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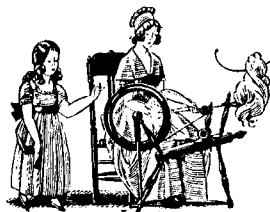
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Woman's Home Companion

Volume LV

Edited by Gertrude B. Lane

Number 10

OCTOBER 1928



GENE GAUNTIER

The most popular figure in the early days of moving pictures tells the story of her thrilling adventures as actress, scenario writer and producer



DRAWN BY D. J. ROSENTHAL FROM A PHOTOGRAPH

I sometimes wrote three complete scenarios for one-reelers in a day

Blazing the Trail



JOSEPH COLLINGS

Rambo's, in Coytesville, New Jersey, since pictured in hundreds of films, was our discovery

A tribute to this intrepid young woman's character and achievements, by her old friend Epes Winthrop Sargent of the Moving Picture World, appears on page 4

IT WAS in June, 1906, that I literally jumped into the moving pictures. And from that day to this I have been connected with them as actress, scenario writer, producer and critic. In these different capacities I watched the very birth-pangs of the industry. I helped to develop and guide it, I cried and laughed over it, and was part of it as it was part of me.

In these reminiscences I make no attempt to write a history of moving pictures. I merely set forth what I recall of those early days in the few companies with which I was associated.

The impulse which led me to fling myself into a Connecticut river from which I issued forth leading lady of a small picture company destined to become a power in the industry was characteristic of the hour.

ON THE stage melodrama was in its hey-day, and from the ranks of melodramatic actors were drawn the players for the first pictures. Why Girls Leave Home: or A Danger Signal on the Path of Folly gave us Lois Weber, Phillips Smalley, Anne Schaeffer and me. The Worst Woman in London was the play that graduated James Kirkwood. Billy the Kid, starring the boy Joseph Santley, produced three men who eventually became great directors, Sidney Olcott, Robert Vignola and George Melford; also Marion Leonard, the original "Biograph Girl," and Fred Santley who afterward starred in the Bertie series for Kalem. Mary Pickford had already appeared in The Fatal Wedding and Laurette Taylor had been leading woman for young Santley in The Boy of the Streets, written by her husband, Charles Taylor. Plays like Bertha the Sewing-machine Girl, Across the Pacific, and Nellie the Beautiful Cloak Model were coming fortunes for Al Woods, Sullivan and Harris, the Mittenhals Brothers, and the Blaneys. The public's appetite for thrillers seemed insatiable.

Like all players of the day, I came to New York each year at the close of the road season in search of an engagement for the next season. In 1906 I arrived with sufficient money to take a delightful little apartment on 101st Street near Central Park West for which I paid thirty-two dollars a month.

About June first I realized that my funds

were running low and in a vague way I thought of the new opening for actors, moving pictures. But like the rest of the legitimate profession I looked on them with contempt and felt sure that my prestige would be lowered if I worked in them. I knew only one person who did work in them regularly, Sidney Olcott, whom I had met at the home of Mrs. Santley, mother of Tommie, Fred and Joe, and my own "New York mother." He was then with the Biograph Company. Today he is one of our outstanding directors.

One noon Sid came from Forty-second Street to 101st Street by surface car, as this was before the day of subways and we had no telephone.

"How would you like to come on a picture tomorrow with Biograph?" I stalled for I did not want to go. He went on to explain:

"It's a water picture. If you can swim—"

"But I can't," I cried, relieved.

"That's all right. You'll only have to get your feet wet. We are going up to Sound Beach, Connecticut, and it will give you a long day in the country. I know you'll enjoy it and it'll put three berries in your pocket. Probably will mean more work too. Now, Dot, I think you are foolish not to seize such an opportunity. It's all going out and nothing coming in with you, and that is no right way for anyone to live—just to lie around waiting for something to turn up."

Good old Sid, how many times has he guided not only me but all of his confrères along the road of his wisdom!

SO THE next morning at eight-five I met the company at the Grand Central Station and we took a train for Sound Beach. Mr. Harrington was the director but the life of the party was a good-looking, enthusiastic man of vivid personality who seemed to take matters into his own hands. He was Frank J. Marion, sales manager for the Mutascope, a subsidiary of the Biograph.

Arrangements had been made for our reception at a farmhouse smothered in roses and lilacs and set down in a field of daisies. Beyond the winding dirt road flowed a river some fifty feet wide which, a few hundred yards below, had been dammed to give power



Producers demanded outdoor background for all scenarios

to a woolen mill, dilapidated and abandoned. Here on one side of the dam was a great pool thirty feet deep and on the other a sheer drop of thirty or forty feet.

"A wonderful place for the plunge," announced Marion and turning to me he added, "You swim of course!"

"Never was in water in my life except a bathtub," I said cheerfully.

"I told you we must have someone who could swim," railed Marion at Olcott.

"You didn't say 'swim,'" said Sid; "you said someone to go in the water."

"That's a fine way to get out of it. The next time you do as I say. All right, folks, take off your make-up and we'll go home and come back again tomorrow."

THIS would never do. Mentally I made a calculation—ten people at three dollars a day, railroad fares and so forth. I spoke up:

"What do you want me to do?"

"The girl must be thrown into the mill dam."

"All right, I'll do it if you make sure someone will save me."

"It's impossible. The water is thirty feet deep. I won't risk it."

"Well, I will. Just have rescuers near and I'll take the chance."

It took some persuading, Sid adding his voice to mine, and in the end Marion agreed.

The picture, The Paymaster, proceeded on its criminal way until noon and I quickly caught on to the knack of facing the camera. But in the back of my mind lurked the fear of the big scene. For I was afraid—horribly so. But I was going through with it if it killed me. We had a rehearsal, all except the plunge. I came running across the stone dam until I reached the center when Jim Slevin, the villain who was pursuing, caught me. There was a fierce struggle and he lifted me bodily, whispering: "Hold your breath. Now—one—two—three—" and hurled me head downward into the water. Just outside the camera lines, in boats, waited the other members of the cast, tense and ready to plunge in should it be necessary. Slevin, frightened at what he had done, stared with mouth open and arms hanging.

"Get out, you fool," roared Marion, holding back Gordon Burbe, the hero, who strained to run into the scene and make the rescue. It was too good! Marion gripped him until my body rose and disappeared again. In the meantime I felt as if I were plumb the bottom of the river. Ten feet down I went, with the strength of Slevin's arm. I thought I would never stop going and start up again. My lungs were bursting. It seemed impossible to hold my breath another second. I felt the air on my face and wondered why I wasn't rescued; then down I went again. I was panic-stricken. Something had gone wrong. I was going to drown! Just then I felt firm arms under me and remembered not to struggle. A few strong strokes and I was laid on the damhead while the camera ground out the last few feet.

It was quite a triumph. Marion seized my hands and all but kissed me. Sid laughed and cried in his excitement and the cast gathered around showering me with congratulations. As for me, I have never before nor since been so exhilarated and self-satisfied. The plunge was my open sesame to the film world, for Mr. Marion was so grateful that for several years he would not even consider another leading woman. Moreover I was presented with five dollars for my day's work instead of the customary three.

BEFORE I continue the story of my career, let us take a look at the moving picture of 1906 and the theater in which it was shown.

The moving picture had just climbed upon the first rung of the ladder to fame and success. From the ignominy of being a "chaser" in the vaudeville program it had risen to the dignity of the "store

likewise. With himself to write scenarios and direct and with Mr. Long to oversee the mechanical end success seemed assured. Such a company had been formed in Chicago by Spoor and Anderson (Broncho Billy) under the name Essanay (S and A). The other American producing firms were Biograph, Vitagraph, Edison, Selig and Lubin. Some foreign films also had a following, notably Pathé, Gaumont and Melies.

Unfortunately the combined savings of Long and Marion amounted to only three thousand dollars, so they approached George Kleine who was in the optical business in Chicago and who was also dabbling in films. Mr. Kleine put in two thousand dollars and received a third interest, but in a very short time the original promoters bought him out for several times the original investment.

With five thousand dollars and boundless enthusiasm they formed the Kalem Company—K for Kleine, L for Long and M for Marion. They secured a floor in a loft building at 131 West Twenty-fourth Street, put a thin partition in a small room, dividing it into two offices, and used the back part for a laboratory.

There was to be no studio. Mr. Marion believed that outdoor pictures were much better photographically, and also permitted the action which he had determined should be the keynote of his pictures. Three years passed before the first crude actor-built interiors were used in Kalem films.

The first drastic change Mr. Marion made was to raise the wages of the actor to five dollars a day, thereby compelling all other companies to follow suit. And in February of 1907 the first picture, The Sleigh Belle, was filmed, followed some weeks later by The Pony Express. In the latter appeared Sidney Olcott, Robert Vignola and Joe and Fred Santley, not to mention Joe's horse Silverheels.

THE summer of 1907 saw a general improvement in pictures all along the line and the Kalem Company settled down to a regular release of a one-reel picture weekly. Mr. Olcott, the director, gathered about him a score of actors who were his personal friends and threw himself whole-heartedly into the work. The chief requisite of the actor who would work for Sid was a telephone number, so those whose lodgings had no telephones must arrange for calls at the corner delicatessen or at some friend's home, dropping in every evening to see whether their services were required for the morning. Another necessity for Kalem actors was "rough stuff." How often over the phone did listening ears catch the voice of the director: [CONTINUED ON PAGE 181]



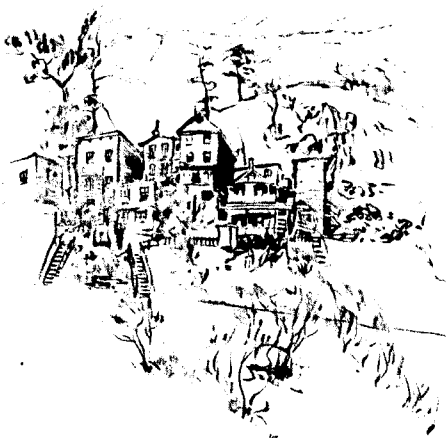
DRAWN BY H. J. ROSENWINTER FROM A PHOTOGRAPH

Reading a scenario: the compensation to the author was twenty dollars a reel

theater," usually a dingy, odorous little hole, about the size of the average shop on Main Street. Outside it blazed with electric lights of low candle power, which made up in quantity what they lacked in quality.

The entire front was usually plastered with glaring sheets of pictorial paper and strips of canvas proclaiming the current atrocity of crime and adventure. Inside were benches, kitchen chairs, or, in the more luxurious, hard wooden opera seats. Admission was a nickel. The pictures were jumpy and dingy, running five to eight hundred feet, and thrown upon an oblong of more or less white canvas, generally ornamented with sagging folds and an occasional rent. But they moved, those old pictures, and that was the wonder of it, the thing which pulled in the crowds.

IHAD signed up with The County Chairman before I took my epoch-making plunge into the little Connecticut stream, but I made my third camera appearance before taking to the road, including a reproduction of the Harry Thaw-Stanford White murder for the Mutoscope. My faith in the moving pictures increased with each experience; and before I returned to New York in the spring of 1907 many important things had happened. The Motion Picture Patents Company had been formed and was bringing some sort of order out of the chaos in which producers had been making and marketing pictures. The nickelodeons in which Mr. Marion was financially interested had spread all over the country and were coining money for him. Having decided that there was money in the producing end of the business he induced Mr. Samuel Long, who was manager of the Biograph factory at Hoboken, to believe



JOSEPH GOLINER

Shadyside, a crude ugly little settlement, furnished the background for practically every picture we made that first summer

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Blazing the Trail

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8]

"Hello! That you, Jim? We're going to do a picture tomorrow. Shadyside. Be at the Forty-second Street ferry at seven-forty-five. Bring your rough stuff."

And in suitcases or paper bundles the "rough stuff" would appear with Jim—and Joe and Bill and Harry; an old flannel shirt, bandanna handkerchief, rough trousers and shoes, and a cap or wide-brimmed shabby hat. Bob Vignola had a particularly good character shirt, a dark red flannel with plaid marking of dingy white. Again and again that shirt appeared in Kalem pictures, worn either by Bob or some friend to whom he had loaned it, for they seemed to think that on a different person it would not be recognized. Finally one day, after watching the shirt get in its devilry for the tenth time in as many pictures, Mr. Marion remarked to Sid:

"I think you had better give that shirt of Bob's a rest. It'll soon be known as the Kalem trademark."

Compare this with the elaborate wardrobes of today!

THE general procedure for taking a picture was always the same. There was never a scenario on hand and Sid, after finishing up the previous week's work, would hang about the lean-to office waiting for something to turn up. About Wednesday Mr. Marion would come down from his home in Connecticut, a black scowl on his face and an unfriendly attitude toward everyone. And Sid would whisper: "Either his liver is bad or he has a story to get off his chest." Sid would then "beat it" till after lunch, returning to face a smiling buoyant Marion looking up expectantly over his desk.

"That you, Sid? The report is for good weather tomorrow. You'd better get your people together and run out to Shadyside and take this picture. It's about a horse thief and there's a dandy climax. The last scene shows him after the vigilance committee has lynched him, hanging over the Palisades by his neck. Here's the dope. You'd better get busy on the 'phone right away." And he would hand Sid a used business envelope on the back of which, in his minute handwriting, was sketched the outline of six scenes, supposed to run one hundred and fifty feet to the scene—as much as our little camera would hold. A half dozen words described each scene; I believe to this day Mr. Marion holds the championship for the shortest working scenario.

So the next morning at quarter of eight a bunch of sleepy actors would be grouped before the ferry gate as the boat clanged in, with Sid running excitedly back and forth scanning the entrance for some late comer, and marching him forward scolding volubly just before the gates closed. Or if the delinquent did not appear:

"Frank, Bill isn't here. If he doesn't come on the next boat you'll have to double one of the posse. We need him in the first scene and the sun is only on that barn early in the morning. Better make it smooth face, you'll wear whiskers as the father."

SHADYSIDE, lying at the foot of the Palisades, furnished the background for practically every picture we made that first summer. It was a crude ugly little settlement with miserable shacks clinging to the side of the hill, but we had discovered it and had tested its possibilities, so we guarded it jealously from other picture companies.

We carried our suitcases and props up and down the steep road on each trip, and we made our headquarters in a boarding house run for laborers. We made up in hot cell-like rooms, uncarpeted and furnished with lumpy beds which we eyed with distrust. Ricketty washstands from which we removed chipped bowls and pitchers served as our dressing tables, all in striking contrast to the cool inviting dressing-rooms of today's wonderful studios.

The food served by the German couple who ran the house consisted largely of muscle-making dishes like stewed beef with noodles, corned beef and cabbage or sauerkraut, boiled potatoes, cabbage slaw, rye bread, huge mugs of beer or coffee; but after a grueling day on location we did not find it distasteful. [CONTINUED ON PAGE 182]

An Extension Telephone by your Bedside is Aid and Protection in Emergencies

An Advertisement of the American Telephone and Telegraph Company

SLEEP is better and safer when there is an extension telephone by your bedside. Calls to neighbors, fire department or police may be made instantly when the telephone is within reach.

Extension telephones are needed not only in emergencies. Wisely placed extensions save miles of steps in running up and down stairs and from one part of the house to another. They prevent embarrassment in making or answering calls when others are present. They avoid the loss of calls through failure to answer promptly.

In building a new house or in renting or buying a home, make sure that there is provision for adequate telephone service with the necessary extensions. Adequate telephone equipment is an essential modern convenience.

And it is very inexpensive. Extension telephones with all their protection and convenience cost only a few cents a week. Ask the local Bell business office to advise with you regarding the proper telephone equipment of your home for the greatest comfort, protection and saving of time.



"I've found it, Mother"

How much more welcome that is to a busy mother than "I can't find my galoshes." . . . "Mother, what did you do with my skates?" Give your children Eveready Flashlights and they will enjoy finding things for themselves. A flashlight puts light—bright, safe light and lots of it—where a child can use it. The flashlight habit for children saves parents the endless hunt for misplaced clothes and lost playthings. And, most of all, it protects the child from the dangers of the dark—a bad bump or a nasty fall.

Get Eveready Flashlights for your children. See that they're always bright-burning, too, with the very best of batteries—Eveready Batteries. They're as dependable as the night is long. Long-lasting too. Just jammed full of usefulness. Always get genuine Eveready Batteries when you refill a flashlight, and be certain of LIGHT.



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LEARN right at home in spare time to make your own clothes in the newest, loveliest styles for a third of what you pay in the shops. The Woman's Institute will teach you how to put real style into everything you make. Just as it has taught so many other women and girls. You learn all the secrets of designing, cutting, fitting and finishing that make the professional dressmaker so successful.

FREE Mail the coupon for the fascinating Free Booklet, "How to Make Beautiful Clothes," and learn how you can have more and prettier clothes at small cost and earn \$20 to \$10 a week.

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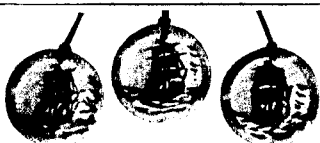
Removes hair in only 3 minutes from arms, under arms, legs, lack of neck or face. Leaves skin smooth, white, dainty.

Del-a-tone Cream or Powder is sold by drug and dept. stores, or sent prepaid, in plain wrapper, in U. S. for \$1.00. Money back if desired. For generous sample send 10c to Miss Mildred Hadley, c/o The Delatone Co., Dept. 1010, 721 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Illinois.

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Blazing the Trail

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 181]

It was Olcott's ambition to finish each one-reel picture in a single day so he held a stop watch on the final rehearsal. If during the actual filming he heard the cameraman say quietly, "Speed up, Sid; film's running out," he would dance up and down shouting, "Hurry up, folks; film's going. Grab her, Jim; kiss her; not too long, quick! Don't wait to put her coat on—out of the scene—hurry now! Out, Max? Good lord! Why didn't you hurry? You should have cut across the side-lines."

For the first picture technique did not permit of the action's being stopped midway. If the actors were headed for an exit, outside the carefully marked lines they must be at the end of the scene.

This early technique, which like Topsy "just grewed," requires some explanation. The marvelous photographic effects of today were far beyond the possibilities of the pioneer moving picture cameras and film. Klieg lights were unknown and interior or studio pictures were not successful. Producers demanded outdoor background for all scenarios. There were no close-ups, no subtle pauses. There could be no action directly across the foreground because this meant a blurred picture. If Mary and John were strolling through the woods they must be seen entering the path at an angle from the sidelines and they must exit the same way. A stare had to be held, a start had to be violent. If the director wished certain spoken words to register, they were enunciated with exaggerated slowness, leaving no doubt in the mind of the spectator.

IN JUNE, 1907, Kalem was admitted to the Motion Pictures Patents Company. This organization, which was bitterly assailed as the moving picture trust of its day, included also Vitagraph, Edison, Selig, Lubin, Pathé, Melies and Essanay.

It organized the producers on a business basis, opened up the era of prosperity which made millionaires of Mr. Marion and Mr. Long in less than five years and started up the ladder of success many of the actors who began at the very bottom and climbed high by hard work, enthusiasm and loyalty under that clever leader, Sidney Olcott.

Olcott had been engaged by Kalem to direct a one-reel picture of about a thousand feet every week for the munificent sum of ten dollars per picture! Today he is said to receive one thousand dollars per week, another indication of the almost unbelievable changes and developments in the moving picture industry.

Born in Toronto, Canada, Olcott was about thirty when he joined the Kalem Company. He had played in the support of the then famous melodramatic boy-actor, Joseph Santley, the same Joseph Santley who has been starred in musical comedy and who more recently has helped to stage the Music Box Revues in New York. At that time Joe was a boy in short trousers, watched over by an adoring mother.

IN APPEARANCE Olcott was of medium height, deep-chested, with slender sensitive hands, a small well-shaped head and close-cropped curly hair already turning gray. He was thirsty for learning that had been denied him in his youth, and doggedly determined to get it. Especially was he interested in philosophy and psychic phenomena and was psychic to an uncanny degree. It was impossible to conceal anything from Olcott. He knew what was going on, from some sixth sense. Consciously or unconsciously, he used the power of suggestion, even of hypnotism, on his actors. He would stare straight into our eyes with those large blue and slightly protruding orbs of his, never shifting his glance as he explained the situation or action, and no one thought of questioning his instruction or refusing no matter how difficult or dangerous the stunt he demanded.

Olcott was of Irish birth and possessed all the sparkle and sentiment of that emotional race; also he loved a fight and was as tenacious as a bulldog. His method of direction would not be tolerated today.

Shouts, threats, sarcasm, bullying, cajoling, petting, he would try each in turn. But after the scene was over it was always

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 183]

I Used To Be A 'Stylish Stout'

The personal story of a woman who made herself over into a slim, graceful, buoyant healthy person—free from the ill-effects of obesity.



"It was a perpetual torment for me to be stout. I couldn't go anywhere without being reminded that I was fat. I couldn't walk a block without sitting down. Even the lightest housework quickly tired me. My heart would beat too fast if I hurried. I was afraid to accept invitations because I knew people would always be talking about me. You can imagine what misery fat caused me—aches and pains in my body as well as mental worry."

But that's all over now, and all the credit for my wonderful improvement goes to Annette Kellermann. I had heard how she, called the world's most perfectly formed woman, had once been a puny, ailing sickly child. I found out that her figure had not changed by a fraction of an inch, or by the least ounce, in over 16 years. I wrote to Miss Kellermann, told her all about myself, and asked what she could do for me.

"In reply she sent me a charming letter and a copy of her delightful book called, *The Body Beautiful*. That book I can truly say, was the turning point in my life. It rescued me from the misery of fat, and showed me the way to make myself exquisitely slim in a short while. And it was so very easy. Actually, it was a delight for me to follow her instructions—light exercise for only 15 minutes a day, and plenty of the right kind of satisfying food that produced energy instead of fat. It was a revelation, even to me, how quickly my weight began to decrease. I felt better from the very first day."

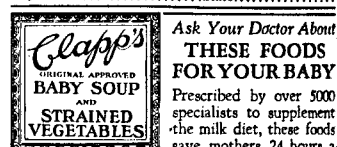
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Blazing the Trail

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 182]

the same—an arm thrown round the shoulder, compliments, enthusiasm. His people adored him, respected him and would (and did) risk their lives for him. He was the sun around which they all revolved. Soon he was considered the best of all directors, and he held that reputation until another dynamic personality burst on the screen world, D. W. Griffith.

About 1914 Olcott disappeared from view, as so often occurs in the moving picture world. It would be interesting to know what happened to him, where he hid himself and what he did during those years of oblivion. But obviously he kept in touch with pictures, watching and studying the changing technique and the methods in which he had no part. In his hiding place he too continued to grow and to keep pace with the newer motion pictures. For he emerged from his shell after an absence of seven years as director for Little Old New York starring Marion Davies, followed quickly by The Green Goddess with George Arliss, The Humming Bird with Gloria Swanson, Spanish Dancer with Pola Negri, and that exquisite production which marked Valentino's return to the screen, Monsieur Beaucaire—every one of them a sure-fire hit. I understand that his bullying bombastic style of direction has given place to the quiet courteous treatment demanded by present-day producers and stars.

DURING the summer of 1907 Mr. Marion stopped writing scenarios and asked me to try my hand at it. I made a crude scenario from a melodrama in which I had played, Why Girls Leave Home. It was hopeless but in a few days I was asked to try again with Tom Sawyer and to turn out a scenario which we could take in one day outdoors, omitting all difficult situations, river or rough stuff. That scene of white-washing the fence was my inspiration, for I saw it in every detail just as it would appear in the picture. The scenario was pretty dreadful but it was what Marion and Olcott wanted and it gave me the knack of writing. Henceforth I was the mainstay of the Kalem scenario department.

Tom Sawyer was the first of over three hundred which I wrote and produced or sold. The woods were full of ideas. The surface had scarcely been scratched. A poem, a picture, a short story, a scene from a current play, a headline in a newspaper. All was grist that came to my mill. There was no copyright law to protect authors and I could and did infringe upon everything.

We also traded on the names of successes, although the plot might be totally different. Thus Polly of the Circus, an outstanding stage hit with Mabel Taliaferro, became Dolly the Circus Queen. I sometimes wrote three complete scenarios for one-reelers in a day, but generally under pressure, at the last minute when the company was idle and waiting for a story. After Tom Sawyer I never had a scenario refused, nor wrote one that was not produced. The compensation for these earlier efforts was twenty dollars a reel—a fairly high figure when you remember the director received only ten dollars for directing it.

THAT summer of 1907 introduced us to two wonderful new locations. Rambo's in Coytesville, New Jersey, and Windy Goal, the Ernest Thompson Seton place at Cos Cob, Connecticut.

Coytesville was the same sleepy little village it had been for a hundred years, with winding dirt roads and clapboard houses nestling among rose and lilac bushes, an ideal background for pictures. Rambo's, since pictured in hundreds of films, was our discovery. It was merely a barroom where light lunches were available at all hours. Substantial home-cooked hot meals were ordered in advance. Above were small bare sleeping-rooms where we made up. It was run by Mr. and Mrs. Rambo and Mrs. Rambo's sister, kindly interested folks who did everything in their power to aid us.

A narrow porch supported by uprights ran across the front of the house, which was plain even to ugliness but typical of almost any part of the United States.

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 184]



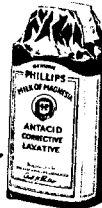
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Blazing the Trail

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 183]

It served as a New England tavern, for many a western saloon, for Civil War recruiting stations, and dozens of other sets. Banisters and railings could be hastily added, old-fashioned chairs, tables and flowering pots dragged out and, with the camera shooting the opposite direction, the old place could be, and has been, used for two different sets in the same picture. At the side was a wide old double wooden gate leading to a typical barnyard, with latticed pump, barns, haystacks, chicken yard, cowsheds, wagons, horses, and all the other paraphernalia necessary to add color to a scene. And the prices were so reasonable. A dollar apiece for dressing-rooms, fifty cents each for the smoking room and nothing at all for the use of the exteriors and props. A year or so later, when Mr. Griffith, with his (for then) luxurious ideas, discovered this place which we had considered wholly our own, he started what to us was a riot of extravagance. Everything was paid for! Twenty-five dollars for the use of the exterior of the house! Two dollars each for rooms! And more elaborate dinners were ordered, at two dollars a plate!

THERE we made The Days of '61, the first picture of the Civil War ever produced. The battle scenes were taken up at St. John's Military Academy at Manlius, New York, near Syracuse. The costumes came from Gus Elliott's, an old German down in St. Mark's place, and everyone went to select his own. It was a queer old shop such as Dickens might have written about. Costumes were rented for one dollar each, if not elaborate or of extra fine materials. Wigs also could be had.

The Thompson Seton place supplied the background for our first Indian pictures. An unforgettable lake was encircled by a primeval forest and tangled underbrush, all reflected on the mirror-like surface of the water on which floated birch-bark Indian canoes. The owner was a nature lover, so wild birds and small animals lived unafraid in the grounds.

With this environment, plus costumes and props, we turned out pictures which were things of beauty even in those crude days. Here also the next summer we took Hiawatha, Evangeline and As You Like It. For by that time, you see, we had begun to reach for higher things.

ALL this was most interesting, but I still had no intention of remaining with the pictures. In the fall of 1907 I was rehearsing with a promising melodrama, Texas, when an imperative call came from Mr. Marion. From force of habit I answered.

He explained that the Pain's Fireworks Company, which had been exhibiting a spectacle all summer on the racetrack at Sheepshead Park, was closing for the season. Here was a great opportunity to produce Ben Hur using the Pain Company's props, supers and standing scenery. Would I have the scenario ready in two days? It was October. The fall rains might begin at any time.

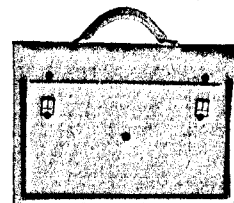
I was not familiar with Ben Hur and the mere reading of the book would ordinarily occupy two days. But by this time my self-confidence was unlimited and I promised. What is more, by dint of working nearly all of two nights I turned in the script on schedule.

Mr. Olcott and I went to the racetrack, found the props impossible and the supers inadequate, hurried back to Swain's Agency and interviewed people for the cast and for extras, and late in the evening rushed down to Elliott's and remained until after midnight selecting props and hundreds of costumes. In five days after the idea was conceived we were at Sheepshead Bay taking the first scenes. In three days more it was finished and in the developing tanks. Just compare that with the two years or more that Metro-Goldwyn spent on the stupendous Ben Hur which recently dazzled the public and which represented several trips to Italy and an investment of millions.

Nevertheless, we were proud because we turned out the greatest spectacle and money-maker up to that time.

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 186]

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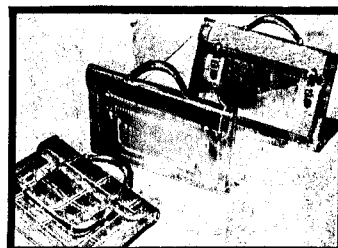
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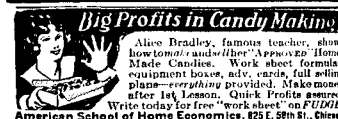
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Blazing the Trail

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 184]

Arrangements had been made for Mr. Frank Oakes Rose, stage manager for Pain's Fireworks, to stage the spectacle. Olcott was to be on hand merely to offer suggestions. Oh, the guilelessness and confidence of Mr. Marion!

The weather turned cold with a biting wind coming in from the sea, and the people had been called for eight o'clock in the morning. When I arrived a little before noon they were shivering in their thin Roman costumes and nothing had been accomplished. Not a scene had been taken. Chaos reigned and Mr. Rose was like a madman. He had never even seen a motion picture taken, knew nothing of technique or camera limitations, and had reduced Max Schneider, our cameraman, to despair with his impossible suggestions. Olcott sat on the fence of the racetrack kicking his heels, his white attitude saying, "I should worry."

AT LAST Marion came to him, almost with tears in his eyes. "For the love of Mike, Sid, get into this and get something done. That man doesn't know the first principles of pictures."

Sid twitched his eyebrows and laughed but he jumped down from his perch, which was promptly taken by Mr. Rose who was wiping nervous perspiration from his brow. "Gad, that's the hardest thing I was ever up against," said the man who had produced a dozen spectacles. And there he sat for the rest of the day, learning how moving pictures were made.

For things began to happen. Fast and furiously Olcott drove his crowds and they, sensing an intelligent guiding hand, ceased milling and stampeding and settled down to constructive action. Three days it kept up and at the end of that time, exhausted but happy, we had the picture "in the box." And the next day it rained.

Of course viewed by present standards it was an atrocious film. Imagine producing Ben Hur in approximately one thousand feet and "sixteen magnificent scenes" as the advertisement read! The chariot race was the great climax and "sold" the picture. But there were no water scenes, no galley shots. Nevertheless, crude as it was, it was a step forward and a fine advertisement for the Kalem Company.

MOST important, it brought to a climax the copyright issue, which had been rumbling and grumbling in the background of studios for some time.

Harper and Brothers and the General Lew Wallace Estate brought suit against the Kalem Company, the Motion Picture Patents Company, and the scenarist for an infringement of copyright, and asked for an accounting of profits. It was a test of copyright laws, for up to now no one had seemed to know just where they stood. The new industry had no precedents to guide it, moving pictures were distinctly neither stories nor plays and no author had thus far come forward with enough confidence or money to fight the already strong organization. However, the General Film Company wished to establish for its own satisfaction the exact status of its writers and to settle once and for all its own prerogatives. So the suit dragged year after year and through court after court, up to the Supreme Court of the United States, where a verdict was handed down for Harper's and against the film people. It cost Kalem twenty-five thousand dollars and the Patents Company, which had assumed the expenses of the suit as a test case, an additional twenty-five thousand dollars. And it settled the question of the copyright law for all time.

Gradually but conclusively the rights and limitations of the moving picture people began to be clearly defined.

[TO BE CONTINUED IN THE NOVEMBER ISSUE]

ELEANOR HALLOWELL ABBOTT has written for the COMPANION a heart-searching and affecting story—Thinking of My Soldier—which will appear in the November COMPANION.



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