

the direct method in life and thereby risked the whole future of European civilisation. 'Would Falstaff have fraternised with Faust?' asks Miss Butler in this lecture, one firmly based on a deep understanding of the German mind and gracefully indicating the urgency of the problem. As literary figures both do honour to the nations which produced them; as symbols of an attitude to life they provide a terrifying contrast. Falstaff babbled of green fields, Faust uttered in their presence the most poignant cry in German poetry: 'Verweile doch, du bist so schön'; but the first was *approaching death*—with all his faults, with the awe of a Christian man and a tenderness of soul more real than the grossness of his body—while the other *had already tasted of death's mystery*. The Germans have forgotten Aristotle: poetry must be in a way larger than life, to draw from our eyes the tears we dare not shed in the presence of grim reality; and all being must be in some sense reduced before it can be identified with the questing soul.

EDWARD QUINN.

THE FILMS

SOCIOLOGY OF FILM. By J. P. Mayer. (Faber; 15s.)

AMERICA AT THE MOVIES. By Margaret Farrand Thorp. (Faber; 12s. 6d.)

THE FACTUAL FILM: A survey by the Arts Enquiry. (P.E.P. and Oxford University Press; 12s. 6d.)

The local Odeon is a portent, and that not primarily because of its architecture, however prodigious it may be. For the cinema, the place where films are shown, is the meeting-point of many currents—financial, industrial, sociological, artistic—and the word 'Cinema' (with a capital) has acquired a wealth of connotations which must embarrass anyone who has the hardihood to write on the subject. Mr Rank, speaking at the annual general meeting of the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation (cf. report in *The Economist*, December 7th, 1946), is pleased that 'during a period of steady progress in our business, which embraces all branches of the industry from studio to screen, trading profits have reached a new high level which constitutes a record achievement in the history of the corporation'. For Mr Mayer, 'Films exert the most powerful influence in our lives. . . . The nature of this influence which is exerted on *all* classes of British society . . . is a *moral* one. Value patterns, actual behaviour, the outlook on life generally, are manifestly shaped by film influences'. For Miss Thorp, 'it is undoubtedly true that no art has ever been so shaped and influenced by its audience as the art of the cinema'. For the Arts Enquiry's survey, 'The film industry as a whole has measured the popularity of a film only in terms of box-office receipts and has shown little sense of responsibility for encouraging the best in public taste or for stimulating public interest in the film as a creative and interpretative medium'.

The first task of any investigator into the Cinema must, then, be to disentangle its various threads and to assess their relative impor-

tance. It is useless to complain of the artistic poverty of most feature films unless one takes account of the elaborate commercial process of which the film, as a thing made in a studio, is only a small part. It is equally useless to deplore the moral effect of the Cinema without reference to the structure of the society whose values the usual film all too faithfully reflects.

Mr Maver, as a sociologist, is more concerned with the filmgoer than with the film. What he asks in effect is: how are the millions who flock to the cinema every week influenced by films? But before he attempts to answer this question in the light of replies to questionnaires and of his own observations, Mr Maver in two introductory chapters lays down some very necessary first principles. He considers the 'mythical' element in the modern passion for the cinema, that element which Malinowski in another connection described as 'not merely a story told but a reality lived'. He emphasises the contemporary need for 'visualisation' and draws a valuable comparison between the reactions of modern audiences and those of Elizabethans, who were trained *listeners*. Again, 'Film is symptom and cause', and is a medium, both as popular art and educational instrument, which can serve positive ends if responsibly developed. He tackles resolutely the question of State responsibility and finds in St Augustine's summary of the attitude of his own age—*Let the laws protect the rights of property and leave men's morals alone*—a good description of our own age's domination by the interests of high finance, at least in the world of the cinema.

The power of the film barons is real. In one sphere at least, that of the widespread children's cinema clubs, it is a menace. In answer to the industry's defence of a policy of 'mere' entertainment, Mr Mayer very properly replies: 'It is impossible to provide entertainment divorced from moral and psychological norms. Even if you intend to give pure entertainment, the power of visualisation creates moral patterns'. The replies to a *picturegoer* questionnaire printed by Mr Maver reveal how potent is the influence exerted by a constant diet of film-going, on social behaviour—dress, manners, conversation—no less than on general moral values. *Sociology of Film* is a preliminary study, and a most valuable one. It is only through a careful analysis of the effect of the cinema on its devotees (and that means, by now, the substantial majority of the population) that the ground can be prepared for reform. Priests, teachers, in fact everyone concerned with education in its widest sense, should read Mr Mayer's book and consider how far they can assist in the *constructive* work of harnessing a monster whose power is as yet insufficiently appreciated.

Miss Thorp's book, which first appeared in America in 1939, is a diverting but shrewd account of the effect of films on American society in that year. She rightly relates the general problem to its local concrete expression: in other words, what happens, say, when *A Yank at Oxford* comes to Oklahoma? A skilful analysis of the industry, of methods of distribution, of the pre-occupations of producers, of the star system and publicity, of the methods and effect of

propaganda, censorship and criticism—all this is brilliantly illustrated. 'The movie heroine never has more than one child and that child never has to be washed or dressed or punished or got ready for school'. 'The young people who go to these displays of sex excitement may not be aware of all the education they are getting but they do go to the movies, many of them quite deliberately, to learn social techniques'. 'They were interested in the film (*Confessions of a Nazi Spy*) but they were not particularly excited about it. A good picture, they said, but of course all that spy stuff is not true; it's just a movie'.

The Factual Film, on the other hand, is exclusively concerned with the cinema as a medium for purposes other than entertainment. It represents the second of four reports to be presented by the Dartington Hall Trustees on the Visual Arts, the Factual Film, Music, and the Theatre. Chapters on the Documentary Film (which is the outstanding British contribution to the cinema) are followed by sections on the use of the film in education, news films, and films for historical and sociological record. A chapter on 'Films and the Public' deals with general questions of policy—the work of film societies, films for children, religious films, film criticism and the British Film Institute.

This report is full of accurate information, and behind the official phrases of the careful survey one discerns a lively appreciation of the importance of the film in our social life, and a determination that its use as an instrument of education and information shall not be swamped by the financial interests of the feature film. Of the four recommendations made by the (anonymous) writers, three have already been implemented, viz., the continuance of the Films Division of the Ministry of Information, the development of an educational film policy by the Ministry of Education and the establishment of a film department within UNESCO. These proposals, good in themselves, will need careful watching, and the Christian contribution, one may add, lies not only in the field of moral judgment in the narrow sense. The potentialities, for good or evil, of the cinema are unimaginably great, and the fact that up to now the public opinion of religious bodies has concentrated on the regulation of the outrageous has obscured the real function of the Christian critic. In films, as in much else besides, reform must be related to society as a whole: it is idle to complain of the false standards of the usual Hollywood musical unless one realises *why* such a film is made at all, and, still more important, *why* it is liked.

Enough has been said to show how valuable these studies should be to anyone who is aware of the serious social problem presented by the modern cinema and who, by a discriminating understanding, may hope to assist in its solution.

ILLTUD EVANS, O.P.

SCIENCE AND THE MEANINGS OF TRUTH. By Martin Johnson. (Faber; 12s. 6d.)

In the first part of his latest book Mr Johnson gives a not specifically new but brilliantly expounded account of scientific method first