

# Ask me about the Screen

At least 350,000 people in Canada attend motion picture theatres every day, or more than 10,000,000 a year. Courier readers want to know the facts about film dramas and the colossal industry behind them. Merrick R. Nutting knows. He is a veteran in Film-Land in both Canada and the United States. Those who are interested in the vital facts about the Fifth Biggest Industry will find this series of articles Canadian headquarters for live-wire information.

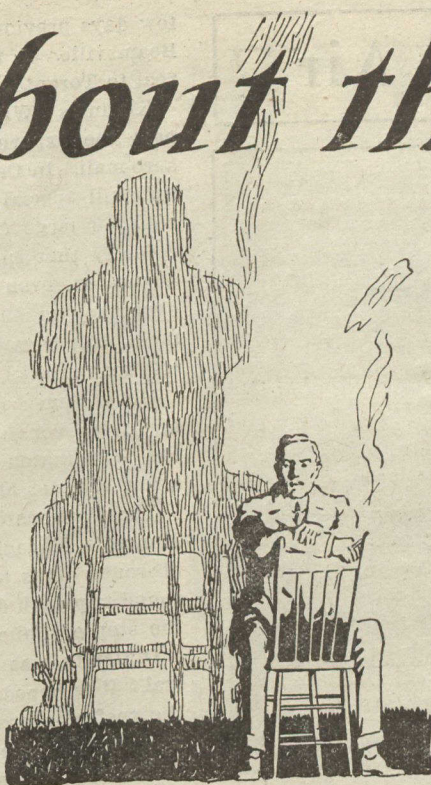
MANY people have asked me at various times where all the pictures come from that are shown daily in Canadian theatres. Fully 95 per cent of them are produced in the United States. The other 5 per cent consist of scenics, news weeklies or war pictures, which are naturally photographed where the action takes place. France was the first country to produce Motion Pictures; but the first great republic soon took the lead over the second. The United States now produce more thousand miles of film per year than all other countries combined. Italy had several studios, among which Cines and Italia were the best known brands. Lumiere, Pathe and Gaumont were the leading French Producers, and the last two named are still in business with studios in France and New York. England has never produced pictures to any extent, and no pictures made in England have ever gained popularity on this side of the Atlantic. In fact, for several years there has been no market for European features in either Canada or the United States.

Why is this? Several reasons. The motion picture is really more an outgrowth of the newspaper and the camera than it is of the stage; except in dramatic sequence and presentation and the employment of known actors for the star parts, it has nothing to do with the stage; and the United States is the greatest newspaper country in the world. In the second place European screen artists are too much given to over-acting and gesticulation.

Now about the great producing companies; a little about their history—and it's very interesting. It's only about six or seven years since the motion picture industry was frankly a mechanical or manufacturing business. To get an appreciation of the enormous strides made by the industry and its almost perilous invasion of the art world, you must remember that, as late as 1912 the production of pictures in the United States was controlled by a group of manufacturers operating under the name of the Patents Company. They had basic patents on all the cameras used in taking the pictures, also holding the patents on the Projectors or machines used to throw the pictures on the screen. These manufacturers who were then making one and two reel subjects were distributing their pictures through the General Film Company of New York with branches throughout the world. The well known brands at this time were Vitagraph, Biograph, Kalem, Pathe, Bison Kleine, Edison, Essany, Selig and Lubin. Many of you will remember the Stars of those days, John Bunny and Flora Finch, Lillian Walker, Henry B. Walthall, Mary Pickford, Blanche Sweet, Maurice Costello and Kate Price.

So here was an attempt, successful up till six years ago, to make the fifth biggest industry a straight monopoly. What a monopoly! You might as well try to syndicate-control the air. No thanks to the G. F. C. that the monopoly didn't succeed; for they made every effort to control the exclusive right to manufacture and distribute films in America.

But big business brains were soon attracted to the film industry just as they were to the automobile industry. Promoters and capitalists got into the game. Several free trade companies were launched, most important of which were the group of manufacturers known as the Independents, who released their pictures through the Exchanges operated by Carl Llamallex. From this group developed the Universal Film Company, to-day one of the largest producing bodies. Another group marketed their pictures through the Mutual Film Corporation, which still exists.



About this time Adolph Zukor, of New York, formed the Famous Players' Film Corporation, which has grown and developed into the Paramount-Artcraft organization of to-day. These independent companies were responsible for a good many unheard-of dramas in the courts because of actions taken against them by the Patents Company for infringement of the patents. After being in the law courts for many months the Supreme Court decided in 1913 that the Patents Company were a combine operating in restraint of trade and the Government refused to grant further injunctions against the independents. This action let down the bars. There was a grand rush to Film-Land, like a miners' stampede. The film business was now everybody's. And most of the bogus wildcat features that ever characterized mining began to invade the industry. Producing companies came up like mushrooms.

Some of them, be it admitted, were formed with the sole object of making pictures, just as some mining companies are organized to produce minerals. But a whole lot of them were for the main business of getting other people's money by stock selling. The film industry was a novelty. Everybody thought it was a Klondike, and that the investment of a few hundred dollars now would make them independently rich by and bye. In 1913-14-15 New York was full of what is known as "sucker money" and in the theatrical district every other office was occupied by a Film Producing Company with officers who issued very alluring prospectuses which promised large returns to investors. Not only private individuals but Wall Street got the fever and hundreds of thousands of dollars were squandered in fitting up offices, building studios and the making of pictures. As it was a new business in which no one had the benefit of experience, there was necessarily much waste in experimenting; studio buildings were erected that were afterwards found to be all wrong in construction and layout; cameras and lighting systems were tried out and discarded for something better; different grades of raw film stock were tested; printing machines and laboratory appliances had to be built and re-built as they were found not suited to the work required; scenarios for plays had to be secured and people engaged for the parts that not only possessed the knowledge of stage technique necessary but would photograph well, and this was not easy. And after the pictures were made offices or exchanges had to be opened in various parts of the country to distribute the finished productions to the theatres.

NOW for once anyhow in the history of speculation, "sucker money" operated for the public benefit. If it had not been for the thousands of hoping-to-be-Wallingfords who parted with their millions of money in Film-Land, the industry would never have made such tremendous strides; for no individual or group of men would ever have put up

**FIRST** of all you'll be interested to know that the Film Business, counting capital invested, people employed and wages and salaries and fees paid, has become the fifth industry in the United States; how it came to employ even more people than the automobile industry and has 900 theatres in Canada.

By MERRICK R. NUTTING

the money necessary to carry on all the experiments which have brought about not only the phenomenal improvement in production, lighting and photography, but have attracted the leading writers of fiction, so that now many of the productions released are either picturizations of standard works of the world's fiction or from the pens of the leading writers of the best sellers of to-day.

The demand for better pictures and more of them and the difficulty of promoting money from the public, due to previous experience, has brought into the producing field bigger men who have invested their own money and ability in the making of productions and the business of distribution. There is still a tremendous waste in the production of pictures, but when one considers the chaos that existed only a few years ago in both the mechanical and financial administration of the production end of the business and compares those conditions with the splendid pictures put out by the leading manufacturers today; when you see Film Stars whose names and faces are better known than the first ladies of the land, and players whose yearly salaries make the incomes of Governor-Generals and Presidents look as small as a school girl's pin money; when you see companies with head offices more sumptuous and staffs ten times the size of our largest financial or commercial institutions, companies that maintain branch offices in every large city, not only in the United States and Canada, but all over the civilized world; when you consider the amount of money, brains and knowledge that must be back of all this to make it a financial success—then you can see that the motion picture industry is well entitled, as an industry, quite apart from all the objectionable features that have grown into it, to cause the public to spend more money on its productions than it spends on theatres and music, or candy, or any other form of entertainment.

THERE are three centres in the United States where the majority of films are produced. New York and environs, including Brooklyn, Yonkers, Mount Vernon and New Rochelle, N.Y., and Fort Lee, The Palisades, Jersey City and Bayonne, N.J., all within a half hour's ride from Broadway; Southern California, now the largest producing centre, where Los Angeles and Hollywood have the largest Film Colonies in the West; Florida, with several studios on both the East and West Coast, that are busy all the time, and in addition many New York Companies are taken to Florida to secure outdoor locations.

New York was the first manufacturing centre for many reasons. The Head Offices of the first manufacturers were located in New York as it was a better field for the promotion of "other people's money" than any other. New York probably always will be the best little "get money easy" town in the world, and the promoters could get the money easier if they had a tangible and visible asset in the form of a studio building around the corner to show the investor. Again New York was and is still the centre of things theatrical in America and it was easier to secure people to fill a cast or to get the necessary properties and interior stage sets and furnishings. New York had many advantages for interior scenes, but outdoor locations were very difficult. Perhaps you, reader, can remember the time when the atmosphere of a Western Cowboy Picture (photographed on the Palisades, opposite Upper N. Y.) would be spoiled by the appearance of an automobile.

(Continued on Page 22.)