

The Screen

"The Story of Louis Pasteur"

IN VIEW of the usual Hollywood standard *The Story of Louis Pasteur* conveys its message with signal maturity. Paul Muni, an actor of real theatrical culture and one of the very few who can choose his own roles, was largely instrumental in having this film produced. It is concerned more with the work of the French scientist than with the episodes which Hollywood fondly calls a man's "private life." Muni's interpretation of Pasteur is full of warmth, humility and tenderness. Josephine Hutchinson as Pasteur's wife is convincing and gives the actress her first real opportunity in the films. The high spot in the film is Pasteur's famous demonstration of his anthrax serum before an audience of Europe's famous scientists, France's medical skeptics and the grateful peasants of Pouilly-le-Fort. Conceived in carnival spirit, the scene rises to a lyric climax when a peasant lifts a sheep toward the sky in salute to Pasteur.

With skill and understanding Muni interprets Pasteur's crusade for aseptic surgery. In fact, in the episode—when a physician is about to deliver his daughter's child—Pasteur takes command and gives an elementary lesson in aseptic surgery.

But the insertion of some box-office melodrama in many places prevents *The Story of Louis Pasteur* from being as dramatic and exciting as John Ford's film of *Arrowsmith* or Sidney Howard's *Yellowjack*. Why the sensational murder in the first scene of *Pasteur*? Why was it necessary to make Pasteur promise the doctor who was about to deliver his daughter's child that he would publicly announce that his hydrophobia cure was a fake? Why the excessive contrasts in characterizations, making Pasteur a Messiah and his colleagues inhuman and wooden villains? The high drama in the least sensational scenes exposes these synthetic "over-

dramatizations." One answer, I believe, is to be found in the pages of *Variety*:

From a salesmanship standpoint there is too much attention paid to the anthrax and rabies cures and not enough to the childbirth angles. Latter actually was rather unimportant in Pasteur's life as compared to the former, but for dramatic purposes, sharpening it might have led to greater audience interest. On the other hand, there's the censorial angle.

As Delahanty stated in *The New York Post*, it is true that the conflict is between Pasteur and the French Academy of Medicine and that his experiments were in direct opposition to the sacrosanct opinion of the academy members. This would be an oversimplification—one which would narrow the potential significance of *The Story of Louis Pasteur*. Pasteur was a complex personality: outside his laboratory, pompous, arrogant, violently jealous of his fellow scientists; at work a genius. Politically conservative, a mystical Catholic, a professional patriot, Pasteur bitterly opposed Darwin's theory of evolution, dogmatically denied the possibility of spontaneous generation. But although professional Pasteur-baiters existed in abundance, they were by no means the sole or even the most important cause of the "conflict between Pasteur and the French Academy."

Pasteur in all his complexity and unhappiness and with his many faults, is remembered and honored as a great scientist. This full complexity of the man provided the material for a much higher and more dramatic film than the present product. It was this fully truthful method that made *Chapayev* a great film biography. Can Hollywood dare to use it? Nevertheless as it is, *The Story of Louis Pasteur* is a step forward, a small but welcome one. PETER ELLIS.

Between Ourselves

WITH this issue our editorial masthead on page five has been revised to list additions and changes. The magazine, of course, will continue to be edited collectively by an editorial board. Isidor Schneider and Joseph Freeman have joined the staff as co-editors. Loren Miller, who has been in Los Angeles since January, will continue to act as contributing editor; similarly Granville Hicks and Joshua Kunitz.

With the assistance of our friends in Canada and America who protested to the Canadian authorities against their banning of *THE NEW MASSES*, the prohibitory order has been finally lifted. *THE NEW MASSES* can now circulate freely throughout Canada.

The original ban was imposed several years ago when our magazine was still a monthly. When on January 1, 1934 it became a weekly, we initiated the campaign to win the right to be distributed to dealers and to subscribers in Canada. It has been a long and weary—and worthwhile battle.

Now that the ban has been removed, we wish to broadcast the fact to everyone in Canada who may be interested in helping us to gain proper distribution. We want to tell Canadian friends that a subscription to *THE NEW MASSES* is a guarantee of its regular weekly receipt. A yearly subscription, because of higher postage rates, costs fifty cents more than the regular \$4.50.

Members of our editorial board will participate in the discussion following Earl Browder's talk on "The Intellectual Crisis" (Hotel Delano, 108 West 43d St., Feb. 24, 8:20 p.m.). The lecture is one of a series given by the League of American Writers.

Because of the unusual interest created by her talk at the last meeting of the Friends of *THE NEW MASSES*, Elizabeth Lawson will speak again on February 26 (8:30 p.m., Room 717A, Steinway Hall, 113 W. 57th St., N. Y.). Her subject is "The Position Today of the Negro." Admission free.

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