

# IN THE "MOVIES" YESTERDAY and TODAY

## History and Development of the Motion Picture Screen

### By THOMAS H. INCE

#### 3. PUBLIC DEMANDS FORCE PROGRESS.

Among the first pictures I produced under the Kessel and Baumann banner at Edendale, my initial venture in California, was a comedy entitled "The New Cook." It ran about 62 scenes, less than a reel, as against four to seven hundred scenes, or five to eight reels, which comprise the feature picture of today.

This maiden effort was a big success, however, and with the impetus given me by the praise it received, I became bolder and produced other successes.

The problem of stories was a serious one, even in those days, because there were no scenario departments and no market from which to purchase scenarios. The only stories available, if I may be permitted to use that term, were the attempts of school pupils who

as well burn down the house, or blow up the bridge. That would get a thrill.

And so it went, until necessity caused the development of the continuity, which is a working continuity of the story, with each scene clearly defined and the situations worked out in logical sequence. This form of manuscript came through its own demand and practically developed itself. For the sake of convenience a director would classify the scenes we were to take each day, and jot down on a piece of paper, or maybe on his cuff, and thus the more elaborate form of a detailed and finished continuity came about and gradually established itself as the accepted form.

#### Thrills, But No Plot.

The chase would be taken up by others, and before they had gone a block the whole community would be in pursuit, gathering momentum as it went, dashing madly down steep hillsides, across brooks, over fences and through wooded country until the culprit was apprehended and brought to justice.

These pictures carried a decided thrill, and I can remember distinctly how an excited audience would cheer wildly at the antics of the

#### Many Absurdities.

In the early days of flimdom, productions often were crude and filled with many incongruities. In a picture where letters and telegrams were used the handwriting on letters written by individuals in the story, and telegrams coming from the telegraph office were all in the same handwriting. Words were misspelled and grammatical errors were frequent.

One incident, which illustrates this lack of consistency and faulty production occurred in one of the early pictures, the story of which concerned a young American who was visiting in Turkey. I think his name was Jones. Being an enterprising youth, Jones decided to pay a clandestine visit to the Sultan's harem. He was discovered by the irate Sultan and thrown into prison.

Such an act being considered a sacrilege, Jones was condemned to die, and to properly get this fact over to the audience, a letter was delivered to Jones from the Sultan, which read as follows:

"My dear Mr. Jones—I beg to inform you that tomorrow at sunrise you will be executed for breaking into my harem. Yours very truly, The Sultan."

#### Mistakes Overlooked.

I have no doubt that the meaning was clear to the audience, and I have no doubt that the audience accepted this inconsistency without resentment, but what would an audience of today do to such an incongruous expression?

In the days of the double exposure development, a scene occurred in a lion's cage which was supposed to depict several very fierce and angry lions. The lions were old, contented and at peace with the world, and were not looking for trouble. To make the scene convincing it was necessary to arouse their anger, so it was decided that the keeper should get behind them and prod them with a stick.

The first exposure was taken of the lions, who were only mildly aroused. The second was to show the keeper prodding them. The scene would have passed had not something gone wrong with the blending of the two exposures.

When the double exposure was thrown on the scene the keeper was in front of the lions poking the air frantically with the stick, while the lions looked on in silent amusement.

When you stop to think that even ten years ago such things were the rule, rather than the exception, it is easy to see the tremendous strides that have been made toward establishing the motion picture industry as an art, instead of a form of cheap amusement.

#### (To be continued.)

### Just Fiddlin'

Life's orchestra is made up of a lot of different instruments. Some men pound and some blow, but Jimmie Brown—just fiddled.

Jimmie had been a bright youngster, a promising boy. Folks predicted a hearty success from him. But they had been disappointed.

Boys around him had climbed, and were conductors and leaders in Life's orchestra. Some of his old chums had assumed leading parts here and there, in factory, farm, and city, in shop and office. But, somehow, Jim just fiddled along.

He had ability, but he didn't use it. He might have been a hustler—if hustlin' hadn't been such a hard work. There might have been a gold mine under his front steps. But even if he had been sure of it, he didn't have a shovel, anyway. And if he had a shovel—well, he wasn't fond of digging!

So Jimmie continues to fiddle in Life's orchestra.

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#### THE MORAL

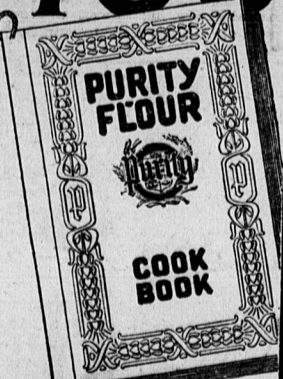
The teacher was trying to impress on the children how important had been the discovery of the law of gravitation.

"Sir Isaac Newton was sitting on the ground and looking at the tree. An apple fell on his head, and from

that he discovered gravitation. Just think, children," she added, "isn't that wonderful?"

The "smart boy" in the class did not seem impressed. "Yes, miss," he piped up. "And if he had been sitting in school looking at his books he wouldn't have discovered any-thing."

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- "THE HERMIT OF FERRENDO"
1. Fade in - Joe Dies, fishing - looks front - smiles
  2. Stream - Coyle enters with bucket - dips it in water
  3. Stream - Joe dies. (close up) - he calls and laughs
  4. Stream - (alone up) - Coyle dies - looks up - gets nervous
  5. Stream - Joe calls again
  6. Stream - Coyle dies - picks up stick & exits
  7. Joe Dies. - laughs - drops fish pole & runs out
  8. Spot - Coyle walks in - looks & gives start
  9. Top of hill - flash of Indians on hill
  10. Spot - Coyle turns & runs away
  11. Ex. cabin - Coyle runs in a steps & thinks
  12. In cabin - flash of man - puts jug away
  13. Ex. cabin - Coyle dies. & exits in cabin

Above, Thomas H. Ince and William S. Hart with Sioux Indian chiefs who appeared in pioneer "westerns." Below, example of the first script, with a total of 50 scenes as compared with 400 to 700 in modern features.

wanted to write "for the movies," and they were useless. It therefore evolved upon the director to manufacture his stories from his own brain.

#### Tricks That Satisfied.

But to trace the whole development of pictures, I must go back prior to my advent into the industry, to the time when there was no plot at all. Moving pictures then were merely a series of scenes depicting objects and figures in motion, the pantomime alone sufficing. Among these were the highly amusing and mystifying trick pictures in which a man would be run over by a steam roller and spread out on the ground as flat as the proverbial pancake. He would be reduced by one operation of the camera from a three-dimensional man, having length, breadth and thickness, to a two-dimensional being, having only length and breadth, his thickness being that of a sheet of paper. Then by reversing the film he would be restored to his normal cast and structure.

But the public soon became more sophisticated and demanded a plot, moving objects, with no particular reason for moving, no longer suf-

actors, and actually in their imaginations, join in the chase. But even these pictures, which were a distinct advancement over the trick films, carried no real plot.

Pictures had established no precedents and the public took them as they were, but as the industry began to grow, the public became more demanding and the story problem loomed large. It was just about that time that I became actually engaged in picture making. Gradually we began to get stories that had some semblance of a plot. Even when stories were first adopted there was no such thing as continuity. A director would get the germ idea of a plot, assemble his cast, go out on location and start to shoot, having only a hazy idea of what he was going to do. His one idea was to get action and to keep things moving, regardless of the sequence of scenes or the logic of his plot.

All would go well for a while, then the inevitable would happen and he would have to hold up the picture and keep the cast standing around while he racked his brain for an idea.

"Let's see," he would say. "What shall we do next? Well, we might