

THE IMMIGRANT AND THE "MOVIES": A NEW KIND OF EDUCATION

TO encourage the making and distributing of films that will promote faith in America, the Americanism Committee of the Motion Picture Industry was organized.

At the call of Hon. Franklin K. Lane, representatives of all the motion picture producers and distributors met at his office in Washington in December last. This conference was addressed by Vice-President Marshall, Senator Kenyon and Representative Hess. Later the following resolution was adopted at a joint meeting of the House and Senate Committees on Education:

"Be it resolved, That it is the sense of a Joint Committee on Education of the Senate and House that the Motion Picture Industry of the United States be requested to do all that is within its power to upbuild and strengthen the spirit of Americanism within our people."

All the leading producers, artists, directors and distributing agencies of the country have agreed to lend their facilities to the promotion of American ideals. The plans of the Committee contemplate no profit to anyone out of the making, distributing or exhibition of these films. Sufficient revenue will be derived merely to pay the bare expenses. The films will eventually be available for free exhibition in schools, churches, community and welfare houses.

To give a more explicit idea of his reason for calling together the moving picture men, Secretary Lane prepared the following statement on "Concrete Americanism" for the press:

"America is the epic of man as a working-man. We have nothing precious that does not represent struggle. We have nothing of lasting value that does not represent determination. We have nothing admirable that does not represent self-sacrifice. We have no philosophy except the philosophy of confidence, of optimism, of faith in the righteousness of the contest we make against nature.

"America was torn from the forces of nature. Our forefathers, the first emigrants to these shores, were compelled to fight for their homes against dangers that today can scarcely be imagined and against odds that were heart-breaking. It is well that this was so. For out of the throes of their travail America has become more than a land.

THE IMMIGRANT AND THE "MOVIES"

America is a spirit. America is an inspiration. America is an attitude toward men and material things—an outlook and a faith. America is something mystical that lives in the heavens. It is the constant and continuous searching of the human heart for the thing that is better.

"We are to conquer this land in that spirit. And we must keep alive in ourselves the thought that this spirit is Americanism—that it is robust and dauntless and kind and hearty and irresistible, and through it men win out against all adversity. This is what has made us great.

"From the first this spirit has been generous. It has extended the open hand across the seas. It has said to men everywhere that coming clean they would be welcome. This was the land of heart's desire where men could be their own masters and rise according to the qualities that they had. Here was youth with which they could identify themselves; land which they could own; society of which they could become an integral part; political life which they could help to shape and in which they would have satisfied that world-long yearning for recognition. The man could here be developed—the full man—for schools were here and a sympathetic environment. Others were climbing, too, with whom they could measure their progress.

Land of Opportunity

"This was a fair picture surely. And they came—some for economic reasons, desiring their chance at the good things spread on this rich table that Columbus found. Others came that they might have the larger satisfactions of an independent, unhampered, unmastered growth as man among equals. Here was opportunity.

"We met them at the gate with a truly American welcome, which most of them could not understand: 'Enter and make a place for yourself.' This had been the greeting we ourselves had received. There was to be no coddling here. This was a man's land—a place of test. The art that was most needed was the art of getting on. If literature and science and experiment were to come, they must be founded upon the solid rock of a self-sustained, unpatronized people. Dreams of ease must be cast aside until the right to dream was earned. The American was to be a journeyman doing his bit at the making of the land. If this was not a worth-while job, then there was no place for the stranger. We had mines to dig, buildings to erect, railroads to construct, farms to plow, sewers to lay, machines to build and everyone must do his share.

"The Lord had laid on us the responsibility of reclaiming for mankind a large share of

THE IMMIGRANT AND THE "MOVIES"

this land and all else could wait in life till this end was reached. In this steady drive we made ourselves. We were impatient with those who called out to stop or go slow. The pace that we set was that which must be kept. 'All men are born free and equal,' we called to the newcomer and went on forgetful that he was not free, for he had still the limitation of his old life—not equal for many reasons. Manifestly a man without tools is not equal to the man with, and those here already were men who knew its spirit and the way to meet it and run with it—who had access to the heart of a people and knew what its call was. Things did not lie obvious before the eye like a seam of coal on a naked hillside. This new land was a hunting ground and those who knew the favorite cover and could blend most quietly into the landscape found themselves best at the game.

The New Emigrant

"What of the new emigrant? With others in like situation, possibly from his own country, equally ignorant, equally handicapped, the new American starts his life. It takes a brave and very ambitious man to lift himself out of such an environment. Easily he becomes a victim to the shrewd, predatory padrone or boss. He falls into debt and becomes mortgaged to ignorance and squalor for years. His ideal of America has suffered a change. 'And is this freedom?' he says to himself, as with tired back he bends to his work without hope that the burden will be lighter tomorrow.

"He cannot read the signs which warn him of danger. He cannot read of the opportunities which city and country offer. In his own land perhaps he had no chance to learn in his own tongue. In this new land he is too tired, too hesitant, to learn this strange difficult tongue. Is it any wonder if, to this dissatisfied stranger, the voice of one who speaks to him in the language of home has authority and carries far? And if this voice preaches discontent, and violent discontent, as the one sure path to better days, is it strange that he should listen?

"He can find no one to make him see the greater America. The whole of this continent is to him the cramped apartment, the dirty street and the sweat shop or factory. To the sweep of the great land with its many beckonings, his eyes are closed, and in his isolation and ignorance and disappointment there is a fruitful nesting place for all the hurtful microbes that attack society.

"This man is our charge—our opportunity. He needs and deserves kind solicitude, thoughtful consideration. Give him a glimpse into the philosophy which underlies

THE IMMIGRANT AND THE "MOVIES"

our struggle and he will turn into a cheerful fellow-worker in the making of America as have all the rest who have preceded him. He is a human being whom we can help to a truer view of that which we have said to the world was the most stimulating, invigorating, developing of all atmospheres—that of freedom.

Democracy's Test

"And the test of our democracy is in our ability to absorb that man and incorporate him into the body of our life as an American. We want to interpret America to him in terms of fair play, in terms of the square deal. We want in the end to interpret America in healthier babies that have enough milk to drink. We want to interpret America in boys and girls and men and women who can read and write. We want to interpret America in better housing conditions and decent wages, in hours that will allow a father to know his own family. That is Americanism in the concrete reduced to practical terms. That is the spirit of the Declaration of Independence put into terms that are social and economic."