

REAL MAN BEHIND THE MOVIES IS THE STAGE DIRECTOR

Highly Paid Specialists Developed in the Last Decade in Progress of the Film Plays--The Work of D. W. Griffith

WITHIN the last decade or so the business of producing motion picture plays has created, developed and brought into prominence a new profession, which even now is only beginning to show its possibilities. Ten years ago the photo play scenario as it exists to-day was practically unknown and actors were directed in their work only in a desultory way.

Then gradually some men displayed an ability to tell others how to produce effects which forced them naturally into prominence and they were called upon to direct others so frequently that they could devote little if any time to portraying characters for reproduction upon the screen. These men therefore began to devote all their time to telling others how to act, to preparing the stage settings, to developing plots and to making original plots themselves and staging them.

That was the beginning of the motion picture play director, a man who possesses an order of ability vastly different from that of his brother the stage director in a theatre.

The compensation of the director is all out of proportion to the youthfulness of the profession, but not at all disproportionate to the arduousness of the labor and the skill necessary to successful work. Like any other profession, it has its grades of compensation, and pecuniary emolument is based upon ability to reproduce worth while results.

"If a director can do anything at all," said a film manufacturer recently, "he commands \$5,000 a year, and more if he can do something very well. Some directors are drawing larger salaries than the average bank president and there are few competent directors who could afford to exchange incomes with the average good lawyer or doctor with what would be considered an excellent practice."

The highest paid director in the country, and that argues in the world, is D. W. Griffith of the Mutual Film Corporation, one of the independent companies, whose salary is conceded to be not less than \$30,000 and is probably considerably more. But Mr. Griffith is a director of directors now rather than a director of plays, although he frequently rehearses the actors in a big play before it is ready for production before the camera.

The layman understands little of the work of a director of a motion picture play, which is perhaps as well for the enjoyment of the finished product. The director deals with the bare bones of his subject, and a skeleton is not a sightly object. He takes material so crude for acting that the average stage director would look upon it as utterly hopeless, licks it into shape in a liffy, drapes it about the bones of his plot, and in a comparatively short time produces a pleasing and attractive figure for the delectation of the patrons of the five, ten and twenty-five cent exhibition houses.

So skillful does he become in this work that to a first class director there is very little of the material offered—that is, people who wish to act for the movies—which he cannot use in one way or another. But he does not teach them to act; his time is too short for that; nor does he even simply tell them how to act. He shows them how to act, and if he cannot on the moment show them exactly the steps they are to take, the motions they are to make, how they are to move about in the limited area covered by the eye of the camera and the emotions they are to depict on their faces, the scene is ruined and the length of film used in taking a picture of that scene is spoiled. It must all be done over again, at a cost.

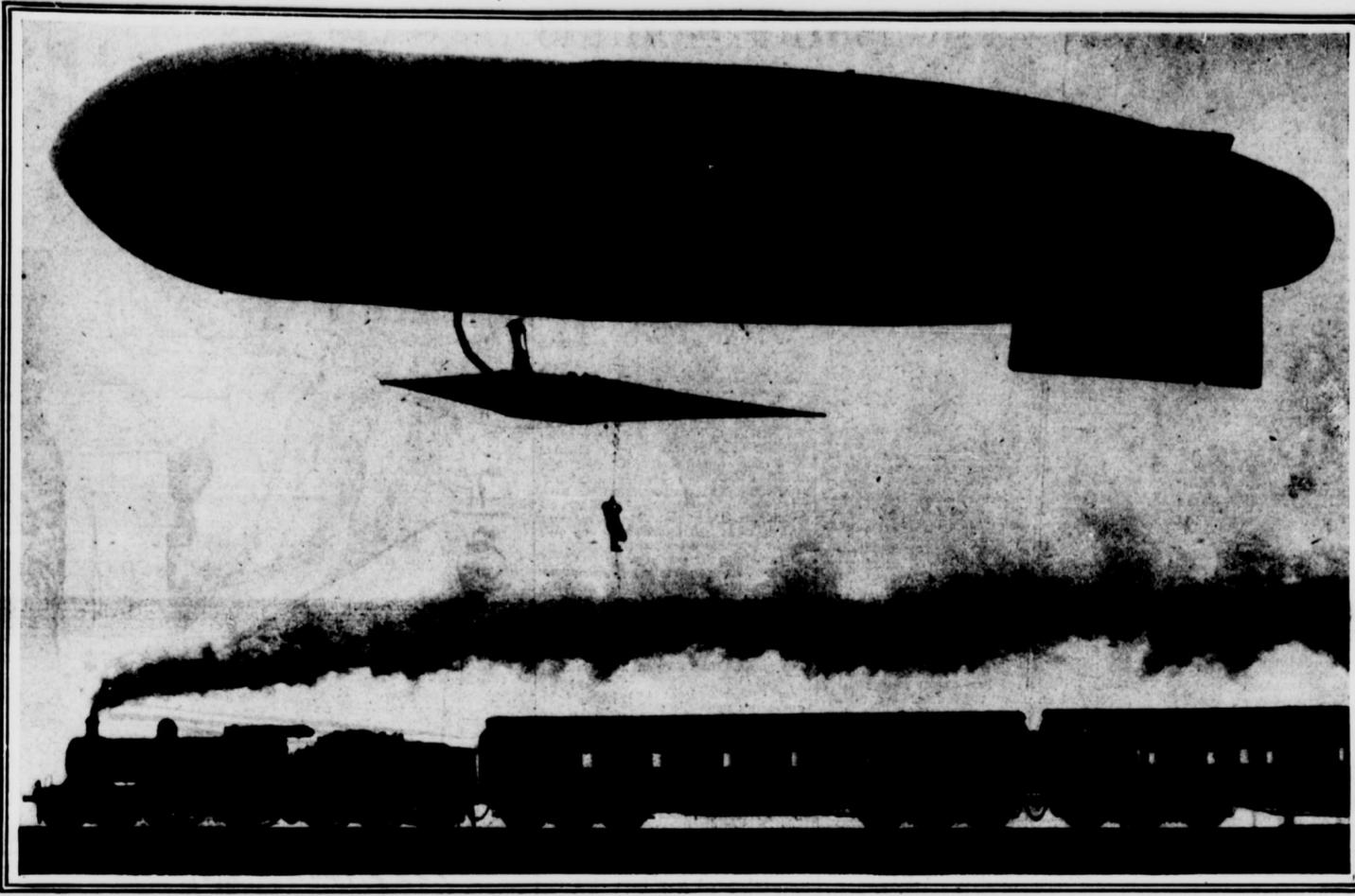
It is obvious, then, that through the course of a single day a busy director will himself run several times through the whole gamut of simulated emotions, affecting them so forcefully that he moves the actors whom he is directing to a similar counterfeiting. To illustrate, take a scene in court where a man is on trial for his life, as directed by Davis of the Itano. Judge, jury, accused, counsel and spectators are in place, the arguments are finished and the case about to be closed. The camera is in position and the director is standing where, of course, he is not caught by the lens.

"All ready," says the director. "Camera." The word which starts the camera man turning the crank. "Now, counsel for the defence, stand up. We rest our case, your Honor." Register that you are perfectly satisfied that your man will be acquitted.

"Accused, lift your head and register pleasure. Judge, nod your head sedately and with dignity. Sit down, counsel. Jury, look at each other and show that you are practically agreed for acquittal. Judge, turn to charge the jury.

"Now, gamekeeper, stand up. I demand to be heard." That's right. Audience, all turn to him and register astonishment. (A gamekeeper, roughly dressed, has stood up in the audience.) "Judge, look indignant at the interruption. Jurymen, all look astonishment at gamekeeper. Accused and counsel, turn and look at him, surprised. Attendant, tap and call for order. That's right.

"Now, gamekeeper, come on. Push roughly through that gate. Get up, accused, and try to stop him. Good! Scowl at him threateningly, gamekeeper. You're ready to smash him in the nose. Pull down the accused, counsel. Go on, gamekeeper. Take the stand. Swear to the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the whole truth and help you God."



SENSATIONAL FEAT OF MOVIE ACTOR.

In a photo-drama, "The Great Python Robbery," recently staged at Hendon, Middlesex, England, part of the plot was the descent of a detective from the Willows airship on to the top of a speeding Midland train. The part was successfully carried out by a man named Finn, who has gained a reputation for his fearlessness.

up and start for the witness, accused. You're crazy mad. Grab him, counsel. Force him down. Resist. That's right. Down with you. All right."

Since the action must keep pace with the camera and the words of director must precede the action by a small fraction of a second, it is apparent that he is doing rapid fire work, both in talking and acting, for he himself portrays every emotion which he calls for in the actors. It began and ended in two minutes.

But there is still use for the setting of part of the court room. Naturally the dramatic entrance of the gamekeeper and his charge has had its effect upon the jury and this must be shown by a close view of their faces. The jurymen are not finished actors by any means. They are all "extras" and some of them have never worked in front of a camera before.

They must be shown what to do, so they are rehearsed, very briefly but very thoroughly, watching the director while he shows them every move they must make, every emotion they must display and then copying him to his satisfaction. The other actors have, of course, been removed from the scene. The camera is fixed in a new position so as to take the jury alone, the director mounts the Judge's bench as the best position from which to work and the scene is started.

"Now," says the director, "The witness is making his accusation. Camera. I saw him shoot him." Look at him, the prisoner! God! He shot him! Look at each other, mouths open, eyes staring. Almighty! The man's a murderer. All right."

This took about thirty seconds and the director wiped his brow after he

said "All right." Fancy a stage director doing this sometimes from 9 o'clock in the morning until 5 o'clock or later in the evening. That is why so many motion picture directors are simply bundles of nerves.

Walter Macnamara of the Universal, who directed the production of "The Traffic in Souls," had not much left in him after the play was finished. Not all directors, however, are so strenuous. Each has his own method and his own ideas for bringing out what he intends to show. Some find it best to read the entire play to the actors who are to participate in it, assign the parts, let them rehearse themselves for a while and then finish the rehearsing himself.

Other directors say they can get better results by springing the scene and their parts on the actors suddenly, without giving them a knowledge of the entire play. Many an actor, working under a director who operates on the latter plan, would be hard put to it to tell a consecutive story of the drama or comedy in which he is one of the principal characters.

"While there are many points of difference between producing a play on the theatrical stage and producing one for the camera," said one director, "to my mind the principal point of difference is this: In the former the director begins at the beginning and progresses straight through to the end, or practically so. A director of a photo play will begin at the beginning or at the end or at any point between, according to weather, studio or other conditions.

"It is not at all uncommon for me to make the last scene the first thing and then take the others as best suits my convenience. I may finish, for instance, scenes 35, 10, 8, 24 and 18 in the order

named and then not touch the play again for a couple of weeks, perhaps not finishing it even then.

"Just to show you. Here is a scenario for a single reel melodrama. One of the stage settings is a room of state in a palace. You will notice that that same setting is used for scenes 1, 3, 5, 8, 18, 20, 41 and 45. Now, I cannot tear down that setting when I have finished scene 1 and rebuild it for scene 3 and repeat the tearing down and building up again and again. Naturally, I produce all the scenes while the setting is standing, beginning with the first and progressing to the last, or beginning and continuing anywhere according to the facilities.

"Again, for reasons of economy I may not use this setting until after all the other scenes have been made, although it is placed first in the scenario. Another director may be using a room of state in another play, which I can adapt, with a few changes, to my play. Obviously, it is economy for me to wait until he has finished, make the changes and put mine on.

"Then, too, there are exterior scenes which must be taken in the open, some in the city and some in the country. Two of these, you notice, are in the country. It would be too expensive for me to load my people into automobiles and travel twenty miles or more for two scenes. Therefore I wait until I have a number of exteriors that can be taken in the same neighborhood, and then go out. Perhaps I take half a dozen plays with me and we will do exteriors in all of them before we return, and sometimes several weeks will elapse before opportunity affords to make the trip.

"But the delay does not cause any trouble unless a leading character is

leaving me or my camera man has accepted a position with another company. Of course we must use the same leading characters all the way through a play; everybody appreciates that. But what is not generally known to the layman is that we must also use the same camera man and the same camera in every scene of any play. Each man and each machine has individuality, and this individuality must be preserved all through the various scenes, whether they are interiors or exteriors.

But the work of a director is not confined merely to showing people how to act and guiding them through their performances. For one thing, he decides what shall or what shall not be produced within proper limitations.

There are a few companies in which the scenario department decides upon the acceptance or rejection of manuscripts, hands them to their directors and tells them to produce them, but in the majority of cases the "scripts," as they are called, are first submitted to the directors, who report on their acceptability. It is not unusual, either, for a director to receive a script before the scenario department does, accept it and so notify the scenario editor.

It has happened also that a director has accepted a scenario and begun its production before the scenario editor knew anything about it. Such a condition is becoming rather rare, however, but in the last analysis, where ordinary plays are concerned, the director is the lord of his own productions. It will happen too that the possibilities of a play will appeal to a director but not appeal to him personally, when he may suggest: "Give that to Green, it is in his line but not in mine."

The purchase of the picture rights of plays which have made a hit with

the public, the production of great spectacles, such as "Quo Vadis," "The Last Days of Pompeii" and others, modifies naturally the power of the director in particular instances, but a thousand ordinary plays are produced to one of these, still leaving the director in the position of a dictator, and even with the big productions the head director has a powerful voice.

Another part of the work of the director, then, is the exercise of good judgment in selecting plays for picturing. To do this effectively he must constantly keep his finger on the pulse of the public, because many plays are submitted which lend themselves readily to the screen but which would not take with the public were they produced. The looking office or the distributing company is of course his best guide in this, and he must keep in close touch with them.

Also he must keep informed of the plays released by other companies as well as his own to prevent duplication. The scenario department helps here. One man says he has a complete list of every play released for the last ten years; others say they should like to see such a list, but never have.

Once a scenario has reached the director for production it is his absolutely. No script is sacred that gets into his hands. He cuts here, slashes there, builds up and tears down until it suits his own ideas of what the play ought to be, frequently changing not only action but plot as well. Many a budding author of motion picture plays has failed almost to recognize his darling effort when he saw it on a screen, but few have had the hardihood to say that it was not improved when it fell to a competent director.

"It is of record that \$150 has been

He Not Only Shows the Actors How to Act but in a Single Day Will Himself Run Through the Whole Gamut of Emotions

paid for a scenario and the whole thing, plot and all, thrown away for the sake of getting a single big scene and idea, around which an entirely new play was built. Many times also the director is a direct producer of plays. From an idea which is suggested by a play he is staging or by some other circumstance a director writes his own scenario. There is one director in New York working for a company which produces only multiple reel plays who has himself written more than 75 per cent. of the plays produced by his company in the last year. All directors consider it a part of their work to do this, or when unable to find time to write scenarios themselves to suggest to the scenario editor a plot which can be written by his staff.

With his scenario fixed to suit him the director turns his attention to the settings for the different scenes, interior and exterior. He directs the work of the property man and the stage hands in their preparation, displaying a care which is sometimes no less than meticulous.

The eye of the camera has no imagination, but shows exactly what is placed before it, so all details have to be carefully worked out, no matter how small they are. Some stage settings take many hours to prepare and then are used for only a few minutes; nor are the most elaborate ones always the most difficult to get ready. It took less than an hour recently to prepare a stage setting representing an elaborate apartment, and it was used during an entire day. On the other hand, six hours were consumed in preparing a cellar scene, which was used less than two minutes.

Three painted walls had to be set up, representing the stones of the foundation; a big furnace, with its accompanying pipes, had to be placed in position; the floor sanded to look natural; barrels, boxes and pieces of old lumber piled and scattered about; dead matches thrown carelessly on the floor and the fine dust of ashes obtained and thrown upon top of the pipes. The actors were "discovered" when the picture was made beside the furnace. They indicated that they heard a noise upstairs and a door beside the furnace. No other use was made of this setting.

A director is hardly necessary to the preparation of a scene like this, one might think, but if any detail were left out thousands would notice it and the best effect of the scene be lost.

Everybody knows the great care Mr. Belasco exercises in preparing his plays, that stage settings and costumes shall be true to nature, that the period in which the play is supposed to occur, other theatrical producers follow Mr. Belasco in this respect so far as their resources of finance and artistic ability permit. The same is true of the director of motion picture plays, although as a general thing the exigencies of the business will not permit the development of another Belasco, even were such a thing possible.

But the average theatrical production demands only a few scenes or settings, while the average motion picture play, which consumes, say a quarter of an hour to exhibit on the screen, has from a dozen to twenty different stage settings. All these must be in keeping as to time, place and character. It is the business of the director to make them so, and he cannot give months to the study and preparation of them.

This does not apply to the work of the director of the great productions, which require many months of preparation in which the last thing thought of is haste. But these big plays are pictured under one head character, who has opportunity for consultation with each other before a single big scene is attempted.

In the matter of lighting a stage setting the work of the director dovetails with that of the camera man. The latter is supposed to know just how the lights should be placed to produce the best results, but was beside the director who tries to lay blame upon the camera man for faulty work. He might almost as well blame the property man for any error in a stage setting. The director is the man who must get results, and good ones, and it is distinctly "up to him" to do so.

All big concerns have what are called "outside" stages. They are large platforms, open to the air above and on all sides so that daylight may be had during sunlight hours. For the winter months these platforms are closed in and covered with glass roofs, to protect the actors from the weather and at the same time allow the light to stream through. Some of them are a hundred feet square, or more, and permit simultaneous work by a dozen different directors on different plays. Here the light is managed by shifting screens such as a photographer shifts his screens in his studio. It is the director's job to see that his camera man shifts the screens so as to produce the best effects.

Interior studios, of which there are many more, are furnished with great banks of Cooper Hewitt incandescent tubes, pendant from the ceilings and on portable stands. Moving these about from place to place so as to concentrate their light upon the scene being pictured, is supposed to be the work of the camera man; but while the director may defer to the latter many times in this where there is a difference of opinion, he never defers to anybody in the makeup on the faces of his actors. He must know accurately just how any makeup will appear before these lights—and he gets very little assistance from his actors, who are rarely artists.

That is pretty nearly all a director of motion picture plays has to do. Only to know a good play when he sees the scenario, to recognize the screenable possibilities of a plot, to create a good play from a poorly written scenario, to write plays himself, to make a momentary actor out of one who has little if any experience in acting, and to do it in a few minutes, to be thoroughly familiar with costumes and furniture of all periods, to have an eye for details in setting or pantomime or the registers of emotions, to display good judgment as to where, when and how to take pictures of scenes of a play; to be a bit of a photographer and a bit of an electrician, and a few other things hardly worth mentioning here.



The stage director, short stout, man near camera, showing actors how to act.