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"THE CABINET OF DOCTOR CALIGARI" (6 Reels)

PRODUCING COMPANY: Decla-Bioscop  
DIRECTOR: Robert Wiene  
SCENARIO: Carl Mayer and Hans Janowitz  
PRODUCTION DESIGN: Hermann Warm, Walter Riemann, Walter Roehrig  
PHOTOGRAPHY: Willy Hameister

RELEASE DATE: February, 1920 (In Berlin, Germany)

RUNNING TIME: 72 minutes

CAST: Werner Krauss (Dr. Caligari); Conrad Veidt (Cesare); Freidrich Feher (Francis); Lil Dagover, (Jane); Hans Heinz von Twardowski (Alan); Rudolf Lettinger (Dr. Olsen); Rudolf Klein-Rogge (A criminal).

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STORY:

Francis, a handsome youth is seated on a bench in a garden. He is speaking to a man as a wraithlike feminine figure slowly passes by. He tells his companion, "What I have experienced with her is even stranger than your story. I will tell it to you." The scene fades out, then fades in a small North German town called Holstenwall, where a fair is taking place.

One of the side-shows is operated by a weird hunched figure called Dr. Caligari, who advertises the somnambulist Cesare. Caligari goes to the town hall to procure a license, and is treated haughtily by the arrogant official in charge. The following morning the clerk is found murdered in his room, which does not prevent the townspeople from enjoying the Fair.

Francis and Alan, two students both in love with Dr. Olsen's daughter Jane, enter Caligari's tent and watch Cesare come awake and step out of his upright coffinlike box. Told by Caligari that Cesare can answer questions about the future, Alan asks how long he has to live, and is told "Until dawn," by Cesare.

When Alan is found the next morning stabbed to death by the same means as the clerk, and Francis becomes suspicious of Caligari. He persuades Jane's father to assist his investigation, and armed with a warrant, they are about to force Caligari to end Cesare's trance when they are called away to the police station. There they attend the examination of a criminal caught in the act of stabbing a woman, who now frantically denies being the hunted double killer.

Francis continues spying on Caligari through the latter's window, where he sees Caligari seated near Cesare's open box with the sleeper within.

In reality the figure is a dummy, since Cesare is just then in the process of stabbing Jane. He gazes at her, then puts the dagger away and flees with the screaming girl in his arms, over roofs and roads. Pursued by her father, Cesare drops the girl, who is escorted home, while the lonely kidnaper dies of exhaustion.

When Jane insists on having recognized Cesare, Francis once again approaches Caligari's wagon, accompanied by police. This time, he discovers the ruse, and in the confusion, Caligari escapes.

He seeks shelter in an insane asylum, where he is followed by Francis. When Francis seeks out the director to inquire about the fugitive, he is horror-struck to discover that the director and Dr. Caligari are one and the same!



The following night, while the director sleeps, Francis and two members of the asylum medical staff search the director's office, and discover records indicating that the director was trying to imitate an earlier showman with a somnambulist whom he had hypnotized into committing various murders. When a somnambulist had been submitted to his care he had not been able to resist the temptation to repeat the terrible games.

To make him admit his crimes, Francis confronts him with the corpse of Cesare. When he realizes that his tool is dead, he begins to rave, and is put into a strait jacket by the trained attendants, as the scene fades out.

Having finished his narration of the foregoing story, Francis follows his companion back to the asylum, where he mingles with the crowd of sad inhabitants, including the very-much alive Cesare, who is absently stroking a flower. The director of the asylum, a mild and understanding person joins the crowd, and Francis wildly attacks him as his imaginary creation, Caligari.

Later, after examination, the director tells the attendants mildly that Francis believes him to be Caligari. Now that he understands the case of his patient, the director concludes, he will be able to cure him.

With this cheerful message the audience is dismissed.

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The story was based upon a true incident that one of the authors, Hans Janowitz, had experienced... a brutal sex murder which had taken place during his visit to a fair in Hamburg in 1913. When World War I was over, he returned from it a convinced pacifist, animated by a hatred of an authority which had sent millions of innocent men to their deaths.

He settled in Berlin, where he met Carl Meyer, and soon found that they shared their revolutionary moods and views. The latter had undergone considerable mental examination while in service, and emerged from it embittered against the high-ranking psychiatrist in charge of his case. Mutual discussions of Janowitz's Hamburg Fair experience and Meyer's mental duel with the psychiatrist stimulated the germ of the idea which became "CALIGARI". After seeing the prototype for Cesare at a side show one night, they wrote the manuscript within the next six weeks.

This horror tale was an outspoken revolutionary story. The authors half intentionally stigmatized the omnipotence of a state authority manifesting itself in the form of universal conscription and declarations of war. The character of Caligari symbolizes the German war government with its unlimited authority and lust for power, which ruthlessly violates all human rights and values. Functioning as a mere instrument, Cesare represents the common man, who under the pressure of compulsory military service, is drilled to kill blindly. Cesare, therefore, is not the guilty murderer, but the innocent victim.

Eric Pommer, the head of Decla-Bioscop, accepted the script, but insisted in a change in the original story, over the violent protests of the authors. The original story was an account of real horrors, but the final version surrounds the story by Francis' "narration", changing it into a chimera concocted by the mentally deranged Francis. Janowitz and Mayer raged against the "framing" story because it perverted, if not reversed their intrinsic intentions. While the original story exposed the madness inherent in authority, the final version glorified authority and convicted its antagonist of madness. Wiene, the director, significantly avoided mutilating the original story itself, but preserved and emphasized it -- as a madman's hallucination. This effect was aided by the expressionistic back grounds and sets, which emphasized the bizarre atmosphere of the madman's story. "Caligari" may truly be considered the ancestor of all horror films. It exerted a lasting effect on cinema art.