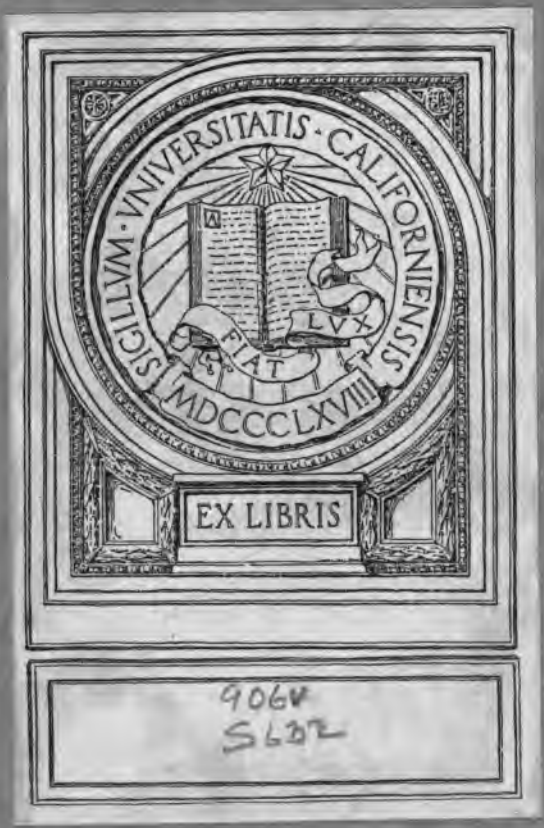
ON PICTURE-PLAY WRITING

A Hand-book of Workmanship

JAMES SLEVIN



On Picture-Play Writing

A Hand-Book of Workmanship

By

JAMES SLEVIN

Pathé Frères Picture-Playwright

PUBLISHED BY
FARMER SMITH
Incorporated
Cedar Grove, N. J.

Printed by
Daily Chronicle Press
Orange, N. J.

To

MR. J. A. BERST

PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL FILM CO. AND
VICE-PRESIDENT OF PATHÉ FRÈRES

Who has done more than any
other to elevate the standard
of moving pictures, and on
whom more than any other
the progress and success
of this art depends.

I TAKE occasion here to acknowledge gratefully the very good help of all the play and story writers, and those who have written on or about the subject from the time of Aristotle down, most of whose works I've read and tried to profit by. If I've neglected any it has been an unintentional oversight, or because of my limited knowledge of languages.

I also thank my many friends, whose advice I've freely used, whose patience I've abused, and whose good opinion has finally forced me to this tedious effort.

JAMES SLEVIN.

New York City,
December Fourth,
One Thousand Nine
Hundred and Twelve.

Introductory

WE may regard a picture-play in three ways:
As a piece of writing,
As an expression of life,
As a picture-play or series of situations properly arranged for representation on the screen.

Of course there are a great many other aspects from which a picture-play may be viewed, and numerous other standpoints than the three I've mentioned. For instance, when I witness a "chase" picture-play, so frequent among foreign producers, and so badly aped by Americans, the conclusion is thrust on me that picture-play making is the art of demonstrating how many absurd obstacles can be put in a man's way in a given space, without reason or logical sequence. This sort of obstacle race is, I understand, in certain nooks and corners of the world, considered quite laughable. Personally I can hardly restrain my tears when I see such an inane exhibition.

In another picture-play, the story consists of a man shopping with his wife and having difficulty with bundles and boxes. From the subsequent

action, I come to the conclusion that picture-play making is the art of balancing and squashing band boxes.

Again when I see a somewhat mature and fat hero, playing a cowboy, gotten up as no human outside of moving pictures ever appeared, when in company with others or alone this somewhat mature and fat hero rides up hill and down dale, forward and back, around and around, mounted bravely on a discarded street car nag, and when this continues for the full twenty minutes without end or object, meaning or direction, I can't help but think that picture-play making is the art of horse-back, hide and seek, or a game of chase the wind.

Most of all, when I see a moving-picture of the peculiarly virtuous and otherwise insipid young man, pursued and persecuted for thirty or forty scenes by a particularly villainous villain, I am minded for the time that our picture-playing is the art of weaving a web of false evidence around an all too innocent person, and I come away with the uncomfortable notion that maybe after all our prison house at Ossining and other such establishments throughout the country are filled with poor innocents unjustly accused.

There is one thing, however, that consoles me—being of rather a sentimental turn, I'm glad to see that all these various stories, no matter what the beginning, middle or general make-up consists of,

end with the invariable hug and kiss, I think after all picture-play making, in its climaxes at least, must be the delightful art of hugging and kissing. For in all times and places, at home and abroad, in private or the public market place, in all conditions or climates, rain or shine, in season or out of season, the hero and heroine always bury their troubles in one long embrace.

Well, you may take your choice of all these aspects of the picture-play. I just mention them off hand as they come to me. But now I want you to consider it in the first three ways I've named. I'll say them over once more.

Firstly, a picture-play may be regarded as a piece of writing. This is the art of the author.

Secondly, as an expression of human life. This is the art of the dramatist.

Thirdly, as a picture-play or series of situations properly arranged for representation on the screen. This is the art of the picture playwright or scenario editor.

I'm merely going to touch on the first two and that only in their relation to the third, and as soon as I have pointed out their relative bearing, I'll drop them and come to the main purpose of my book, namely, the practical craftsmanship of the work.

Picture-play making has no rules. It is easy to write out certain hints and recommendations, to tell the beginner especially what not to do; but the best

guide in the matter is plain common sense, tempered of course by artistic taste and mature judgment.

The written picture-play, to make its proper appeal to its public, must be sent through an exceedingly complex machine, the moving-picture studio and laboratory. The methods and conditions of which are to nearly all beginners an attractive mystery. As they have little or no opportunity to get acquainted with the various equipment, mechanism, etc., they are eager to learn it second hand by reading it up.

Now then, in a plain and practical way, I'm going to call attention to some of the problems and possibilities of the picture-play. One thing is sure, and must be stated at the start, that the only part of the art I'm attempting to teach is a formal and mechanical one, the art of construction.

One can learn to write a story in an effective way, to group one's ideas so to arrange one's transitions, and marshal one's forces, as best to get and hold the interest of the spectator. But the inspiration or idea comes from another source. You either have it or not. If you have it you can be taught how to express it. If you haven't it, you can no more learn how to get it than you can learn how to grow six feet tall. You either have it in you or not, that's all.

But you can be consoled by the thought that you are under no obligation to express that which you

do not possess; and that in the long run you are saved from the many trials and heartaches of learning a long and tedious art.

Some people are born with a lively talent or native bump for this art, and a very little instruction and practice renders them adepts at it; while others have a dent where their bump of inventiveness ought to be. There are still others with a moderately developed faculty for writing, the plodders who reach out gratefully for every help they can get, and it is to these that I address the pages of my book.

I am laying down only such plain rules and indispensable rudiments of the art as will help those who already possess the necessary talent. Marconi could not have invented the wireless telegraph without a thorough grounding in and technical knowledge of electricity, although there are thousands of others with the same knowledge who could never have invented wireless telegraphy or anything else.

The picture playwright labors under a great many serious difficulties in arranging his theme or story for his audience. At the start off, we assume that he has a theme or story which is new, unique, original and of the widest possible interest to all classes. Then he must think out with great care and discretion, the particular types of characters best suited to carry on his story. When he has further drawn on his imagination for the main incidents of his action, he has to chop it up into fourteen, twenty,

forty or more scenes as the case may require, each scene containing a fair portion of the action of his story.

Having so divided his material into different scenes, he must devise and arrange the proper sequence of incidents, so that the theme itself as well as the characters expressing it are fittingly introduced to the spectators, so that attention is caught from the start and held.

Say in a story containing thirty-five scenes carried on by different numbers of characters from one alone in a scene to ninety or one hundred.

Each scene will have to belong intimately to the play and be part and parcel of it.

It will have to be so arranged that it will carry on the action of the story in the most natural way, without bringing the characters on too frequently or unnecessarily, and so as to give them all a good logical reason for their coming and going.

Now these thirty-five scenes can be arranged in thousands of different ways, but the particular arrangement and design best suited to carry on this particular theme and story must be thought out.

This will give you some idea of the judgment, taste and discretion needed in getting fit and natural sequence in your series of incidents.

Furthermore, every scene and every bit of action in every scene must first of all carry on the story.

Secondly, must develop and elucidate the character concerned.

Thirdly, it must fit the period, costume, location and theme.

Fourthly, although natural, the action must tend a trifle toward the ideal with a certain grace, rhythm and harmony.

Fifthly, it should form and lead up to a perfect transition, blending the particular scene with the ones preceding and immediately following.

Lastly, this must be done quite implicitly and unconsciously, as though the picture playwright were quite unaware of it.

I have tried here to give you some idea of the complexity of the picture-play makers' art. It will moreover serve to explain why so few have the patience to learn it.

CHAPTER I

A Piece of Writing

YOU will often hear it said that the writing, or literary style, has nothing to do with a picture-play: that the great test of merit is, will it act? Now this statement, although partly true, is misleading, as it is quite obvious that the more attractive one's style, the clearer one's method of expression, the better able one is to present a theme or story.

First then make the word picture, brief, concise, crisp, pointed, but adequate to the needs of the subject matter. Besides enabling you to sell your play, this will serve to stimulate the tired brain of the editor or director, and the results will show in the production.

I would say that the great test of a picture-play is, will it read as well as act? Here it may occur to you that the great and final test of merit in a picture-play as well as in any other sort of writing is, will it sell?

Now I'm going to set aside all further consideration of writing or of literary style. As a matter of fact, the best literary criticism of the day does not concern itself with moving picture writing at all. The best dramatic criticism does not concern itself with the picture drama, the best art criticism does not concern itself with the moving picture art. This is a weighty matter for authors and producers to reflect on. However, I fear that the truth and justice of this decision cannot well be called into question.

It is for us who are engaged in writing for the screen to try and better our standing and remove this reproach.

CHAPTER II

An Expression of Life

I RECALL that as a youngster I was always an inveterate reader. Fairy tale, romance, wild west, anything, so long as it was a story, held my attention. I must confess that Jesse James and Cole Younger were very attractive figures to me in those days. Although I was never quite satisfied as to the moral rectitude of their mode of life, their bravery and daring were so marked, their adventures so stirring, that I found them on the whole very much to be admired. Indeed, I considered their lives far more interesting than that of any school boy in the land.

Now the average moving picture audience is very much like a child. It wants a story, without any regard to the lesson or moral to be drawn from it; without regard to truth, history, character or anything else outside of entertainment. Though this is all very true, one cannot deny that the demand for a story or series of incidents, for this swift succes-

sions of exciting, empty situations, with no concern about truth, life or character development, is really very childish.

What I want to say is, mere situations and incidents, mere stories presented as such, are nothing but crude melodrama, unless they are used as a means of character development and expression of human life.

In a really live picture-play the characters should control the story, but in no case excepting a dead play does the story control the character. This is the essential difference between a live play and a dead one.

Nearly everyone who has written on the subject of play or story writing has brought this very matter up for discussion.

A picture-play undoubtedly can be written, as most of them have been written, without anything that can be called character, but it is hard to conceive of a picture-play without a story of some sort.

Now, although this is quite true, it is entirely unimportant to our argument. We all know that story or action is by history, tradition and common sense, the base and foundation of the picture-play, but is not its noblest element, nor that by which its standard or rating of merit should be measured.

The skeleton of a man is his fundamental element no doubt, and even when stripped of skin and flesh, with some slight assistance, it can still retain its

form and upright position, as we may see in any anatomical museum; whereas, a man without bones, would be about as able to stand upright as a jelly fish. However, it would be the height of absurdity to say that the skeleton and not the brain, flesh, nerves, etc., is therefore the noblest and most important part of man.

It seems to me that what is most fitted for the picture-play is to show character in story or action.

I'm not in any way condemning story telling, nor the value of situation, I simply say that the rating of merit in situation and story is its relation to, and presentation of a better knowledge of, human life and character. And this brings me to the third and really most important part of my book, the picture-play or series of situations properly arranged for representation on the screen, which I shall deal with as completely as space will permit, under its various subdivisions and captions.

CHAPTER III

A Picture-Play—The Theme

BY the word theme I mean either its subject or its story. For although most of us have some sort of specific theme in mind when we sit down to write, it sometimes happens that a story is conceived without any definite theme in mind at all. Again the story is just as liable to suggest the theme as the theme is to suggest the story. So instead of deliberately going about writing a play on prohibition, labor unions, or the evil of trusts, and then looking about for a story to illustrate it, you will often find it more practical to conceive of the story first, and illustrate your specific theme, if you decide to have one at all, as you go along.

In place of an abstract specific theme, one many wish to illustrate some broad phase or condition of human life, without confining oneself to any particular character or group of characters. One's artistic right in this regard cannot be denied one may even claim the precedent of the classics for tableau plays of this sort.

The writer who knows some interesting aspect of life so intimately that he can make it live again on the screen, can safely defy the narrow prejudices of the critics, and offer his tableau play with only as much of story and situation as truthfully belongs to it.

Many charming domestic plays, and idyllic pictures of country life are ruined artistically by dragging in neck and crop some thrilling melodrama.

Start your picture-play with a unique theme, an original story, an impressive character, a strikingly, interesting or unusually funny situation or a typical phase of society, keeping always in mind that the highest aim of the picture-play is to convey a true knowledge of human life and character.

There are ninety millions or more of our fellows, living here with us in our own country, not to mention the billions living in all other countries of the world, each presenting in his or her life a moving picture full of varied action and interest, besides developing a character of great complexity.

This is the fruitful source from which we can draw our story, situation, character or theme. Now the art of picture-play making helps you to abstract with rare taste and mature judgment the very quintessence of the characters, situations and phases of life, and so to condense and pack them that they can be presented in a picture-play of from eighteen to twenty minutes duration.

An easy method of stimulating your imagination will be to tabulate all the professions, industries, occupations, social conditions, modes of life, and styles of character that you have any knowledge of, and fit your stories or ideas accordingly. This will give you wider range, and will add greater variety to the subjects of your writings.

It may happen that the impulses to try your hand at writing will come to you, and you will sit down with the determination to set your mind to work and to invent a story or plot. After an effort of this sort, you may invent something, but I'm always suspicious of stories so invented. You'll often find, if you are entirely truthful with yourself, that instead of inventing an original idea in such cases, you are more likely to be drawing on the bank account of your memory.

On the other hand, you may sit listlessly, without any thought of writing at all, and through your mind without any premeditation or warning, an idea flashes. Now ideas coming in this way are generally more to the purpose. They have the advantage of being natural and spontaneous, and are much easier to carry out in the detail of construction.

With regard to ideas for picture-plays, you are in a position similar to the operator at the wireless telegraph station. You may sit for hours without anything of interest occurring to your imagination, when from the most unexpected sources a message

arrives. Again you are like the wireless operator in so much as you are to judge of the importance or value of the message, also you are expected to have the requisite technical knowledge for recording it, and giving it out through the proper channels to the waiting public.

So I would say that the story or idea that comes to you naturally and without effort on your part, the story that, so to speak, chooses you, is generally much better than the story you might choose.

CHAPTER IV

What Is Dramatic?

CRISIS or conflict is the very essence of the dramatic in the picture-play. The play itself is a more or less rapidly developing crisis in destiny, or circumstance. The big dramatic scene of a play is a crisis within a crisis.

Picture-play making in a way is the art of presenting a crisis, just as story writing is the art of gradual developments. Its slowness of method is one of the principal points in which the story is different from the play. The story writer gives you great sections of life with gradual unfolding of character and conditions, while the playwright gives you only the culminating points or climaxes, the rapid and startling changes.

However, it is quite obvious, that not every crisis is suitable drama. A surgical operation, a civil service examination, an ordinary marriage, may present an actual crisis in a man's life without being fit material for presentation on the screen. Now we

can recognize the dramatic crisis in this way: First of all it comes about as the result of several minor crises, involving emotional excitement, and the unfolding of character.

Take for instance one of the most ordinary and hard worked of crises, a bankruptcy. Most people who figure in the daily accounts of bankrupts simply drift to leeward by slow gradations, experiencing discouragement, fear, hopelessness and despair, in a more or less degree, according to their particular temperament, or the condition of their livers. In all this there may be matter for a good story, though not even one really dramatic scene. But bankruptcy sometimes occurs in the form of one or more sudden sharp crises, and so has been made use of to excellent effect.

In many of the old melodramas we've seen the business man, glance at the news ticker, open a telegram or newspaper, only to find that he is financially ruined. In so many of our stock market plays, Wall Street, or wheat pit plays, this has been done until we are tired of it. Gambling of various kinds has been as frequently used to bring about a dramatic crisis in someone's life, often ending in attempted suicide.

The dramatic crisis deals in emotions, and the more emotion and greater variety you can get out of a situation, the nearer you are to the dramatic. The more crisply you handle your scene, the more

novelty and unexpected thrill you extract from it, the more acceptable is your art.

A conflict, a clashing of wills, opposing interests, a fight of some kind is always dramatic, also the sudden change from joy to gloom, from hope to despair, when brought about naturally and with good cause.

It may be as Maeterlinck says in his "The Tragic in Daily Life," that an old man seated in his arm-chair, waiting patiently, with his lamp beside him, submitting with bent head to the presence of his soul and his destiny; motionless as he is, does yet live in reality a deeper, more human and more universal life than the lover who strangles his mistress, or the captain who avenges his honor. However, the slow internal tragedy of his soul is material for the novelist, and not for the swift, crisp methods of the picture-play.

This crispness, however, may easily degenerate into absurd melodrama; as in a picture which I've recently seen. There was a much persecuted heroine confined for some cause which I could not well make out, on the third floor of a tenement house. Now for some reason or other she was in imminent danger with no apparent chance of escape; it seemed that she had no resource but to submit to the villain who was even then at the door, or to dash herself from the third story window to the narrow street below. Suddenly there appeared on the scene

three Chinamen who by a special dispensation of providence happened to be accomplished acrobats. Now the second climbed onto the shoulders of the first, the third onto the shoulders of the second, forming a sort of human step-ladder for the lady's rescue. The heroine, it would seem, had latent acrobatic talents herself, combined with the most fool-hardy daring, for she mounted the shoulders of the one who stood on top, and was successfully carried across the street to the third story of another tenement, which for some mysterious reason had a convenient balcony to receive her.

In another recent picture, released by a Western firm, after many scenes of more or less dullness, a man found himself caught on the roof of a burning building. At the last moment of his agony, when he was on the point of being devoured by the flames, a derrick suddenly swung down from mid-air with two men dangling from a chain. Recognizing the man on the roof as a fellow hero in distress, they quickly rescued him, and they all made a safe descent while the building located on a city street was burning to the ground with never a fireman in sight.

Now, although these things show dramatic crises after a fashion, they are nevertheless great absurdities, and in no way rational or commendable drama, or fit for the purpose of the picture-play.

CHAPTER V

True To Life

IT seems to me that there is no other question so often misquoted, so little understood and so variously abused among spectators, writers, producers and critics, as this one of being true to life in a picture-play.

The moving picture art is unlike any other, inasmuch as it employs in its method of expression real men and women, in their actual homes, playgrounds, battlefields, ships, railroad trains or wherever found. Now this method has created a very false impression in the minds of many, that a picture-play is good and "true to life" insomuch as it is an exact picture of all the details of real life, with all its actors doing, living, marrying and giving in marriage just as they do in real life. This is very far from true, as we shall find on closer and more thorough analysis.

In the first place, taking the ordinary play of about eighteen to twenty minutes duration, the picture-playwright has only an average of about

three minutes in which to introduce, develop and unfold each character; whereas nature makes about seventy odd years for the same work. Now you will see at a glance that a picture-play ordinarily can only give you about one twenty-fourth of one-million-five-hundred-thousandth part of what nature offers.

Keeping in mind the very great variety and complexity of every human personality, the almost infinite aspects and phases in which it may be studied, it is easily believable that there are in the life of the average seventy years duration, hundreds of thousands of varying characteristics, according to the moments the writer selects for interpretation, and according to the way in which he chooses to look at them.

If the writer tries to show all of a many-sided character, completely so as to give the spectator a clear idea of the whole life history of the man, his methods and details must be widely different from nature's details and methods.

The mere smallest fraction of a character cannot be like a whole character, nor can a character that has to be presented in about three minutes be like a character that is presented in seventy or more years; there must be many and considerable concessions, quite extensive compromises and accommodations, and setting aside of detail. In fact the writer must be guilty of quite some falsification if he desires his

characters to be anywhere near true to life in their most essential and innermost qualities. Hence, picture-play making has been called the truth of the unreal.

The same thing must apply to situation and incident. The method of presentation of a story in moving pictures is as unlike real life as the landscape painted on canvas is unlike real water, trees, and earth. This does not mean that there is no such thing as honest and real interpretation of character and incident. On the contrary great character and events can be shown quite faithfully and truthfully in the moving-picture, but never as in real life. If you were to make the experiment you would find the few who looked at your "real life picture" accusing you of the utterest insincerity and falsification.

The most ordinary mistake is to say that a character or incident is unreal because it is unusual. It is enough to drive one insane to hear or read the complacent comment of good folk from Hoboken or Flatbush or some other nick-in-the-woods, who find a picture-play not true to life," because its characters, incidents and situations are not such as they meet with every day at the corner grocer's in Flatbush or Hoboken. They do not realize that what happens at the corner grocer's in Hoboken or Flatbush or the characters that congregate there, may be of very little interest to the rest of the world, in

fact may be of no account whatever to other patrons of the pictures. Though of course every individual character in Hoboken and Flatbush is of interest and importance to the picture-play maker as a study at least. But if a story deals with unusual incidents from some other part of the world, and unusual characters which do not hail from Hoboken or Flatbush, they should not therefore be criticised by these good folks as unreal and untrue to life.

It is important to learn to distinguish between the unusual or uncommon, and the unreal.

I quote at some length in another part of this work, a picture-play in which there is a situation where a burglar pauses in his burglarizing of a house to adjust a lovers' quarrel, and bring it to a happy ending. Now this is a situation which might not occur more than once in a thousand years; yet it is entirely probable and serves to get beneath the crust of a thoroughly human character in a way that only such a situation would have served. But it is in no way an unreal situation such as the often repeated situation where one or more characters overhears long dialogues and witnesses important actions occurring among others in the same room, or in ridiculously close proximity; or where we are asked to believe that a detective can pass unrecognized among those who know him intimately, when disguised merely by the use of a false mustache or wig.

Yet spectators, critics, and even producers who accept these stale impossible old tricks with enthusiasm, will call in question some incident, character or situation, which is merely unusual or uncommon, and has not happened in their particular nick-in-the-woods.

In the matter of probability; we find nature violating it every hour. You can scarcely open your daily paper without reading of some almost unbelievable happening. So when you see a situation or character presented in moving pictures, do not condemn it because it has not happened to fall under your limited observation or occurred in your narrow circle of acquaintance.

You should only ask yourself if what you have seen has been vividly expressed by the picture maker, whether it fits reasonably into his theme and bears consistent relation to the rest of his story.

It probably has never occurred in this world that any group of persons have gone through the characteristic and dramatic incidents of their lives in such a way that they could be exactly copied for use in a picture-play.

We have all had certain dramatic moments, or scenes of some short duration, and we all have characters and are living lives that present material for the picture playwright. But none of us have ever lived through or taken part in a scene that

could be exactly copied for the screen in all its details, especially in matter of duration of time.

So distrust all judgment of a picture-play that views it as an exact copy of real life. Remember that neither in this nor in any other art can anything be tastefully presented in mere imitation of nature.

CHAPTER VI

Routine of Construction

I'LL start off with an illustration which will help you to understand what I mean by picture-play construction. I want you to transfer yourself in imagination to our national capital at Washington, situated on its hill overlooking the city. Picture to yourself the surrounding landscape before the capitol building was constructed, the numberless irregular and varied lines and curves the landscape then presented.

The architect came along, and after a definite plan and design, with all specifications and details, constructed the enormous and beautiful building, on the top of the hill, in quite the finest location he could select.

Now note the difference between this excellently designed building, and the surrounding landscape as it was. The lines of the building are symmetrical, exact according to a certain plan and design. The surrounding landscape was careless, confused and unsymmetrical.

The picture playwright is the architect of his country's picture drama, and what the architect did for that wild countryside, the picture maker must do for his country's life and character.

First of all there must be correct design in every detail of his work. The total effect of the capitol building is that it was built after a carefully wrought design. The effect of the former landscape or countryside was, that it was apparently thrown about without any play whatever. Nature's work is full of willfulness, carelessness and confusion; man's work is full of purpose, arrangement and definite design.

All rules of construction are arbitrary and relative. The highest intention of a picture play should be not to turn out a nice and clever bit of craftsmanship, but to give a better insight into human life and character.

Your story should be so constructed that it does not present events as they actually happen, but so that it will leave an impression on your mind after the eighteen or twenty minutes traffic of the screen, similar to what you would retain if you had been able to, and had possessed the patience to give the weeks, months or years necessary for the observation of such a happening in real life; as though you had been intimately acquainted with all the characters or personages who took part in the story, so that at the end of the picture-play, the impres-

sion on your mind would be somewhat after the manner of a memory of something through which you yourself had lived years before, of which only the most striking, important and vivid details remain with you.

You see construction is after all merely the art of selection, condensation and arrangement.

Now then, keeping all this in mind, your first step in construction of a picture-play should be to draw up on paper a brief scenario or routine of scenes, entrances and exits of characters and grouping of incidents.

Later this can be dispensed with, when by constant practice you have so developed your memory and power of concentration that you can retain a clear outline of your story in your mind, always ready for reference, without any such aid. However, do not attempt this feat till by long practice and experience you are sure you can accomplish it. Otherwise you will fall into a go-as-you-please system of construction, which will confuse your ideas and defeat your purpose as a writer.

In a picture-play, grouping of incidents, transitions, proportion and balance are so essential that a clear outline either on paper or in your memory is as necessary to you as a set of plans is to an architect about to put up an important building.

This method of first laying out a play in outline

or scenario form comes to us from the writers of the regular or legitimate drama.

In fact, years ago the playwright of the Italian commedia dell' arte depended entirely on such a brief scenario or outline of scenes, leaving it to the actors to fill in the dialogue and action. Now the same method was in use shortly before Shakespeare's time, as we can see from some "Ms." or "Plats" which are still extant in England.

This scenario or brief scheme of the coming on and going off of the actors, was used in this way. It was hung up conveniently in the wings where the actors referred to it from time to time to refresh their memories, and then made their entrances accordingly. When on the stage, they talked till they had finished their particular bit or run out of breath, then the next actor or group of actors came on to relieve them, and so they labored through the two or three hours of their play, if such it might be called.

This same method was made use of by the old fashioned minstrel show "after piece" and the "medicine shows" which were at one time popular in certain parts of our own country, but which died a natural and unlamented death about ten years ago.

The growth from this loose method of construction in the sixteenth century proceeded by easy steps to the more or less complete play which was read from the prompt box or prompt side of the

stage. By the way, I assume that you know what a prompt box is. Even in my own time I have seen one of those abominations and anachronisms of the theatre in actual use.

Well, as soon as the theatre became a recognized business, not to say art or profession, and the actors were classed as at least nearly respectable vagabonds, the complete play was found absolutely necessary to the very existence of the theatre, and the old method of extemporizing or improvising from a scenario or scheme of scenes was relegated to cheap minstrel "after pieces," "medicine shows" and in due course to the scrap heap, where such methods rightfully belong.

For some reason or other this "medicine show" method of play construction was dug out of the scrap heap and was made use of in the earlier picture-plays of five or six years ago. In fact such crude and archaic methods are still almost universally followed in most moving picture studios up to the present day.

However, this order of things must soon give way to the complete and properly constructed picture-play, with detail of dialogue and action as it has in the legitimate theatre.

The sooner this comes about the sooner we shall get away from the inane form of entertainment which now is given in most of our show houses, and pass on to a better and higher order of work.

In this way only can we aspire to an even competition with the legitimate drama. For this we don't need the talking picture, with its film-record forming perfect synchronism of action and sound, all we need is better plays, produced in a more painstaking, tasteful manner, by competent directors and artists.

Of course, there are some difficulties yet to be overcome in the photographing, developing, printing and projecting of the pictures, but these are comparatively slight, and will undoubtedly be overcome in due course. The main difficulty in the way, the main obstacle to normal progress, that which makes the ordinary moving picture a laughing stock and a byword to people of judgment, good taste and discretion, is the crude method by which the picture-play is constructed and produced.

To illustrate this matter more clearly, I'm tempted to quote a scenario which recently passed through my hands, also to describe the method in which it was staged.

One of the scenes read: "Man and woman enter on bridge and talk as they pass along."

Now the first thing that occurs to one's mind is, what are they, old or young? tall or short? fat or lean? black, white or yellow? Then what in the name of common sense are they talking about? Politics or the public school question? Woman's suffrage, war, or the weather? Are they quarreling or courting?

Of course by studying the entire manuscript, it was possible to make out some vague notion of who and what the characters might be, and what they might possibly be discussing. Though five competent judges before whom I laid the matter could come to nothing approaching an agreement in the matter.

Now this obscurity and confusion should be entirely unnecessary. The scene should have been clearly written, the topic of their conversation so clearly indicated that there could be no possible doubt in the matter. Yet there is nothing more common or frequent in scenarios than such meaningless scenes.

I've often come across scenes like this: "Mary and Joe come into parlor and have a love scene," or "Dan and Pete meet in the park and have a quarrel," or "Mother and daughter are in an excited conversation." Such a method of construction is nothing more nor less than an acknowledgment of one's inability to describe properly a scene, and the wish to fall back on the mercy of the director or actor.

Recently I was in a moving picture studio where a picture-play was being produced. Now hours upon hours had been used up in the arranging of the stage settings, properties, lights, etc. This was of course all commendable, since the directors did not quite know what they wanted, and with them every new setting for a scene was an experiment in an unknown

field. But what attention was paid to the rehearsal of the scenes? Practically none at all. I doubt very much if any of those taking part in the play had anything but the vaguest notion of the story.

It happened that there was only one girl in the scenes I witnessed, and she was scared stiff, and confused out of all idea of expression or vivacity by the constant shouting of the director, even while the scene was being played, and the camera boy was photographing it.

The directions that were shouted were such as made it difficult to hold a straight face. For instance, at the very end of the final scene, a very ordinary and unimpressive piece of action was given, namely: "sitting in a chair." Now this is the way it was conducted: The hero and heroine had deliberately placed themselves at the nearest approach to the camera, and the other characters had all walked out. Then the director shouted to the girl playing the heroine, "Ask him to sit down." She did so timidly and modestly as was becoming, but the absurdity of the matter rose from the fact that there was only one chair in the scene, and she had been directed to sit in it herself. She said, "Won't you come over and sit down, please?" or something to that effect. Then she took the hero by the hand and led him over to the only chair, in which she herself deliberately sat, leaving the hero chairless. A discourtesy

that I'm sure the little lady would have been quite incapable of in her own home in real life.

Now then, while they were in this position, heroine sitting, hero standing, the director shouted: "Talk." Both gave a noticeable start as their nerves were already on edge, and not having the remotest idea of what they were supposed to say, they both moved their lips, attempting to talk at one and the same time, without either making any pretense at listening or attending to what the other was saying. Then the director shouted, "Smile;" and after the usual startled jump at the sound of the master's voice, both indulged in a particularly forced and strained grimace, quite as painful to behold as no doubt it was to accomplish. And so this valuable contribution to the moving picture art came to an end.

You may ask, won't this look alright when presented on the screen? Indeed it will not. It will look exactly as it did in the making, if not worse. The camera does not lie, and when it leans toward falsification at all, it is not in the matter of flattery nor of correcting and covering up of mistakes and absurdities. It is rather in the matter of making new mistakes or exaggerating those already made.

But you will say, aren't there some good and really artistic pictures made from brief scenarios or outlines of plot? Hasn't this form and method of construction been found sufficient for some produc-

tions of merit? To this I say yes. The moving picture business so far has developed about half a dozen men, who have the necessary art, good taste, judgment and technical knowledge fittingly to produce a moving picture play even from such raw material. But every one of them is a capable writer, and creator of picture-plays, and I contend that it is simply a matter of memory and concentration with them. Their play is written in their excellently trained minds, for they are a sort of genius created by the very exigencies of the case which I am describing. And there is not one of them who would not welcome the perfectly written picture-play or any other step forward in the betterment of their art.

For the rest, there are not so many who can be safely entrusted with the production of a picture-play even when completely and carefully written. Some of them, as well as the actors they employ, show such a complete ignorance of essential matters of taste and civilized customs, that any particular point of offense seems almost too trivial for mention. A casual observance of the many pictures exhibited daily about you, will bear out the truth and fairness of what I say. And this is not a matter easily remedied.

It has been suggested that some producers as well as actors might profitably take positions as servants in respectable households, assuming that they could qualify as servants, and there learn the

rudiments of good manners, and how civilized men and women live, their customs, their style, and ideas of politeness in their daily life. How they greet one another in the street or at home. How they talk, laugh, walk. How and when they sit or stand. How and when they remove their hats, lay aside their cane, gloves and top-coat. How to assist a lady with her coat or wraps. How to assist a lady into or out of a carriage or automobile and how people of refinement eat and drink. Most particularly this—their table manners.

As this suggestion is impracticable and impossible to those whom it might most benefit, insomuch as servants are generally required to have letters and other evidence of good character, I would suggest, since there are abundant books on this subject, that it should all be carefully read up, by those who know how to read, and observed in theatres, also in the lobbys, corridors and dining rooms of our better class hotels and cafes, and even in the churches and on the street.

Another very great danger to those employed in the moving-picture business, as well as to those employed on the stage, is that their business is so exacting and absorbing that it takes them away from all social intercourse with people in other walks of life. They get away from the knowledge of standards and ideals of real life, and form standards and ideals of their own. So their minds and imagin-

ations become warped and ingrown. Talking shop is the extent and variety of their conversational ability, and they are in great danger of forming a separate and distinct social class as the gypsies have done.

And these are the people among whom you will most often hear it said that stories and picture-plays are rejected because they are too good or high class for the patrons of our theatres.

This only goes to show their own caliber of mind and not that of the spectator. There is nothing in the heavens above, or on the earth, or in the subways beneath the earth, or in the mind of the moving picture producer or exhibitor, too good or high class for the patrons of moving pictures.

As an excellent example of good and high class work which has been vastly popular and greatly appreciated for some time, we can turn to nature. The Creator's opinion of the minds of his spectators was shown when he hung the stars in the heavens, stretched the wonderful stage curtain of the sky above us, when He gave us the marvelous variety of light effects, of dawn and of evening, and the lightning and the shooting stars, surrounded us with all the wonderful flowers, blossoms, rivulets, landscapes and other beauties of nature, of which our best art is but a weak imitation. In argument against the very wise producer you can say, that these wonderful demonstrations of high art have

remained popular for some time, and in all probability will continue successfully at the same old stand, the moving picture producer and small exhibitor to the contrary notwithstanding.

Now then, to return to the actual work of picture-play construction. The first scenario or scheme and outline of characters, situations and scenes should be in no way hide-bound. On the contrary, it should be simply provisional, and subject to endless change. There must be so close an interdependence between situation, character and detail of action, that the writer cannot afford to bind himself in advance, to any absolute plan.

You will often find that instead of adhering to your original scheme, you drift almost entirely away from it, sometimes changing even what you considered your main situation or big scene.

This occurred to me quite recently when I was writing a picture-play released under the title of "Anguished Hours." This idea originally was suggested by that old song the "Mistletoe Bough," which relates in substance how a young woman on the night of her marriage, playfully hid in an old air tight chest, which by a fatal accident closed on her, with a spring lock. Her husband and friends searched vainly for her, finally giving up in despair. I developed a further complication, I forgot whether it's in the song or not, of how everyone misjudged the young woman, and said she had eloped with a

man who had been rather attentive to her that evening, and who suddenly went away about the time she disappeared. Now years after, the old song says, the husband going through the attic of the castle where this old chest was kept, opened it and found the skeleton of his lost bride.

I at once fell in love with the situation. "Ha!" said I, "what a scene where the husband shall find the skeleton of his lost bride in the old chest. If that doesn't make them sit up and take notice, what will?"

I began the play. The first scenes went alright, and the story seemed to develop superbly, till I came to the scene of the skeleton in the chest. .I battled with it for some hours quite in vain, when suddenly I saw what was wrong. My big scene did not fit at all. It did not satisfy my sense of justice that this young and innocent woman should die for no reason whatever, and that her perfectly good and upright husband should suffer this terrible shock, for no better cause than the mere entertainment of a few picture-play spectators. It struck me that it was quite as barbarous as the spectacles shown in the coliseum of the ancients, when brave men and virtuous women were slaughtered in the arena to make a Roman holiday.

So my big scene had to go. I cut it out and at once everything went quite smoothly. It was my sense of justice that was offended by this scene. My

sense of the fitness of things, of right and wrong, and depend upon it the spectator watching the picture show, no matter how casually, has this same sense of justice too.

Now then, I would lay down this general rule in the matter, if you construct a picture in which you unnecessarily or unjustly kill or injure a man, woman, child, or animal, you commit an offense against art, at least equal to the offense you would commit against the law, should you actually be guilty of the same brutal violence in real life.

From your scenario, or brief outline of the action of your story divided into from twelve to forty scenes, with introduction of your principal characters, their various coming on and going off, contention and by play in the different situations, you come down to the work of construction.

First of all you must begin to evolve a clear idea of the principal characters you have conceived in your imagination as best fitted for presentation in the particular story or series of situations which you have thought out.

With regard to the number of characters you should use in a particular story; this of course is purely relative. My favorite answer to the question is: that you naturally use fewer characters in a secret elopement than in a national convention, in a duel than in a battle scene.

The only safe rule in this matter is to use only as many principals or leading characters as you can conveniently develop and as many extra or auxiliary characters as the best interpretation of your theme or story demands.

In a broad social study, or a picturesque romance, you may have as many auxiliary figures as you please, keeping in mind always that if you wish to particularly develop any unusually impressive character, you must keep that character very much in the foreground, and not allow the merely auxiliary characters to interfere nor absorb too much attention themselves.

In a subtle comedy, or a tragedy involving some important point of ethics, the principal characters should be few, and should have the foreground to themselves as much as possible.

It may not be out of place here to say that the reason why the "dramatis personae" or people appearing in a play are called "characters" is because those chosen or imagined by the playwright for such a purpose are supposed to be the sort in whom character predominates, impressive types who represent the outcome or crystallization of unusual experiences and carry with them the atmosphere of their particular walk in life, not merely insipid and uninteresting people who serve to fill in the background, and for the most part pass unobserved.

I hope it is unnecessary to warn you against the

use of over eccentric names, and silly puns in the make-up of your manuscripts, such as A. Piker, the Tinhorn gambler, and Miss Fewclothes, the Salome dancer.

The name of a character should be brief first of all, so that if you have occasion to use it in a letter or subtitle it will not take up too much time for picturing it on the screen, and so that it can be easily read, and remembered. Then it should be characteristic without being eccentric. Farcial names, within reasonable limits, may be used in farces; eccentric names on occasions in eccentric comedy, while soberly appropriate names may be used in serious drama.

Look out for clearly establishing the relationship of each character to all of the other characters, also to the locations and surroundings in which they are found.

Such as, for instance, in the opening scene of a play you might describe Job Worth, a substantial middle-aged farmer, is harvesting his grain field. He indicates by removing his hat, moping his brow with a bandana, and puffing out a long breath, or in some other characteristic way, that it is hot work. He then looks off expectantly, shading his eyes with his hand, and indicates by expression that he sees some one coming, and is pleased. He calls off in the same direction in which he has looked and beckons and says, "Hurry Jane, I'm waiting for

you." Then proceeds to drive his horses beneath some convenient shade trees. Turning he looks off once more and waves his hand in the direction from which he has already indicated he has seen some one coming.

Scene 2. A foot path running through a grain field. Jane, a sprightly young country girl, Job Worth's daughter, is coming along in the direction of the field where we saw Job Worth. She is carrying a lunch basket, and a stone jug of drinking water. Now she indicates that she sees her father waving to her and waves back and calls to him in a girlish fashion saying, "I'm hurrying as fast as I can." Then she secures a firmer hold of the jug and basket, and runs off in the direction of the place where we left the father.

Scene 3. In the same field as we saw before, only pictured from a different viewpoint, Job Worth has now put his horses in the shade, and is waiting at the foot of a large oak ~~tree~~ in the foreground for the arrival of his daughter. Directly she comes on, stands besides him and so by the manner of their greeting, their attitude toward each other, their relative ages, the service Jane is rendering to Mr. Worth in bringing his lunch, and jug of water, and her way of giving them to him, the relationship is established. His relationship to the field, reaper, and horses has also been brought within the range of reasonable probability by his care and use of

them. The afternoon lunch and jug of water need not be explained as it is almost a universal custom in the West and Northwest, to stop for a half hour in the mid-afternoon, to rest and refresh man and beast. Anyhow, the action itself and the object of it is self explanatory.

So with a little forethought and ordinary ingenuity, many details which are frequently neglected can be just as easily cleared up.

If a man is seated on the porch of a cottage in his shirt sleeves, reading a paper or magazine, or otherwise comfortably occupied, it is reasonable to suppose that he lives in that cottage. If a woman approximately the same age as the man, steps out on the porch, with her hat off, and greets him with some little caress or other sign of affection, it is quite easy to surmise that she is his wife. Then if a little girl comes romping in at the gate, with a few school books swinging from the end of a strap, and kisses the woman and climbs onto the man's knee, we conjecture with good cause that she is their child, just returning from school, etc.

So the fisher maiden, the Indian girl, the art model, the bank clerk, the lawyer, doctor or clergyman, the cowboy or Indian brave, the astronomer or inventor, or whatever the type of character, he or she must be clearly established in the early part of the picture-play, in all his or her bearings and

relationship to the story, location and other characters presented.

It may occur to you that family relationship is generally expressed in real life, in jealousy, bickerings, quarrels and contention. Now this is no doubt very true, and presents an interesting phase of life, and a worthy lesson in domestic virtue. If by introducing your characters in a family brawl, you place them properly in your story, why not? I certainly see no cause for objection. All this can be more clearly seen in a sample picture-play which I will show later on.

Having introduced our characters and established their relationship to one another, and to their surroundings, we then watch them carefully throughout the body of the play, keeping in mind their different distinctive traits, which they must never for one moment lose, whether facing death, or in the midst of ridicule, or carried away by the emotions of some strong situation.

The next matter that calls for our attention is the grouping of incidents, in such a way that they are marshalled for the most effective attack. Say for example, you have a melodramatic situation where a group of pioneer families are within a stockade defending themselves against hostile Indians, and you have by a proper group of incidents shown that the last drop of water is gone, and men, women and children are famishing from thirst. Death

threatens from without from the murderous Indians, and a perhaps more horrible death threatens within from the slow torture of thirst. Now a volunteer comes forth, one who says he will attempt to break through the line of savages and obtain water and help from the outside.

With due caution, he starts out on his desperate adventure. Now the grouping of incidents require that we follow him rather than remain with those inside the stockade. There is where the interest lies. We have already seen the action inside and outside of the stockade in all its excitement and variety, but this adventure presents a new promise of excitement. We want to know what difficulties he meets with, whether or not he is wounded, killed, or arrives safely on the outside. When we have landed him at his destination or seen him safely on his way, we are ready to return to the stockade, but not before.

The proper grouping of incidents, and marshalling of your forces, is of the utmost importance.

I give this broad example of a melodramatic situation to illustrate my meaning, because in a broad sweeping action of this sort the method is obivious, one has but little choice. But in subtler scenes and situations, the application of this principal of construction is most difficult, and is acquired only by long practice and mature thought.

Look out for useless and meaningless scenes, or

incidents in scenes which do not properly belong to the story. They only distract your attention and waste precious time.

The great point of advantage which the picture-play has over the legitimate or stage play is that it can present almost perfect continuity of action. Don't forget this precious privilege of our art. Follow each principal character through all the windings of his development, in the various scenes of the play, so that the spectator can be reasonably assured that he has practically not lost sight of the hero or heroine during any of the important moments of the crises or other interesting events of their lives which you are presenting, showing the spectator into the privacy of their homes and even their innermost thoughts.

At an early stage in the course of construction of your play, you will be confronted by the question of stage settings, furniture, and locations. You want to know if you should draw up a scene and property plot as is done in theatrical productions. You naturally want to know just where certain bits of action take place.

You wonder if Betty is standing at the well when she says yes to Dan; or if they are seated in the old swing. You wonder again if she is seated on a lounge, and he kneeling on the rug beside her when he proposes. You wonder where Frances is when James kisses her for the first time.

Locations, stage settings, furniture, costuming, and other accessories, play a very important part in picture-play making of the day, and you should use the most painstaking care in describing every requirement of your scenes adequately, but not too minutely, nor diffusively.

It is a good general system to avoid, as much as possible, expressions which show that you have a stage scene, or studio setting in mind, and not a happening in real life, in its proper environment and surroundings.

Do not be too elaborate, and do not lecture about the desirable locations or settings for your scenes. Simply state briefly and concisely what after careful thought you deem most fitting for a certain bit of action and in all probability your hints will be taken in good part by the director. It is not so long ago when scenery and furniture played a very small part in moving pictures. We can all remember a few years back when whole scenes were played against a canvas drop with a stove, table and chair painted on it, all of which swayed gracefully as the actors knocked against it; also settings with window panes made of paper, which flapped lightly in the breeze, as the story went on. Even yet there are enough inaccuracies and absurdities in settings, costumes and furniture to make it worth one's while to visit the picture theatres for the amusement derived from this matter alone.

Not only in describing your settings and stage directions, but also in visualizing the action of your scenes, the idea of a studio set, or prepared scene, should be as far as possible from your mind.

You should see and describe, the hillside cabin door, garden, seashore, office, kitchen, drawing room, or wherever the action takes place, not as an action rehearsed in a particular setting for a picture-play, but as a happening in real life. Using this method will greatly help you to acquire ease and a refreshing naturalness.

CHAPTER VII

"Beginning, Middle, End"

ARISTOTLE, writing on the subject of play construction over two thousand years ago, laid down the simple rule that a play should have a beginning, a middle and an end. Now though he was writing about plays of a very different nature, his old rule most obviously applies to our modern picture-play, a marvel in mechanical invention of which he never dreamed.

So we say that the picture-play must have a fitting and appropriate beginning, and proceed in orderly fashion in the course of its development by way of the middle to the end.

This is so self-evident a fact, it may occur to you that we did not need a great philosopher like Aristotle to think of it. It is, nevertheless, true that we can see it violated every day in a great many of our moving picture plays.

Though most of them have a middle, they are frequently lacking in a beginning, and instead of ending, they simply leave off.

Where, then, and how should a picture-play be-

gin according to the requirements of art? It is true that moving picture producers with very few exceptions do not judge their plays according to artistic standards or requirements. They are passed upon, for the most part, by individuals unhampered by any such knowledge, and who make no pretense to it whatsoever.

Having in mind then a character, who has lived through a series of stirring events suitable to your purpose you must decide with good discretion at what particular moment of the crisis you are to start off. In this regard, you are in much the same position as the camera man studying his finder, to see just how much of a given location he can "get in," what he must sacrifice or cut off to give the most striking effect.

There are some writers and producers who can never decide where to begin. They keep going back, and going back into the antecedents of a character or of a story, till they almost begin with the fable of Adam and Eve. To satisfy their sense of what is justly due a subject, they often go back thirty or forty years, and travel through many countries, ignoring entirely the requirements of unity of time and of place.

In a play of stirring nature you can begin almost in the middle of it, plunging right into the main crisis, or series of crises leading up to it, even at the sacrifice

of minor antecedent circumstances and detail. This method it seems to me is well fitted to the picture-play of ordinary length, because it gives time to develop the important points of the play. It shows the characters not in a long sequence of events, which do not bring out their natures and essential traits, but thrusts them at once into a series of short, sharp crises, in which we soon find out what they are made of.

If your play happens to be of a lighter nature, and you want to entertain in a gentle and quiet manner, it is well to begin with your characters all serene and happy in their ordinary walk of life, then suddenly plunge them into a crisis of some kind, comedy, farcical, or mildly serious, or let the crisis develop from some unexpected quarter, like the cloud on the horizon, at first no bigger than a man's hand, but presaging the storm.

Apart from historical subjects, which are sometimes profitably used, it is better to arrange your story so that it comes easily within the frame or scope of the picture, leaving nothing to be explained by subtitles, or other annoying methods.

A picture play, unlike a play of the other sort, should require no exposition.

Instead of long drawn out episodes lasting many years, which make inconsiderate demands on the imagination, furnishing the loose, go-as-you-please, ragged-edged, out at elbow sort of drama, which

defy all notion of time or place, or unity of action, and destroy all illusion of reality, set your spectators, so to speak, at the finishing line of the race. Save them the tedious delays, annoyances, and disappointments of the starting post, and the first laps or heats. Give them the brief sharp moments of expectancy and doubt, when horses and men are straining their utmost to win in face of odds and a heavy field. Then show the winners crowned and the losers taking their dust.

A few short preliminary scenes arousing interest, and exciting curiosity are not out of place. But even such scenes should contain if possible a subordinate crisis, contributory to the main crisis of your play. This will give to each scene or group of scenes an individual interest of their own. Always keeping in mind that every scene and every incident in every scene must be part and parcel of the main story and forshadow without forstalling the main situation or climax.

If, when a picture has been run half way through, the spectator's interest is not aroused and he doesn't care a row of pins whether he stays for the rest of the picture or returns to his home in Brooklyn, it is because the construction is at fault.

To the middle of the picture-play, or the second grouping of scenes belongs the working up or heightening of the interest aroused in the earlier scenes.

A great number of stories have been produced and some of them not without merit which seem to set aside this rule entirely. They form a sort of running fire which might at anytime take a turn in any possible direction, without falsifying its antecedents or your expectations. No part of it is intimately involved in any other part. If the material were found too long for a one thousand foot release, several scenes might be cut out, or it might be divided into a couple of separate reels, or it might even be run backwards as a matter of fact, starting with the last scene and proceeding to the first without necessitating any considerable re-adjustments.

The greatest fault with this sort of picture-play is that it precludes all idea of tension or suspense; i. e., the reaching out or stretching forward of the spectator's mind to discover what is to follow.

Patrons of the show will stand a moderate amount of preparation, placing of characters, and introduction of theme or story, but to hold them, a tension of suspense must soon set in, otherwise they become restless and tired, gossip with each other or tell stories, or comment on this very fault of the picture-play.

One of the clearest examples of tension or suspense is in the story which I recall translating from the Latin as a school exercise when a boy, "The Sword of Damocles." The man seated in the place of honor at the banquet suddenly discovers that a

heavy and sharp sword is hanging over his head by a single hair. Naturally he, as well as the rest of those present, are eagerly speculating as to how soon the sword will fall, to the exclusion of all other thoughts. This is the state of suspense or eager expectancy which you must try to arouse in the spectator's mind.

Now in building up this tension or state of suspense, you often create certain finger posts which point definitely in one direction, or raise a reasonable demand for a certain logical sequence, or scene to follow, which scene you must not neglect even at a sacrifice of the pleasure it may sometimes give you, to puzzle by some paradox or startle people out of their shoes by some sudden, violent and unexpected turn of events.

In this way you sometimes give the spectator a glimpse of the end or point you are aiming at, but you keep to yourself the means by which you are going to get there.

This sort of obligatory scene may be demanded as a logical effect or result of the cause you have presented.

It may be demanded by art itself, as a point or scene you should not neglect in the development of your theme.

It may be demanded as a sufficient reason for some marked change in an important character.

In the picture presentation of a bit of history or

a well known story, it may be demanded by the generally accepted facts, or the established fiction.

Now the end of your picture-play will often cause you considerable trouble. You can consider yourself very happy if the logical outcome of your theme does not force you into the necessity of a tame last scene, nor one in which you must kill off some of your principal characters in order to get rid of them. If your story sustains and increases the tension up to the final scene, you are most fortunate. Probably the most successful way of doing this, will be to save your climax or big situation to the final scene or group of scenes, where it seems properly to belong.

This does not mean that you must always close your story with some stirring, and emphatic crises. It may often happen that it is desirable to indicate by a few brief incidents what afterwards become of your principle characters, or what was the final outcome of your group of situations. In this way, you can often and quite artistically give a quiet, idyllic ending to a very stirring picture-play. It may even form an anti-climax, but if it is reasonably demanded for the rounding of the theme, it should by all means be made use of.

As a general rule, in this matter, I would say, never start a story which you can't properly and successfully finish. Don't undertake to write your picture-play at all, unless the end is plainly in sight. In this way, you will avoid the sickening make-

shift endings where some character or incident is dragged in by the hair of the head at the last moment, to help out a badly constructed story.

Keep away from blind alley themes, that lead nowhere. Unless a problem is capable of being reasonably and satisfactorily solved, it is not fit material for a picture-play. Whether it be tragedy, comedy, or farce, if the end does not satisfy that certain something in the mind, the feeling of what is just, the sense of truth, humor, beauty, sublimity, or simply of the fitness of things, then it is better not to attempt it at all.

Trying to write a picture-play which neither satisfies the higher nor the lower instincts of the mind, that leaves one's desires unsatisfied, no matter what other attractive point it may possess, is a blunder and waste of time.

It will help you in this regard if you avoid sordid subjects, founded on a study of vice, ugliness and disease.

As a final word, don't let the ending of your picture-play take the spectators entirely by surprise. By this I don't mean that you should close your play in the conventional tableau with the hero posing with the heroine in his arms, but that you should make the spectator feel that the moment of closing your story was well chosen, and satisfactory to him, though he may not be able to tell the reason why.

CHAPTER VIII

The Finished Product

AS a further effort, to be useful in this matter, I am including a picture-play, the different points of which I will comment upon briefly.

I thought that a study of a play completely written, which has been sold and successfully produced, and has given satisfaction to producers, exhibitors, critics and spectators, would help you on toward a fuller and more practical knowledge of the subject.

If you are a regular attendant of the picture theatres, you may have seen this play presented under another name. I have changed the name to keep away from any suggestion of advertising. It seems to me that the one given below is appropriate and bears close relationship to the theme or story.

This picture play, barring a few added comments which I hope will be of benefit, is given just as it was submitted to the firm which bought it.

"A MAN'S A MAN"

The theme of this picture-play is: "A man is always a man, and has still the essential virtues of

manhood, no matter how low he has descended in the social scale."

You see I have chosen a play with a theme in the stricter sense, as well as a story, to give a fuller and better example of craftsmanship.

"Synopsis of the Story"

This is the story of "Jane," a young society girl who is engaged to "Jim," a young business man of her own set.

At a garden party given by Mrs. Orr, a leader in their set, Jane becomes jealous of Jim's apparent show of preference for their hostess, and quarrels with him. In the moment of pique and anger, she allows Mr. Dean, an old roue, to help her with her wraps and show her to her automobile.

Mrs. Orr, taking advantage of this sudden breach between the two young lovers, lavishes attention on Jim, but he is too much concerned about his sweetheart to respond to her advances, and leaves the party in a very depressed mood.

Now Jane returning to her home, dismisses her maid and sits down despondently contemplating suicide. She gathers in a little heap all the jewelry and other presents which she has received from her sweetheart, writes a farewell note to him, then takes a revolver and prepares to die.

In the meantime, Pete, a burglar prowling around happens to decide on Jane's house for his nightly raid, crawls through the window, and tip-toes in without being noticed by Jane. He is startled at sight of the revolver in her hand, is about to make a hasty retreat, but seeing that she is all alone, overpowers her, gets possession of the revolver, smothers her screams with the dainty wrap she is wearing, ties her securely in the chair where she is sitting, and proceeds to burglarize. He is greatly surprised to find the little heap of jewelry and other valuables. On taking immediate advantage of the windfall, he finds Jane's farewell note to her sweetheart. This is too much for him. The heartbroken tone of the note, the presence of the pretty girl, arouses the spark of manhood in him, and the sense of shielding the woman in distress, which every man possesses. His mind, rendered alert and resourceful by the needs of his craft, is quick to act. He forces Jane to call her sweetheart on the telephone, then has them send for a clergyman, and at the point of the revolver, sees that they are married. Having accomplished this good deed, while the lovers are happily engrossed in each other, oblivious of their surroundings, Pete quietly walks away with the swag he had previously gathered.

Here you have a brief synopsis of the story. I've used a very simple and direct style, keeping in mind the fact that it was intended for the blasé and

sophisticated mind of the scenario editor and producer. In this matter you find yourself at a great disadvantage. Instead of addressing yourself directly to the normally impressionable mind of the public as story writers of the other sort do, you are addressing yourself to an expert in his line, to whom practically nothing is new, whose mind is surfeited with stories of all kinds and calloused to the mere beauties of style.

With regard to the length of the synopsis, opinions vary. I simply say let it be adequate to its purpose. As the Irishman when asked how long a man's leg should be, answered naively, "Long enought to reach from his body to the ground."

"A MAN'S A MAN"

CAST AND DESCRIPTION OF CHARACTERS

Jane.....A young society girl,
Jim.....A successful business man, her fiance.
Mrs. Orr...A young widow, leader in her social set.
Pete.....A burglar.
A hard looking character of the ex-convict type, should be about fifty years old in appearance.
Mr. Dean.....An overdressed old roue.
A middle aged clergyman, a maid, guests at the garden party and others as indicated in the story.

Period—Present.
Location—U. S. A.
Season—Summer.

The object of the above information is self evident. It is for the types of characters, costuming, manners, national customs, style of architecture, etc.

A play supposed to take place in Egypt in the second dynasty of the Pharaohs, or in China in the time of Confucius, would of course be radically different in all such details.

Scene 1.

In the beautiful garden of Mrs. Orr's mansion.

There are numerous Chinese lanterns, festoons, garlands, tables laid with refreshments. On a porch in the background is an orchestra, and all other arrangements appropriate for a garden party.

Most of the guests are putting on their wraps, preparing to go home. Jane, a young society girl, is in the foreground engrossed in earnest conversation with Jim, her fiance, a young business man. Mrs. Orr, the hostess, a dashing widow, passes by them, stops, smiles at Jim, drops a small bouquet which she is wearing. Jim picks it up and hands it to her. She thanks him very graciously, and engages him in conversation, then pins a little flower from her bouquet in the lapel of his coat. Jane becomes jealous, quarrels with Jim. He tries to explain. She won't listen to him. The widow looks on with an amused smile. Jane takes off her engagement ring and returns it to Jim, then calls for her wraps. A maid hands them to her. Jim offers to

help her with them but Jane refuses, permitting Mr. Dean, an old roue, who comes up opportunely to do her this service. Jane, in the moment of pique and anger, turns away from Jim, takes the old roue's arm, and they leave the garden. Jim stands sadly thinking for a moment, when Mrs. Orr tries to console him. She says, "Ah, I see you two have quarreled, I congratulate you both! You certainly are the most mismated couple I know, etc." He keeps looking in the direction where Jane went out. Then excusing himself, thanking his hostess and bidding her goodnight, he leaves her and follows his sweetheart. Mrs. Orr turns her attention to the other guests.

Scene 2

Outside the gates of the mansion in which the party has taken place.

Several guests are getting into their automobiles, carriages and various conveyances. Mr. Dean assists Jane into her automobile. Just then Jim comes out and tries to speak to her, also starts to get into her automobile, but she slams the door in his face, tells the chauffeur to drive on, leaving both Jim and the old roue standing there bewildered. Mrs. Orr comes out in time to witness Jim's discomfiture. After a moment, Jim turns and goes slowly on his way home. Mr. Dean turns his attention to Mrs. Orr.

By the locations, orchestra, tables with refresh-

ments, guests, etc., it can be seen at a glance that a garden party is represented. Jane and Jim in the foreground, engrossed in conversation, are easily recognizable as a young couple engaged to be married. The hostess introduces herself by her attitude toward her guests.

Mr. Dean, with his ever-ready attentions to all females, is a type we all know. So having introduced our characters happy and serene, we start a couple of them quarreling, which is the first link in the chain of incidents of our picture-play.

The quarrel is carried into the second scene so as to emphasize it. Also by the action of the scene we further establish the relation of the characters to each other and to their surroundings.

I merely indicate the nature of the dialogue without writing it out in detail, because the present school of producers and actors are accustomed to this form of play, and would find more details rather cumbersome. So I make this compromise. Though as I've said before, I have no doubt that the play of the future will be complete in every way.

Scene 3.

Outside of Jane's home. A handsome suburban residence. Moonlight effect.

The automobile drives up. Jane gets out, dismisses the chauffeur and goes into her house.

Scene 4.

Sitting room in Jane's home, adjoining her bedroom which has portieres half drawn. Obscure light. Everything is delicately feminine and in good taste.

Jane comes in, turns on the switch. Effect of change of light. The maid who has been waiting up for her, is sitting sleepily in a chair. She gets up quickly ready to help her mistress. Jane dismisses her for the night. The maid realizing something has gone wrong, goes quietly out.

In these two scenes we follow Jane. Firstly, because the interest centres principally around her. Secondly, it fits conveniently into the scheme of things to follow her to her destination in her swift automobile, afterwards into the privacy of her home, because this gives time for Jim, who left the scene after her, to proceed on foot to his home. His going on foot moreover accentuates his disappointment in not having accompanied his sweetheart home in her car.

A suburban residence is suggested because it seems more probable that the happenings of the play might transpire without interruption or interference in a secluded thinly populated suburb, than in a crowded district of the city.

In scene three, I mention that the effect of moonlight is desired, because it will serve to indicate the lateness of the hour, also adds a touch of romance to

the scene. The effect of moonlight is suggested in pictures by tinting the film a bluish shade. The film may also be tinted to show the ruddy glow of lamp light, and no end of other effects suitable to various conditions. Delightful results are gotten also by blending a tint and a tone, but as I said before, these things all belong to a different branch of the art. All you need to do in writing your play is to describe clearly and concisely just what effect you want, without any attempt at technical detail, and the producer will accomplish it in his own way.

Scene 5.

Outside of a bachelor apartment house, where Jim lives. Moonlight effect.

He arrives, stands in the doorway, sadly pondering over the quarrel he has just had with his sweetheart, hesitating whether to go at once and try to see her and square matters, or to wait till some more favorable time. Finally decides to let the matter rest, so goes into the house.

Scene 6.

In Jim's den or sitting room. Everything is mannish and clubby. The light is obscure, except for moonlight which shines through the window.

Jim comes in, turns on the switch. He is very moody and morose, crosses over to his table, picks up Jane's picture, looks at it fondly, sits down in a desperate despondent sort of way.

Having seen Jane safely home in the two preceding scenes, we now naturally turn to Jim, because we expect that there is at least a mild curiosity as to his whereabouts. As he is unmarried, it suits our purpose to place him in a bachelor apartment. Besides, having placed Jane in a private residence, it lends variety to the play to give him a different sort of domicile. The action of the two scenes is self explanatory.

Scene 7.

In Jane's sitting room as before.

Jane is still very desperate and sad. She takes up Jim's picture, which is in a dainty frame on her table before her, looks at it fondly, kisses it, then going to a drawer in her desk, takes out a bunch of his letters, also some jewelry, trinkets, and other presents which he had given her, puts them on the table, takes pen and paper and writes a note to him. She tries to hold back her tears, stops once or twice to wipe her eyes, kiss his picture and accuse him of faithlessness. Having finished the note, she reads it over sadly, seals it, addresses it, puts it with the package of letters and presents, takes a last look around the room, kisses Jim's picture once more, says good-bye to her little home, draws the portieres between the bedroom and sitting room, then taking a small revolver from her desk, she prepares to kill herself.

Here by a natural and logical sequence of inci-

dents, we have lead up to a crisis. So we have written the beginning or first part of our play. You will note in the course of its construction the minor or auxiliary characters were properly disposed of, and how we have concentrated all attention on the two principal or leading characters.

Scene 8.

Outside of Jane's house as before.

Pete, a hard, coarse looking character, about forty-five or fifty years old, of the ex-convict type, with a serous melancholy expression, comes prowling along, looking about cautiously to see that he is not observed. He quietly goes up to Jane's house, contemplating how he can break in. After sizing the house up for a moment carefully, he passes around the side.

Scene 9.

Window outside of Jane's bedroom.

Pete comes on cautiously as before. After some little difficulty, opens the window and crawls in.

Scene 10.

In Jane's bedroom.

Pete comes in, still in a melancholy mood, looks about, sees articles of value on the bureau, then indicates that he hears a slight noise in the next room, tip-toes over to the portieres and peeks through.

By introducing Pete at this particular time of the

action we serve two purposes; first, we emphasize his importance by the unexpected moment chosen for his arrival, secondly, we create and intensify tension or suspense in the action of our play, by having left Jane almost in the act of shooting herself. But this suspense must not be dragged out to an unreasonable length, so we return to her in the next scene.

Scene 11.

Inside Jane's sitting room, as before.

She is sitting desperately with the revolver in her hand, just about to kill herself, when her attention is arrested by a noise. She does not look toward her bedroom, but stands looking in the opposite direction, and listens to locate the noise. Just then Pete tip-toes in behind her. Seeing her with a revolver in her hand, he starts to make a hasty retreat, but noting that she is alone, cautiously sneaks up behind her and grabs her revolver hand, holds his other hand over her mouth, so she will not scream, quickly takes the revolver away from her, takes the scarf which she wears over her shoulders, binds it around her mouth, then takes a rope from his pocket, and ties her hand and foot in the chair. Having done this, he quietly goes about with the same melancholy expression, searching the room for valuables.

So we have saved Jane from one crisis by the

timely arrival of the burglar, but have not destroyed our tension or suspense of interest, because we have immediately plunged her into another greater and more interesting crisis.

Scene 12.

In Jim's room, as before.

He is sitting, in the same desperate mood, contemplating Jane's picture. He takes the telephone from his desk, is about to remove the receiver and call Jane up. He hesitates a moment, shakes his head sadly, puts the telephone down, and sits in the same mood as before.

Without abusing our right of intensifying our story, we left Jane in a still more dangerous and critical position than before, but it was necessary to satisfy curiosity regarding Jim, so the situation is entirely natural.

Scene 13.

In Jane's room, as before.

Pete, having made a thorough search, now finds the jewelry and other presents piled upon the table with the love letters. He looks them over with interest, finally comes across the note which Jane wrote to Jim, reads it over, looks at her, then reads it again, looks at Jane interestedly once more. Then making up his mind to straighten up affairs, he looks at the envelope and reads the address. After this he removes the scarf from around Jane's mouth,

takes off the telephone receiver, holds it to her ear and the transmitter to her mouth, and tells her to call Jim up and ask him to come there at once. She at first refuses, but he threatens her and so she reluctantly obeys.

Scene 14.

In Jim's room as before.

Jim hears the telephone ring, quickly takes down the receiver and listens, first in great surprise, then realizing what is wanted, he says "Yes, yes," hangs up the receiver, gets his hat and rushes out of the house.

Scene 15.

Outside of Jim's house as before.

Jim comes out, looks about for a moment, hails a passing cab, gets in and rides off toward Jane's house.

Scene 16.

In Jane's sitting room as before.

Pete now in a business-like manner, puts the scarf once more over Jane's mouth, a necessary precaution, then looking at her with the same melancholy expression he has worn throughout the whole story, tells her that he will go to the door and wait for Jim. He puts the revolver in his pocket, feels her bonds to see that she is carefully tied, then quietly passes out.

Scene 17.

In front hallway of Jane's home, lighted only by moonlight shining through the glass of the door and transom.

Pete tip-toes in, cautiously opens the door, and peers out, then indicates he sees the one he is looking for, and prepares to receive him.

Scene 18.

Outside of Jane's house as before.

Jim drives up in a cab, gets out, dismisses the cabman and rushes in.

Scene 19.

In the hallway as before.

Pete opens the door. Jim comes in, and seeing the obscure figure in the dim light, thinks it is Jane and reaches out for an embrace, when he is confronted by Pete's revolver and commanded to march in quietly. Jim is dumbfounded, but is forced to obey. Pete follows him in.

Scene 20.

In Jane's sitting room as before.

Pete and Jim come in, Pete with his revolver still pointed at Jim. The latter immediately wants to release Jane. Pete orders him to step away from her, shows him Jane's pitiful note, Jim reads it. Then Pete orders him to get down on his knees and

ask her pardon. He does so. Pete releases Jane's bonds and tells her to throw her arms around Jim's neck and kiss him. She is demure, and bashfully refuses, but Pete points the revolver at her and orders her to do so, then she, very much frightened, hugs Jim with all her might. He then orders Jim to go to the telephone and call up a clergyman. Jim hesitates a moment. Pete encourages him by theatening to shoot him if he does not do so at once, so he goes to the 'phone and calls up a clergyman.

The preceding group of scenes are so intimately related that they form one single action, that of bringing the young lovers together, so it has not been necessary to comment upon them separately. In all the scenes in which Jane's note to Jim has been used, it has not been necessary to flash it on the screen, because its text is rendered so obvious by the action leading up to it that it can have but one meaning, that of a heart breaking farewell to her sweetheart, just before leaving this world forever as she intended. So it would be superfluous to show it, besides it would rather be an insult to the intelligence of the average spectator. Whereas, to leave it to his imagination is a neat bit of flattery to his intuition and shrewdness.

By an easy and natural transition, in about the middle of scene twenty, we pass from the middle or second part of our play to the third part or end.

Scene 21.

In a well-to-do clergyman's study.

The clergyman has been sitting up late, writing the scenario of his next Sunday's sermon. He is very intent on his work, but suddenly hearing the telephone bell ring, answers it, saying he will be there at once, and taking his hat and coat, he goes out.

Scene 22.

Inside Jane's sitting room as before.

Jim having finished telephoning, now stands bewildered, wondering what he must do next. Pete orders him to return to his position on his knees before Jane, and orders her to hug him once more. Jane does so, this time very heartily. Pete now directs him to go to the front door and admit the clergyman. Jim hesitates about leaving Pete alone with Jane, but Pete forces him, at the point of the revolver, to do as he is directed. Then Pete goes into Jane's bedroom once more but turns and watches her through the partly drawn portieres.

Scene 23.

Outside of Jane's house as before.

The clergyman comes up hastily, goes to the door and is met by Jim who leads him in.

Scene 24.

In Jane's sitting room as before.

Jim and the clergyman come in. Pete conceals

himself behind the portieres so that he is not seen by the new arrival. Jim is rather embarrassed over the situation. The clergyman stands waiting for instructions. Pete shoves his revolver between the portieres. Jim sees this and quickly explains to the clergyman that he and Jane wish to be married at once. The clergyman consents, takes his book, they stand up ready for the marriage ceremony. The clergyman says at least one witness is necessary. Jim hesitates, looks around, then indicating to Jane that they will call Pete, goes into her bedroom.

Scene 25.

Inside Jane's bedroom as before.

Jim comes in, explains to Pete that he must be bestman. Pete indicates that he isn't dressed for the occasion. Jim says it doesn't matter. Pete tells him alright, that he will be with him in a moment; then crossing to Jane's bureau, combs his hair, powders his nose, etc., with Jane's things, then he and Jim go out together.

Scene 26.

Sitting room as before.

Pete and Jim come in. Pete is introduced to the clergyman. The clergyman starts to perform the ceremony. He gets up to the part where Jim is to place the ring on the bride's finger. Jim indicates that he has no ring. Pete comes to the rescue, tells them wait one moment, steps aside in the fore-

ground so that they won't see what he is doing, takes out an ample leather pouch from his pocket, spills out a handful of rings and other jewelry, after carefully going over the lot, picks out a neat wedding ring, puts the other jewelry back in the pouch which he puts away, then hands the clergyman the wedding ring. The ceremony proceeds. After the ceremony is over, Jim feels in his pocket to give the clergyman money, is embarrassed to find that he has none. Pete comes to the resue once more, draws out a bill, and hands it to the clergyman, who thanks him. The clergyman giving his blessing once more. Pete leads him to the door.

Scene 27.

Outside the front door of Jane's home.

Pete says good-bye to the clergyman, who goes on his way, while Pete returns into the house.

Scene 28.

Jane's sitting room as before.

Pete comes in. Jane and Jim stand there bashfully. Jim shakes Pete's hand, thanks him. Jane holds out her hand and thanks him too. Pete now showing the first sign of humor, since he has been in the story, wipes off his mouth in preparation to kiss the bride. Jane is at first horrified but then thinking he really deserves a kiss, comes up to him prepared to give him his reward. Pete becomes serious once more and respectfully taking her hand,

kisses it, heaves a sigh, and turns away sadly. Jane and Jim look at him with pity. Then Jim tells her how happy he is and how thankful he will always be to the unexpected friend. While they are all absorbed in each other and planning what they will do for Pete, he standing there with head bowed sorrowfully, sees the jewelry and other valuables which he had packed up, so with a last look of farewell to the happy lovers, gathers the swag and passes silently out into the night.

So without having to resort to subtitles, letters or telegrams, we have brought the play to a satisfactory ending. Though the ending is rather by way of being a surprise, still from certain little hints and finger posts, we cannot say that it was entirely unexpected. The denomination of the clergyman was purposely omitted to save any chance of religious feeling. If the producer should have any choice, he can readily adjust the matter to his own liking.

The little touch at the end where the burglar arouses himself from his near-reform and makes off with the swag, though not strictly moral, is so thoroughly human and germane to the character, that I could not omit it. It is moreover reasonable to believe that the happy young couple will not greatly miss what he took, and readily forgive him.

CHAPTER IX

Random Hints

IN producing a picture-play, whether in the studio or outside the garden wall, seashore or mountain, aboard ship or wherever else, a certain wedge shaped space is laid out and marked with lines of some convenient sort to form the actual boundaries within which the artists taking part in the scene must confine their movements.

The narrow end of this space, about five to eight feet wide, starts about eight or ten feet in front of the camera, and spreads out indefinitely, though the important action is kept within a comparatively small space close to the camera. This space varies a little according to the breadth and depth of definition of the lens used.

You see at a glance that this is just contrary to an ordinary stage setting where the widest end of a more or less wedge shaped space is toward the audience and is usually painted in perspective.

The reason for this is that the stage setting is planned for the human eye, whereas the moving

picture setting is planned for the eye of the camera.

Moving picture scenery is not painted in perspective, unless some special effect is desired, because the camera forms its own perspective.

The actual space in which the principal action of the ordinary picture-play takes place is about five or six feet wide and less than ten feet in length. Frequently not even this much space is used, as when the principal characters are brought very close to the camera, and are cut off at the knees or waist. This latter method is called the American Foreground, as the American producers were first to see the advantage of concentrating the spectators' attention on the face of the actor. In this way the subtler points of the picture-play are conveyed by facial expression and by actually speaking the dialogue written or suggested by the author.

Our American method has occasionally been criticised as inartistic, though it really has the precedent of the greatest sculptors and painters for its defense, as you may see in our Metropolitan Museum, or wherever art treasures are exhibited. No doubt this method was taken in the first place from the great masters.

An improved method of rehearsal would be to give out a copy of the manuscript to each of the principal artists who is to take part in the picture-play, some days before the actual time of rehearsal,

so as to give time for a thorough study of the different parts.

The rehearsals must be done according to the convenience of the locations chosen, though there is an obvious advantage in giving a first general rehearsal in the studio or some other fitting place before starting on the actual production of a picture.

Why the time wasted in endless delays preparing scenery and properties has not been taken advantage of for rehearsals is beyond me.

Before actually photographing the different scenes, which it is very seldom convenient to take in rotation, more thorough and detailed rehearsal should be gone through, till each artist is as near perfect in their part, and as entirely at their ease as possible. Then let the action of the scene be photographed, without the necessity of the director distracting the artists' attention by shouting and prompting, which shows up quite as badly on the screen as prompting and directing of a bad first night performance shows up on the ordinary stage.

A book of considerable length might profitably be written on this subject of rehearsals alone.

The reason I have not dealt specifically with the matter of multiple reel picture-plays, which are now coming into so much prominence, is because that in taking the two, three or more reels as a whole, or complete picture-play, the method of construction is the same as in a single reel subject.

It is so clearly a neglect of a very particular vantage point of picture-play production, to have a character pass from the interior of one house or room, directly into the interior of another, that I have not thought it necessary to dwell on it in the body of this book. The reason for avoidance of this anomaly is obvious. In doing it you defeat your own purpose by destroying the illusion of two distinct houses maybe some considerable distance apart, and you destroy the continuity of your story by neglecting to keep up with your characters in their movements. However, after you have clearly established the relative positions of your houses, if the action of your characters demands rapidity, keeping in mind the fact that the development of your characters in action, is more important than the technique by which you present the characters, you may take whatever liberties you see fit in the matter.

In fact as I said before there is no hide-bound rule in picture-play making. The great end and object of the art is to express characters in action, and all rules and technique have been created for this purpose.

A point frequently neglected is having characters go off, say to the right of the scene, and immediately enter on the right of the following scene. This must inevitably suggest to the spectator that the character in question has gone all the way around the

earth, or taken some other circuitous method of reaching his destination.

Now I come to another point of construction which I will notice for just a moment or so. I mean the "Subtitle" and its use. We have noted that dramatic action is made up chiefly of contrast and conflict. There is nothing so dramatic and nothing so effective on the screen, as a conflict of some kind between two people. A conflict of wit, a conflict of swords or fists, a conflict of passions. There is nothing more dramatic and intensely interesting than conflict between two or more people, except another sort of conflict which is frequently far more dramatic, namely the conflict which takes place in the solitary human mind. Now the Sub-title, which is purely a convention of picture-play making, is what we must frequently fall back on to help out this important sort of conflict. It should be used very sparingly, and never when the same knowledge can be given to the spectator and the same effect created by action or facial expression, or even by the use of a letter, telegram or diary. But keeping in mind our leading rule that the highest aim of the picture-play is to show the greatest quantity and highest quality of human life and character, it is very often necessary to use the subtitle.

In some of my recent picture-plays, I've been praised for managing to convey my meaning without any subtitles, letters, telegrams or other "writ-

ing on the wall." And it is always a pleasure to set aside or overcome such conventions.

In many picture-plays one may manage to express characters quite clearly and satisfactorily without any subtitles. But if it is desirable to show some subtle point which can't be conveyed by mere action, then we must fall back on this really childish means.

You may contend that there are all sorts of abstruse things revolving in the mind of the spectator, but this cannot be depended upon. The bald and frequent use of subtitles to cover up great gaps in continuity is of course to be condemned, also the bromidic forms such as, "A week later," "Next day," and other expressions which have lost their meaning by too frequent use, and really convey about as much idea to the eye accustomed to seeing them, as the ticking of a clock does to the ear inured to its sound.

Technique was made for the picture-play. The picture-play was not made for technique. So you must often sacrifice niceties of construction for the sake of clearer and fuller expression of character and human life.

One is usually expected to furnish a brief synopsis or short story of their picture-play with the manuscript submitted, however, information regarding this matter, also the particular shape, size and form of manuscript desired by the various producers, their

scale of prices and methods of dealing with the writer, can be readily obtained by applying to them personally or by letter. Most of them have brief pamphlets printed for the purpose.

There are upwards of ten thousand picture-plays produced every year in the various studios throughout the world, and a fair average of these are shown to about twenty millions of spectators of all classes and nations before they are finally put on the shelf. This certainly should be sufficient stimulus and inspiration to the ambitous writer.

With regard to trick pictures or photographing illusions, they belong to another branch of the technique, which would hardly pay you to study as they are going more and more out of vogue every day. Artistically the vision, the double exposure and other illusions created by the camera, have about the same standing as the subtitle. They should be avoided when more legitimate methods answer the purpose.

Now what the general picture-play producer knows, is not of great importance, as it principally concerns the picture-play of the past. What really counts is what he doesn't know, and what you by persistent labor and patience may hope to teach him, for it concerns the picture-play of the future.

I repeat here what I said before, that no great art can be founded on the study of sordidness, vice and ugliness.

It is the mission of the picture-play to teach by showing the light and not the darkness, the beautiful and not the repulsive, the sublime and not the abyss. Let this be your motto from a high moral principal and sense of responsibility to the millions of men, women and children throughout the world who will profit by your art.