



Paramount Photos

One of the world's foremost movie producers talks up for the talkies. He describes the difficulties involved in giving the silent screen a tongue. He quotes figures that will make you reel. He answers all the objections you have thought of to the speaking shadows. And he carries to bounds you didn't dare the possibilities of the future

WHEN, in the early months of 1894, Messrs. Raff and Gammon, who conducted with much glitter and considerable success a Kinetoscope Parlor at 1199 Broadway, New York, announced that in the future their patrons would see pictures that talked as well as walked, there was not the public excitement that you might think should have accompanied such an announcement.

Not only was the capricious public highly skeptical but it was somewhat resentful. There was a feeling that Messrs. Raff and Gammon were overstepping the boundaries of legitimacy in advertising—putting something over, so to speak. Yet when the evening came when these articulate pictures were to make their début, large crowds of citizens invaded the Kinetoscope Parlor, so large in fact that policemen had to be called upon to maintain order.

And the pictures did speak, as predicted. Mr. Thomas A. Edison, the creator of the unbelievable thing, had synchronized the filmed scene with phonograph records and while the results were not all that he had hoped for,

nevertheless the pictures did speak. One had merely to drop a cent into the slot, apply the receivers to his ears and his eyes to the peep-hole to capture proof.

Curiously enough, Messrs. Raff and Gammon's patrons were not diverted. They had come expecting to be hoaxed and they departed apparently saddened and mildly affronted because they hadn't been. They went home not to talk glowingly of the wonders that never cease but to hold forth dismally that the talking pictures were poor things doomed to an early withdrawal. Neither Mr. Edison nor anybody else could make soulless photographs speak and that was all there was to it. And even if he did make them speak, it wasn't worth listening to anyway.

And they were right—temporarily.

In a few months Messrs. Raff and Gammon ceased offering Mr. Edison's kinetophone pictures and the critics nodded in smug assent. Had they not predicted that failure awaited?

The Third Début of the Talky

Not that photography of sound was new even then. There had been the experiments of Blake of Brown University, Herman of Liège, and others who had failed to produce anything more than symptoms of what was to come. They were followed by Demeny and his chronophotophone, by Whitman and his cameraphone, by Gaumont's chronophone and the talking movies of Deutsche and Lauste.

But articulate films did not attain to

Hearing

commercial feasibility until Dr. Lee De Forest produced his phonofilm in 1923. A little further experimentation, and today the wholly silent film is gradually becoming something to be remembered, not seen.

The point is this: Something of the same criticism that arose when Raff and Gammon offered Edison's kinetophone to the public was heard when, with one accord, the moving-picture industry went talky a year ago. You heard it said that voice reproduction was bad, that the dialogue was stilted, witless and unreal, that the talky was foredoomed because the movie actor under contract was a pretty puppet without voice or vocabulary.

All sorts of dire prophecies were heard. In newspapers, in magazines and on street corners you were informed that the financial penalties of abandoning the silent drama for the audible film would put a stop to all this nonsense. For example, Cyril So-and-so, the high-salaried idol of ten million girls, would have to be retired because he could not make the vocal grade; and the beautiful Annabel Gorgeous, the greatest box-office siren in history, would have to be dropped because she had a compound lisp. These artists, you may have been informed, had long-term contracts and had to be filmed. Therefore the talkies would have to wait. I mention only these of the thousand and one reasons given you why we, the producers, were making an historic blunder.

A Product of Progress

Wholly aside from the chronic unreliability of these inevitable critics, there was the entirely overlooked fact that, at last, science had produced sound film which was commercially and artistically practicable. After patient work by men who had devoted many years to moving-picture development and by scientists of first-rank minds and reputations, the talking movie had arrived. And in a state of perfection far ahead of the usual début condition.

I know of no film artist who had the appearance and the intelligence to make good in the silent pictures who cannot carry on now. It would be foolish to pretend that the talking picture has attained to its ultimate excellence. Nothing has. But it is here to stay—as substantial a product of our progress as the motor car or the airplane. So much is this so, that the future of the sound and talking picture is the future of the movie industry.

Nor do I say this as a producer of moving pictures who arrogantly decrees what the public can prepare itself to receive. The talking and sound film is not here because we producers found it convenient to make it; articulate pictures have arrived because the public has demanded them. Without the sanction of the public no picture succeeds and by the same token no producer survives who does not correctly measure the public's appetite.

Not that all pictures of the future will speak. They will have sound effects, yes; but there will be that type of film and that character of subject which will not lend themselves to dialogue. There have been and will be pictures wherein speech from the lips of certain of the characters would not only be in bad taste but would be fiercely resented by the audiences.

For example just what could we have done in *The King of Kings*? Or the *Ten Commandments*? How impossible it would have been to have attempted to

Things in the Dark

By Jesse L. Lasky

make them all-talkies. Could we have presumed to reproduce the voice of the Christ? Would we have offended by putting the voice of God into the mouth of a hired actor?

Great pictures of the future may be voiceless but certainly not soundless. Dramatic effect will be enhanced by musical scores written especially for the picture. So important will these scores and musical effects be in pictures to come that it is probable that Hollywood will become the musical center of America.

Limited for the Present

We may look toward that time—and not so far in the future as you may think—when the great composers, the famous singers, the masters of musical direction, will be as eager to come to Hollywood as the artists of the stage and literature are now. The synchronized picture will create an enormous appetite for the best in music. It will influence the music-cultural growth of the nation just as surely as the silent pictures have given us a better theater.

However, at present I see limits to what we shall produce—limits which may be moved outward from time to time. For example, I cannot predict now that we shall fetch grand opera to the screen. The reason is simple enough: It lacks the general popularity that would warrant our filming it. Later, much may happen. The silent films started humbly enough with simple subjects. Neither will we attempt Shakespeare—and for the same reason.

I have read much and heard more to the effect that with the advent of the talking movie, large numbers of the film stars sped to the studios of voice culturists and elocutionists.

Doubtless it is true that there were (and possibly still are) some of our stars who, having had no professional voice training, sought advice of those who had. But elocution went out of fashion long ago. Elocution thrived in the old theater of our fathers. In the mouths of true artists who had the intelligence to adapt that grandiloquence to their own personalities and the parts they played, the ranting was less objectionable, less absurd; but the old declamatory style is a hindrance rather than a help to today's actor.

In the literature of the stage as elsewhere the demand is for the natural, for the truth of life, for fidelity to character and situation. I ask our actors to be natural, speak naturally. We will cast types and voices to suit the scenario's parts. It will not be necessary for a player whose natural talents are

equipment for light rôles to prepare for heavies. None of our artists has been instructed to go in for voice culture.

An Important New Influence

We have one young woman whose voice was as far removed from the conventional stage vocal standards as the ordinary shop-girl's is from Julia Marlowe's. Just as she was, without a moment of voice culture, we put her into a talking picture and her success is phenomenal. She plays the part of one of the million young things one sees in the noonday luncheon rush. She does it superbly. Any affectation of her voice would have ruined the part.

Not that a pleasing voice is not preferable. A true singing voice is grateful upon the ear. But the natural voice can very readily be pleasing.

As the screen influenced styles in clothing, so will the talking movie have its wide and deep effect upon the voices of the nation. As a new gown worn in a picture by Bebe Daniels or Gloria

be sure, the foreign actor who speaks no English can be of little use to us. Inasmuch as we have none of them under contract we refuse to consider the problem.

Frequently we shall use sound and musical effects rather than the spoken word in the interests of effect. Suggestion that instantly fires the imagination may move you more deeply than an ejaculation from the character's lips.

For example, a war impends. A young soldier and his sweetheart are together in a thronged street. The whole atmosphere of the crowd is one of impending tragedy. The girl is tearful—afraid for the man she loves and for a million other men who may be moving toward slaughter. The soldier is calm, mildly reassuring her, although he knows that only a miracle can avert the disaster.

And then suddenly the audience hears a few startled notes of a bugle. The crowd pauses. The girl presses against the soldier, terror-stricken. He is very grim. Nothing is said by either of them but a newsboy dashes into the scene and holds out to the girl a newspaper whereon the single word WAR screams from the page.

Anything that either this girl or her soldier might have said at that moment would have been stupid and colorless. The terrific impact of the calamity is passed on to the audience by suggestion.

The Legitimate Stage is Safe

Our greatest problems touch on none of these snap-criticisms of the sound and talking picture. Our problems haven't changed. They are merely that we shall provide acceptable entertainment. As for technical improvements, our next step will involve the wide-angle lens, giving us a broader screen. Tomorrow's screen will be as large as the theater stage. And that will mean that wherever you sit in the house yours will be equivalent to a front seat.

The moving picture will not kill off the so-called legitimate theater although the screen's importance in public entertainment will be greater now than it has ever been. But as for threatening the existence of the living stage, it would pay us in such an emergency to save it by subsidy. Nothing so worth saving, so necessary to a people's cultural growth, can possibly be lost.

With the growth of the silent movie came the gradual disappearance of the old-fashioned road show—the repertory company. To a great extent even the first-rate Broadway productions were limited to large city showings, and rather few of them. A pronounced success might go to Detroit, Chicago, Philadelphia, Cleveland and possibly, should it have the unlimited appeal of an Abie's Irish Rose or of a few of the truly great musical shows, one or two other large cities.

But now that the sound film has reached that degree of success where nothing that the legitimate stage has to offer is impossible for the camera to reproduce, the speaking stage would seem to face even further limiting. We are now producing sound pictures with such fidelity that it will not be long before we are able to submit to the same tests that the reproducing piano manufacturers offer.

The so-called legitimate stage will, in the new order of things, become even more of a strictly metropolitan institution than it is now. I dare say that communities of less than 150,000 population will not support stage presentations outside of (Continued on page 48)



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Mr. Lasky listens critically to the results of (above) the filming of a garrulous thriller, *The Studio Murder Mystery*. A neat bit of crime, too

Swanson sent a million girls scurrying home to remake a dress or caused a thousand manufacturers of women's wear to hustle back to their designing boards to supply the new demand, so will the speech of the screen heroine find echo on the tongue of her audience.

Another prediction of the early critic of the talking movie was that our non-English-speaking stars would return to Europe because of their ignorance of our tongue. That, too, is without truth. For example, I have requested Maurice Chevalier, the French comedian, to take particular care that he does not lose so much as an inflection of his accent. Emil Jannings in broken English will, I believe, be an even greater sensation than he has been. Accents are in high demand, particularly in character work. We have been hard put to it now and then to find among our American or English actors men and women who could produce dialect properly. To

High Hat

By Bozeman Bulger

You mightn't think of mixing professional baseball and cow-punching. Neither did Benny. But his sister saw how it could be done, and did it—with trimmings

NOSE around with the baseball gang to this day and you'll hear the old graybeards of the game entertain the incoming bushers by telling them the yarn of how Benny Capehart outsmarted the magnates until he wound up with a Texas ranch.

Well, I'm Benny Capehart, and I let all the people who want to think that I'm smart. When folks get the notion that a bird is as wise as a tree full of owls he can even get away with it at the banks. They are just as much a set-up for the up-stage stuff as was old Major Cummings, the gent who figures in this my last will, testament and confession.

When I keep quiet and let folks think I put one over on the baseball magnates I'm just cheating, that's all. My widowed sister, Mary, pulled that trick. Boy, there's a gal who made a steel trap look clumsy!

THE thing started when I was playing the outfield for the Blues and wasn't getting nowhere on the pay roll, even if I was hitting .320. Kid all you like, but don't let nobody tell you I couldn't crash that old apple. Just look over the records and you'll see they haven't had a man in the outfield for ten years who could sock that onion like I did. I've been many kinds of a sucker in my time, but I was never a sucker for a curve ball. Ask any of the old-timers.

Everybody took old Benny—that's me—for an easy-going sort of a bench comedian. I was too easy-going to be a holdout, and when the winter contracts came around there were never any extra big figures on mine. Like a boob I took what was offered me the first few years and let it go at that. I was so crazy to play baseball that I think I'd have played for nothing.

In the winter time—the off season—I lived on my sister's farm out in Texas, doing the best I could. Mary was a widow, having lost as good a husband as any woman ever had. His name was Drury Richardson. He was a good-natured guy and was willing to do anything in the world for Mary. But good nature licked him. When he died he left Mary that little one-horse farm with a big mortgage on it.

Game gal that she was, and is, Mary took it on herself to run that farm and pay off the mortgage. She had a notion that she could turn the trick by raising Jersey and Holstein cattle for milk cows, believing that the old days of raising longhorns on a range were over.

I stuck around helping her the best I could, keeping her company in the winter and doing odd jobs about the place.

You see, Mary was a well-educated girl—had read and studied everything. When we were young they couldn't keep me fastened down in one place long enough to give me an education. So they fastened all the learning on Sis. She was a leader in all the social events and was a regent of the Daughters of the American Revolution. It always

made me feel sort of bad to see her out there on that lonesome farm, three miles from town, working her head off and bearing down on them books and figures night and day.

My job was to herd up them three cows every night and give them a feed. I got a break once in a while by going down to San Antonio and playing pool, where I also got an earful about sporting events.

"Say, Benny," one of them small-city wise guys said to me one night, "I see in the papers where a couple of your big leaguers are holding out for a lot of money. They've got their pictures in the paper. Why don't you try that holding-out thing?"

Everybody around that section knew that I wasn't getting a salary anything like my heavy hitting called for. I'm telling you I could bust that old apple, even if I wasn't smart.

That fellow put a notion into my head. It was only a question if I would be game enough to go through with it. I knew the contracts would be sent out along in January or February. The owners, you know, always make out these contracts a month or so before the teams go south.

That remark down at the poolroom gave me a little courage. Mind you,

I had been socking the ball harder than ever my previous season. Why, there wasn't a curve-ball pitcher in the league who—but you can get all that out of the records. I don't want to be talking about myself, but it's the honest truth when I tell you that I didn't care a rap whether they threw me a hook or a fast one.

I RECKON I was always sort of scatter-brained, and when I began popping off about my new scheme to Sis she looked absent-mindedlike and kept right on with her figures. You know, my brains never were a big favorite in Mary's betting book. She had heard me rave for years. Besides, her mortgage payment was coming due, and at no time was her bank roll big enough to choke a canary.

"All right, Benny, that's fine," she said, without looking up or knowing what I was talking about. "Do what you think is best."

"Sis," I finally declared, myself, "you think I'm just talking, but I'm going to show these baseball birds that Benny Capehart is a game guy."

"What's the trouble?" she asked, still wrestling with them figures. "Has your new contract come?"

"No, Sis, but it ought to be along

most any time now. Old Major Cummings told me when I left that he'd send them out late in January."

"You'd better wait then. He might give you a voluntary raise. How much does your contract call for at present?"

"They paid me thirty-six hundred dollars last year. The way I've been hitting they ought to make it six thousand. Sis, you may not know what it means to be a good curve-ball hitter. Why, only last week—"

"All right, Benny. Maybe you'd better wait. By the way, did you let the two Jerseys into the barn? That other one can stay out tonight."

Well, that being over, I went out and rounded up them two cows, wondering how Sis ever expected to get a nickel out of them. The whole three of them didn't give enough milk for one good sherry flip.

Now, let me tell you another thing: That sister of mine was no hick, even if she did live out on that little farm. She was thirty years old, didn't look it, and was as pretty as a speckled pup. To look at me you wouldn't think I had a sister who could knock 'em dead like that. Sis had a sort of yellow, syrup-candy hair that honestly made you think of gold dust when she sat down near the old kerosene reading lamp and be-



Illustrated by
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That old boy had on more cowboy clothes bought from them trick places than you ever saw on a moving-picture two-gun man