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Intolerance

MR. GRIFFITH has a savage hatred of intolerance. No one who didn't have a genuine and deep emotion of anger at the way we misuse the gift of life, could have produced the film-play at Liberty Theater. Genuine emotion is always impressive; and "Intolerance" is to me particularly so. It seems to me the expression, unequal but always vivid, of a mind which loves life and beauty and joy, and is moved to rage and pity by the deliberate malice with which, in all ages, life and beauty and joy is destroyed.

Slow to start, the play develops the simplest sort of story, which is, in effect, that people were happy and love life in ancient Babylon, in Samaria, in old France, as they are happy and love life today. Against a spectacular or familiar background, the four stories proceed, with some elaborate and supererogatory assistance from the captions. People live and laugh and drink and dance and love. And then—the vials of intolerance are poured forth, and there is a great earthquake and the sun becomes black as sackcloth and the moon red as blood and the stars fall to the earth and the heavens are rolled up like a scroll. Or, to speak in less Apocalyptic language, we see the fall of Babylon, the crucifixion of Jesus, the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, and the almost-execution of a man condemned to death as a murderer. Toward the end the swift convergence of the four tragedies is nothing less than tremendous.

There is much of loveliness in the play, both of spectacle and of human nature; and I only wish the exigencies of concentrating four centuries into one evening had not compelled Mr. Griffith to be so brief with some of them. But the thing which makes "Intolerance" more than a gorgeous and exciting spectacle is the portrayal of the most violent and extreme and terrible emotions. It requires one who loves beauty and tenderness to exhibit the horror of death and the fear of death, without offense: Mr. Griffith does it with the splendor of a great sincerity.

There are parts of the play that, for all Mr. Griffith's earnestness, fail of their effect; but I will refrain from instructing Mr. Griffith in the art of motion pictures, except for the mild suggestion that some of the captions are unduly self-righteous, others are unduly informative, and half of them at least could be dispensed with.

There is, perhaps, something ironic in the idea of the producer of that hate-breeding film-play, "The Birth of a Nation," telling us to be tolerant. But it is not more ironic than the spectacle which some of us haters of censorship furnished when we tried to stop its production—and left a trail of film-censorships in our wake which it will take twenty-five years to abolish! As a brilliant epigrammatist of an Oriental country once remarked, let him that is without sin cast the first stone.

F. D.

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