



Study and Action



Scene: A public place. Time: Today.

Lady A.: Are you going to hear McCormack's Concert?

Lady B.: Well, ah, yes. But really, I'm ashamed to acknowledge to my friends that I like him. You know, they say he's so weepy.

* * * *

The above is an exact report of a conversation held by two fashionable ladies of a large American city. One of the ladies certainly wanted to hear John McCormack sing and she intended to do so, even surreptitiously; but she was afraid to acknowledge openly that she liked McCormack or his style of songs. Her reason was that some of her acquaintances had said he was "too weepy." These friends meant that he sang the old songs expressing those fine, grand, universal and fundamental emotions which are touched by "Mother Machree" and "The Minstrel Boy" and others of McCormack's repertoire.

The comment of these two women may seem a little thing in this big nation of ours but it really signifies a great deal. Their conversation is not singular or isolated; its kindred are so numerous that each day there are a thousand types under a thousand different conditions. One of them, perhaps, would mean little; at most, only the shallowness of some individual; but all of them taken together offer an indication of the artificiality in which our social life is becoming more and more involved.

The affectation in point consists in this, that we cease to judge any of life's experiences on their own individual and intrinsic merits, or upon

the fair and just effect they produce upon our nature when it is not fatigued with pleasure or dominated by some prepossession. This sham culture disregards the radical beauty and interest which God has given His creatures, and substitutes the opinion of some ballroom monarch who decrees that such and such is fashionable and such and such is vulgar. The law of this fanciful land goes still further, and under its regime it becomes dishonorable and common to have emotions and the only true gentleman is the one who is perfectly disinterested in life, untouched by its joys and uninspired by its beauties.

The first impulse of an enthusiastic person is to condemn all these cold-blooded brethren with one sweeping sentence. But a second and wiser thought convinces us that they should be pitied: they are sick. Their silent and chilly exteriors which the unobservant accept as infallible signs of the unemotional often cover an interior riotous with emotions, which somehow or other their internal mechanism cannot release. The pain of such psychological congestion can be known only to the patients. What they need is not a coterie of fauning imitators, but one good stern physician for the body and another for the soul. These rheumatic souls are unfortunate, not censurable.

The others, however, who are willfully stifling their own healthy emotions deserve a much severer sentence. The fundamental false assumption on which their error is based is that it is unmanly to be emotional. How wise is that? It is about as wise as the bantering

one small boy hurls at another for weeping over a tale of misery or praying devoutly. Canon Sheehan says that the three most touching words in Sacred Scripture are those describing Christ looking upon Jerusalem: "And Jesus wept." He might have added the whisperings of the people as they saw Christ thread His way to the tomb of Lazarus: "Behold how he loved him."

The great poets and dramatists who are great because they have known how to interpret nature in the truest possible way, offer expert testimony of whether it is manly or not to have emotions. Recall Shylock's piercing "Jessica, Jessica, Jessica"; or Hamlet's "I lov'd Ophelia"; or Lear's tears for Goneril, or Caesar's resisting Cassius and his known enemies but muffling his face in his mantle when he recognized the dagger of Brutus. Oh, poetry and dramatics themselves are nothing, if not a contradiction to this soulless experience of life!

Not only sublime poetry but base gain recognizes artificiality as an enemy. Artificiality means death to progress and individual enterprise, to art and to letters, and worst of all, to plain good human nature. Wherever it has laid hold of a country it has come as an element of disintegration. It cannot fasten itself on robust and growing nations for the simple reason that their very combat for success preserves their vigor and repels all sickly affectedness; because a nation, as a man, cannot be healthy and sick at the same time.

Artificiality appears only when a country has reached that point of material progress where it supports a monied class which can spare a goodly portion of its stores for the cultivation of luxuries and, ultimately, for its nation's disintegration. England suffered this social malady in the eighteenth century and France in the latter part of the reign of Louis XIV and in the succeeding generations until the event-

ful and only too passionate '89. And now we stand in a fair way to be infected with it ourselves. This spirit of make-believe is a Banshee softly moaning beneath our national window and warning us of the approach of death.

Life is bad enough in this country with its oil scandals and political slander, strikes and high prices, without bringing new ills on the nation. We have no Addison, no Steele, no Pope to teach us; no Moliere to entertain us. At least let us have that normal temper of life which is free to all and which consists in a lattice work of laughter and tears, joys and sorrows, and large open spaces which we can fill in as we choose and are able.

MOVIE INFLUENCE

The influence that the motion picture industry exerts over the people is remarkable. It can best be indicated by a few figures. There are approximately 20,000 picture houses in the United States and nearly 50,000 churches, schools and clubs exhibit pictures. 75,000,000 people see the pictures in the theatres each week, but this total includes many who view more than one picture. A conservative estimate, eliminating the "repeaters" places the number of individuals who pass through the doors of the 20,000 theatres each week at 40,000,000. When the church, school and private audiences are added to this the total mounts considerably. It is, therefore, an appalling number that is influenced through the medium of the screen.

It is important that such a vast audience should not see society misrepresented, the classics mutilated to suit the whims or needs of movie directors, or vice held up as a model to be imitated. Censorship can, it is true, bar immorality, ridicule of religion and many other undesirable things, but censorship cannot stop vulgarity, distorted history or suggestive titles. Censorship touching

these matters must come from the 40,000,000 people who patronize the pictures. If they exert their influence to support the best productions, if they attend intelligent pictures and refuse to witness vulgar or indecent exhibitions—all of which will reflect itself in the box office receipts—the result will be a gradual improvement of screen productions.

That at least one portion of the public, which is a regular patron of the screen, does want high class productions and sensible pictures is indicated by the recent canvas of high-school pupils conducted by the National Committee for Better Films. A questionnaire was submitted to the high schools of 76 cities and towns widely distributed throughout the United States. Returns were received from 17,000 boys and 20,000 girls in which their preference as to pictures was stated. The results were tabulated by The Russell Sage Foundation and they show that the boys preferred Western and frontier stories, comedies, detective stories, and love stories in the order given. The girls first preference were for love stories, then in order of choice, comedies, society life stories and Western and frontier stories.

A significant feature of the report from the students was the criticisms of pictures volunteered by the ones reporting. The result has been tabulated in percentage form and is illustrative of the types of pictures which do not appeal to this class of theatre goers:

Type of Criticism	Boys	Girls
Slapstick (or vulgar)....	23.8	34.5
Not true to life.....	20.6	12.0
Mushy (over sentimental)	18.2	10.6
Bad artistically	18.2	10.6
Immoral (sex)	10.5	11.2
Murder and shooting....	8.1	21.6
Brutality8	1.3

It is interesting to note that both boys and girls show so much unanimity as to what they want to see eliminated from the screen and it is

most significant and highly encouraging that so many of the students went out of their way to send in their criticisms and critical views on the different types of pictures. Effective censorship is, after all, not a matter of law, but a matter of opinion. If the above tabulation is fairly representative of the high-school students attitude towards the type of pictures they wish to view it is a powerful means of directing the influence of the pictures in the right direction.

STUDY CLUBS

Education was never easier to secure in the whole history of civilization than it is today and probably nowhere else are the opportunities as great and the expense to the individual as small as in America. Not only do we have our great systems of public, private and parochial primary schools, our high schools, academies, colleges and universities where formal and well-defined methods of study are available; but these channels of learning are supplemented by many auxiliary methods, such as the evening schools, correspondence courses, lectures, debates and public forums.

To the informal, or self-taught methods, there has recently been made available for Catholic groups a popular and effective system known as the Study Club. The idea itself is not new, but the form is. Study clubs have been long used by groups engaged in propagation work of various kinds. But the Catholic Study Club, sponsored by the National Catholic Welfare Conference, appears in a new and attractive form, flexible enough to adapt itself to the needs of any particular group or locality.

The great appeal and the potential effectiveness of the movement is found in its simplicity or organization and in its singleness of purpose. The organization is extremely flexible with only two officers at most

and unencumbered with rules and by-laws and formal procedures. The purpose is direct: to inform the study club members on the topics engaging their attention. The means used is the discussion method. The club does not propose, sponsor or approve, does not pass resolutions or financially obligate the members. But it does purpose to enlighten them by intelligent discussion—not by the lecture or class room method—but by the more informal, round-the-table method where each member feels free to express his opinion and the result of his reading and research upon the subject under consideration.

Such an organization is sufficiently adjustable to meet the particular needs of any group or locality and embracing enough to cover an unlimited range of topics for various groups. The effectiveness of the movement will depend in a large measure upon grouping into one class a limited number of members interested in a particular subject,

but representing different occupations, interests and professions. This and the members' willingness to work, to contribute their share to the solution of the problems discussed are the important factors making for internal success.

The external effects of such groups properly functioning cannot be estimated, for an intelligent and well-informed Catholic laity is a power for good of tremendous possibilities. It is commendable and significant that the National Council of Catholic Men have centered their activity for this year on the study club program. Clubs are being rapidly introduced into the various Catholic communities and early signs indicate much interest among the members. Study club outlines and pamphlets on how to organize and to conduct a study club have been prepared by the National Catholic Welfare Conference (1312 Massachusetts Ave., N. W., Washington, D. C.) and are now available for distribution.

FAILURE

By BRO. GREGORY HEROLD, O. P

O Jesus, often would I sing
My love in words to Thee,
But though I try and try again,
The words come not to me!

For I who cannot put in song
The sweetness of a bird,
Nor place the greatness of the sea
Within a tiny word,

O Jesus, can I ever hope
To tell my love of Thee,
Far sweeter than a singing bird,
And greater than the sea!