

EDITORIAL

THERE is evidently something wrong with the psychology of a nation that offers a public welcome to an American film star and allows its foremost air-pilot to return from an amazing flight of 17,000 miles without a word or gesture of national appreciation. When one read of the Lord Mayor of London offering a public reception to Mr. Tom Mix, and letting Mr. Alan Cobham slip home without any official notice or recognition, it was impossible not to find in these events a parable symptomatic of the spirit of the age. The lesson of the parable is that the majority of people are suffering from a lack of true values: they have lost their sense of proportion. A writer in a daily paper has pointed out that there is no possible comparison between the feats of the two men. No doubt the exploits of the crack rider of Tony are a remarkable exhibition and a delight to the heart of every school-boy: but who would venture even to think of them in the same category as the airman's marvellous performance? Yet the film actor is invited to the Mansion House while the airman goes quietly home.

There is something wrong somewhere. It may be a gracious act on our part to extend a cordial welcome to American film stars and keep our modest heroes in the background (they would be the last men to court the limelight), but the truth of the matter lies much deeper than a question of good manners or national politeness. What this attitude of the public mind uncomfortably demonstrates is the fact that while purveyors of mere amusement are hailed as super-beings, almost as gods, men who cheerfully risk their lives in the national service for the security of the public are blankly ignored. This is more than saying that we are casual to our heroes and rather patronising to our saviours; it means that the cult of the cinema with all

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that pertains to it is enslaving the mind and imagination of the people, and alienating their attention from serious national interests. The motion pictures have become just as much an institution as the legitimate or music-hall stage: more than that, with many people they have developed into a personal habit, and personal habits, if they are not of a high order, have a way of interfering with the more serious business of life. They usurp energies that should be diverted into more important channels and interfere with a proper appreciation of the things that matter. They throw mental vision out of true focus, with the result that intellectual values and standards lose their real proportions.

This regrettable frame of mind which refuses homage to heroes and covers film stars with adulation has been induced, strangely enough, by films that are for the most part bad. For some reason yet unknown people do not bring to bear on the cinema that strong critical faculty which in the theatre is ready to tear a new play to pieces or proclaim it something worth seeing. Yet only by such genuine criticism can the cinema hope to rise from the depths into which American producers have plunged it, and become a popular artistic medium by realising its vast possibilities. It is not necessary here to enlarge upon the decadence, surely untimely, of the films; that question has already been adequately discussed in these pages (November, 1924). But the point to notice is that, through lack of real criticism and ruthless censorship, the cinema has been allowed to appeal to and cater for man's lower instincts by surrounding the baser inclinations of human nature with the glamour of romance and adventure. Therefore people have come to regard the display of unworthy passion and the practice of criminal adventure as the ordinary things in every-day life, perhaps as an escape from the monotony of their own drab lives, and to acclaim those stars who feature the leading

rôles the most important personages in this unromantic world. No wonder they try to rush the platform when their own particular film fancy condescends to pay them a visit.

Film-fever, one of the most distressing symptoms of this unhealthy age, thrives on the fetid artificiality of the screen and shrinks from the simple things of life, sunshine, fresh air, the open road. Therefore no adequate appreciation is forthcoming for the man who returns victorious from a record flight across the world, and when, as a correspondent in *The Daily Mail* informs us, Mr. Cobham gave 'an admirable lecture on his flight at the Aeolian Hall on April 7 . . . the hall was anything but crowded.' 'Had Charlie Chaplin, Douglas Fairbanks, or Mary Pickford been billed to give a lecture,' the writer justly concludes, 'I venture to predict the hall would have been crowded to suffocation.'

It is time that managers of cinemas in this country had sufficient courage to emulate the example of the Irish Free State in refusing permission to an American film agent to arrange bookings in Ireland for demoralising pictures. The agent threatened to boycott the country and leave it filmless but this threat had not the desired effect of routing the opposition. Only strong action of this kind can hope to preserve the public from the degrading influence of the average film, and counteract the false standards the cinema is doing its utmost to broadcast among the community at large. But when good money is to be coined out of bad shows it is almost too much to hope that any drastic action will ever be taken. In the meantime, the minds of the people are being filled with hectic ideas that have no relation to the pressing needs of daily life. And the time may come when these unpractical ideas will be a menace to the safety of the country.

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