

Opera Glasses of the Screen

WE have both Cecil B. De Mille and William De Mille with us this week. William De Mille's latest effort, "Don't Call It Love," will be screened this week at the Rialto. He is a director who does not appeal to his spectators with large close-ups. He knows the theatre intimately, being the author of such successful plays as "Strongheart," "The Warrens of Virginia" and "The Woman." Then he joined the picture world as a scenario writer, later becoming a producer and director. He made "Grumpy," "Clarence," "Only 33," "Miss Lulu Bett" and "Bought and Paid For." His latest picture was adapted from the story by Julian Street called "Rita Coventry" and the play by Hubert Osborne.

Concerning the adoption of the close-up in motion pictures, Mr. De Mille says it is equivalent to a theatre audience employing opera glasses, the latter being able to select their own close-ups.

"Have you ever watched an audience closely during the progress of a play?" asked Mr. De Mille. "During one moment you will not see more than one or two glasses levelled at the actors, and the next there will be hundreds of pairs of eyes looking through their opera glasses at the players. The reason for the sudden appearance of the glasses is that at that particular instant one of the players is expressing strong emotion facially, not with the figure. A play producer cannot carry his actors closer to the audience, hence the audience draws them nearer with the glasses. In pictures the producer has the means of bringing the players closer to the audience by means of the close-up. Having this experience at his command, the problem to be solved by the director is when to use it."

Mr. De Mille interrupted himself long enough to refill his large pipe. He struck a match, lighted the tobacco and looked relieved.

"The problem is solved," he continued, "by doing deliberately that which the audience does unconsciously. And there is no hit-and-miss method involved. We know that the spectators watch the expression of the players when they are registering emotion. A well-written scenario tells the director when the drama reaches one of the dramatic situations, and it is just that moment when the audience is keen to have a closer view of the actors.

"In a close-up that is too large, one that fills the entire screen, the sense of emotion is lost in the view of the features. The great enlargement of the features interests the spectators so much that the actual purpose of the close-up is defeated. Too large a close-up is therefore as ineffective as none at all."

Mr. De Mille says that he has introduced into his new picture several radical changes in technique. He has revolutionized his ideas by having far fewer titles and emphasized the dialogue. The theme of "Don't Call It Love" centres around Rita Coventry, an opera singer who believes that being in love inspires her when singing. The cast includes Nita Naldi, Agnes Ayres, Jack Holt, Theodore Kosloff and others.

"The Cheapest Photoplay"

IT is not to be wondered at that a director who has taken one year to make a picture on which \$1,500,000 has been spent, should constantly revert in the course of an interview to the production when it is to be presented in a few days. This happened when we had a talk with Cecil B. DeMille the other day in his apartment in the Ambassador Hotel, where he and his entourage have eleven rooms. Incidentally Mr. De Mille came East only to be present at the opening of "The Ten Commandments," the picture to which we have referred. He will return to Hollywood the day after Christmas. Accompanying him for this brief stay in New York are: Mrs. De Mille, the four children, three of whom were adopted; Miss Jeanie Macpherson, scenario writer, and her secretary; Barrett Kiesling, Mr. De Mille's representative, and Mrs. Kiesling, a valet and a maid.

Miss Macpherson was busy en route from California working on the scenario of Mr. De Mille's next picture, "Triumph." Mr. De Mille said that the railroad coach was as busy as an office and a home together, what with the clicking of the typewriter and the talking of children.

"Yes," observed Mr. De Mille, as he paced the carpeted floor and turned on one electric switch after another in an endeavor to find the one which gave the most light, "I came on here to be present at the opening of 'The Ten Commandments.'"

"We put this picture on in Los Angeles

and it was amazing the reaction this production had on the audience. It was most interesting. I thought then that the players had reaped their reward in knowing the wonderful effect their efforts had on the spectators.

Three Thousand Players.

"In some of the scenes of 'The Ten Commandments' we had as many as 3,000 persons, and scenes that were three miles in depth had to be taken. There were about 3,000 animals. These are for the sequences dealing with the Book of Exodus.

"The bravery of the people in this production was something that I shall never forget. They put up with the lashing cold winds that swept Guadeloupe at times and also with the terrific heat. We had reveille at 4 o'clock in the morning. These players had to come forth in their scant clothes—the badge of slavery—and brave the early cold of the day and the frequent sandstorms. It is not a question of time when one is directing a picture with 3,000 persons in it, and you want to have the scenes speak to the people who afterward are going to view them in black and white on a screen in a theatre.

"This spectacle will show people that we have an obligation to the public and that motion pictures can be more than mere stories. The influence on the thought of the world by motion pictures has made us take our work very seriously. The reason for the spectacle in 'The Ten Commandments' is to bring force to this picture. There are four and one-half reels of this prelude. This part cost \$1,000,000. It is a spectacle that is peculiarly impressive and joins the thought with the modern story. The idea of the spectacle as it is presented is worth a million.

The Cheapest Picture.

"'The Ten Commandments' with all its cost is the cheapest picture that was ever made. By this I do not mean that one ought to give any man a million and a half dollars and tell him to go out and make a picture. The idea has got to be good, and it is the working out of that idea in the production in question that makes it worth while. I hope that every picture I make has something to say. I do not mean a series of sermons, but the public is always interested in seeing its own problems discussed. A great many people drink in a great deal of what they see on the stage and screen.

"Reverting to the work of the players, I shall never forget the sacrifices, the dangers and the disagreeable experiences with which they had to bear. Every one of them did his or her bit. They backed me up and put it through. There was in one case 700 horses tied up together that afterward thundered out in a tangled mass. Women and children were courageous in such scenes. This picture will not affect the nation more than these people felt it, for there were times when they sank down on the sands crying."

Mr. DeMille said that there will always be a certain number of pictures merely for entertainment, just as in literature there are books and books. He added that there is one thing that counts in all screen efforts, and that is dramatic interest.

The representative of Mary Pickford wants to have us believe that Mary can not find time to do her Christmas shopping, as every minute of her time is taken up with "Dorothy Vernon of Haddon Hall," a film on which she is now at work. One of Mary's joys is said to be going to her stocking hanging from the radiator or mantelpiece on Christmas morning. It is therefore to be hoped that Douglas Fairbanks will not be too busy to do his shopping, even if Mary has to buy her husband's present by proxy.