THE "NEW ART" AS DISCOVERED BY E. H. SOTHERN

I have discovered a "new art" in posing for the moving pictures, an art that I can perhaps best describe as the concentrated essence of expressiveness. When I first decided to "act" in the various pictures for the Vitagraph Company, people said to me, "Oh, but it will be easy for you because you are an actor of experience and have the nuances of your profession." And this seemed very reasonable; but I found when I began posing that "acting for the movies" was a very different thing indeed from acting for a living audience, and that my work in the past, all the experience that I had acquired in years on the stage, the gesture, the voice, the expression, not only did not avail me, but rather stood in the way of the work I had prepared to do in my real farewell to the American public, for that is what I consider this work with the moving pictures. I am actually saying good-bye to all my friends all over the country simultaneously, and this is an inspiration to me in my acting, because I feel that I am acting before the largest audience I have ever known—for three million people is really a very large audience!

Since I have commenced my work here and know the vast number of people who are entertained, instructed, whose thoughts are influenced, whose daily lives are made less difficult and sordid by the pictures from the reel, I have become vastly interested in the moving picture achievement. However much we may enjoy the legitimate stage from either side of the footlights, however much we may feel that it is the great means of culture of the present day, that it exacts the greatest mental response of any art from its audience, we cannot afford any longer to ignore the new art of the moving picture, an art that reaches ten million people a day across the planet, that is the fifth greatest industry in the world and one of the greatest, if not the greatest, influence over the youth of America in existence today.

What shall we do with such a tremendous power for good or evil? I have been asked this several times in the last few weeks and I do not know that I am ready yet to answer it, although I am more and more convinced that it is a question that this nation must answer and that the influence must be set moving in the right channel. I have heard that the moving pictures influence the young people of America to a far greater degree than all the churches combined today. Now, we would consider it a very important thing if our churches were not all headed in the right direction, all eager to do the utmost for the enlightenment of the country they serve.
A RECENT PICTURE OF MR. E. H. SOTHERN: Although not posed for any part of a moving picture play, one feels in the sensitive quality of face and hands rich capacity for achievement in the "new art" of which Mr. Sothern writes in this issue.
AN INTERESTING STUDY of Mr. Sothern's expression in "The Chattel" which he has recently posed for the Vitagraph Company.

MR. SOTHERN making up in the Vitagraph dressing room for his part in "The Man of Mystery". In the very act of putting on the make-up one feels a subtle change in the expression of Mr. Sothern's face.
MR. SOTHERN in a serious moment in "The Chattel," a moment when dramatic activity, violent gesture are impossible, and all that he has to "say" must be accomplished through his facial expression: Shown above.

AN EXCELLENT idea of how complete a story can be told with the simplest gesture, yet every line of the face made dramatic.
A PICTURE OF MR. SOTHERN in one of the Vitagraph picture-plays in which it would be difficult for even his best friends to recognize him, so completely is he changed by make-up, pose and expression. When one realizes that this picture is without gesture, in fact, without movement on the part of either people and the matter of expression confined almost wholly to the eyes one appreciates how completely new and different from the usual work of the actor is the art of the moving play.
MR. SOTHERN DISCOVERS A “NEW ART”

Naturally, while I am working here with the Vitagraph people, I am listening to all that is being done by the new art of the film, not merely to the facts about the size of the audiences and the enthusiasm, but the power of this art to reach the people along all the lines of democratic education.

Some few weeks ago I was sitting in Central Park watching some children with their nurses; the nurses were very much absorbed in each other, and the children, though out of doors, seemed to be having rather a desolate time. It occurred to me that it would be a very wonderful thing if every park could employ a number of teachers to brighten the lives of the poor little rich children that were playing there, teachers who knew all about birds and squirrels and trees and flowers and who could make the hours out of doors a magic time for the little folks looking so drearily about into a world empty because not understood. But now it seems to me that a still greater work could be done in the parks and playgrounds all over the world by the introduction of moving picture lessons about outdoor life. I am as certain as though I could see those same little children that they would sit in delight before a moving picture showing them the merry ways of the wood folks, the story of the provident little squirrel, the aggressive sparrow, the busy bee, the wise little ant, or the miraculous legend of the growth of flowers; the way the park commissioners, for instance, get the green lawn that the children play on, or the story of the nesting time of birds, the feeding of the young. There is no limit whatever to the opportunity for the instruction of children through moving pictures. This, it seems to me, is the great power that the film will have in the future.

I can see the opportunity of education through the film extending out in so many channels that it is absolutely limitless. Just as today so many people are getting their musical education through the machine, so I believe millions of people in the future will receive their education by pictures. There is the problem of whether or no education that comes so easily will not possibly deaden the capacity for creative thought. I doubt if this problem can be settled except after testing out the matter through an entire generation of educational effort. While it really requires more mental effort to respond to the written word than to the picture, it is a well known fact that the pictures make a more indelible impression upon the memory, and this is an immense advantage for children in public schools, in any method of education that has a limited time and a varied curriculum, with children who have but a few years of educational opportunity.
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It has not yet been proven that the so-called machine music has diminished the output of musical genius. As a matter of fact, here in America at least, more music is being created than ever before. And while music does not come to people through a mechanical process with the same spontaneity that it possesses straight from the hand or the voice of the great musician, pictures could be used in a process of educating children by the reel which would be quite as good, if not better, than any illustrations that are published in the average school book. Also the very magic of what the reel could accomplish, for instance, in such studies as botany, horticulture, architecture, bird life and animal life, must stimulate the imagination of any child of even average interest in life.

A QUESTION that has also been asked me many times since I have been interested in moving pictures is the effect of the ordinary photo-play upon the mental and spiritual quality of the moving picture audience—the play that has been produced wholly to amuse—melodrama of the most exciting, intoxicating character. “Can this be good for our young people, whose lives must of necessity continue drab and monotonous?” Personally, it seems to me decidedly that it is good for them, and the more drab and monotonous their lives the more important that some entertainment should be provided which will furnish a contrast, will bring them escape for the moment from their gray existence, which through sheer interest and excitement will furnish mental stimulus. The vital thing in every life is that it should possess, at least occasionally, some exhilaration, some release from material pressure. We cannot hope that people whose lives are all barren, filled only with exhaustive labor, so planned that hope does not illuminate even youth, should greatly desire to spend the few spare moments with which fortune favors them, in education of however cheerful or popular a nature. The sad, the sick, the hopeless need violent reaction in any entertainment which is given them, and there is little danger through this reaction, certainly not as much as through continued mental depression.

One of the strangest experiences in this posing for the “movies” is the absence of the audience. It is like acting in a continual rehearsal until you realize suddenly that you must become accustomed to doing without that wonderful stimulus which the audience offers to every actor who moves it. I am sure all actors like myself on the legitimate stage rely equally for producing emotional effects upon good scenery, the use of the voice and the response of the audience. Also on the legitimate stage we have an opportunity of testing effects
again and again. We have an entire stage at our disposal, and if a "picture" is not satisfactory at one angle we may test it out at another; I am sure too that every actor relies upon certain modulation of the voice to infuse emotion not only in the audience, but into his acting. We do our acting before the moving camera absolutely denuded of such help as this, with even our gestures limited, with our space for moving about cut to the narrowest allowance. If we attempt to express some sudden violent emotion with a wide gesture we are told quickly that we are out of the picture, if we stride across the stage to express irritation, annoyance, we are out of the picture, if we glance away from the people with whom we are acting our glance is out of the picture. In fact, the first thing to learn in acting in the "movies" is to keep in the picture. Everything is limited for the actor except his facial expression, and that must be exaggerated beyond anything he has ever permitted himself on the legitimate stage. Frequently, every variety of emotion—anger, rage, pride, joy, sorrow—must be given out through the reel to the canvas and then to an audience solely by the varying expression of the eyes and the mouth. That is why I feel, as I said at the beginning of this article, that I had discovered a new art which was the essence of concentrated expression.

Another thing you find very quickly is that you have no opportunity of working up to your scene. In the play written for the legitimate stage usually an actor works up through his first and second act to the final culmination of emotional expression in the third. I shall always remember my bewilderment when I discovered one day that I was being called upon to pose my third act first of all because that scenery was ready and the lights were placed so that that particular part of the room could be best photographed. And it may be that in one moving play an actor will be photographed in various parts of a building or various parts of a town or various parts of a country, according as the director desires to make a particular play intensely and vividly realistic, so that there is no opportunity for putting yourself in a psychological state and living your part from hour to hour, of becoming the actual man you portray.

In the moving picture art you are never your hero for one moment, you are always yourself intensely interested in showing through your expression the kind of a man the hero was, for you see you are never with your audience. You are working for the screen, not for the people, and you are doing what the screen demands. That is why every expression must be intensified in moving pictures, because

(Continued on page 642.)