EXCEPTIONS

Last year, my Examiners took exception to 526 films. The majority of the exceptions entailed the elimination of objectionable sounds, or words or phrases which were considered vulgar and inexpedient. They were most certainly not due to any deterioration in the standard of the films submitted. Every country must have the right to produce films which are considered suitable for exhibition in its home cinemas, but it frequently happens that words, which have a very definite meaning in one country, have an entirely different meaning in another country, and it is due to this fact that our list of exceptions is as high as it is. At the same time, it cannot be denied that certain subjects have required drastic amendment before they were considered suitable for exhibition here, and, in a few cases, additional scenes have been taken in the studio to meet the Board’s requirements. Indeed, foreign producers are beginning to realise this difference in standards, and it is becoming the practice to “shoot” additional scenes for inclusion in the films which are intended to be exhibited in this country. I am given to understand that the same kind of thing is done in some British studios, alternative scenes being “shot” for inclusion in the films intended for certain foreign countries.

It is very satisfactory to find that, in the majority of cases, the renters in this country agree with our exceptions, and having regard to the number of films viewed, and to the number of exceptions taken, it is remarkable how few cases are referred to me personally.

In view of the large number of judgments we are called upon to make, it sometimes happens that we make a mistake. We cannot lay any claim to infallibility, but I can very definitely state that we are conscientious in our earnest endeavour to act in the best interests of the public and of the trade, and obviously the one is the same as the other.

DIFFICULT AND COMPLICATED PROBLEMS

Owing to the number of decisions we are called upon to make each year, it can well be imagined that many difficult and complicated problems must arise, although to the outside public everything seems simple and straightforward. We are, of necessity, judged by the results of
our work, and not by the labour involved in our attempt to bring films into line with public opinion in this country. If the public had any idea of the extent of that work, which I know is appreciated by the trade, they would be even more sympathetic than they are at present. Some time ago, in collaboration with the renter, we entirely re-modelled a certain film, and I asked for permission to project the original version of that film, together with the amended version, to important members of the Government. They could hardly believe it was one and the same film, and were loud in their praise of the amended version, whereas they considered, with us, that the original version was quite prohibitive. From the exhibitor’s point of view, that film proved to be an outstanding success. Again, I must refrain from mentioning it by name. In any case, everyone agreed that its commercial value had not been impaired, but, on the contrary, the amendments had added to its value.

The instances I have mentioned are not isolated cases—they occur over and over again. We are enabled to render this assistance to the trade, being, as we always have been, a central organisation for collecting information of every description from Government Departments, Licensing Authorities and Social Organisations of every kind. In addition, we have now twenty-two years’ experience behind us, which is always placed willingly at the disposal of the trade whenever they desire it. Indeed, the Board to-day is looked upon as the mother of censorships, and censors from all parts of the world visit us when they come to London. Without exception, they affirm that the system in this country is the best system that could be devised, but they have to confess that it would be impracticable in most other countries, where the trade is not nearly so well organised as it is here.

“HORROR” FILMS

And now, it might not be altogether time wasted if I gave you some impressions gained throughout the past twelve months. First and foremost, there appears to be a tendency towards an increase in the number of films which come within the “horror” classification, which I think is unfortunate and undesirable. There were four films placed in this category during last year, whereas during the last six months, we have had to deal with five such films. You are all, of course, aware that, after
discussing this problem with the Licensing Consultative Committee, your Association voluntarily undertook to let the public know that you considered these films unsuitable for children, whether accompanied by their guardians or not. Generally speaking, I am given to understand that this undertaking has been honourably kept, and you would be well advised to continue to carry it out, both in letter and in spirit. Although a separate category has been established for these films, I am sorry to learn they are on the increase, as I cannot believe such films are wholesome, pandering as they do to the love of the morbid and horrible. Although there is little chance of children seeing these films, I believe they will have a deleterious effect on the adolescent, particularly if they are going to increase in number. Some Licensing Authorities are already much disturbed about them, and I hope that the producers and renters will accept this word of warning, and discourage this type of subject as far as possible.

GANGSTER FILMS

Closely allied to the "Horror" film is the "Gangster" film. There is a new type of film being introduced here from America, or, may I say, an old type in a new garment, namely, a revival of the Gangster film, which purports to show the determination of the Federal Government to stamp out gangster activities. In these recent productions, the hero is the policeman, and not the criminal. In the old films, which gave us so much trouble a few years ago, I admit the gangsters generally came to a sticky end. If the contrary had been the case, and crime had been glorified, these films would not have been censured by us. In the new variation the whole of the gangster's gamut of crime, murder, kidnapping, robbery with violence, arson, etc., are just as prominently portrayed as of yore. I consider that the cumulative effect of this type of film is highly undesirable. I discussed this point with the representatives of the American Production Code Committee during their recent visit to London, and found that they were fully alive to, and in general agreement with our views. They explained that the subject of these films had been very carefully and fully discussed at Hollywood prior to production, but permission had been granted to make a limited number from this new angle, namely, Government activity in fighting crime. I trust that we shall not have a recrudescence of these subjects,