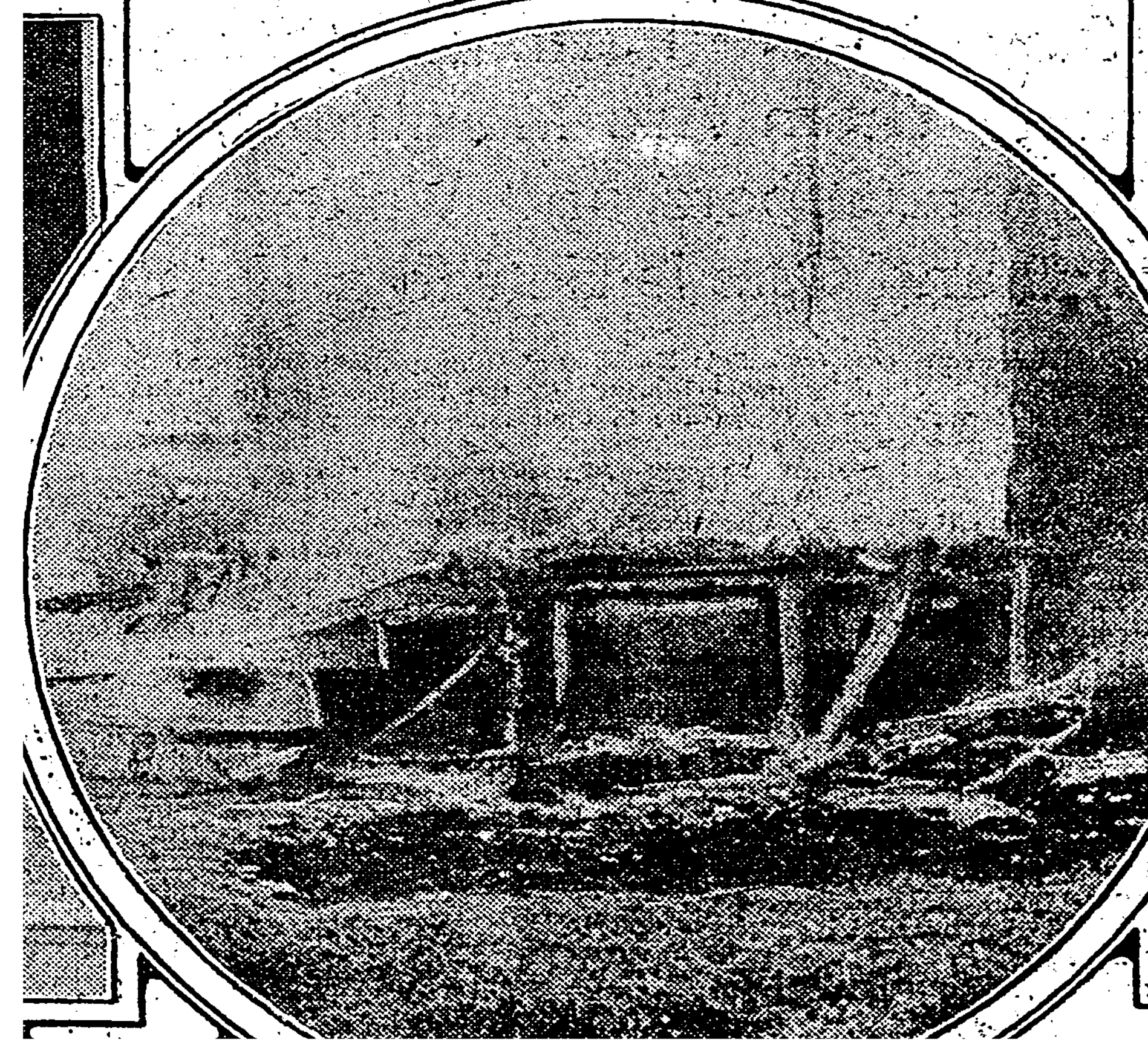


# IS THE MOVING PICTURE TO BE THE PLAY OF THE FUTURE?



To Stage This Play Properly the Biograph Company Renters a Lot and Built This House On It.



So as to Get a Correct Representation of a Ruined Dwelling.

## Inventions Which Will Vastly Increase Its Capabilities—How These Dramas Are Obtained and Why Actors Give Up the Stage to Enter This New Profession.

HERE is a theatre, all ablaze with electric signs. You walk into a spacious lobby and buy your seats—not from a speculator. You pay perhaps fifty cents.

There is an overture by a first-rate orchestra, and then the curtain rises. The play, perhaps, is "Hamlet." It is performed by good actors and for the first time since you have been seeing Shakespearean plays every scene which Shakespeare wrote is played just as he wrote it. Those little two-by-four scenes of half a dozen speeches each, preceded by "Alarums and excursions," which have been the despair of modern theatrical managers, are played just as he intended them to be; and Shakespeare gains vastly. The words of the play are splendidly declaimed—as they should be, when the best actors are engaged; the singing, say of Ophelia's song, is the best you have heard, as it should be, considering that only the best singers are employed; and the colors are vivid, with the very tint of life. Yet it is all nothing but a moving picture show.

Now, all this is a fancy sketch. It has not come to pass, yet it undoubtedly will, and within a very few years at that. And when it does the "legitimate" will have to look to itself.

Just now most moving picture plays are black and white, but the invention of kinemacolor has made it possible to photograph life as it really is. Just to photograph life as it really is, the spoken word with the picture, but Edison announced just before he went to Europe that he had solved the secret. The people with golden voices, like Caruso, have been singing into phonographs for years. What is to prevent the production of a play or an opera wherein the singing would be by such artists as Caruso and Tetrazzini and the acting by—well, there are no Booths on the stage to-day, but by the nearest approach?

The stage has always been handicapped by the fact that you can't tell the story as the novelist can, you can't take your reader from Edinburgh to Calcutta in Act I, and let the audience know what is happening to the heroine while the hero is undergoing tortures thousands of miles away. You have got to have a scene from three to five acts, and the whole action of the play must be arbitrarily confined to that necessity. But if the play is performed in motion picture, the play can be carried on from the first moment to the last, just as it would be in a novel; there is no limit to the number of scenes. If it is necessary to explain why the hero has ceased defending the hut against the Indians, all that is necessary is to turn on another picture and show the savages crawling toward the spring and cutting it off.

It is too much to say that the moving picture is the theatrical show of the future? Yes, if we have got always to see simple black-and-white pictures, soundless and colorless; no, if the invention is to take the course which it seems destined to take, and to develop hugely into the spoken word, the musical accompaniment, and the hiring of the greatest singers to take part in the humblest of plays. The first feature of the future picture which is likely to come into being—the dedication of theatres solely to moving picture plays. Practically every big moving picture concern in the country is already planning for it. The time is close at hand when great theatres will be opened by circuits devoted to nothing else. When that comes about the Theatrical Trust will have to look to its laurels.

The sudden vogue of the motion picture leaves most of us with gasping. It came so quickly, and so unexpected, that we haven't got ourselves accustomed to recognizing its importance. Because we have to keep our children away from the nickelodeons that show how Big Bart robbed a bank we have failed to recognize the fact that in a few years we will be going to sublimated nickelodeons our-

To insure True Local Color This Company Was Transported Across the Continent. That the Play Might Be Staged at the Foot of This Mountain.

selves to hear Carmen and see Macbeth. About fourteen or fifteen years ago the moving pictures showed parades or travel scenes. Then followed the cheap comic or melodramatic films—they were not called plays then. The excesses of these abortions enlisted the attention of theatrical men, and the moving picture show became a serious matter. But the moving picture "play," as distinguished from the moving picture "show," is a thing of only four or five years.

At first the moving picture men themselves had no comprehension of the great possibilities before them. They slammed "plays" together in any fashion. When they had got to the point of needing money to pose, the boss would look around the shop and say, "Jim, are you doing anything? Got that ledger posted? All right, come up on the roof; I want to get you to pose for the hero for a minute. Say, we've got to have a policeman in this film. Is there a big man back there? Oh, yes, Dan, you'll do; you're about the build for a cop, come up and pose." And nowadays every performer in a moving picture play is an actor of experience and ability. The moving picture actors are more rigid than those of the stage; they are more professional and more serious in their work.

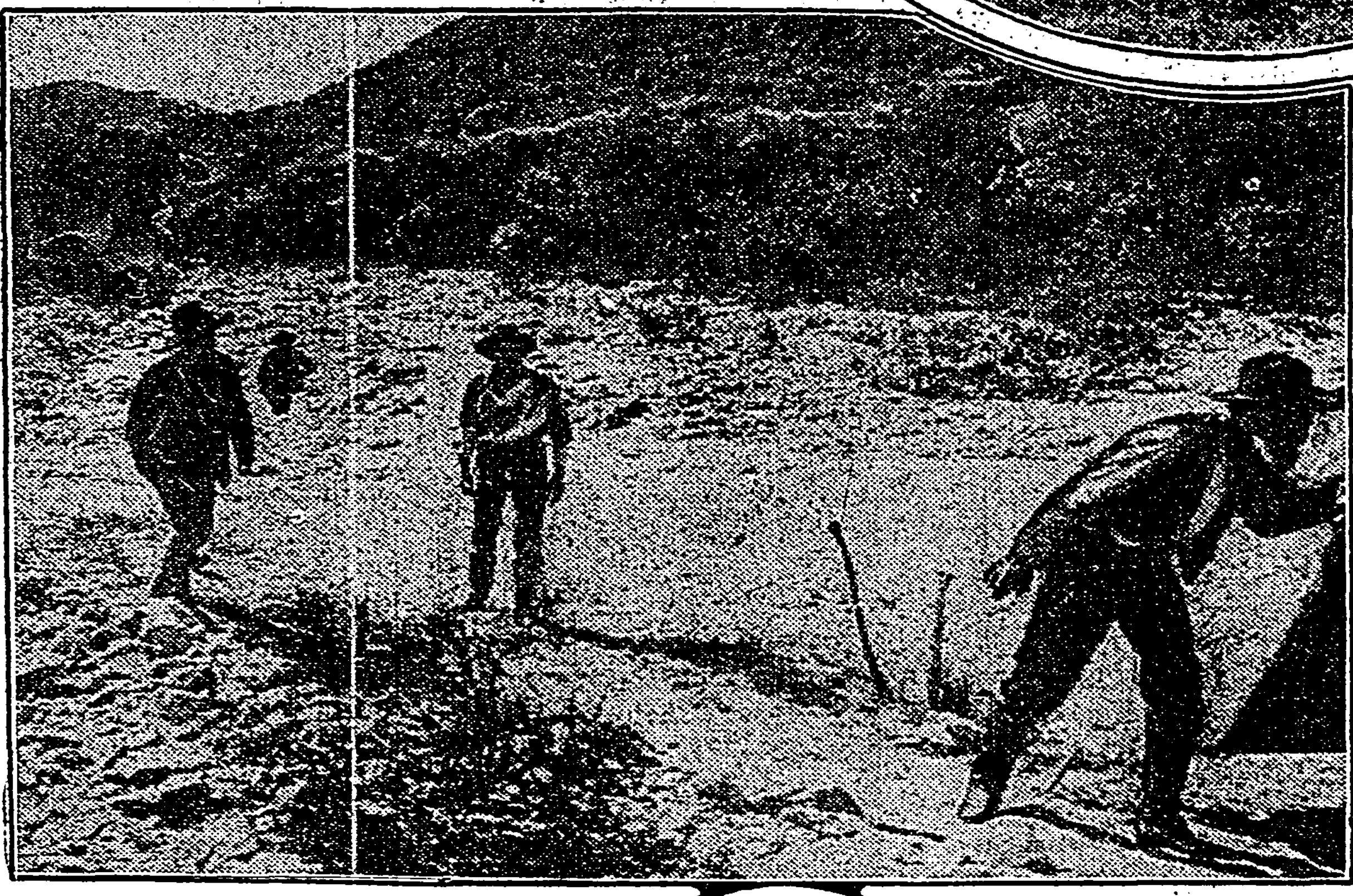
That is one illustration of the difference between the big business of to-day and the hap-hazard of the past. So rapid has been the advance of the motion picture business that most people are still thinking of it in the terms of 1900, or of any year in which it was a "circus" feature. Its arrival at real dignity and serious importance is not as fully recognized as it should be. It is, however, a far cry from the time when the "boss" would ask Jim or Jack to lay aside his bookkeeping or typewriting for a moment to pose to the day when \$100 a week is paid to a conscientious and highly-reputed actor, or from the time when every play was staged hap-hazard on the office roof to the time when big companies are transported thousands of miles at great expense to get the necessary local color.

It is, too, a far cry from the Jesse James or Fanny McGinnis plays to the production of Browning's "Pippa Passes" or Tennyson's "Enoch Arden." In the fanciful sketch of the future given at the beginning of this article one thing was omitted, that when you go into this theatre of ten years from now you will get from an usher a programme on which the names of the actors and actresses will be given, just as they are now when you go to the Empire or the Herald Square. Already the Edison Company is printing the names of its casts. The other companies have got to follow suit.

Even now in many places the appearance on the screen of a familiar face is greeted with applause. The audience knows its favorite actors. It does not know their names, but when the same face that appeared three days ago in a story of the Black Hills appears again in a play of high life in Paris the crowd knows its old friend and cheers him. It is getting to be commoner and commoner, and the lesson of it is not lost on the motion picture companies. The time is coming when fame will be within reach of a motion picture actor as surely as it now is within that of a player in the "legitimate."

Many people have an idea that the actors who pose for motion pictures are broken-down stage people out of a job or fairly good actors who are willing to fill in for a few weeks while waiting for an engagement. It is a ludicrous mistake. It may have been true in the days when the moving picture business was finding itself, but it is not so now, when that profession has become one of the big and serious industries of the country.

To-day the motion picture people employ regular staffs, and large ones, too. Nobody can get a job with one of these



Then They Burned the House Down—

to combine the phonograph with the motion picture, but they have failed. The reason given is that if part of the film is scratched or otherwise defective, it is necessary to leave that part out; but the phonograph, once it has received its record, cannot be edited to fit in with such changes. So, while the story on the screen has been shortened, the phonograph steams lustily on without regard to what its comrade is doing, and the result is confusion.

This obstacle has been found insuperable, but Edison now announces that he has solved the problem with his "speekograph." While he has been at work on that the kinemacolor people have settled the question of photographing in colors. There have been colored moving pictures, of course, but they were made by tinting the pictures after the camera had made them. The kinemacolor invention catches the color at the moment the photograph is made.

So it does not call for any great stretch of the imagination to see Caruso singing for 50 cents. And, if these inventions will do all that their makers claim for them, it will become a very ticklish question whether the 50-cent hearers of the flesh-and-blood Caruso really see and hear more of him than the 50-cent hearers of Caruso on the screen.

The moving-picture drama is a thing of the past five years, and its growth

plays are what one of them called "circus shows." The ill-repute the entertainment gained in its early days still clings to it, helped, of course, by the cheap and flashy nickelodeons that obtrude themselves on the eye at every corner.

But," said the Vitagraph man, "that's as unfair as it would be to brand the legitimate stage with the reputation of Bowery melodrama. The moving pictures have as general a public as any other kind of play."

He opened a ledger and pointed to the plays his concern was staging. They included Dickens's "Tale of Two Cities," "Uncle Tom's Cabin," Scott's "Kenilworth," Cooper's "Leatherstocking" tales, "Macbeth," "Richard III," "Julius Caesar," "The Merchant of Venice," "Virginia," "Les Miserables," "Oliver Twist," and Tennyson's "Elna."

"The biggest hit we've made," said a Biograph officer, "was with Browning's 'Pippa Passes.' That play started even if you think moving pictures are chiefly devoted to showing burglary scenes; but what I am telling you is a cold commercial fact. We did better with 'Pippa Passes' than with anything else."

"We have had a tremendous sale of 'A Tale of Two Cities,'" said the Vitagraph man. "We made it in three rolls of 3,000 feet. Europe called for it, and it is running big on the Continent now. The impression it made was not merely popu-

lans took it for three days and it made such a hit that they reworked it for a two weeks' run. The house was jammed at every performance. Funny, isn't it? It has taken sixty years to get 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' south of the line, and it took the moving picture to do it."

Another advantage which the moving picture play has over other is in the matter of scenery. You can produce it as it is. For instance, the Vitagraph people, in producing the Cooper's "Leatherstocking" stories sent their stock company out to Cooperstown, the scene of Natty Bumppo's adventures and rehearsed the play on the spot.

"The forest isn't there now," objected THE TIMES reporter, when this was told him.

"No, but the lake is," retorted the vitagraph man, "and as to the forest, we're no worse off than a scene painter for a 'legitimate' play would be."

When this company "dramatized" is the only word available, although some moving-picture men prefer the word "pictureize"—the life of Moses, they get a leading clergyman of this city to superintend it, so that they could present themselves against historical errors. Historical plays are the chief pitfall. The public exercises a sterner judgment over moving-picture pictures than over other plays, and resents a solecism. One of the managers of the Biograph Company said that he had sometimes delayed the production of a historical play for months while he searched histories and ran down details of costume and ceremonial, so that no error that could be guarded against might creep in.

The present tendency, most moving-picture men say, is toward the "pictureization" of standard novels or classic plays, chiefly novels. That is to say, the public seems to prefer them, and, of course, the caterers to public taste fall in line. As a rule, where a novel has been dramatized the moving-picture people disregard the dramatization and make their own scenario, though sometimes they take hints from what has already been done.

"Where do you get your plays?" asked



Miss Alice Joyce, One of the Kalem Players.

companies unless he can prove that he is an experienced actor. They will not employ him unless he intends to stay with them permanently. Large salaries are paid to the stars, and even the lesser people in the cast get better pay, very often, than they would if they were employed on the regular stage.

If you apply to the Vitagraph Company, for instance, the first thing they will do will be to hand you a blank which you must fill out by giving a record of your previous experience on the stage. If you have had none, they will not even consider your application. While some companies are not so formal as this, the requirement about previous experience is the same in all.

In fact, the requirements for a moving picture actor are more rigid than those for an actor on the regular stage. That is because a moving picture actor must act with his hands, face, and body; he cannot rely on his voice to help him out of a situation. Few theatregoers realize to what an extent a good voice and good enunciation help an actor along or how helpful he would be if he were obliged to convey his whole meaning by gestures.

"Pantomiming," said one of the officials of the Kinemacolor Company, "is virtually unknown on the American stage. Actors are not trained to act with their faces and bodies, only with their voices. In Europe it is different; there as much attention is given to one form of training as to the other."

"We employed an extremely good actress, with a fine reputation," said an officer of the Biograph Company. "In the play in which she made her first appearance she played the part of a mother who finds her child killed in a trolley accident, and gathers his body up in her arms."

"The moment we saw the film we knew it wouldn't do. There was no more sorrow on her face than there is in yours at this moment. You have no idea how your imagination is affected by the sound of a voice. On the regular stage a thrilling cry of sorrow, a choked utterance, would have so affected you that you would have been carried away, and would not have noticed the entire absence of any grief from her face. But the moving picture is the acid test; it brings out such deficiencies with brutal frankness."

The moving-picture business is making greater and greater appeals to stage people every day. In most cases the pay is better than that on the stage. Then the employment is steady. The bane of the theatrical business has always been the

The Biograph Company Sent a Company to California That This Scene in "A Drop of Water" Might Be Staged Against a Background of Real Cacti and Sagebrush.

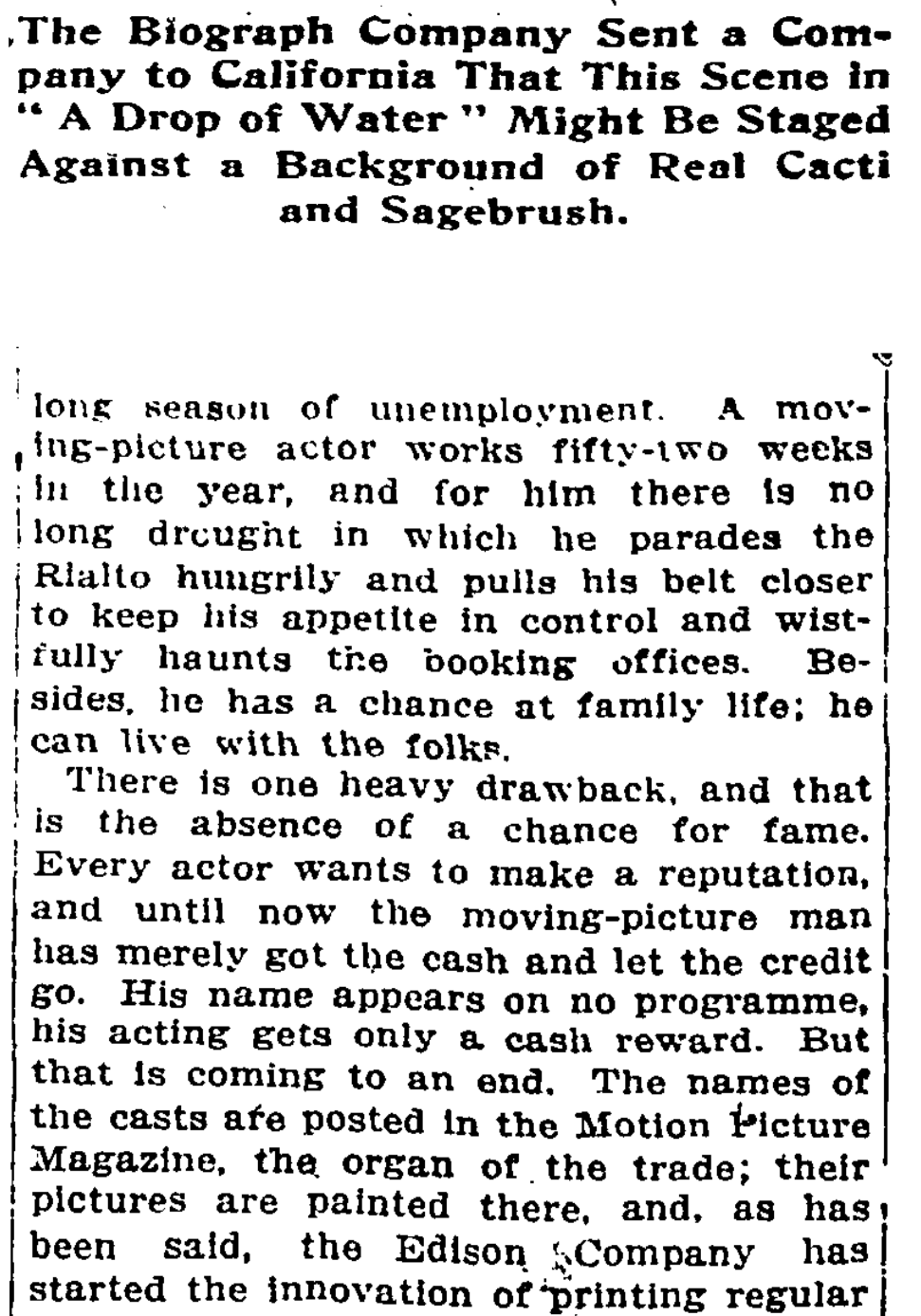
long season of unemployment. A moving-picture actor works fifty-two weeks in the year, and for him there is no long drought in which he parades the Rialto hungrily and pulls his belt closer to keep his appetite in control and wistfully haunts the booking offices. Besides, he has a chance at family life; he can live with the folk.

There is one heavy drawback, and that is the absence of a chance for fame. Every actor wants to make a reputation, and until now the moving-picture man has merely got the cash and let the credit accrue on the regular stage. His name appears on no programme, his acting gets only a cash reward. But that is coming to an end. The names of the casts are posted in the Motion Picture Magazine, the organ of the trade; their pictures are painted there, and, as has been said, the Edison Company has started the innovation of printing regular programmes with the full cast, just as is done on every stage. When the other companies fall into line the last step in securing the full dignity of the stage to the moving-picture actor will have been taken.

The audiences themselves are compelling it. Where plays by certain stock companies are shown the spectators get to know the faces of the actors and to find their favorites. It is a common thing for an audience in many parts of the country to burst out in applause when the face of some favorite actor appears on the screen or to hiss some well-known villain. Naturally such audiences are consumed with curiosity to know the names of the heroes they are cheering, and the companies must yield to the demand. The publication of the photographs and names of the leading stock actors and actresses is a sign of it.

When the business arrives at the point of having pictures in the tint of life, accompanied by phonographic dialogue and produced in great theatres given over to this form of entertainment—and all these things are coming—it needs no see to discern that the old playhouses will be face to face with a dangerous rival. The danger will be accentuated by the superior flexibility of the moving picture drama, which does not have to be divided into acts any more than a novel does, and by the cheapness of the entertainment.

In France many attempts have been



Teaching History in Motion Picture Dramas—The Vitagraph's Portrayal of the Robbing of Edward III. by Alice Perrers.

has been by leaps and bounds. Fourteen years ago, when the moving picture first began to attract attention, it devoted itself chiefly to reproductions of actual happenings, such as parades. The average length of a film then was from twenty-six to fifty feet. Now it is about 1,000. About five years ago men of brains and ability discerned the possibilities of the thing, and the result was the marvelous growth of the industry till it reached the point it has achieved today.

There are only from twenty-three to twenty-five manufacturers and importers in this country now, but the number of exhibitors ranges from 10,000 to 15,000.

"When I started in this business," said one of the Vitagraph men—"and that's about thirteen years ago—I remember that Edison felt his way with a little experimental play called 'Casey and the Steam Roller.' No, it wasn't the first motion-picture play, but it was one of the earliest. Well, that film was sixty feet long. A year ago it was done over again, and this time on a 400-foot film."

All the motion-picture men are anxious to have the public get rid as soon as possible of the idea that moving-picture

isn't artistic. Not a day goes by that we don't get a letter from somebody who has been stirred up by it."

And that suggests the topic advertised earlier in this article, the superior flexibility of the moving picture drama. When you dramatize "A Tale of Two Cities" or "Dombey and Son" you have got to observe the unwieldy unities of the stage; you can't have more than a certain number of acts, you must have a dramatic situation at the end of each, and you are forced to take some one character, such as Sydney Carton or Capt. Cuttle, and centre the play about him, to the ruin of Dickens's story. But if it is a moving picture play you can tell the whole story; the story and not the character will be the thing.

"I was opposed to putting 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' on," said the Vitagraph man. "Of course you know that although that play has been the stand-by of the American stage, it hasn't been possible to produce it successfully in the South. So I figured that if we put that play on we would have to cut out everything south of Mason and Dixon's line."

"I was overruled, and it is a good thing I was. The Shubert Theatre in New Or-



Miss Mabel Trunnelle of the Edison Stock Company.

the reporter of one moving-picture man. "We employ a regular staff of dramatists," was the reply, "but in addition to that we get scenarios from everywhere. They come in from all over the country. Most of them, though, are not very good. If we find one good one out of a hundred, that are sent in in this way we think we are doing well. Sometimes there is just one situation that promises well, and we accept the scenario for its sake, and have it worked over by one of our regular staff."

The actors employed by these companies average from \$20 to \$50 a week in salary, although some of them range far above those figures. The employment is steady all the year round, and, as one moving picture man said, "There is no danger of having to walk home." "Extra people" are engaged by the day, and sometimes the motion picture companies need 300 or 400 men and women in that capacity. "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," a fourth of July picture staged by the Vitagraph, called for 1,000 "extra people."

This company employs ten stage managers in addition to its corps of actors. The scenario of a play is given to these men and they lay out the characters, the scenes, the stage settings, just as would be done on the regular stage. They employ eight or ten stage carpenters, and have their own staff of scene painters, scene shifters, &c.

When the Biograph Company was about to produce a "pictureization" of Helen Hunt Jackson's Indian novel, "Ramona," they sent a company of sixty-five actors out to California and kept them there for five months, so as to get the correct local color and scenery. In this story an Indian village is devastated by the whites. In order to get a faithful likeness of the devastation, the Biograph Company purchased a village and burnt it down.

"You see," explained one of the men-

(Continued on Page 11.)

# IS THE MOVING PICTURE TO BE THE PLAY OF THE FUTURE?

(Continued from Page 8.)

agers of the company, "we can't imagine things in the moving picture business. The public demands a much more faithful likeness to life than it does on the regular stage."

It is, in fact, quite a common thing for a motion picture company to build a house and destroy it in order to get the realistic effect of destruction. In two of the Biograph Company's productions, "The Trust" and "Swords and Hearts," this was done. In the latter they hired a lot in New Jersey, built a house on it and burnt the house down so as to supply a fire scene.

"If you are producing a play on the regular stage," said the biograph man, "and you need to portray cactus and sage-brush, what do you do? Get somebody to paint it. What did we do? We sent our company across the continent and pictured them in a real desert with real cactus and real sage-brush around them. The public won't stand for imitations in our business."

In the Biograph Company's play of "The Lonedale Operator," a real engine was obtained from a railroad company and a professional engineer was employed to drive it. At the Indianapolis convention of railroad men the vitagraph people wished to make a film showing a railroad collision, and they hired two worn-out engines and drove them against each other.

On one occasion the Biograph Company presented a play in which a girl, unjustly accused of crime, flees from a policeman in an east side district. They sent their staff of actors down to Rivington Street and played the scene there. Of course, the causal Livingston Street crowd had no way of knowing that it was not real. So, when the actress, seeking to escape from the actor who was playing the policeman—and who looked the part—

scrambled aboard a trolley car, the crowd was tremendously interested. The conductor, thinking she really was trying to escape from justice, whispered to her, "Get up in the front there, an' he can't see you!"

But the girl, in obedience to the requirements of her part, rushed out of the car and clambered aboard another, with the fictitious policeman in hot pursuit. The motorman of this car was of a different stripe from the conductor of the other. He yelled to the "policeman," "Here she is, Cap! Get aboard an' you can git her!" "Funny study in the differing phases of human nature," dryly commented the official to whom she subsequently told the story.

The Edison Company some time ago staged a riot scene in a country district. It was so realistic that the constabulary descended on the lot where it was taking place and arrested the "rioters." Nay, more, they were locked up, and it took a lot of frantic telephoning and finally the appearance of the officers of the company on the scene to convince the town officials that it was all "acting." But, of course, the appearance of real policemen was caught by the camera and added immensely to the realism of the riot scene.

Pathé Frères say that once when they were staging a play in a country town an officious citizen interfered with them and declared that he would not permit a lot of actors to conduct monkeyshines in the main street of his venerated village. Whereupon a policeman stepped up to him and announced that he would be put under arrest if he interfered any further. The officious citizen slunk away and never knew that the "policeman" was one of the actors assigned for the moment to wear a uniform.

The Biograph Company not long ago had a play one of the scenes of which represented a cavalry charge by part of the Grande Armée. After looking over a

## Practically Every Big Concern in the Country Already Planning to That End.

number of places its agents reported in favor of a certain field in New Jersey. The owner was asked what he would charge for the use of his field for ten minutes.

The company was willing to pay any exorbitant sum, even up to \$50. But the canny Jerseyman, knowing that he was dealing with a big New York concern, set the fancy price of \$300 on it and refused to budge. It got the fighting blood of the company up and they decided that in dealing with such a man it was not necessary to be scrupulous. They pretended to enter into negotiations with him for the purchase of the lot, paid down a \$50 deposit, used the lot, and then—forfeited the \$50.

"Chiefly as a lesson," said a Biograph man, grinning as he told the story.

How do the actors manage to conduct a rehearsal in which they have no lines to speak? It must be a hard thing to play a part in which you have to kill a man, or order your first born out of doors forever, or reveal yourself at the crisis as Hawkshaw the Detective, and still never utter a sound.

Well, they do talk. But they extemporize their lines; none are written down for them. A TIMES reporter had the privilege of seeing a rehearsal of a play dealing with the outbreak of the American Revolution. Most of the actors, in order to get the proper facial effect, talked in undertones or monotones, but one experienced man invented, as he went along, lines which would have done no discredit to a professional playwright. As he shook his fist at a picture of George II. and shouted, "You royal scoundrel, this

means war!" the words lent more expression to his face than all the pitter-patter with which the others tried to keep their mouths moving.

What kind of plays do the different parts of the country prefer? Well, the

East makes a strong and steady demand on plays of the wild West. The West, which knows better, will have none of them. A Denver man who wears a dinner coat at the proper time of day can't be convinced of the reality of a play that shows him wearing a sombrero and chaps. But the east side of New York, which believes that Wild Bill is still doing business and that Calamity Jane roams the prairies to this day, eats such plays up. They are exported to Europe, where they find a steady popularity and a strong demand, although, say the moving-picture men, Europe takes just as kindly to a scene of life on the Atlantic Coast as it does to a Buffalo Bill or Jesse James show.

The American representatives of the Pathé Frères notice a demand in New Orleans for French plays. The old French tradition there is still strong, and the importations from Pathé's establishment in Paris meet a steady demand. In the East, say Pathé Frères, there is a heavy demand for Western plays and not much of a demand for European importations. In the West they want "American stuff" without much regard to what part of the country it portrays. All over America, Pathé Frères say, the big demand is for "good comic." If there is any difference it is the East and not the West which prefers melodrama.

One of the handicaps of the business, though it is one which will be removed with its progress in other directions, is the unwillingness of theatrical managers to recognize it as more than an interlude. A set of moving pictures is engaged for a certain run. One of the plays may

make a powerful impression; people who have seen it may go out and tell their neighbors about it, just as they would about a real play. But when the neighbors come to the theatre to see it they find that under the ironclad rule deciding the length of its run it has been taken off and something else substituted.

If you like "The Pink Lady" you tell your friends; and if its run has been determined as one of two months it can be extended for six months or a year to meet the demand. But if you like a moving picture play you can't secure an extended run in any such way. The Vitagraph's "Battle Hymn of the Republic," which cost an immense amount of money and was prepared with vast care, was scheduled for a one-night run. Of course a manager who notices that his audiences like one set of pictures more than another can reorder them, but that is a rather unscientific way of meeting the situation.

This blemish is due, of course, to the desire of the theatrical managers to keep strictly up to date and to their refusal to recognize the fact that a moving picture drama is as much a play as anything that Eugene Walter or the late Clyde Fitch ever wrote.

The coming of the moving picture theatre as a feature in amusement life cannot be much longer delayed. The cheap theatres now masquerading under that name, and presenting inferior shows, have got to come to it. All the big companies are planning for it, and the Kine-macolor Company, which has been in America only about five weeks, is making large plans in that direction. It is worth noting, by the way, that the only time Queen Alexandra has been induced to go to the theatre was to see a kinemacolor production of her son's coronation—a pretty decisive test of one woman's belief in its accuracy. It will be remembered that she refused to see the coronation itself, but she evidently was anxious to know what it looked like.

One of the modern extensions of the business is the "aerodrome," an imposing sort of name, but the reality is not so imposing as the title. It is simply an open-air performance of moving pictures. It is getting more and more popular in the country districts, and has this advantage over Ben Greet and Maude Adams, that the weather cannot put it out of business permanently.

We are just at the dawn of the moving picture as a feature of modern life. As has been said, its utilization in the drama is only a thing of five years. Sociological and philanthropic organizations are beginning to make use of it in a limited way. One enthusiastic moving picture man looks forward to its use in the schools.

"Why not?" said he. "Pictures are the best way of impressing things on the mind of a child. Properly speaking, there is no other method. I read about Niagara Falls in my school geography, but I read only words. When I saw the falls it was a revelation to me. If it had been put on a screen in the classroom I would have understood what the teacher was telling me."

"Then think of the possibilities in the way of teaching history and, for that matter, of teaching almost any branch. There is no end to them."

There is, by the way, a strong demand for historical plays. One example is the Vitagraph's portrayal of the last days of Edward III, in which the famous story of how Alice Perrers robbed the dying King of his signet ring is shown. Many other scenes in European and American history which have defied production on the regular stage because of intrinsic difficulties offer no obstacle to the moving-picture man. The educational possibilities of this new form of drama are seemingly limitless.

It is impossible to conjecture how great a part it may play in our civilization by, say, the dawn of the twenty-first century.