

Christ on Screen



THE LAST SUPPER

is portrayed in Cecil B. De Mille's screen triumph, "The King of Kings," a version of the life of Christ, for which one reviewer says Mr. De Mille will be rewarded in heaven. The reader will notice that the grouping closely follows Da Vinci's arrangement.

CECIL B. DE MILLE'S REWARD for "The King of Kings" will be in heaven, says John S. Cohen, Jr., in the *New York Evening Sun*, and that verdict is good enough for Quinn Martin, reviewer for the *New York World*, and for some others, too, who look upon this pictorial version of the life of Christ as Mr. De Mille's greatest triumph. The film will probably be seen around the globe, even, perhaps, in the very land where the divine tragedy was enacted two thousand years ago, for Mr. De Mille and Jeanie McPherson have transcribed from the original scripts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, a story that must, as the scenarists wish, help carry the Gospel to all the world. The great sorcerer of the screen unroins his genius for spectacle, pageantry, drama, color, and beauty, and if the story suffers at all in the transcription it is only, in the mind of one or two reviewers, because something is lacking in the portrayal of Christ. The difficulty may be inherent in the task. The picture demonstrates, says the reviewer for the *New York Daily News*, "in such a manner as has never been equaled—the magic of the motion-picture; the genius of the camera, the dexterity of the scenic artists, the skill of the make-up department, the versatility of the wardrobe designers, the power of sympathetic understanding, handling of a huge cast of players—players who are not merely playing in this case but feeling and believing their rôles." The making of the film took a year, one-third of the time it took to make *Ben Hur*.

The story moves from the scene where Mary the wanton, who came to curse, remained to kiss the hem of His garment, through the major episodes that led to the Last Supper and the betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane, to the throne of Pontius Pilate, who so unwillingly gave up the "just man" to the mob baying for His blood, and thence up the long way to Golgotha, where He died between the two thieves. The picture finishes with the Resurrection and the Ascension. The whole is calculated to stir emotion in any breast, and to reach an impulse that, perhaps, has slumbered in many who will flock to see this gospel of the screen. The actors are of the first magnitude, the scenes are said to be true to architectural and topographical detail, and the whole is threaded with the reverence due the story. There are occasional lapses from fidelity to time and place, but they are held to be justified under poetic license, and Quinn Martin, reviewer for the *New York World*, thinks "it

"King of Kings"



Cecil B. De Mille

ample, is shrewdly handled. You see *Him*, not directly, but through the eyes of a blind child who is being cured—first, blackness, then a gradually growing field of light and slowly, inexorably, the emergence of the enhaloed head.

"There is skilful direction, too, in the bringing back to life of *Lazarus*, and in the Last Supper, closing, as it does, to admirable pictorial effect with a fadeout that leaves in the center of the screen nothing but that ever-glowing grail from which *Christ* gave his disciples to drink. For continued dramatic power, however, it is the long episodes of the trial of *Christ*, the journey to the Cross and the rending of the earth following His death that are most effective.

"Tho it is Warner's acting that lights up 'The King of Kings' with its finest glow, every performance in the picture is admirable. For the first part of the film Joseph Schildkraut's *Judas* did seem pretty much the routine screen villain, with his lust for power and his endless misunderstandings of his Lord, but later on, particularly when he watches *Christ* being beaten by the Roman soldiers, he is splendid. Fine work, too, is contributed by Ernest Torrence, as *Peter*; Robert Edeson, as *Matthew*; a boy programmed as M. Moore, who is especially good as the young *Mark*; Victor Varconi as *Pilate*, and that marvelous actor, Rudolph Schildkraut, as the *High Priest*. Jacqueline Logan, as *Mary Magdalene*, cast in probably the least sincere rôle, is an always gracious and lovely figure. And Dorothy Cumming is a dignified *Virain*."



THE WOMAN TAKEN IN ADULTERY

"Tho it is Warner's acting that lights up 'The King of Kings' with its finest glow," says Richard Watts, Jr., in the *New York Herald Tribune*, "every performance in the picture is admirable."

would not be very sensible and none too profitable, under the circumstances, to look upon the picture's story, with its occasional detour chronologically from the record, with a hypercritical eye." Great drama, thinks Mr. Martin, has been woven out of a great story, and he says: "Unless the world is a place much less smart and alert than I still think it is, 'The King of Kings' will live on in opulence and flowery success to a ripe old age. Certainly it is a

OldMagazineArticles.com

"King of Kings"



memorable achievement, one of the most exquisite things which the cinema has wrought."

The portrayal of Christ is, of course, a task of inherent difficulty, and there is some difference of opinion as to H. B. Warner's success in that eminent rôle. Mordaunt Hall, reviewing the film for the *New York Times*, experiences "a touch of resentment, for despite the earnestness on Mr. Warner's countenance, he does not appeal to one as the general conception of Christ, gained from Bellini, da Vinci, and other old masters of painting." Mr. Hall is, however, genuinely impressed with Mr. De Mille's gigantic panorama, and, after a little of the minor criticism with which reviewers and critics are wont to dull the edge of rhapsody, he says, "it is, indeed, astonishing that this film could have been pictured with such reverence and such a fine degree of accuracy, allowing, of course, for imagination in some episodes." Mr. Martin, of *The World*, again, thinks Mr. Warner "very near to perfection in his portrayal," while Richard Watts, Jr., reviewing the film for the *New York Herald Tribune* says of Mr. Warner's "important achievement": "Avoiding with amazing skill the cognate perils of making the rôle too self-consciously saccharine, or, on the other hand, too much the breezily informal Hollywood leading man, he presents his Saviour an always believable and tremendously moving combination of tenderness, quiet humor, spiritual nobility, and just the right touch of earthliness. In the most difficult of parts, he contributes one of the ablest of cinema performances." Touching upon the spectacle as a whole, Mr. Watts writes:

"Throughout 'The King of Kings' there are episodes of enormous effectiveness. The first appearance of *Christ*, for ex-