

THE SILENT DRAMA



“A Fool There Was”

WHEN Kipling wrote “The Vampire” he kindled flames of inspiration in a great many unexpected quarters. Burne-Jones did a painting to illustrate the poem; then Porter Emerson Browne made a play of it; and finally William Fox reduced the idea to celluloid.

It was the movie, with Theda Bara, that did most of the damage. “To vamp” became a household verb, and Miss Bara became very famous. “A Fool There Was,” in its original film form, probably exerted a more profound influence on contemporary thought than any picture that has ever been produced.

All this, however, was eight years ago. Times and movies have changed materially since then. The vamp gave way to the baby vamp some years back, and the latter has now been superseded by the flapper. It was therefore a questionable move on Mr. Fox’s part to produce a revised version of “A Fool There Was” in this advanced age.

ONE can not help comparing the present product with its predecessor, or rather, with one’s hazy recollection of it. I, for one, am prepared to cast my ballot for Miss Bara’s Vampire without question. It seems to me that Miss Estelle Taylor, who plays the part in the 1922 edition, is far from convincing. She is indubitably a most attractive young woman, but she can not stack up against Theda Bara as a wrecker of homes.

Moreover, any actress who essays a rôle of this type today must face the gruelling test of comparison with Pola Negri, and I venture to say that Miss Negri can give Miss Taylor a handicap of four jars of lip rouge, eight close-fitting gowns and twenty-

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five eye-rolling close-ups—and still win in a walk.

“A FOOL THERE WAS,” in its present form, possesses one sterling quality. That quality is embodied in the person of Lewis Stone, an actor of genuine and consistent ability. Mr. Stone is the Fool—the same weakling who made his prayer to a rag, a bone and a hank of hair, and finally landed face down on the canvas, while the grim referee counted ten over his clammy form.

It is not an easy part, but Mr. Stone does much to make it credible.

THE censorship menace hangs heavy over “A Fool There Was.” Emmett Flynn, the director, has been compelled to omit so much essential detail that it almost seems as if the devastating liaison between the Fool and the Vampire were just a platonic, boy-and-girl affair.

This intolerable threat is gradually throttling any artistic possibilities that the movies may possess. Every producer must make sure that his pictures are “censor-proof,” which means that, so far as the screen is concerned, Antony and Cleopatra were respectably married, there is no trouble of any kind between Capital and Labor, and babies come from Christmas trees. Marriage is a chemical fade-out.

The movies may reflect real life, but only to a certain extent. That extent is gauged by persons who believe that dancing is a vicious form of Babylonian decadence.

The Puritans originally provided the backbone of the American race; and now they are systematically endeavoring to reduce that backbone to a pulp. *Robert E. Sherwood.*

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