

Hollywood Whoopee in Manila

Goodness, gracious! Here are gorgeous temples rising aloft on every hand and the choicest business blocks, and to what cult? Who are their vestals, what their oracles, who their high priests? One is the *Lyric*, another the *Rialto*, another the *Ideal*, another the *Savoy*, another the *Columbia*; and skirting the very plaza of Sta. Cruz parish church are three more, the *Tivoli*, the *Majestic*, the *Palace*. Their names give them away, are indeed catchy notices to the public that here are spectacles to see; and all night long their vigils are aflame, so that the dark is turned day and a livid light thrusts back the arc of shadowed heaven. For all this splendor, how many worshipers: what votive gifts to furnish out such shrines.

Yea, truly spoken. In the parlance of the times, it's all good business.

The cult exploited in these handsome piles is a profane cult, e'en a vulgar one: the cult of the Hollywood movies—the circusses, if not the bread, of a democracy resurgent and eminently up and coming all over this populous world. It's a force to be dealt with; and tariffs, an expedient denied to moralists in the Philippines, seem not to be sufficient to keep it down. Up it bobs in England, South Africa—everywhere. And where it goes, gaudier and gaudier temples rise in its popular honor: none is so poor but to do it reverence, to turn a familiar phrase about.

Moralists worry, but the crowd laughs and goes to the show. Even France, nursemaid of drama, wants Hollywood importations cut about 60%, with reciprocal arrangements for French films in America; and *Il Duce* is worried in Italy. This Hollywood movie—it's almost an avangell! In South America particularly, members of the substantial class who have always boasted they were the state but who have looked back too much toward Europe, sit in their clubs and deplore the Hollywood movies and the degradation of the times. They wonder what will happen to countries as eager as theirs to applaud the tricksters of the screen, who contrive such prodigious exhibitions. We have these pessimists in Manila, too.

Their anxiety harks back, of course, to periods when the theater—from which they don't distinguish the screen, apparently—boded no good to the gods of things as they are when the theme on the boards was one to crowd the galleries. Why can't people shun the movies and patronize musicals and applaud the pageants of their betters, or sit quietly at home of evenings and read Guest, Kyne and the author of *Riders of the Purple Sage* in the original? The answer is, people don't have to! That answer explains, does it not, the new *Lyric*, peerless among Escolta (Main street) buildings?—and the *Rialto*, similarly dominating in its spacious beauty on Rizal avenue? More will come. Be not surprised if the *Savoy* dons new architectural garments (and its vaudeville girls don fewer and scantier), or any of the rest.

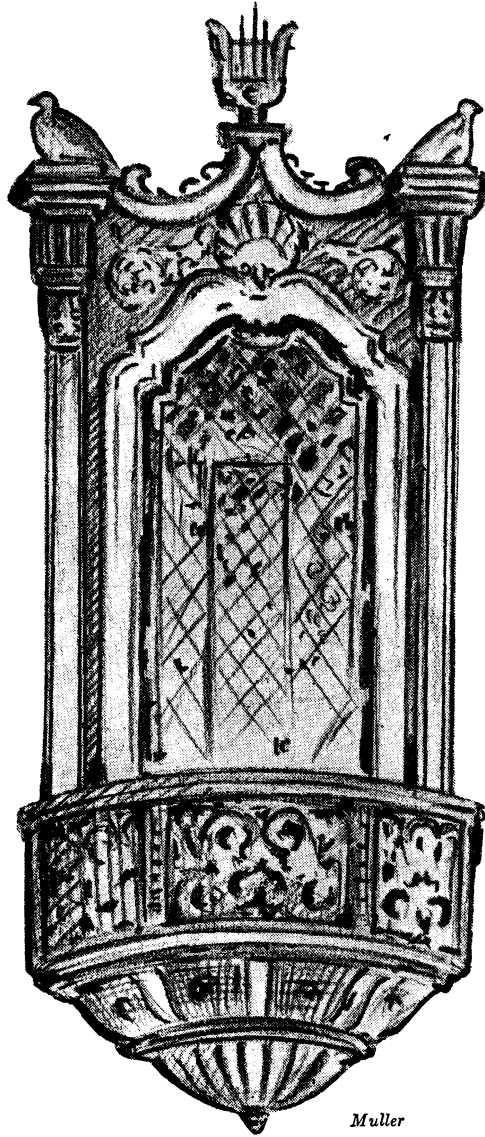
Yes, there really is an evangel of the movies; it is not blasphemy to say so; and neophytes of native peoples easily pleased, make their nightly pilgrimages to the box offices. Why? What is the charm, the mystery, the promise? Where is the lodestone hidden? Wherein lies the oracular power of the picture puppets? Foolish questions, if one is at all crowd-minded. Every picture is a delphic promise, mystic with possibilities to every beholder.

Hollywood movies, anyone may observe, are of, for and by the crowd: they are the celluloid version in manifold of an allocution uttered at Gettysburg by a mystic who came up from the crowd and whom the crowd will never cease to venerate: "of the people, for the people..." Lincoln felt for the people, the Hollywood movies flatter them; wide though the contrast, the primary concern of the statesman was, and that of the picture star is, the people. Maybe Lincoln would have enjoyed the movies, he did enjoy what went for them in his day and vicinity: camp meeting, county fairs, barbecues. He was exceedingly fond of the theater, too. The Fletchers in buskins, the Johnsons in socks, of his day, were his friends; and he was both a student and patron of their art.

His career is a *super feature* for the films.

The rail splitter who made good in such a glorious way!

One may question Hollywood's ethics easier than he may its psychology, which is quite irreproachable. The crowd, which Hollywood proposes to please as a good business proposition, is made up of underdogs. *Ain't* it the truth? In the Hollywood movies, naturally, the underdog always comes out on top. But



Muller

The *Lyric* is cooled and ventilated indirectly by means of these false windows.

lordy, intransigents! fear not if he does. His triumphs are always those of copybook uprightness. The crook is always either caught and publicly disgraced and punished, or made repentant by adversity; the Hollywood movies always flicker out the admonishment, *Honesty is the best policy*. In them, cruel authority, parental or what-not, is always defied until it comes to its senses and moderates its severity: the eloping couple is forgiven, the erring wife had good and sufficient reason—beauty, for one thing!—and the effeminate son turns out at last the real pride of the family, one whom Dad is glad to acclaim a chip off the old block!

Far from there being anything subversive in such preachments, they are a positive public good; they reach the discouraged ego of adolescence (and fellows down on their luck) with stimulating pluck and hope just when they need this illusion most; and they don't hurt anyone who is already plentifully supplied with what they offer. Hollywood movies are a cult of nonquitters and nonwelchers. Their forest rangers are not only handsome and heroic, they are as devoted to the trees they guard as the Author of the forest himself is. They have a lot of mean cowboys, but their colleagues who are

Gee, It Makes A Sonnet!

The movies first of all are popular,
Their dairymaidish whimsies woo the crowd
That feels not humor till it laughs out loud
At wit, quite witless unless ocular,
That comes to be, in shadow, jocular—
Like oldtime crooking of our uncle's fingers
'Twixt light and wall made shows whose memory lingers,
Of prankish shades with bodies globular.

In brief, the movies recapitulate
Our childhood years, of all our years the best
Remembered in our grown-up prime—
Are you too proud tonight to sit you late,
When to the show you've hurried with the rest,
To see a tale unreel of once upon a time?

loyal to the ranch always baffle the rougues in the end. Hollywood movies discover shining virtues beneath rough exteriors, but the crowd knows of Exhibits a-b-c in support of cases like this. Hollywood is strictly for property, and usually bestows a generous portion of it on one or more deserving young couples before the fadeout shows the hero and the heroine in each other's arms.

Work hard, keep your wits about you, make good and win a lovely girl's true love (or a handsome man's)—that's what the Hollywood film copybook says over and over again: the old story that never grows old! Demoralizing? Why, Hollywood movies are no more demoralizing than the boss's announcement of a raise in one's salary; or, on nearing one's vine and fig tree in a row of tenements, the smell of a hearty supper and the song of a comely wife. They're not at all demoralizing; they're exhilarating, rejuvenating; they are cheer leaders. They are somewhat rough on traditions, a new cult replacing an old one, but there is nothing in them but what encourages men (of the crowd) to work hard and build good homes, to which they retire early and sober, and women to adorn those homes and comfort those men with their adorable and indispensable presence, when, and as long as, they are appreciated in them. Hollywood life may be on the loose, but Hollywood movies are as orthodox as a stump speech on the Iowa hustings.

So that explains, partially, the prosperity of the movie business in Manila. It is somewhat confounding to the theory that *east is east and west is west and never the twain shall meet*, but that is just a theory, and the movies are very positively a fact. They say we're to have even the talkies in the new *Lyric*. Fine! Out at Binangonan recently, some little boys guided us up *Monte Calvario*, where a cross was planted, and in returning one of them slipped and started tumbling down hill. But, with a proud exclamation,—*Douglas Fairbanks!*—he righted himself and fell into step again. Inquiry prompted by the incident revealed a surprising village familiarity with the stars that made Hollywood famous and are keeping up her professional repute. Names were murmured: *Clara Bow*, *Greta Garbo*, *Lilian Gish*, *Aileen Pringle*, *Buster Keaton*, *Charlie Chaplin*, *Harold Lloyd*. They are the Americans best known in Binangonan, if not the only ones, Chaplin among them. But is it so bad? It isn't. It isn't even unique. It's natural, has innumerable analogies in history and is quite all right.