

clude that this continent will ever be hastened down the river of regimentation by such windy louts as the lesser fry of this book. Huey Long may possibly be a king in certain sections of the Deep South; but he is a washroom drunk in the East, and would be kicked to death by the Sun-Kisters of the Far West. Bilbo is hardly worth consideration. Father Coughlin could not escape castration in many Baptist backwaters. Doc Townsend in a test of taxable strength would find support only among sufferers from arterio-sclerosis. It is a pleasure to live on a continent without frontiers, which is devoted to sectionalism.

Hearst is entirely another matter from Swing's worthies. Unquestionably the imperial state of California must soon disenfranchise many of its floaters; in a country where so much of the wealth is landed, and in the hands of syndicates and wealthy communes, the Hamiltonian checks on suffrage will soon be established if the state is to survive as an empire. But Californians fry at the appellation of fascist, as they hate all notions from east of the Mississippi — let alone from east of the Atlantic Ocean — and they have their own traditions to follow. At heart every Native Son worth ten dollars is a Vigilante. Their uniform, when the impossible Merriam (who is among them universally admitted to be a booby) breaks down, will probably stem from Forty-Niner costumes, with variegated bandannas to denote various offices of the klans; and certainly then it will not be long before many hundreds of thousands of Californians will be deprived of the ballot.

I've no doubt that Hearst will help to bring this on, and that there will be a counter revival of the Wobbly movement, which was the one romantic piece of fool-gallantry in the dull history of American

labor. I have seen strong men break down and weep into their gin when reciting the vanished deeds of the Wobblies. These men will have a chance, ere long, as the Old Hickories of the Left, to redeem their legends; though they will need to move fast when next the Vigilantes are out, or they'll soon find themselves in the lower camp with the Chinamen.



The Highest-Priced Art

THE CONTENT OF MOTION PICTURES, by Edgar Dale. \$2.50. 5½ x 7¾; 234 pp. New York: *The Macmillan Company*.

HERE is a profound indictment of the movies, briefed by a sociologist who, rather than view the films himself, has relied upon the estimates of them in trade journals and on continuity sheets. He hears that the movies are in bad shape. As to the remedy, he has none to recommend.

Personally, I feel that there is nothing wrong with the movies that shooting the entire human race will not cure. It is true that they contain too much matter appertaining to sex, crime, and superstition; and Professor Dale catalogs the themes of 1500 motion pictures, supplying scientific categories for them. I could do the same for Shakespeare and arrive at similar conclusions; possibly *Hamlet* could be placed under murder, suicide, arson, and rape as a general proposition, though to dub Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern gangsters and call the play a gang film would be stretching the truth. But Greek drama of a classic stature would resist the test; the works of Euripides, *et al.*, find no convenient categories, the movies never reaching for the old plot about the man who marries his mother, or the mother who shoots her child.

dren. The Payne Foundation has merely wasted its money in compiling these reports, though none should cavil at such a result, as most wealthy decedents provide foundations expressly for money to be wasted.

A poet in a garret needs a penny pencil and an envelope: but a moving picture director such as Pudovkin, who is also a poet, needs the backing of the Soviet government for his poetry, with enormous technical facilities and material equipment, with even the government calling the tune. Hence the fundamental difference between the two media of expression. No one, however, has drawn attention to these conditions. Furthermore, all film, whether Russian, German, or American, must be directed to the crowd, and even its best poetry to the L.C.D. One could as easily take printed matter designed for the same audience and excoriate the invention of printing because of it as condemn the movies for the inevitable results of mechanical restrictions.

As for the future of the movie: in any community it must always parallel journalism of the simplest sort to get its great effects. This confines it to a problem in simplicity in the use of film only achieved to the fullest by Charlie Chaplin and Walt Disney. (Though this is not to say that many do not strive to reach this simplicity, or that it will never be generally achieved.) Just now art films are only beginning; the contemporary speed of film is about 23 degrees Scheiner in regard to light value, and its celluloid backing is too expensive for any but professionals working for commercial combines seeking profits, or states seeking to disseminate propaganda. The Payne Foundation, if it wishes to improve the intellectual and artistic value of film, would best kick the sociologists out of the file room and get down to chemical

and physical research. Once the celluloid backing of emulsion is discarded, and some cheap material such as cellophane is employed for coating with a fast emulsion — so fast as to use only ordinary incandescent lamps or capable of using any light conditions of average daytime with employment of filters to make this condition uniform from day to day — then we might reasonably expect film to improve up to the level of printed matter. Only then would the thousands who might employ motion pictures as a medium of expression find the medium available for their talents. Certainly children, who constitute forty per cent of our audiences, suffer from the quality of film entertainment given them; and this entertainment will never reach a uniformly fair level without first descending to the cost-level which writers and amateur directors might afford.

It is a problem which is at one with almost every form of expression characteristic of our age. The radio is far below, by any test, the artistic quality of film in its general output; radio's best work is in the broadcast of music of symphonic compositions, and even this is usually too far below the actual rendition to warrant any adjective but indifferent; whatever literature the radio has encouraged is not worthy of saving in the least. Yet film frequently presents sequences which, to the initiate, are as good as the work of the best modernist composers.

The movies are not of course on the same level as good metropolitan newspapers, low as the latter may be; because there is no way in which the work of young men, in the films, can carry its impress into the finished work, whereas many newspapers boast young writers of great gifts whose work is vital. But this tyranny against the individual is always

apparent in the films. Its essential is the tyranny of the medium's cost, not of its aim.

If we seek to classify the contents of film, which Prof. Dale fails to do, we find that, except where dictators employ movies for state uses, there is only one kind: the play film. The full use of the motion picture — regardless of its sociological consequences — is to be found in Russia, where there are documentary films, art films and play films. One can best illustrate this by the example, say, of filming rice culture. A Russian film of a documentary nature would be purely educational — in the sense of education and propaganda being a Marxist identity — showing the process of rice culture from the first thawing of the paddy to the finished food. A second film might be an art film, devoted almost wholly to the effects of light and shadow on a rice field, with sequences showing the workers, the vegetation, the wheeled carts and oxen — and all this beautifully woven out of camera quality. A third film naturally would concern a plot, relying upon human passion, among workers in a rice field, with the inevitable hero and heroine, and a triangular villain seeking to confound them.

In countries where government has not yet seized film as a medium of expression,

all three of these qualities must be woven into one film, forcing the picture to take on at once the scope of a novel of heroic stature. Even the cheapest film from Hollywood or London or Paris — the three democracies — must undertake to embody at once documentary or journalistic, artistic or beautiful, contrived or sentimental effects. To do this on film which will run its course in an hour, and above all to follow symbols which will be instantly grasped by undreamed-of multitudes upon the five continents, makes the success of such a film in all three qualities well-nigh unattainable. A good half of the objectionable features in motion pictures derive out of this problem. Only a government capable of forcing audiences to attend willy-nilly can, at present film costs, surmount these objections.

Whether foundations such as the Payne, independent film companies, university set-ups, guilds, and syndicates can ever succeed in improving the movies is questionable. But if film itself can some day be bought and used as cheaply as the novelist can now buy and use his tools, then there should be an immediate change for the better. Otherwise we will have to await patiently the gradual improvement of press and government which will necessarily force the movies to corresponding progress.

CHECK LIST of NEW BOOKS

BIOGRAPHY

MICHELANGELO, THE MAN.

By *Donald Lord Finlayson.*

Thomas Y. Crowell Company
\$3.50 6 x 9¼; 356 pp. *New York*

Despite the title this is again the story of Michelangelo the artist, whose work can give us a better insight into the character of the man than can any treatise on his personality. The author, passing lightly over the artist's childhood, follows his career from the time young Michelangelo becomes the protégé of Lorenzo the Magnificent on through his never ending service to the various popes and to the Medici family. The impression gleaned is that of a somewhat crotchety figure forever toiling over some project in the Vatican, one whose moral virtue is all the more remarkable in a time when debauchery was the order of the day. This virtue and innate sense of justice are evidenced in the many letters which the author has scattered throughout the book. That Michelangelo possessed a rare sense of humor is also shown. Even if the book occasionally lapses into the style of a dry thesis on art, it is, nevertheless, authenticated and learned. There are many illustrations, a chronological table and an extensive index.

KATE CHASE: *Dominant Daughter.*

By *Mary Merwin Phelps.*

Thomas Y. Crowell Company
\$3 6 x 9; 316 pp. *New York*

Kate Chase was the daughter of Salmon Portland Chase, one of the most conspicuous public figures of his day. In the course of his brilliant career he was a governor, a senator, a secretary of the treasury, and a chief justice. But his ambitious daughter, whose beauty and grace made even Mrs. Lincoln take a secondary place in Washington society, had a strong desire to see him in the White House. She planned her entire life with this end in view. Even her marriage to Governor Sprague was a subtle

piece of political strategy, for it was with his money that she purposed to finance the campaigns. Five times she tried to bring about his election — each attempt proving more futile and absurd. Then, with the panic of 1873, the Sprague millions melted away, and poor Kate was forced to descend the ladder to poverty and neglect. The book reveals patient and careful research on the part of Miss Phelps, but as entertainment it is only mildly successful. There is an index and also a short appendix.

HEROES AND ASSASSINS.

By *Stoyan Christowe.*

Robert M. McBride & Company
\$3 6 x 8½; 285 pp. *New York*

For the first time the entire story of the Inner Macedonian Revolutionary Organization — known and dreaded from one end of the Balkans to the other as the "Imro" — has been told. Macedonia is the Balkan area where Greece, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria touch. Ever since the country was divided at the peace conference, without reference to the wishes of the inhabitants, the Revolutionary Organization, first set up to fight the Turks, has conducted a campaign of terrorism to secure Macedonian autonomy. Plot, counterplot, and intrigue within intrigue, together with the inside story of the political assassinations which culminated in the murder of King Alexander of Yugoslavia, make this a fascinating as well as a historically important book. There are many illustrations and an index.

MY OLD WORLD.

By *Abbé Ernest Dimmet.*

Simon and Schuster
\$2.50 5¼ x 8¼; 280 pp. *New York*

In this charming book of memoirs the Abbé Dimmet looks back wistfully upon interesting phases of his early life in the old world of nineteenth-century France. Born almost seventy years ago in the picturesque village of Trélon, reared among simple foresters and cattle breed-