influence of commercially shown films.'¹

Some forty-eight observers were distributed over twenty-seven centres in England and Scotland. They made notes on ninety films. 'On the whole the observers' reports, though differing widely in their estimate of individual films show remarkable agreement in their general conclusions. They confirm the generally accepted belief that there is little educational value in the films usually shown to the public.' This is a confirmation of the psychological fact that there is no easy way of doing hard things; but there is a quick way of doing hard things—by hard work. Liquid food is no substitute for solid food. But cinemas provide mental food in what we may call liquid form. It is therefore significant that investigation into facts confirms *a priori* reasoning.

¹Printed in *The Journal of Adult Education*, April, 1930.

The Report continues: 'Thirteen centres reported definitely deleterious elements in the programmes which they visited; that is *deleterious morally* rather than intellectually. One film dealing with the life of the American underworld was singled out by four centres for especial condemnation. Another deleterious film (Manchester) was one showing the attempt of a married woman to seduce a young boy.' And this after the examination and no doubt the approval of the censor!

'Nearly all our observers are agreed upon the intellectually deadening quality of the programmes . . . they are characterised by an almost entire lack of originality, spontaneity and variety in the realm of ideas. . . . One or two observers add that many children have developed the habit of going far too often to the pictures, with the result that whatever good effects these might occasionally produce were offset by the mental drug habit they thus inculcated.' All this indictment of the existing commercial film is summed up in the following conclusions of the forty-eight observers:—

1. General agreement as to the paucity of direct education in the sense of instruction or useful information or aesthetic stimulation.

2. General agreement that the most educational feature of the average programme is the news budget; but that this is usually treated too cursorily to be effective.

3. In exceptional cases individual films have some direct educational value, mainly through setting or through the incidental showing of pictures of nature or of life in foreign countries.

4. A number of films, rather fewer than the good films referred to above, were definitely *described as deleterious in a moral sense*.

Blackfriars

5. The crude and stereotyped fare offered in many programmes *has a deleterious effect intellectually*, by degrading the imagination of those who see them and by failing to provide any stimulus of original ideas.

Captain Curd's plain-spoken indictment could hardly find more timely and complete confirmation. It remains to be seen how far the indictment and the confirmation will have their desired effect on either the film-maker or the film-gazer.

VINCENT MCNABB, O.P.

O FELIX CULPA !

*' O Felix culpa quae talem et tantum meruit habere
Redemptorem.'*

EDEN'S curst tree
On Calvary
Bore fruit beyond hope's dreaming.

O blessed Sin !
That thus did win
Such and so great redeeming.

VINCENT MCNABB, O.P.