

## Hail and Farewell

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WHEN the labourer's task nears its end, old memories stir ; there is some sadness, but always hope that effort may prove fruitful, and compensation if that hope is partly realised.

Since 1940 over a hundred students from some thirty overseas territories have attended at Soho Square for instruction in the Visual Aids. They have listened to Theory, have applied Theory to Practice, and have returned home determined to apply that knowledge to the benefit of their peoples.

To those whom I have met in this connection I send a last few words.

Though for some of you opportunity for instruction has been brief, yet the knowledge gained has been widened since by experience in your own lands. The good work must go on. From your own people you must find new disciples to aid in the development and extension of your sphere of action and purpose. They will look to you for guidance.

Impress them with the potentiality of the Motion Picture. Inspire them with the knowledge that they are privileged Apostles of a medium with tremendous power for Good.

To realise this, to see the Vision Splendid, it may be well to glance backward into the strange story of Man's progress, a tale of seeming miracles.

In the far distant past, aeons ago, Man struggled blindly with his confused thoughts. Around him he saw the trees, the rocks, the animals, the birds, and he heard the wind, the rain, the thunder, the angry cries of beasts, the song of birds. He could only express his own intent, in human communication, by gruff sounds, or gestures to implement his purpose.

He only knew Time in which he lived, and Place within which he moved; he was little more than animal. His mind could not compass any conception of Time before or after his life-limit, nor Place beyond his environment.

By some strangely awakened intuition he scraped graphic shapes on his cave walls, crude representations of the animals and objects around him. They *recalled things seen* in the only environment he knew. It was a tremendous step forward.

Ages passed. Then something seemingly miraculous happened, when or where we know not, but the happening initiated and conditioned all the subsequent advance of Man in this world of ours.

By some inexplicable mental illumination Man invested a drawn symbol to *recall an uttered sound*. It may have been to remind him of a wild beast's cry, or the sound of a bird's song. In that moment of amazing vision language was born.

His earlier graphic cave-scrawled shapes were symbols of *space*, of things seen in an environment; his invented shapes to recall sounds heard were symbols of *time* since sound occupies Time.

Centuries passed, but the seeds of progress were sown. Ideographs were invented, Hieroglyphics designed, Alphabets were born. Speech could be held in symbols, recorded shapes, that could express to the mind, through imagination, all Place and all Time in this world as we know it.

Man had opened the door to Human Knowledge, for within those two conceptions . . . in some place, at some Time, knowledge is contained. Literature is the child of those far distant primitive discoveries.

What has all this to do with our Modern Picture-medium? Much, if we will ponder well the strange tale in its bearing on our own aim, and present world problems.

Consider the stupendous outcome of those primitive gropings that led to the capture of speech in the Written Word, that opened to Mankind the Library Gate to all knowledge; the medium that could hold unchanged for ever the flight of human thought through past, present, and future . . . all Time and all Place.

But, alas, the Library Gate is open only to those who can read the written symbols. To the literate, the invention is the greatest of all gifts to Mankind, to the illiterate its deprivation is the greatest obstacle to human progress.

If, despite the existence of recorded utterances that compass all space and time, Man is unable to *read* and profit thereby, the enlargement of his mental world is confined to the limitations of oral communication. What they tell him of the outer world and of the happenings therein, outside his own experience, may be imperfect, or false, and inevitably impermanent.

His credible world is that of his environment; credible time is only his own life-span. These limitations tend to make him stubborn and suspicious of all save his own kin.

The optimist says the remedy is to teach the illiterate to read. True, if there is time, within a generation, for the children, but what of the adult? Are we content to reply "Am I my brother's keeper?"?

No! For, once again, Man has invented the marvellous . . . the Motion Picture.

This later product of Man's vision can deputise for the written word; it can capture Past and Present everywhere, Life being lived, Life as it was lived, Life as it might be lived.

Its message goes through the eye directly to the mind; there is no need for translation of a symbol into a mental recalling of its sound, before understanding is reached, as is the case with the written word.

To the literate it can give greater *illumination* of that which is written.

To the illiterate it gives *immediate* knowledge, otherwise denied him. It is the illiterate's library, to which he can go again and again, for the film bookshelf is the not insoluble problem of the Community Centre.

Consider other mediums of expression used by Man. We only know of the thoughts, the experiences, the emotions of those who have lived before us, or with us, by their writings, drawings, paintings, sculptures, architecture, music, drama.

Of these, writing is pre-eminently the greatest; for deep knowledge we must go to the Book. Therein we can find expression of *Ideas*, ideologies, tyranny, democracy, fascism, nazi-ism, theology, metaphysics, philosophy, history, art and science, all in full detail.

Motion Picture cannot achieve this depth of expression, but it can throw a swift searchlight on all, and reveal much that can *stir interest* in the mind . . . and thereby urge us to know more.

This stirring of interest is the Motion Picture's greatest power, and strong interest can stir strong emotion. Strong emotion can stir action.

In this we face a danger. The Motion Picture can stir Man to good thoughts, and good actions, or to evil thoughts and evil actions. Used for Man's good, there is no medium so powerful for his benefit, so swift to give him wisdom. And since the illiterate world largely outnumbers the literate, surely the widest and wisest use of the Motion Picture is more urgently the immediate purpose of the Poet's vision, the Parliament of Man, the Federation of the World.

But we can only establish its *immediate potency* by striving for its perfect functioning. In this there is yet much to discover, but even now there are proven principles that must be applied.

I have no space to deal with the many technical factors of film-making treatments, scripts, direction angles, filming, editing and the like. Much concerning these can be found in previous *Colonial Cinema* issues. I am only concerned now with some vital principles of medium.

(1) Only through the visualised Human Story can we hope to hold the interest of an audience.

The Parables set the pattern of familiar scene with known characters. The simple words left the implication of good and evil, wisdom and folly, to the stirred imagination of the listeners.

In Motion Picture you have the perfect medium for the Human Life Story with its problems faced and solved.

Your added commentary is far less important and is only needed when scene is incapable of expressing intention clearly. The less you have to rely upon it the better . . . the more you will advance as film-makers.

"Words are like leaves; and where they most abound  
Much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found."

- (2) Truth, and nothing but the truth, is what your film expresses. The old Greek Philosopher said "Wisdom consists in saying the truth, in listening to her, and acting in accordance". St. Paul said "The Truth shall make you Free".
- (3) Maintain without deviation Singularity of Purpose in your Film as a whole. More than one purpose will weaken the message.
- (4) Pursue this maintenance of Singularity of Purpose by emphasising the *significant* in each sequence of your film.  
*Singularity of the Significant* is the touchstone test of the well-made film . . . S.O.S.

Summing up . . . Your film will achieve its purpose when that purpose is simple . . . singular . . . significant . . . but more vital than all else—TRUE. Lacking singularity of the significant—in other words, aiming at dual purposes in the whole, or in each sequence—may leave the audience mind confused and uncertain, but if it lacks Truth it will fail utterly.

Motion Picture is a dynamic medium. We live in a dynamic age of swift change, almost chaotic in nature. For such an age it is reasonable to use a dynamic medium for the expression of ideas. We have it in the Moving Picture and its young offspring the Flannelgraph. It has a faithful servant in the Static Film Strip, that valuable medium that can emphasise the essentials that may lose significance by the rapid passage of the moving scene.

You who are the privileged users of these media are in happy case. It is a labour of love . . . I know you will see to it that it will never be Love's Labour Lost.