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The magnificence of the Babylonian sequence in *Intolerance* can hardly be overstated. I cannot vouch for its historical accuracy, but its dramatic power is overwhelming. It revives the glory of the ancient world and stimulates the imagination as few films have even attempted to do it. Yet *Intolerance* could not move us as it does for this reason alone. The final justification of the film is that it makes us care for human beings and what they represent. If we grant that Griffith fails to extend to Pharisees the same charity that he rightly and gladly proffers to publicans, grant his unfairness to settlements and foundations, grant that the specific measures he advocates and opposes may well occasion intelligent dissent, he was still everlastingly right in his basic contention that charity stinks when it is given without love, and we know this better now than we did in 1916. Unfortunately it is still true in these latter days that many persons' idea of justice is "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and a murder for a murder," that war is "the most potent weapon forged in the fires of intolerance," and that conquerors still cry, "Kill, kill, kill, and to God be the glory, world without end, Amen." When D. W. Griffith made *Intolerance*, he was thinking of the film as a universal language, directed toward understanding and good will and offering the hope of amelioration of ancient wrongs. It did not turn out that way, but that was not Griffith's fault. And though it is now the fashion to call him naïve for having believed, one may still be pardoned for continuing to feel that his naiveté may entitle him to a higher place in the New Jerusalem than the disillusioned sophistication of those who have succeeded him.

Thus the final greatness of this great film lies somewhere beyond its heroic scope, the grandeur of its sets, or its appeal to the imagination. It even lies beyond the technical innovations that were so far ahead of their time that for many years they were thought of as having originated much later with the Germans and the Rus-

sians. It is a great thing to be able to manipulate and control multitudes to achieve a dramatic effect, but it is greater to be able to deal with individual human beings so as to draw out of them such acting as deepens the humanity of all who see them. Griffith certainly does not leave us indifferent to the people in the French and the Babylonian stories. Take the wonderful moment in the French story in which the priest draws the fleeing Huguenot child under his robe and into his house, indicating to her pursuers that she had fled down the street. This was more than an attempt to placate Catholic viewers; it was an affirmation of Griffith's belief that there is decency and humanity in men belonging to all parties and all creeds.

Yet when all is said and done, the greatest triumphs in this kind are won in the modern story. Mae Marsh's anguish in the courtroom scene has been praised often enough though not too highly, but surely her greatest scene, and Harron's too, comes at the very end, when they clasp each other again after he has been brought down from the gallows. This is a moment so true and so perfectly handled that one can hardly view it, no matter how often he may have seen the film, without tears, and surely it is one of the finest things that have ever been filmed. Moreover, though the attention is rightly focused on the principals, it is not the least of the virtues of this scene that the minor characters in it—the Governor's wife, the priest, and at least one of the prison officials—are drawn into its emotional pattern and make their contributions to its overwhelming total effect. Can it be that they represent ourselves? Here is humanity naked and unashamed—not of sin, which is flaunted often enough—but of love and innocence, which we so often fear and try so desperately to conceal. Surely something like this was the effect Griffith dreamed of and hoped that his film might create in the hearts of the world.

E. W.

The Fall of Babylon and The Mother and the Law

For the D. W. Griffith Repertory Season at New York's George M. Cohan Theatre, in the summer of 1919, the director took two stories from *Intolerance* and presented them as solo features. Following their New York premières, both films were released on a states'-rights basis.

The first to emerge as a separate film was *The Fall of Babylon*, which opened on July 21. Griffith took the basic

story as it had appeared in *Intolerance*; slightly reedited it; shot some additional footage, largely of Constance Talmadge as the Mountain Girl and George Fawcett as a Babylonian judge; and added a new ending. Instead of meeting death by a Persian arrow, the Mountain Girl escapes with the Rhapsode, and goes with him to her old home in the mountains.

For the première of *The Fall of Babylon*, the director

devised an entirely original form of presentation. The curtain rose on a totally dark stage, on which was a globe representing the earth, and a woman (Betty Kaye) representing ancient Babylon. On the globe was projected film of New York City. Then began the film proper, showing Babylon in all its splendor, and introducing the Mountain Girl and the Rhapsode. Then, as the *Moving Picture World* (August 2, 1919) explained: "During a feast given by Belshazzar to his favorite, the action is transferred from the screen to the stage by a clever arrangement of lights, and the dance which follows seems an appropriate part of the story. It is called the shawl dance, and, as performed by Kyra, is a remarkable exhibition of grace and dexterity."

The presentation returned to the film at the point where Cyrus, King of the Persians, is introduced. Before the end of Act One of the program, at which the Persians are defeated, there was one further cutback to the stage, when Margaret Fritts and Samuel Critcherson, as the Mountain Girl and the Rhapsode, sang a duet.

Act Two began with the stage set to represent a hall in the Babylonian Palace, and with a dance by Betty Kaye. The film, then, reopened with the Feast of Belshazzar. There was one further stage sequence, immediately prior to the fall of the city, at which point Kyra performed the Dance of Undulation.

As Edward Weitzel commented in the *Moving Picture World*: "The novelty of the method [of presentation] will commend it, and D. W. Griffith is to be applauded for his willingness to try something new and to add to the scope of the screen." Of the film itself, Julian Johnson in *Photoplay* (October, 1919) wrote: "It was most interesting to me as a reminiscence of my original enthusiasms, as I view them in longer focus, for where has there ever been such painting, such sculpture, such complete reconstruction of a civilization not only dead, but forgotten?"

The Mother and the Law was first screened on August 18, 1919, minus—some might say thankfully—any stage presentation. As with *The Fall of Babylon*, Griffith made changes, shooting additional footage, editing other footage, and using film rejected for the story as it appeared in *Intolerance*.

The production contains a number of major changes. The most major, and certainly the most moving of which is the indication of the fate of the baby taken from the Dear One. As a result of insufficient care in the hands of the Jenkins Foundation, it dies. This event results in one of the most emotional moments of the film, in which the Dear One sees her dead baby in the coffin and bids him good-bye. Arthur Lennig movingly describes the scene in his book *The Silent Voice*: "... the Dear One is told, 'Owing to your lack of care of the baby before we took it,

it has died.' The lid has been put on the small grey coffin. She asks that it be lifted and looks at the dead child. Then she approaches it, smiles, and touches it lovingly; only when she finds it cold do her eyes take on a look of pain. The scene is one of the greatest of all Griffith's attempts to touch the human heart."

Scenes featuring Mae Marsh with Robert Harron, not in *Intolerance*, include the couple's first date and their honeymoon, which, apparently, took place in a lumberyard. There are also many additional scenes of Robert Harron in prison, breaking rocks and passing an open grave.

When *Intolerance* was first shown in Philadelphia, *The North American* of December 30, 1916, criticized the film for its "libel against a class which comprises some of the cleanest-souled, most unselfish and self-sacrificing women of the nation," and for its "intent to incite popular resentment against social workers, because—drawing the inference from the whole film—because they are dangerous foes of the saloon and the brothel." To counteract criticism such as this, Griffith added an extremely lengthy sequence to *The Mother and the Law*, depicting the valuable work undertaken by the Salvation Army. This sequence included shots of Kate Bruce as a Salvation Army worker comforting an unmarried mother-to-be.

Extant prints of *The Mother and the Law* now end at the freeing of the Boy at the gallows. According to a list of titles in the D. W. Griffith Collection at the Museum of Modern Art, the film originally ended on a happier and cozier note. The final titles were:

"They won't hang him, Father?"

Two Years Later

The little hub of the new universe

"Shu'um toothums!"

Such titles indicate that the Dear One and the Boy were blessed by a second child, but give no indication as to the fate of the Friendless One.

As released in 1919, *The Mother and the Law* is for me one of Griffith's most moving and finest works. With all the splendors and disasters of earlier eras removed, the viewer may concentrate on this simple story of human love and human frailty. No actor and actress of the silent screen have done anything to compare with the playing of Robert Harron and Mae Marsh, and no director has come closer to perfection in realism than has D. W. Griffith in *The Mother and the Law*.

A. S.

nearly reduced to immobility, being permitted hardly any more action than if they were posing for their portraits. Some matters, too, such as the degree of the Rhapsode's involvement in the treachery of the High Priest of Bel, are left unpardonably obscure. But none of this counts for much against the film's scope, power, passion, and humanity.

It was of course so colossal a failure commercially that it cast its shadow over all the rest of Griffith's career, a fact which stands in amazing contrast to its tremendous reputation and influence. Its influence on film spectacle was not limited to Ince's *Civilization*, Tourneur's *Woman*, DeMille's *Joan the Woman* (the first of his big spectacles), to say nothing of the two *Ben-Hurs*, several *Cleopatras* and many more, but extended to France (Abel Gance), Germany (Fritz Lang), and above all to Russia, where Lenin toured it through the country for a decade and the great directors of the burgeoning Russian cinema used it as their textbook.

Though the abstract title of the film was probably unfortunate, especially coming as it did after the greatest title in motion picture history, *The Birth of a Nation*, whose eloquence still rings down the years, its commercial failure has never been adequately explained. The stock explanations, which practically every writer on films parrots from his predecessors, are that the use of four interwoven stories puzzled the simple spectators of 1916, that the intensity of the film and the restlessness and pace of its last two reels wearied them, and that its temper was antipathetic to that of a nation that was preparing to make the world safe for democracy by joining in the bloodiest war that human idiocy had thus far achieved and by this means destroy war forever. "There is so much in it," wrote Iris Barry; "there is too much of it; the pace increases so relentlessly; its intense hail of images—many of them only five frames long—cruelly hammers the sensibility; its climax is near hysteria."

But none of this really seems to cover the case. Even the Woman Who Rocks the Cradle, the recurrent shots of whom Griffith uses to symbolize life's progress and continuity and to mark transitions from one age to another, has been boggled over. One gentleman objected that she had nothing to do with the story, yet she obviously has everything to do with it, for all the characters are her children. Another objected that to an audience the image of a woman rocking a cradle could only mean that a baby was coming, but babies are generally rocked after birth, not before. Alexander Woolcott found "grotesque incoherence of design and utter fatuity of thought" in *Intolerance*, and Heywood Brown confessed to preferring the contemporary Annette Kellerman swim spectacle, *A Daughter of the Gods*, because it contained a story that

could be followed. Surely a man does not often have a better chance than that to make a fool of himself, for the truth is that anyone who had trouble following *Intolerance* might also be expected to have trouble with "Little Red Riding-Hood"; I could name you a dozen one-reel Biographs which presented greater difficulties but which the nickelodeon, often largely juvenile, audiences seem to have taken in their stride. Frederick James Smith was quite just when he pointed out in the *New York Dramatic Mirror* that the trouble with people like Woolcott was that they did not know how to watch a motion picture or understand the difference between stage and screen technique. As for the war, everybody who lived through those years knows that the American nation as a whole was not burning with zeal to embrace the conflict in 1916; if this had been so, Woodrow Wilson would not have been reelected because "he kept us out of war." Indeed, if the war had any influence upon the immediate fate of *Intolerance*, my own guess would be that people stayed away from it, not because their mood was militaristic but because they were getting enough of war in the newspapers. But all speculation of this kind is guesswork, no matter where it comes out.

One thing is clear, however: the graduates of the nickelodeon were much better equipped to understand *Intolerance* in 1916 than most of the people who went to see it only because it was being presented in "legitimate" theaters. For while the film was creative, even revolutionary, in its technique, it had long roots in cinema history and especially in Griffith's own. This was never better pointed out than by the reviewer in the *Boston Evening Transcript*; Griffith cannot often have encountered so well informed an evaluation of his work, and he must have rubbed his eyes to find it in such a definitely "upper class" newspaper. One wonders whether Amy Lowell read it in nearby Brookline; along with Hardy's *Dynasts* and Carlyle's *French Revolution*, *Intolerance* may well have influenced her *Can Grande's Castle*.

The [general] effect is naturally a stunning departure from the customary moving picture, developed though it is from Mr. Griffith's own invention, the "flash back." But it is not so much a departure from Mr. Griffith's past as many will think. Just as the two different stories told, one following another, in the two halves of *The Birth*, may be traced technically to his earlier Biograph films, *The Battle* and *The Battle at Elderbush Gulch*, so you may find "studies" for the various parts of *Intolerance* in other films made in those almost prehistoric but immortal days when the future of the photoplay and of Mr. Griffith was being made at the old Biograph studios. The slum life of the modern story in *Intolerance* was handled in half a dozen films like *The Musketeers of Pig Alley*, blending the romance of the "gunman" with an intimate realism of treatment. The fall of Babylon had its prototype in *Judith of Bethulia*. The Christ story has figured in a dozen bits of allegory in

photoplays of other periods. The Renaissance of Charles IX is almost wholly novel to the screen but Griffith has handled Italian costumes of that period in *The Perfidy of Mary*¹ and *The Blind Princess and the Poet*. There is even a bit of Griffith's old "Pickford stuff" . . . in the girl from the mountains who descends upon Babylon, displays her tempestuous talents in the marriage market, and ends by driving a rocking chariot to the relief of the city.

The element of propaganda was just as evident in the old Biograph days. Mr. Griffith has always been fascinated by the ability of the film to show, both in action and in printed "leaders," an ethical point of view. He taught a sort of cave-man psychology in *Man's Genesis* . . . ; he showed the eternal struggle of the scholar-husband and the light-minded dancer-wife in *Oil and Water*; he made a sort of *Everywoman* of the films in *The Blind Princess and the Poet*; and the list might be continued almost indefinitely.

Intolerance was "A Drama of Comparisons," depicting "Love's Struggle Throughout the Ages." It began with the modern story, which in its original form had been made independently. The other three stories were an afterthought, prompted in part by Griffith's resentment of what he considered the intolerance that had been shown toward him by those who had opposed the exhibition of *The Birth of a Nation* and partly perhaps by his feeling that *The Mother and the Law* alone was not big enough to be issued as a successor to that film.

But the changes and additions did much more than transform *The Mother and the Law* into a giant spectacle. They universalized the theme, leaving the hero and the heroine no longer merely this man and this woman but Humanity, the helpless Little Man, who, in every age, asks only to be allowed to enjoy his simple life in peace, and whose happiness is forever being wrecked by the exploiters who break in upon him and enslave him to make him the tool of their cruelties and selfish aggrandizement, the instruments of their meaningless greed and hate and lust. "The little factory couple in the modern street scene called The Dear One and The Boy," wrote Vachel Lindsay, "seem to wave their hands back to Babylon amid the orchestration of ancient memories. The ages make a resonance behind their simple plans and terrible perplexities." Many years later, A. Nicholas Vardac expressed the same idea more elaborately:

The young wife rushing to save her unjustly condemned husband from the gallows was . . . of only contemporary importance, but its dramatic and thematic significance was lifted out of all time and presented as an eternal verity through the intercutting of the culminating events of the other three spectacles: Christ struggling toward Calvary, the Babylonian mountain girl racing to warn Belshazzar that his priests had

¹ An error, surely; see the stills from *The Perfidy of Mary* in Lillian Gish's *Dorothy and Lillian Gish*, p. 21.

betrayed him, and the Huguenot fighting his way through the streets on St. Bartholomew's Day to save his sweetheart from massacre by the French mercenaries.

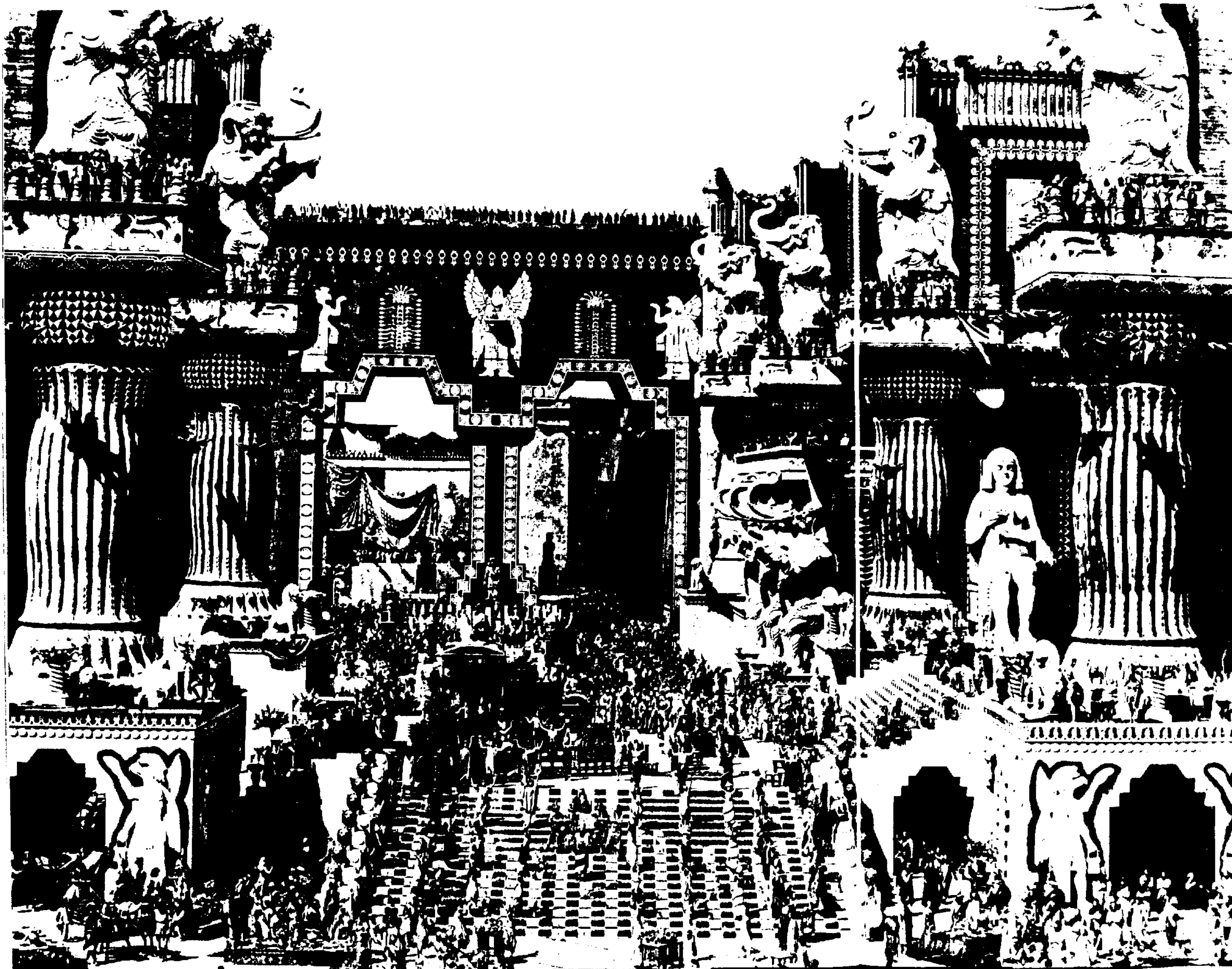
This, surely, provided abundant justification for Griffith's not setting forth events "in their historical sequence, or according to accepted forms of dramatic construction," but, as he says, "as they might flash across a mind seeking to parallel the life of the different ages."

Griffith had been known for his ingenious manipulation of shots for a long time and his capacity to break a scene up into shots that enable us to see it, sometimes with incredible speed and convenience, from different points of view. Paul O'Dell, whose analysis of the action of *Intolerance* is the best available substitute for seeing the film itself, has analyzed the murder sequence in detail, finding that it runs about five minutes and comprises 111 shots. In this film, moreover, Griffith intercuts not only within each story but between the stories, so that at last everything coexists in a kind of Eternal Now. Like Shakespeare, Griffith also knew the difference between dramatic time and actual time, and the time element in *Intolerance* is handled so skillfully that nobody is ever troubled by the fact that it seems to be taking as long to carry the Boy to the gallows as was required for the whole Fall of Babylon and Massacre of St. Bartholomew's.

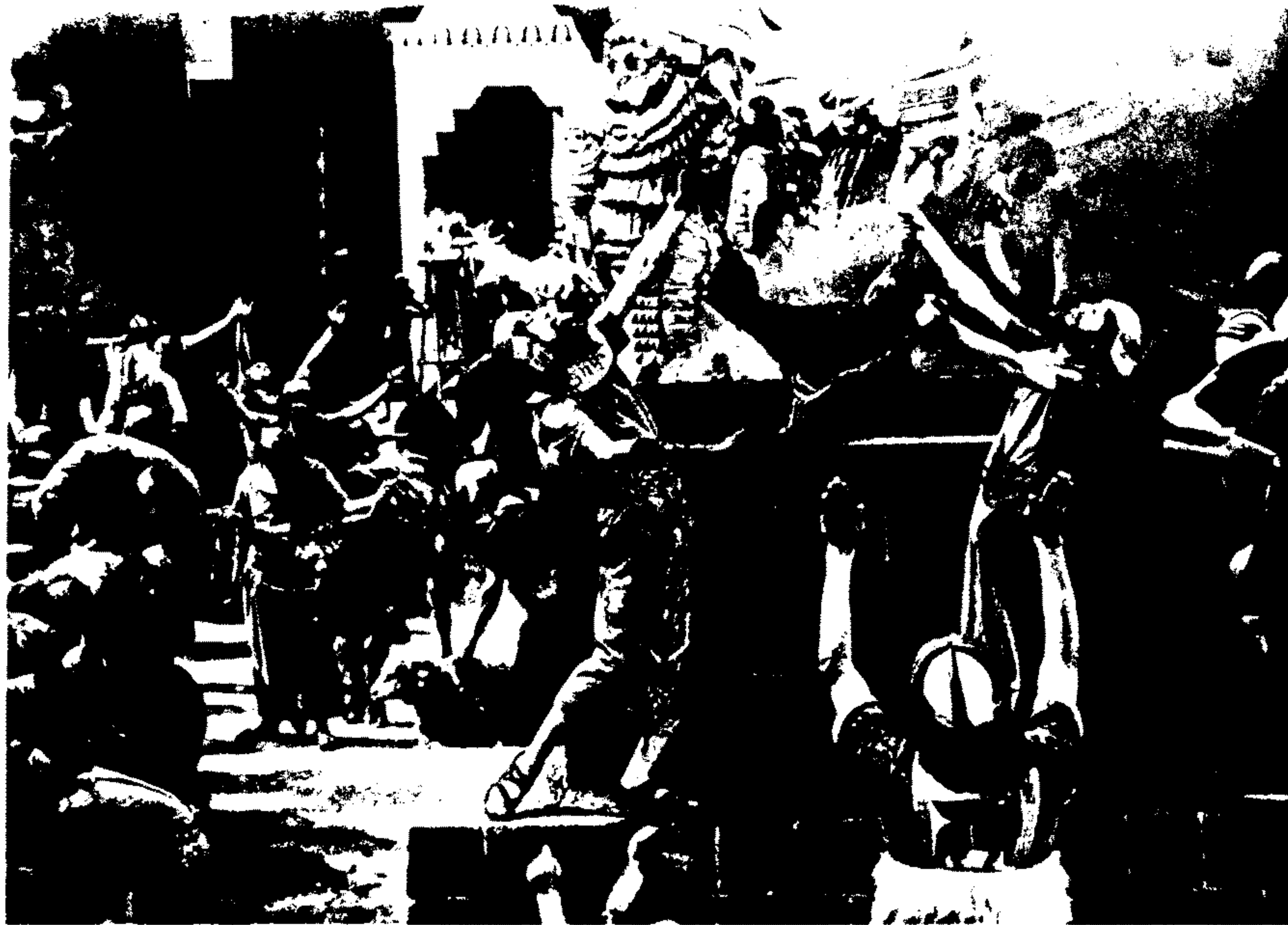
The French story is closed somewhat earlier than the others, and the Christ story is useful primarily for the grandeur of its associations; if He too was a victim of intolerance, then indeed we are dealing with a cosmic theme, and all who suffer innocently are, in Biblical parlance, filling up His sufferings. At at least one point the parallelism may be open to objection: however innocent the Boy in the modern story may have been, many must experience a faint sense of blasphemy when his march to the gallows is juxtaposed to Christ's walk along the Via Dolorosa. Yet even this might be defended by citing His own words that "inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these, ye have done it unto me," and many of the other juxtapositions do shed a light on the significance of what is being presented that could have been achieved in no other way. I for one must admit my indebtedness to Paul O'Dell's penetrating note on the placing of the Boy's return to the Dear One after his first term in prison in juxtaposition to Belshazzar's feast in the Babylonian story:

The link between the Boy's return and Belshazzar's feast is not so slight or arbitrary as it might at first seem. In both cases the atmosphere is one of rejoicing and anticipation of more settled times ahead; and in both cases there is also a sense of loss—the Boy is confronted with the seizure of his child whom he has never seen—and in both cases also, the hope for the future is soon to be destroyed, quickly, and unexpectedly.

Belshazzar's Banquet Hall



Moods of the Mountain Girl (Constance Talmadge)



The Mountain Girl brings Belshazzar news of the attack

Sacrifices for deliverance and victory



The Banquet Hall in shambles

CRITICISM

There are a good many of us who will never be convinced that *Intolerance* is not the greatest of all motion pictures, "the end and justification," as Iris Barry has said, "of that whole school of American cinematography based on the terse cutting and disjunctive assembly of lengths of film, which began with *The Great Train Robbery* and culminated in *The Birth of a Nation* and in this."

This is not to say that it is a flawless work of art. On the contrary, it has enough faults to wreck any film except a very great one. It is full of melodrama and half-baked sociology, and it sometimes forces the note in an attempt to achieve unity by making intolerance the root of all woes. Though so great an authority as A. H. Sayce was tremendously impressed by the Babylonian section, the simplification of the struggle between Babylonia and

Persia as a confrontation of "good guys" against "bad guys," with the fall of Babylon a calamity for civilization, would be difficult to substantiate; one wonders too how the Temple of Love and the festival and orgy scenes were supposed to support the hypothesis of Babylonian superiority! The conflict between the various acting styles employed is sometimes troublesome. Mae Marsh, Robert Harron, and others in the modern story are naturalistic, but Constance Talmadge as the Mountain Girl is obviously giving a performance and a very good one at that. Though we know Griffith's own attitude toward Catherine de Médicis to have been one of considerable charity and understanding, Josephine Crowell presents her in the film as more demon than woman, while such figures as Christ, Belshazzar, and the Princess Beloved are very