

SCIENCE - AND - INVENTION

CRIME AND THE MOVIES

EFFORTS TO PROHIBIT the exploitation of acts of violence and criminality by means of the motion-picture are approved as essentially in accord with scientific procedure by Dr. A. T. Poffenberger, of Columbia University, New York City, writing in *The Scientific Monthly* (New York). He points out that the classes most likely to be influenced—children and the mentally weak—differ from the ordinary adult in their greater suggestibility. He admits that prohibitions and censorships of any sort are distasteful to the American people, except where the general welfare is at stake. Accusations against the motion-picture must, therefore, be carefully investigated; and the present time, when attention is being centered upon the means of crime-prevention, seems an appropriate one. He goes on:

“The question is a psychological one, and concerns the effects of motion-picture experience upon the mind of the young person. The average adult can not interpret the reactions of a child in terms of his own reactions, because there are fundamental differences between the two. A knowledge of child psychology is needed to understand what the motion-picture means to the child.

“Rightly used, the motion-picture is indeed one of the most powerful educational forces of the twentieth century. But wrongly used and not carefully guarded, it might easily become a training-school for anti-Americanism, immorality, and disregard for law—a condition in which each individual is a law unto himself. We have therefore, in a sense, to meet an emergency.

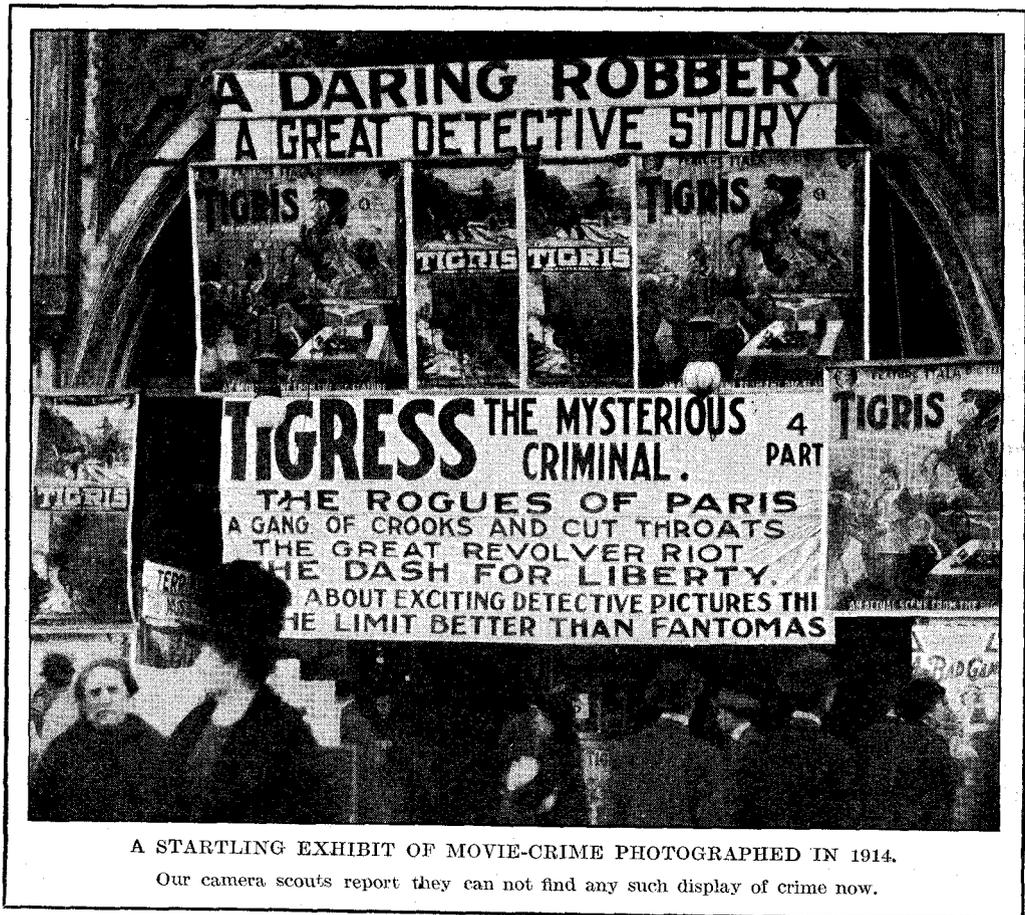
“In a consideration of the young, we must not fail to include that great class of unfortunates designated as the mentally deficient. The problem of the mentally retarded individual is essentially the same as that of the normal person of younger years. This type of individual is at large, and must be protected from evil suggestions and from too complex an environment. Such persons, when the higher forms of control which they lack are supplied by guardians or are made unnecessary by simplified living conditions, may well become useful and self-supporting members of society. Without this control, they constitute a real danger.

“What, then, are the mental characteristics of these two groups, children and mentally deficient adults, which mark them off from normal adults?

“One respect in which they differ from the adult is in suggestibility; another is the lack of ability to foresee and to weigh the consequences for self and others of different kinds of behavior; another is the lack of capacity and willingness to exercise self-restraint; and still another is an imagination less controlled and checked by reference to the realities. All these traits taken together make the child and the mentally deficient person especially susceptible to evil influences. That is why one expects the majority of certain kinds of crimes to be committed by persons of retarded mental development. And recent statistical studies of the relation between crime and mental defect

confirm the expectation. Naturally, these traits may be played upon either for good or evil. One who knows the mechanism of suggestion would expect the prevalence of crime, especially when advertised, to breed more crime.

“Motion-pictures containing scenes vividly portraying defiance of law and crimes of all degrees may, by an ending which shows the criminal brought to justice and the victory of the right, carry a moral to the intelligent adult; but that which impresses the mind of the mentally young and colors their imagination is the excitement and bravado accompanying the criminal act, while the moral goes unheeded. Their minds can not logically reach the conclusion to which the chain of circumstances



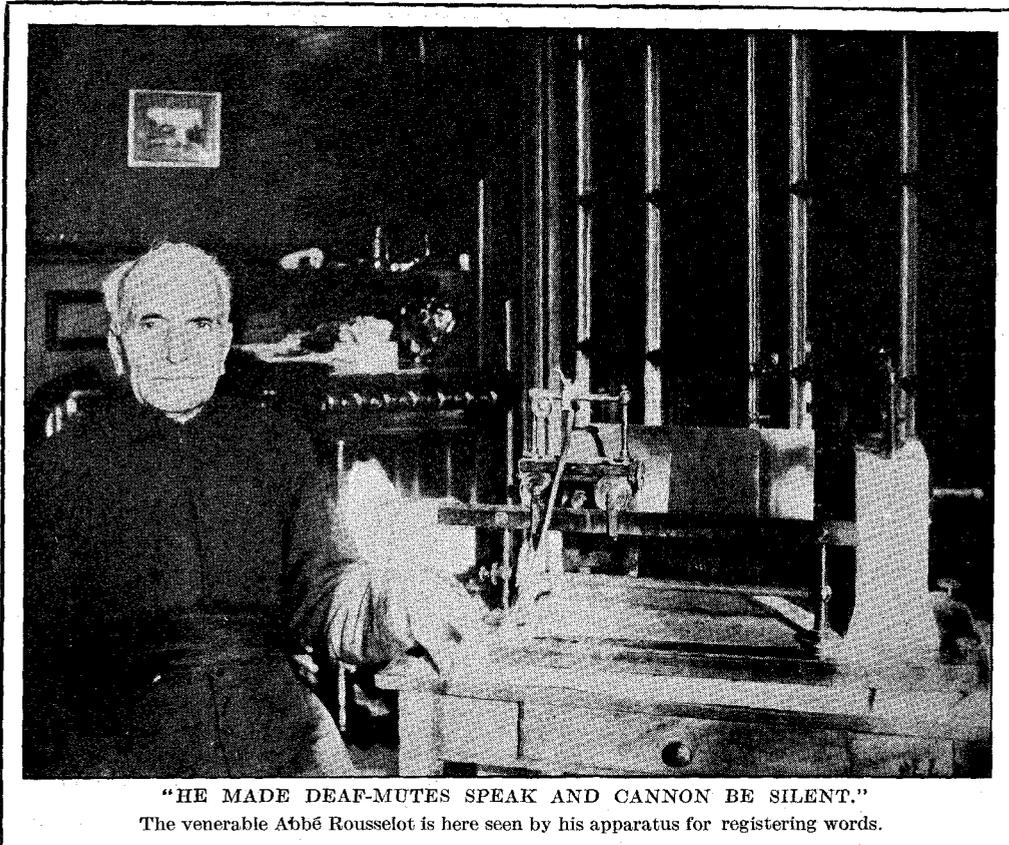
will drive the normal adult. A survey of any group of posters advertising motion-pictures will show a surprisingly large portion suggesting murder, burglary, violence, or crime of some sort. Considering the almost unlimited audiences which the advertising posters command, their careful control would seem a greater necessity even than that of the play itself.”

It is just on account of this susceptibility to suggestion, Dr. Poffenberger believes, that the mentally retarded criminal and the child criminal need a special kind of treatment and special courts to handle their cases. What needs most emphasis now, however, is prevention, not cure:

“If the motion-picture is to become the educational force that it is capable of becoming, the censorship must be an internal one. The old notion is outworn that it is necessary ‘to give the people what they want.’ It is the function of an educational medium, and an entertaining medium also, to give the public what they should have in order that they may learn to want it. The function of education is to create as well as to satisfy wants. The future of the motion-picture is limited only by the foresight of its leaders.”

A PRIEST WHO SILENCED GERMAN GUNS

IT WAS A DISTINGUISHED French Catholic priest who perfected the delicate phonetic instruments which located the batteries of the enemy during the war and even revealed the caliber of each gun. After a lifetime spent mainly in the study of phonetics, the Abbé Jean Rousselot, now in his seventy-fifth year, is rewarded by the chair of Experimental Phonetics in the College of France. *L'Opinion* (Paris) tells how the venerable scientist first began the study of sound:



"HE MADE DEAF-MUTES SPEAK AND CANNON BE SILENT."
The venerable Abbé Rousselot is here seen by his apparatus for registering words.

"It was through his study of voice production and his analysis of the motions and changes of form of the lips, mouth, larynx, and nostrils that he was able so to analyze speech into its elements that he could teach words and sentences to children and adults whose deafness had prevented their enunciating vowels or consonants. It was his study of sounds by means of delicate instruments that gave Abbé Rousselot the power during the war to locate the batteries of the enemy. As early as the summer of 1915 he was stationed at Fontainebleau taking records on tambours or revolving drums of all the wild confusion of sounds which reigned there, and then from the study of these tracings, each representing a given sound, calculating the intensity, the pitch, and the timber of the latter. Possessed of these data he was able to determine by means of carefully worked out tables, not only the exact position but the caliber of every gun in the German batteries. There seems something almost miraculous, indeed, in the precision with which he was able to distinguish such sounds coming from various distances as that of the explosion of the charge or the sound-wave coming from the mouth of the gun, the whine of the projectile in the air, and the noise of the shell's explosion—and this amidst a myriad other noises. For days on end he camped in the forest of Fontainebleau devoting his time, his strength, and his skill to France in this manner, while from October, 1917, to November, 1918, he was occupied in making experiments on French submarines and in teaching their crews to detect their hidden German foes."

Now the Abbé sits in his laboratory of the College of France, the most completely equipped in Europe, we are told, where he has conducted experiments for almost a quarter of a century. "He made deaf-mutes speak and cannon be silent," it is said of him in France. A number of devices for studying and recording sound have been invented and perfected by him, including his apparatus for registering words, shown above.

DOCTORS WISH TO PRESCRIBE ALCOHOL

TO A PROPOSITION duly made and presented to the physicians of the United States that they transfer to some government agency the privilege granted them by the Volstead Act to prescribe alcohol when indicated, nearly 25,000 representatives of the profession answer "No." A referendum vote taken on this question by *The Medical Pocket Quarterly* (Jersey City, N. J.) to establish the sentiment of the profession on the question showed 20,176 votes against the surrender of this privilege to the Government, and 1,935 in favor of surrender, while 1,134 failed to vote. The total vote cast is claimed by *The Quarterly* to be "the largest, most nation-wide, and most representative vote ever cast by the physicians of this country on any single subject," and shows a significant solidarity of sentiment. We read:

"Physicians of every State in the Union voted in this referendum, including practitioners in all the States of the South and West which were running on a prohibition basis before the enactment of the Eighteenth Amendment. Country as well as city physicians participated in equal amount, the vote as a whole epitomizing clearly the unwillingness of the medical profession to relinquish the prerogative they enjoy, even if they all do not exercise it, for personal or other reasons.

"In analyzing the votes cast, it is proper to state that all who voted against the surrender to the Government of the right to write alcohol prescriptions, when in their judgment an alcoholic

stimulant would be beneficial to their patient, did not vote 'No' because of any predisposition in favor of alcohol as a useful medicine.

"Still others believed that even if they personally did not agree with their fellow practitioners who consider alcohol a helpful and valuable medical agent in the treatment of certain diseases, these practitioners should not be deprived of the right to prescribe it whenever they deemed it proper. Such an inhibition, they held, would be gratuitous interference with the practise of their fellow practitioners and the means they employ to achieve the cure of their patient or the mitigation of their suffering, if incurable. Medical thought in the use of remedial agents not being standardized, and physicians being of different minds concerning the merits of the drugs they prescribe, no physician, they say, has an inherent right to impose his personal preferences upon others whose experiences persuade them to think differently.

"On the question of compulsory health insurance, submitted to the physicians of the nation, the vote cast was still more overwhelmingly against the introduction to this country of this form of European socialism. Here the cities where the industrial classes live and which should be most vitally affected were supposed to be the main opposition to this type of legislation, but the vote shows the country as deeply opposed to it.

"Compulsory health insurance touches a peculiarly tender spot in the hide of the physician—it strikes a body blow at the heart of his pocketbook. In voting on this question, a number of physicians stated that if compulsory health insurance became a law, they would forthwith quit the practise of medicine. Others added they would never serve on any insurance panel, even tho assigned to it by State authorities, on which they would be obliged to give their services, demanded by advocates of this legislation. On this question the medical profession, as shown by its vote and the statements accompanying it, is prepared to fight to the death, without quarter or compromise."