

PLAYS

Tokio Insists on Clean Wholesome Movies

CECIL DE MILLE, the motion-picture producer, says Current Opinion, recently came out of his projecting-room with the expression in his eyes that must have been in the eyes of Columbus when he first saw the new land.

"Come in here," said De Mille to his associates. "I want you to see something. I don't understand it; it is new and strange, but it is the greatest thing I ever saw." And what they saw in the projecting-room was the Japanese actor, Sessue Hayakawa, in a then unfinished film play entitled "The Cheat." It was the spectacle of an actor who could register great emotional effects without moving a muscle of his face.

Questioned on the subject, Hayakawa gave a characteristically oblique answer, intimating that the Billy Sunday revival-meetings are an indication of the weakness of western civilizations. He said that the vociferous evangelist seemed very strange and grotesque to a Japanese of the Samurai class, adding:

"We are all trained from childhood never to betray emotion with our faces. Mr. Sunday certainly has a great power over his audiences, but he waves his arms and jumps up on his pulpit and screams out slang phrases. We had an actor in Japan named Danjuro who could sway an audience more powerfully than Sunday. He didn't fling his arms about. He didn't move a muscle. He stood in the centre of the stage absolutely motionless, his face absolutely without expression."

Hayakawa, on the screen, obtains his most pronounced effects by this same repressed method. He refutes the theory that motion pictures can never tell a great story because there are no words; that subtle, psychological effects cannot be shown simply by gestures. On the contrary:

"Words are the crude things. It is words that cannot tell a subtle story."

"But gestures?" I expostulated. "Can you tell the story of a man's soul struggle by wriggling your hands?"

"I do not wriggle my hands," said Hayakawa, with dignity. "Neither do I make gestures. If I want to show on the screen that I hate a man I do not shake my fists at him. I think down in my heart how I hate him and try not to move a muscle of my face; just as I would in life."

"How does the audience get it?"

"That is one of the matters difficult of explanation," said Hayakawa. "But the audience gets it, nevertheless. It gets the story with finer shades of meaning than words could possibly tell them. Words would, in fact, take away from the meaning and confuse it."

The ancient drama of Japan, we are reminded, is all of tragic character and tells of death. Comedies were almost unknown in Japan until in comparatively recent time. It is true that Shakespeare is popular, but his popularity is based on his tragedies and not on his comedies. The favorite native Japanese plays are still full of sorrow and tears, which makes it all the more surprising to this typically stoic Japanese actor that among the American screen players the most popular in Japan is Charley Chaplin. A great vogue for Chaplin has come through the school-children of Japan.

In this connection, we read that Japan has developed a code of movie ethics in the way of censorship rules that is in many respects an improvement on anything that our official censors have thus far invoked. For example, Tokio bans the sex triangle from its movie menu. It requires love scenes to be "temperate and restrained." Divorce, domestic infelicity and belligerency between husband and wife must either be altogether avoided or kept discreetly in the background. Under no circumstances can such things be featured or their unsavory details be exploited, regardless of the "moral lesson" ostensibly aimed at. Murder, burglary, arson, crime of nearly every sort, treason or disloyalty to country, are to be kept off the screen as far as possible. Children are not permitted to witness pictures in which "wanton destruction of property" is depicted. Finally Tokio will permit no picture that exposes to ridicule persons in authority, such as teachers or policemen

—a rule that hits at the very capstone of American film "comedy." There are many things for us to learn from the Japanese in film making.

Why Close the Theatres?

AMONG the schemes proposed to save coal has been that to close theatres and vaudeville and motion-picture houses three days a week.

It is interesting to us who in Canada are consider-



IF you had eyes like this gentleman you would naturally apply for a job in a movie show. Mr. Chichenin—that's his name—qualifies for the screen. He is the man whom Trotsky nominated as Russian Ambassador in London before the post was offered to Mr. Litvinoff. He was in an English internment camp when he was offered the post. Oh, he surely qualifies for the screen.

ing this move, to read of the effect of such a rule in New York City. Because of its 118 places of such entertainment, the rule would be specially noticeable here, says the Outlook. These places burn some \$2,500 worth of coal a day; were they closed in cold weather, they would still have to burn much fuel to prevent the freezing of their sprinkler systems.

Added to this would be the attendant loss to the Government, of taxes on admission, which would much exceed any saving on coal. So far from saving something to the Government, therefore, the scheme would work the other way and the saving of coal would be negligible.

But this is not all. The thousands of employees, not to mention some hundreds of actors and actresses, would be reduced to part pay on half-time employment. But most important yet is the recognition of the theatre as a distinct means of stimulating a cheery, soldierly spirit. London and Paris have long since understood this, and the theatres in those cities are open and crowded. In every city there are large numbers of soldiers and sailors on leave.

Florence Easton's Elizabeth

FLORENCE EASTON'S work in the role of Elizabeth in Lizst's opera of that name at the Metropolitan seems to have ranked among the big interpretations of the season. In nearly two columns'

description of the work the New York Evening Post devotes the major part of its report of the artists to the admirable doings of this Canadian singer who made her opera debut here some years ago with the Savage Opera in English. The writer says:

The audience was in its attitude like the large assemblages that have so often worshipped at the shrine of "Pasifal." Very few left before the impressive final scene; there was much applause for the spectacle, the music, the singers; and all of it was fully deserved. Florence Easton made the part of Elizabeth one of the most emotional and fascinating impersonations ever witnessed at the Metropolitan—quite as good as Fremstad's Kundry in its way. Her airs are mostly pathetic, but with the aid of tonal modulation and varied facial expression she imparted to them surprising variety and a deep appeal to the feelings. Her diction, too, was remarkably distinct. Several times during the evening the writer heard the remark that for the first time at the Metropolitan a work was being sung in understandable English.

Begin in the Chorus

ELSIE FERGUSON, who appears in "Rose of the World," has this bit of advice for the amateur who would a-filming go:

"The time has passed when inexperienced people will be able to attain a position of importance in films. Real artists have come into the industry, and the cost of production has become so great that directors can no longer take the time to train their people in the art of acting. I would emphatically urge that beginners start their career on the stage, if they would attain real artistic success. I would advise them to get positions in the chorus. The other girls around them will act as a support during their first days. Thus they get used to stage ways and study the art so that when the opportunity comes to play a little part they will be equipped for success."

Miss Ferguson began in the chorus.

Back to Happiness

LAURETTE TAYLOR comes back to her own in "Happiness." That doesn't mean that she lacks versatility or can only play the Peg line of parts. So far, though, she has been at her best in the display of the gamine humor and pathos which won her greatest recognition in "Peg o' My Heart." In "Happiness" she returns to this phase with apparent satisfaction to herself and to the quick appreciation of her great personal following.

Some expert dramatists have confessed that they wrote their plays backwards; that is, they found their climaxes and then wrote up to them. Mr. Mannors is evidently not of this school, for in his plays the finish seems to gain from him the least consideration. The main thing is achieved when it provides even a plausible setting in which the star may shine, and this "Happiness" does. The first act was the original sketch supplying the title, and the key without which the rest of the piece means little. In the added material we have the exposition of what had only been told at first, shown best by author and artist in the touching and delightful air of motherly protection thrown by the child about the mother.

Lovers of Peg will find much of her brought to life again in "Happiness," and in the earlier episodes might bring themselves to believe that this is Peg before she went to England.

LEO DITRICH-STEIN, who used to be such a success in The Concertmaster, is now doing an equally picturesque role in "The King" at the Cohan Theatre, New York. Eyeglass and cigarette and Persian lamb cuffs are included in the wardrobe. The tilt of the cap over the monocle is a cool bit of subterfuge that goes well with the gloves in the under-hand.

