

PORTLAND'S MOVING PICTURE SHOWS

A LOT OF MATERIAL FACTS, SOME CAUSTIC CRITICISM, A LITTLE PRAISE, HUMANE HUMOR AND A PREACHMENT

BY LEON BAER

One year ago there were only three moving picture shows in the city of Portland. A recent investigation reveals 15 places of this form of amusement scattered throughout the business district of the city. Eleven of these are of the 6-cent variety, or Nickelodeon shows, the remaining six charge 10 cents admission, and are about the same show.

It's much like buying a bowl of soup somewhere for 5 cents and then going to a better joint and plating down a dime for the same sort of soup in a fancier bowl. Only these shows are not as nourishing or helpful as soup.

Of these sixteen shows, some investigated facts may be of interest. Any attempt to estimate the exact number of Portlanders who are instructed, amused, disgusted and bored by means of moving pictures during the course of a year would seriously test the ability of a mathematical wonder—and I'm far from strong.

But the estimated number of people who attend the two largest moving picture shows in Portland averages between 10,000 and 15,000 every week. The others are like rats, according to their size, location and the quality of stuff they present.

The largest rent paid by a moving picture concern is \$700 per month—the smallest rent is \$175 monthly. Approximately the rent is \$375 per month. In addition to rent there is the expense of lights, heating, and the services of employees.

of objective impression upon the eye, but if a photographic genius of the name of Muybridge had not come through and showed that he had the welfare of future generations at heart, ten million people would now be moving pictureless.

Muybridge made the initial motion picture film by depicting the movements of a racing horse. Having no camera that would serve the purpose, Muybridge resorted to invention. He placed 24 cameras side by side, parallel with a wall facing the sun, at the border of the racing track. Each camera was operated by electricity and possessed a rapid snapshot shutter. These shutters were kept open by means of silk threads which crossed the track and were attached to the wall. As the horse came running down the course, his body broke each thread in succession, and the shutters clicked in response. The photographs, when developed, and placed side by side on one strip, had the effect of one continuous picture.

It was here that the motion picture industry began. At first the experiments were disheartening and highly unsatisfactory, owing to the fact that the photos when enlarged lacked all detail and sharp clear lines. However the appearance in 1888 of the highly sensitized dry plate, relieved this difficulty, and motion pictures were an actual fact.

Here a new phase of the question arose, namely, the possibility of reproduction in such a manner as to seem realistic to an audience. For several years inventors struggled with this difficulty and many unsatisfactory apparatus were made; but it was not until the early nineties (90) that our own Thomas Edison completed the work, and gave to the world his practical invention, the kinesiograph. Later the still more successful cinematograph took its place.



distance to the moon. (This alleged distance will be properly measured when the aeroplanes get to doing good work.) This, mind you, is only for one day, and if you were to multiply this distance by the 365 days these shows are doing business, you could gain a snickering idea of what the magnitude of the moving picture industry really is.

detail they give their production before the artist with the camera. Play-writing for the moving-picture shows has become an art in itself, and there are any number of writers who devote their time and attention to this form of plays alone. Exhibitors seek eagerly for spectacular effects, and enterprising producers naturally resort to clever devising of trick films.

proceeds to change every feature into 57 different varieties of facial contortions, it seemingly never occurs to us that these and the hundred and one things that make our eyes amazed and our mouths stand open like cellar doors in St. John—as I say, it never occurs to us that all these are the simplest kinds of tricks, or effects, that are oftentimes obtained by stopping the camera, and sometimes by patching or cutting the films.

and indifferent has been spoken and written concerning the influence of amusement, and the value to any community of raising the standard of entertainment, it might be well to consider what these moving pictures are doing for their audiences, and especially for their enormous and always increasing audience of children.

In the infant stage of the motion-picture industry, to produce laughter seemed to be the goal of each manufacturer; the films were universally made with this aim in view. The unlicked hero or heroine of the film happened to have as many accidents of a mirth-provoking nature as the mind of the fertile photographer could conceive.

Always there was a ducking scene, in which everyone got wetted and we laughed till our sides ached. And then came the interminable chase, always along 17 miles of roughly wooded territory, with endless rocks and pitfalls, and every time any of the participants fell down how we cackled and guffawed. In the last act, the victim always was caught, and the curtain fell as the mob danced about the luckless wight, beating him with clubs and rails. Ho, how we laughed, and spent our nickels night after night to see this performance.

Gradually, however, the enterprising

and fairies who went away from our burndrum lives years ago, come back once again through the medium of a film, and all the wonderful things which we half believe are produced in such a manner that we are convinced of their existence by their animated charm and lifelike manner.

As a power in politics, and especially in the present campaign, the motion pictures are playing a prominent part. Secretary Taft was the first candidate to be put on a film, and now we have yards and yards of political photos. (One or two of them was of Bryan, in his home, shaking hands with prospective voters, bowing, smiling, at his desk, making a speech, etc., etc. I would suggest that it would be an economic feature to preserve this film for the future Presidential campaign when he runs again.)

Educational and philanthropic bodies are using motion pictures in their work. Various settlement and charity organizations are co-operating with the motion picture industry, with a view toward educational quality and elevation of ideals. In many parts of the world religious orders are taking advantage of this method to bring before the masses stories of the Bible. What is more realistic than the Pathé film, the Passion Play? All of us know something, or much, of the life of Jesus. Possibly some of us have felt that it might be true, or it might not be, that a Christ reigned at one time. Here we have seen this film, we go away forced to believe that he lived, and walked on earth and died. Our lukewarm faith becomes a certainty and all because this strong dramatic appeal to the eye impresses its truth upon us.

In just the same manner we are impressed when other historical facts appear before us via the motion pictures, whether it be "Alice in Wonderland" or "The Courtship of Miles Standish," "Dumas' Camille," "Nort in 'A Doll's House'" or "Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch." The reproduction of the world's greatest drama, notably the Shakespearean plays, are attracting unusual attention.

But after all has been said and done, there is another, the harmful, side of this form of amusement. So cheap a form of entertainment and one so positive of an enormous patronage is always sure of commercial success, though it cheats the true and rightful demand of the dramatic appetite of the public, at the same time that it undermines and tears down all principles governing good dramatic entertainment. It may be necessary for the base and indifferent adult to have his instincts and perceptions of drama battered into existence by means of this cheap form of art, but it is nothing short of a crime to undermine the fresh and elemental impulse of a child by feeding his imagination with too much moving pictures. A reverent, careful training of a child's imagination, directed by love and forethought, by means of the drama as a symbol, will instill the most deep-rooted allegiance to truth, loyalty and honor. On the other hand, his imagination will be stultified and erroneously fed by violent, illogical and grossly untrue scenes and scenes having no relation to life, and are only invented to meet the limitations of the picture film and the yawning pocket of the manufacturer.

The child who attends such shows regularly develops neurasthenia (if you don't know what that is ask any physician—a disease condition of the nervous system). Hysteria will develop (yes, Mrs. Fool-mind, your little daughter or young son can have mild hysteria by an over-excitation or stimulation of this nervous organization, just as probably you have them when you see a mouse or drink too much tea). A constant and unceasing stimulation of a child's imagination and stupefying of a child's mind, his imagination is easily betrayed—and what, oh what, ye sage ones, is a child with no imagination? He is devoid of the most potent help that Mother Nature has bestowed upon him, to put him in touch with us—rather shall we not say, to put us of a gray, and scornful, dull, age in touch and keeping with his beautiful, clear world of dreams and fancies? If we vitiate his imagination by putting the wrong pictures before him, how can we hope for his little humanity to bespeak our big humanity? How can we hope to help or foster his ideals if we prevent his being animated by an all-enfolding spirit?

Do not let pass any opportunity presented by a child's craving instinct for the dramatic, to mold and guide his flexible mind and heart. Take him to see educational pictures, let him view in pictorial form things he has heard of or seen; but for goodness sake, and the child's sake, cut out such travesties as "The Burglar's Revenge," "The Little Match Girl Kidnapped," "Child Slaves in the South," "Rebelling in China," "A Western Holdup," and all such gaudy and undisputed rot.

The worst evil, however, of attending moving picture shows, lies in the fact that such undue excitation of nerves and eyes tend to physical and mental injury. We adults sit in the darkened show place with tense brows and fixed eyes, while the film spitters its hurried course before our bewildered and strained vision.

Our eyes smart and sting, frequently are moist, and just as our vision is dimmed and our eyes strained just so, our minds and imaginations are confused and rendered dull by a sequence of action absolutely improbable, and wholly impossible, in real life. We leave the theater with our eyes blinking or half shut, rubbing them or holding them at half-mast against the sudden glare of electric light that we face at the end of the act. For hours afterward we experience a faint, almost imperceptible tightening of the eyeballs, and the lids bat nervously. Statistics show that a very great part of the eye troubles so much commented upon among the children in our public schools is due to constant attendance at moving picture shows, the eyes being affected by the flickering of the film.

Still, after all this last harangue, do you suppose there will be any material decrease in the attendance at Portland's moving picture shows? By the way, did you ever notice that the pictures on the film are the only known place in all the wide world that ever rounds up thieves, rewards the virtuous, punishes the guilty, and invariably finds a policeman when he is needed. He is ever there, Johnny on the spot—Consistency, thou art a mule!

Very few people have any well-defined

This is not such an easy feat as it ap-



ILLUSTRATED SONGS ARE INVARIABLY PATHETIC.

idea of what amount of work and time and money is back of the spluttering film that takes our skeletons from us. In the construction of a motion picture there is much to be considered aside from the technical side of the art. Plays have to be prepared in much the same manner they are for a theater, with the exception that all dialogue is omitted, and the plot is the chief point. (Yes, John Henry,

pears to the layman, especially when it is desired to obtain convincing pictures of travels, tours in the ozone and underneath the bony deep, magicians, stunts, and other purely imaginative and fantastic illusions that are produced at these shows.

When we see Uncle Rubie knocked head fo'most of the street-car that travels at a rate that makes our rapid Jefferson-

home, clad appropriately in a near seal-skin saque and French-heeled pumps, to die in ten feet of snow at the church steps, who is to tell us that the snow is only cotton or sawdust, and the swirling flakes that sweep over her prostrate form while the orchestra grinds out "Elizabeth-crossing-the-ice music," is produced by drafts of air from carefully arranged electric fans?

And in that famous old favorite, where

manufacturers began to realize that the art of motion pictures presented greater possibilities than horseplay acts and highly colored sentimental song albums. From the inception of this idea both American and foreign films have improved to such an extent that we now see films of high educational value, and many of religious tendency. This is not to say that humor has taken a back

In several of the moving-picture theaters the photograph is used to emit sounds that supply to the pictured shadows a metal voice. This phase of the show is most acceptable to the well-stimulated appetites of the greedy moving-picture public. In other houses, vocalists warble zany and irresponsibly while the wonderfully and fearfully colored song slides tell their story. Theatrical "singlets" in moving-picture theaters here who are paid from \$25 to \$35 weekly for perpetrating their songs. Each show works what are termed three shifts—two regular men who attend to running the moving-picture machines and the third man who is called a "swing man." (The term "swing" in Webster's Unabridged, but no doubt it will find a place there if moving pictures continue till the next edition gets printed.)

The swing man, Mabel, is the fellow who works while the other regular chap eats, or does for a ride, or has his photo taken. This swing man works for several houses at once, and is, in short, a general utility man. He swings in between shifts, and works an hour or so in each place. Therefore he is called a swing man. And for his swinging he gets about thirty big, fat dollars each week. How would you like to be the swing man?

The regular men at the machines average from \$25 to \$40 a week. They've got writing for the Sunday papers skinned a city block.

Despite the fact that there was merit in the new invention and the manufacture of motion pictures offered vast possibilities and returns for its promoters, still the idea that these machines would ever be more than a sort of scientific toy, a turn to hold the vacillating attention of a fickle public, did not seem to occur to anyone.

It remained for a Frenchman, Antoine Lumiere, to inaugurate a series of public exhibitions of motion pictures, and these soon attracted such universal attention that within a short time the art was introduced to the American theatergoing public, the first exhibition of the machine taking place in June, 1895, at Keith's Union Square Theater, in New York. In the 12 years that have elapsed since then there have been marvelous improvements and progress in the motion picture industry, and the poorly constructed, slow-moving apparatus of a dozen years ago have given way to machines almost perfect in mechanism.

The largest producers in the world are Pathé Freres, who maintain posing corps of clever actors in all parts of the world, and whose shops in Paris for the turning out of trick and transformation films employ thousands of expert workmen.

The Pathé films are always absolutely correct as regards local color, and their trademark—a flat silhouetted rooster of the weather-vane variety—always bespeaks for the film the same quality that the word Sterling carries when stamped on silver. Other producers of note are Edison, Kalem, the Vitograph Company and the Biograph Company. Oftentimes these firms spend thousands of dollars in making a single film, and circulate more coin of the realm in staging their films than most theatrical managers devote to an entire production. It is interesting to note here that many of the best pictures were formerly procured right from the drama or play as presented at the theater, until a recent injunction against the

The films and song slides, every move a picture, Herbert, are procured from Eastern cities, New York, Chicago and sleepy old Philadelphia ranking first. In fact, in the latter city there are four different manufacturers of films, and in New York the industry has taken the dignified form of a trust, and there are 25 or 30 agencies alone in this country.

These song slides are all hand-colored, and most of them look like they were colored after night by a near artist or the correspondence method. The songs are nearly all highly sentimental, and we all sniffle and let the drops run off our noses while we watch every movement of the immaculate young man who sits on a bank, regardless alike of his rheumatics and big trousers, and weeps for Mary who is weeping under a mulberry tree in the valley. The average rental of one of these monstrosities is 75 cents for a "set." A set is the several pictures and scenes depicted during one song.

The moving-picture films are rented through agencies, and the rental varies according to the condition of the film and its popularity. Most of the shows run six films each week, and the average rental is 1.5. That is to say, when a film comes fresh in its pristine glory from the manufacturers it is more expensive than another film, cracked, imperfect or stale to theater-goers. Some shows change their program twice, some three times each week; therefore, with two films at each performance, the average expense is \$60 per week for the use of films alone.

Add to this the rental of an electric piano or orchestra at about \$30 per month, the ticket-taker, whose salary is from \$12 to \$25 per week, the ticket-seller, who averages from \$8 to \$10 each week, and you are beginning to have a faint idea of the number of people who have to patronize these shows to make them a paying proposition. You'd be surprised to know that women and children lead in attendance, but it's a fact.

From present indications we have every reason to believe that the great mass of the amusement-loving and greedy public will never tire of gazing on the manifold and doubtful charms of the moving picture.

While true that the motion-picture machine is distinctly a modern innovation, the discovery upon which it is founded dates back of the Christian era. An Egyptian named Ptolemaeus, an old chap who was rich enough to afford dabbling in literature and science, and who wrote occasionally for the Sunday papers, and who no doubt would have had an L.L.D. bestowed on him willy nilly if he had lived now, as I say, Ptolemaeus discovered that the human eye possesses the power of retaining an object or light for some indefinite time after said object or light had vanished from the radius of said eye. He proved this by a practical demonstration. Tracing a line of color (no, Emma dear, this has nothing to do with the color line as drawn in the South), tracing this line, presumably vivid, along the surface of a glassed object, Ptolemaeus was able to show that by revolving the object with great velocity, the comparatively short line of color appeared to extend completely around the object. A lot of us clever folk have discovered this seemingly astounding thing since, but Ptolemaeus beat us to it. However, he didn't patent his discovery.

This was 130 B. C. It was far into the eighteenth century before anyone got up sufficient ambition to peer ahead into the future and consider the millions of people who would be peevishly clamoring for moving pictures. During this interval several enterprising inventors devised parlor games and nice lady-like exhibitions and tests to show the duration

manufacturers of the films was brought about by the playwright and the actor who presented the play, and has rendered impossible any further stealing on the part of the film makers.

There are, according to statistics, 12,000 of these shows in the United States, and the films that are run through these machines during one day, would, if placed in juxtaposition (that's just plain, everyday side-by-side) form a line 145,000 miles in length, that's more than one-half the



THE FIRST "MOVING" PICTURE.

I agree with you, some of our modern plays, as presented in Portland, could well do away with their dialogue and pay a little more attention to the plot. After the play has been accepted, it is the work of the stage manager, or producer, to attend to the details. Scenery is designed and executed. "Props" are secured, costumes are planned and actors engaged. Rehearsals are given in a large, commodious frame building usually erected for this purpose alone, and when the company is absolutely perfect in every

street cars look like a snail; when we see the unfortunate tramp run over in 30 different places; when we see the lovely pale-face maiden dragged all over Eastern Oregon at the heels of a 12-horse team and sudden death, to say nothing of the equally improbable and sometimes improper visions of beautiful damsels dressed a la Anna Held or Mother Eve, popping out of urns and other respectable places, or when a face appears on the curtain and immediately

Fearless Fido, the dachshund, discovers the house on fire and every inmate sleeping as peacefully as a coon—as when the flames and smoke pour out from every crack and crevice, and we watch Fido save the entire family, including the cook lady, the American flag and a life-size, enlarged crayon portrait of grandma—who, oh who, is to tell us that the great fire scene was produced by means of chemicals, and that Fearless Fido had been trained for weeks past to do his little heroic stunt?

At this time, when so much good, had

sent, only that it is cleaner and more generally good in quality—a sort of catering to an intelligent appreciation of humorous situations, as it were. These lessons that the motion pictures give us are not easily forgotten. The heroes and heroines of legendary romances, of historical fact of whom we have known through the instrumentality of the motion pictures. The nymphs, mermaids