

REVIEW of REVIEWS

September, 1910 Vol. XLII No. 3

THE MOVING PICTURE AND THE NATIONAL CHARACTER

MOVING pictures are the main American amusement of to-day. You must appreciate this first of all. Study this table:

CITIES	POPULATION	M. P. THEATERS	SEATING CAPACITY
New York	4,338,322	450 (est.)	150,000
Chicago	2,000,000	310 "	93,000
Philadelphia	1,491,082	160 "	57,000
St. Louis	824,000	142 "	50,410
Cleveland	600,000	75 "	22,500
Baltimore	600,000	83 "	24,900
San Francisco	400,000	68 "	32,400
Cincinnati	350,000	75 "	22,500
New Orleans	325,000	28 "	5,600

In New York City, the moving-picture center of the world, there are 250 "shows" against only 76 regular theaters. Some of the latter include moving pictures on their bills.

The chief combination of manufacturers produces 20,000 feet a week of new films—of which eighty copies apiece must be made. Mr. Edison's royalty, begun only recently, amounts from this source to an income of \$8000 a week. The middlemen or "exchanges" pay manufacturers \$9,000,000 for films, which the former rent at about \$18,000,000 a year to the actual exhibitors or showmen. They in turn collected nickels and dimes in 1909, at their 10,000 ticket-windows, amounting to \$57,500,000. And these audiences numbered more than two and a quarter million souls *per day*—three times the audiences of all the regular theaters in America put together!

When an enterprise as vast as this gets into the field of morals, something serious is bound to happen one way or the other. So far, it is hap-



*Kinemacolor
35 mm film
projector*

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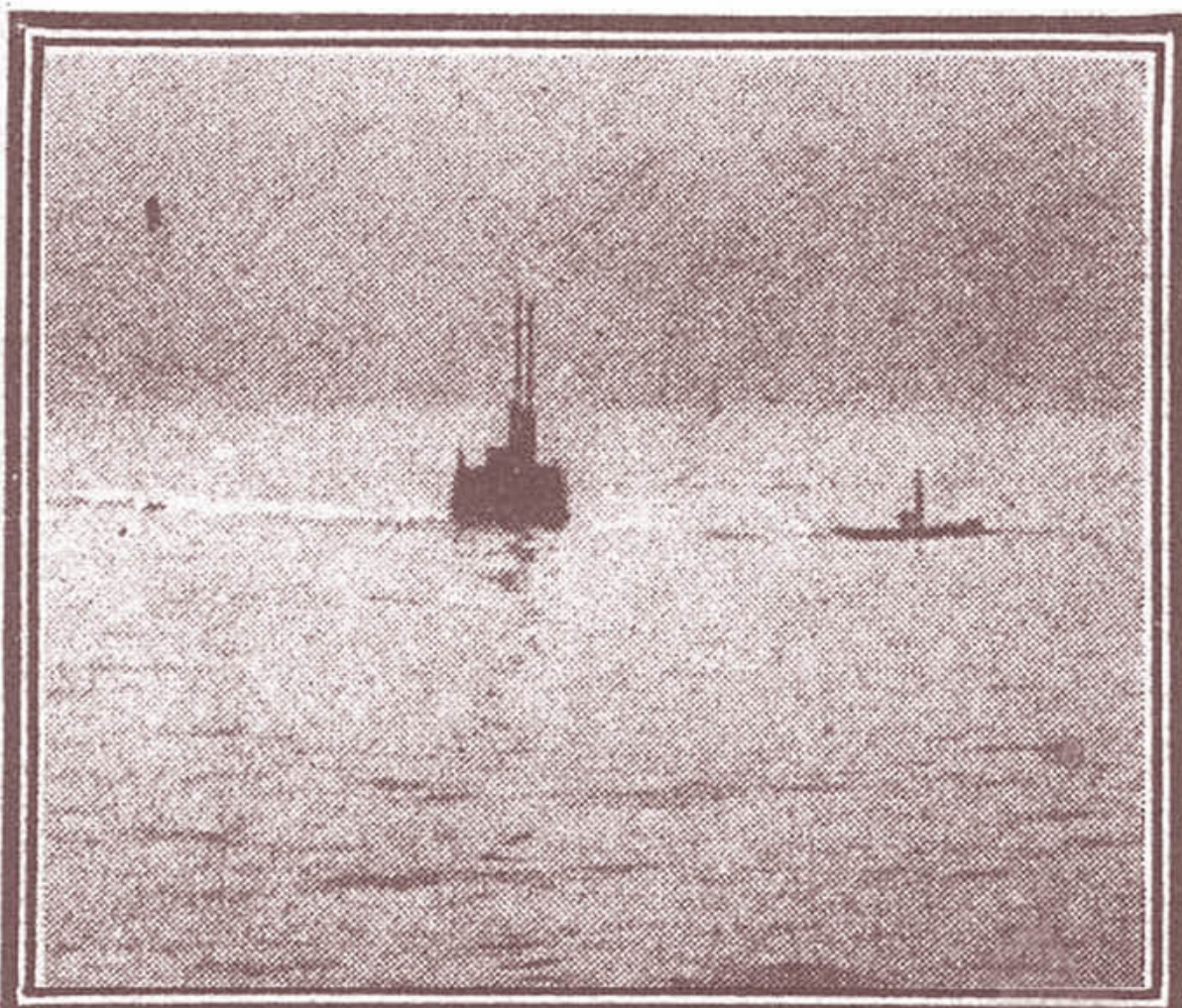
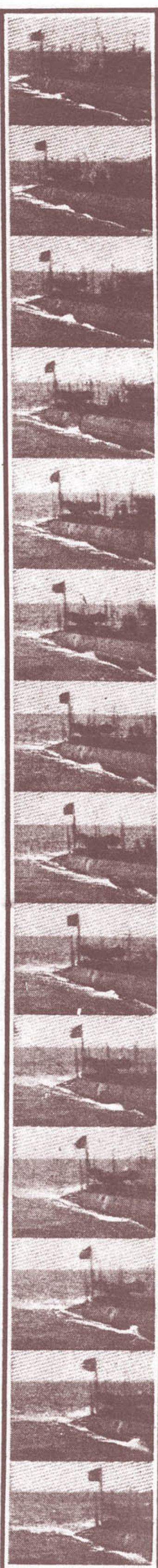
pening both ways. For instance, we quote from a last month's newspaper:

Charles Judson witnessed a "suicide" scene last night in a moving picture show at Newark. Then he went home and copied the plan of the picture heroine. His body was found in his gas-filled room this morning.

The suicide was nineteen years old. The picture that he saw last night showed a young woman going through all the preliminaries to suicide by gas, finally reclining on her bed and awaiting death calmly.

What was thrown on the screen Judson copied to the last detail, even to the stuffing of the cracks of the windows and doors.

In the files of any newspaper office can be found story after story like the above. Only a few weeks ago the newspapers told of a tragedy in Philadelphia. A clerk, unreasonably jealous of his wife, went with her to a moving-picture melodrama. It showed a home disrupted by a friend's attentions to the wife. The suggestion of fancied wrongs fanned the clerk to a murderous rage. The next morning this clerk shot his wife dead in the presence of their seven-year-old son. The police had no trouble in learning the immediate incitement.



(At recruiting stations spirited manœuvres are shown of submarines, as above, and torpedo boats, as in the central reproduction of consecutive films)

With young, formative, and impressionable minds the results are, of course, worse. Indeed the motionpicture show is as widely suggestive

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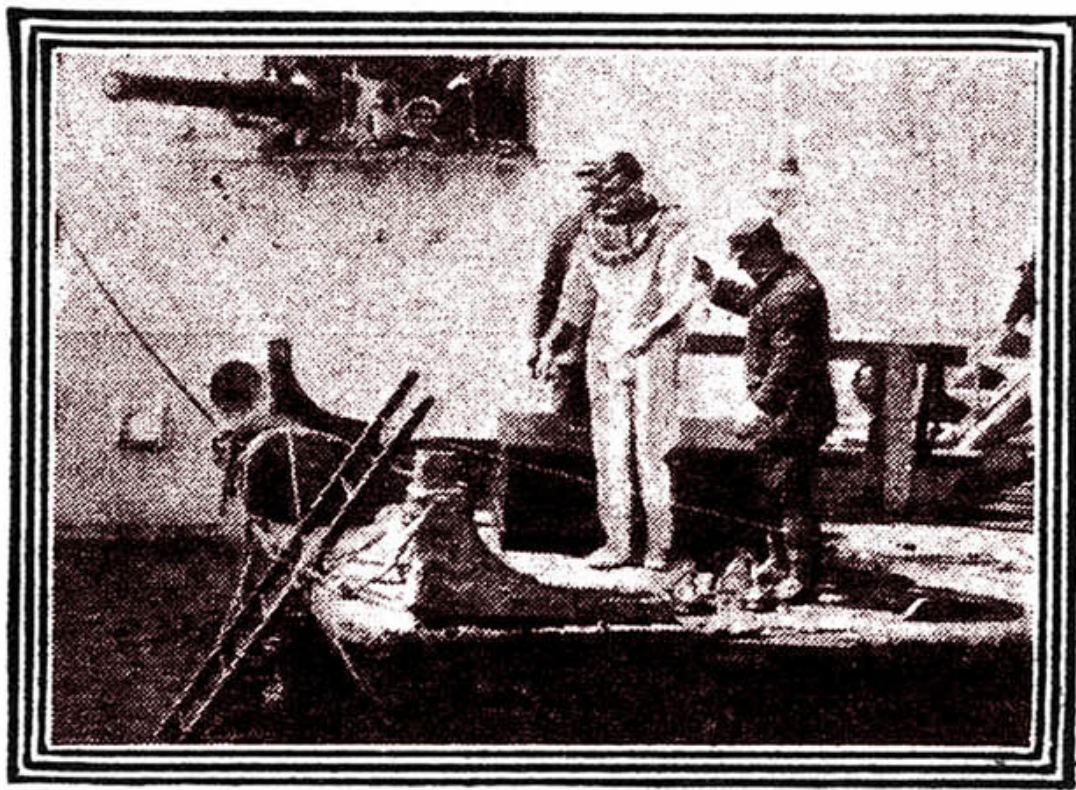
to this class as the cheap sensational novel used to be. Recent records show that three Brooklyn lads committed burglary to get the price of admission to unlimited "Wild West" pictures. To obtain free tickets from the criminals who run shows in sections of large cities, many boys and girls have been led into all sorts of vice. Two Pittsburg youths tried to "hold up" a street car after viewing a train robbery enacted on a moving-picture screen.

Only a few weeks ago, the President of Police in Berlin forbade children under fourteen to attend moving pictures at night under any circumstances. Before that, the efforts of the S. P. C. C. of New York City had resulted in a similar law against the admission of any children under sixteen unaccompanied by an adult. The International Police Association adopted William A. Pinkerton's resolution at its last meeting for the suppression of moving pictures calculated to increase crime. The agitation in July against the moving pictures of the prizefight at Reno, Nevada, became nation wide.

THE CONSTRUCTIVE SIDE

Is there any reason why so compelling a force cannot be thrown entirely to the aid of education and inspiration?

No reason at all appears to an observer of the uplift and public serv-



Edison Manufacturing Company

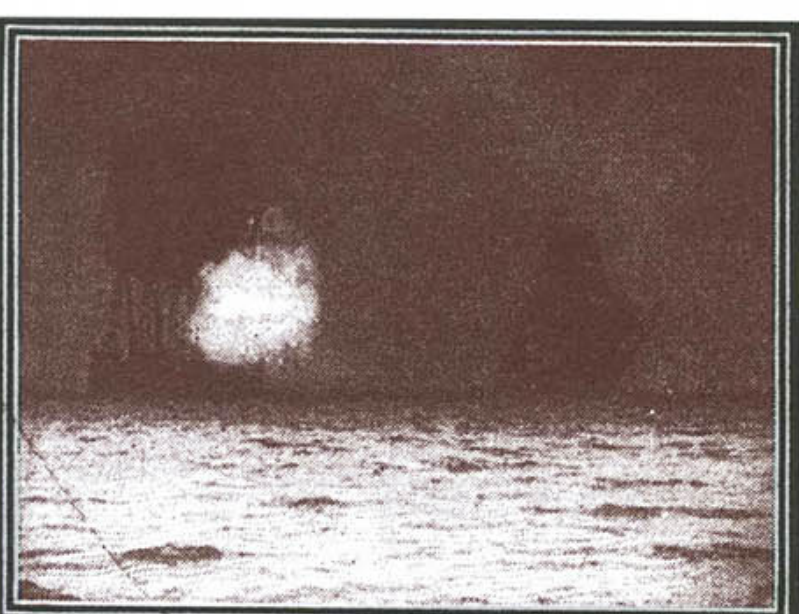
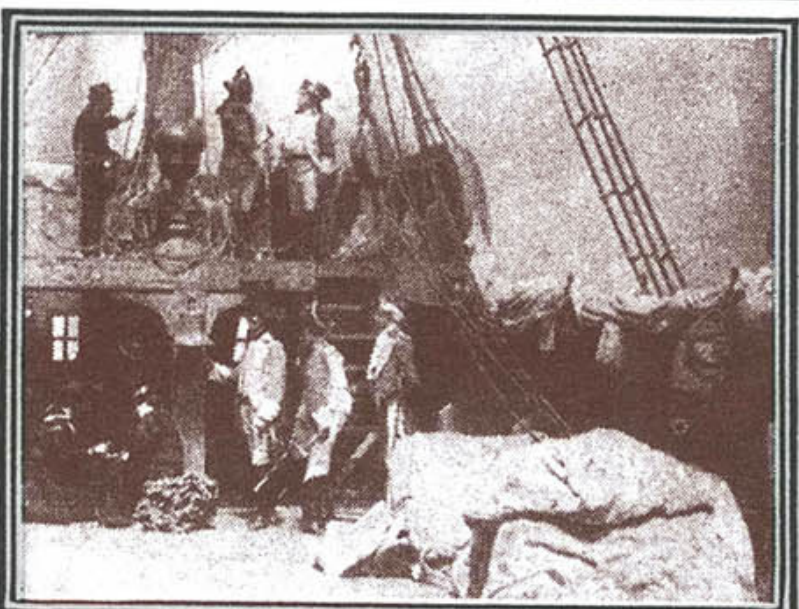
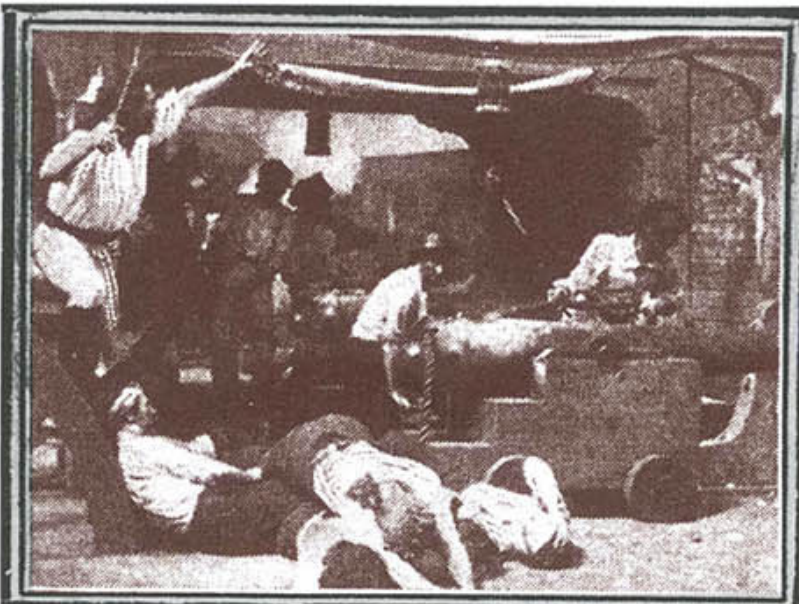
(A scene from "Tom Bowline," the story of a country lad's rise in the Navy, written by Paymaster Dyer, and acted before the motion-camera for the inspiration of prospective sailors)

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ice already credited to the best film manufacturers. To popularize the Navy, a few motion pictures were made, by order of the Government, for exhibition in recruiting offices. Then one of the "Edison" film company's operators suggested that mere views and naval drills were all right, but that adventures, romances, and spirited action would be better. Whereupon Paymaster George P. Dyer became an active playwright, with motion pictures as his material. His first production was "Up the Ladder with Tom Bowline," a country lad's rise in the service and the heroism that wins him a beautiful bride. "The Sea Hounds" was another romance dealing with torpedo boats. The Government cheerfully furnished as "stage properties" the battleship *Texas*, at Charleston; the *Reina Mercedes* at Newport; the entire torpedo fleet of eleven craft at Newport; a half-dozen torpedo boats at Charleston, and a squadron at Magdalena Bay. The method has proved a convincing recruiting method.

The possibilities of constructive helpfulness in the motion picture have long been plain to thinkers like Thomas A. Edison. He said recently: "It will wipe out narrow-minded prejudices which are founded on ignorance, it will create a feeling of sympathy and a desire to help the down-trodden people of the earth, and it will give new ideals to be followed."

"It is a tremendous vital force of culture as well as amusement" in the neat phrase of Prof. F. K. Starr of the University of Chicago. Glancing over the catalogues of manufacturers like Pathé Frères and George Kleine of Chicago, one finds films offered that unfold lessons in "agriculture, aeronautics, animal life, bacteriology, biography, biology, botany, entomology, ethnology, fisheries, geography, history, industrial, kindergarten studies, mining and metallurgy, microscopy, military, naval, natural history, ornithology, pathology, pisciculture, railroad, religion, scenic, travel and zoölogy."



Photographs by Edison Manufacturing Company

THE LIFE AND BATTLES OF JOHN PAUL JONES

(The actors follow historical paintings closely. The battle of the *Serapis* and the *Bon Homme Richard* was run off in miniature—in a tank)



Photograph by the Biograph Company

LI HUNG CHANG AND THE FIRST MOVING PICTURE EXHIBITION IN CHINA

(The kinetoscope contained pictures of Li himself, as he had visited Grant's Tomb in New York. Li exclaimed with emotion, "It moves! It moves!")

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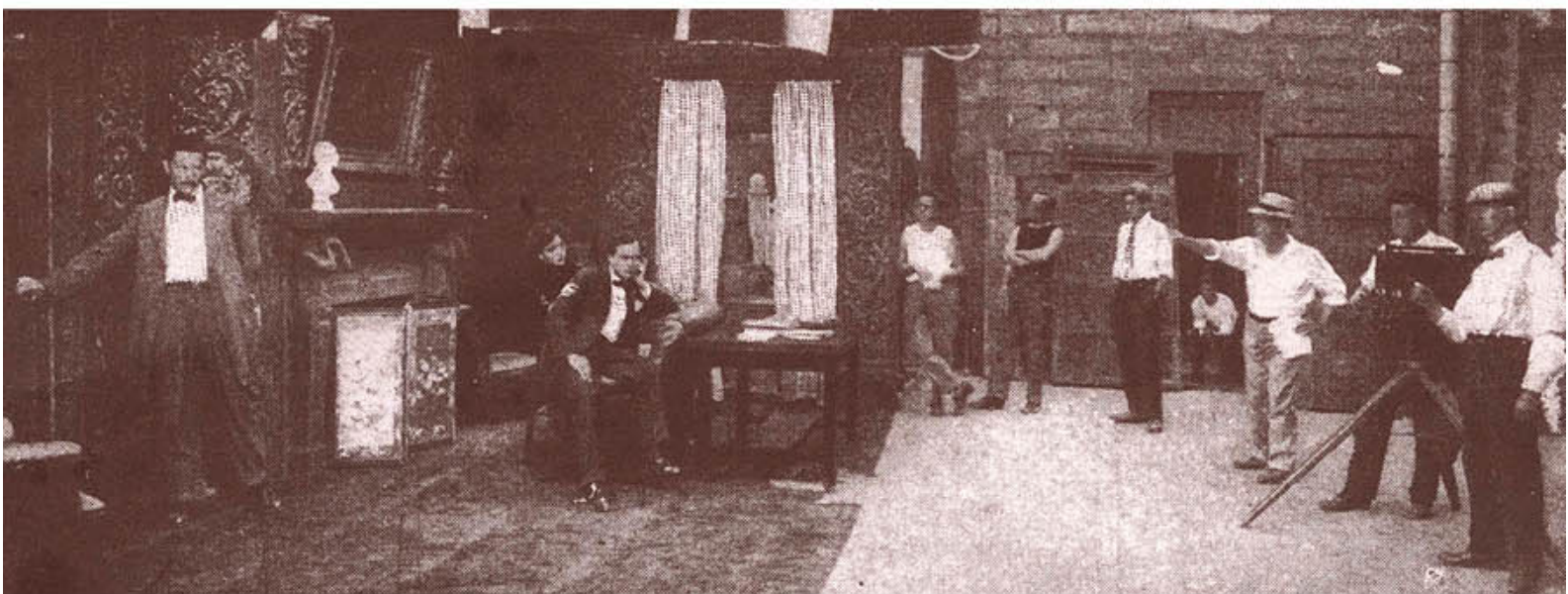
CATCHING A CAVALRY CHARGE ON THE MOVING-PICTURE CAMERA

In the upper picture operators of the Vitagraph Company are recording a cavalry charge while the stage instructs the galloping "actors" through a megaphone.

William H. Maxwell, the New York City Superintendent of Schools, demonstrated this year, before the Board of Education and a number of visiting educators and clergymen, a history lesson in motion pictures—scenes from the life of George Washington, including a highly realistic crossing of the Delaware, a triumph of "make-believe" more impressive to the school child's imagination than any book could possibly be. The scenes were directed by the late Prof. Charles Sprague Smith, head of the People's Institute, a pioneer in the movement for wholesome pictures. Another film-history just completed is the life of John Paul Jones. During months past actors and stage managers have been at work dramatizing historical paintings of the sea-fighter's life with high accuracy. The battle between the *Serapis* and *Bon Homme Richard* is unquestionably convincing, although it actually took place in the Bronx Borough of New York City on a miniature scale, in a tank.



Indeed, no less than 900 of the 2900 subjects



"BEHIND THE SCENES" WITH THE MOVING-PICTURE FOLKS

In the lower picture the intense emotion on the stage contrasts with the business air of managers and operators to the right

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passed upon by the "censors" of moving pictures in New York City, during the year ending last spring, were classed as having educational value. Many other subjects dealt incidentally with foreign geography and social life.

Only 14 per cent. of these films were classed as "pedagogical." But of the other 86 per cent. a full half was put down as "serious" drama.

These 2900 films, however, were of the better class to begin with, as will be plain after examining the nature of the "censors'" work.



THE NATIONAL BOARD OF CENSORSHIP

The big practical step toward eliminating pictures that are dangerous, and encouraging wholesome ones, was the formation, by the People's Institute of New York, of the National Board of Censorship. This is composed of public-spirited men and women, persons of high professional standing, representatives of the municipal government, and of social organizations, along with those of the main combination of manufacturers. Many of the so-called "independents," however, voluntarily submit their films also for the National Board's "O K"—which, as a certificate of good standing and respectability, has business value.

Four times a week the censors meet, passing each time upon fifty-odd series of films. Slips of paper are handed around, and criticisms and suggestions are written on them by the censors. These command the manufacturers' attention, although, in many cases, the rearrangement of plot and picture means an immediate money loss.

ACTUALITY REGARDLESS OF EXPENSE

So the problem of suppressing moving pictures that are improper has ceased to exist with these leading and successful manufacturers—those in the so-called "trust," and several of the "independents" too. To get plays that shall be at once uplifting and striking, they scour the earth.

For instance, ex-President Roosevelt, soon after his return from Africa, spoke at a gathering of notable big game hunters in warm praise of another African sportsman, likewise just returned. The latter, however, had exhibited his coolness, courage and quick decision in face of dangerous animals to obtain, not their hides and heads,

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Photograph by Pathé Frères

SCENE FROM "THE LIFE OF CHRIST," AS PRODUCED BEFORE MOTION PICTURES IN FRANCE WITH EXTRAORDINARY HISTORICAL ACCURACY, DÉLICACY AND REVERENCE

but their movements on films worked by other members of the party. The method used by "Buffalo Jones," leader of this carefully selected expedition, was to "rope" or "lasso" the brute performers. Many thousand dollars will be spent before the public sees that American film, of course. But there are many examples of big outlays on the part of moving picture manufacturers to get the "real thing" outdoors. The Selig Company in Chicago, having mapped out supposititious adventures of Colonel Roosevelt in the jungle, is said to have spent \$10,000 before the pictures were completed. A real lion had to be shot dead by the moving-picture hunter, whose life was really in peril. The Kalem Company hired a whole railroad in Florida to make a realistic war-time series. The Edison Company, in depicting how an evil man came to his end by going over a steep cliff, sent an automobile originally worth \$4,000 over the Palisades, opposite New York City. In the tank were twenty gallons of gasoline and there were forty more gallons in glass bottles in the tonneau, to insure a slight explosion when the machine landed on the rocks. The flames shot up a hundred feet. The camera men got excellent pictures.

The leading French Company, Pathé Frères, has 5,000 employees over most of the globe. It has offices and a manufactory in New York City and Jersey City. The main offices are in Paris with several branches in France. In Spain, Russia, Italy, Germany, India and Japan there are fully equipped branches. In almost every other country there is an operator with his camera, ready to go out on instructions from Paris.

FRENCH ART ON THE MOVING-PICTURE SCREEN

In France the moving picture has been

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"THE KISS OF JUDAS"—ANOTHER BIBLICAL SUBJECT AS STAGED FOR THE FRENCH "FILMS D'ART," BEFORE WHICH ALBERT LAMBERT, MOUNET-SULLY AND OTHER FAMOUS ACTORS HAVE APPEARED

elevated to another form of artistic expression. As early as 1889 Coquelin and Bernhardt did not consider it inconsistent with their high position to pose before the speeding films. Bernhardt gave her rendition of "Hamlet," Coquelin appeared in "Les Précieuses Ridicules" and it is told that they acted with all the sparkle and inspiration that



goes across the footlights to a keenly sympathetic audience. "We are playing for posterity," remarked Coquelin.

Edmond Rostand is reported as fashioning a picture play. Henri Lavedan has written several, among them "The Assassination of the Duke of Guise," for which Saint Saëns composed especial music; and the "Kiss of Judas." Albert Lambert's portrayal of *Jesus* is beautifully tender, irradiated by a transfiguring humility and clothed

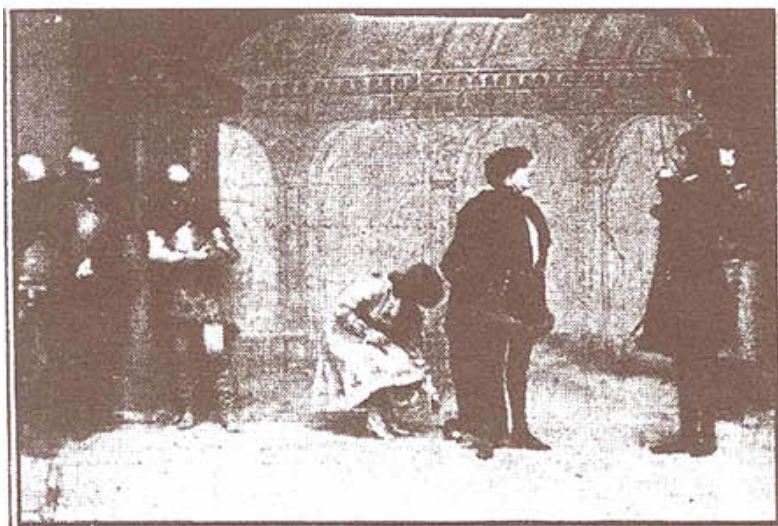
with a tranquillity and mysticism that differentiates it completely from its surroundings.

Stage management, too, is at its highest in these pictures. The suggestion of painted canvas is entirely lacking in the interiors, while the action in the open is "the real thing."

SPELLBOUND BEFORE A PICTURE PLAY

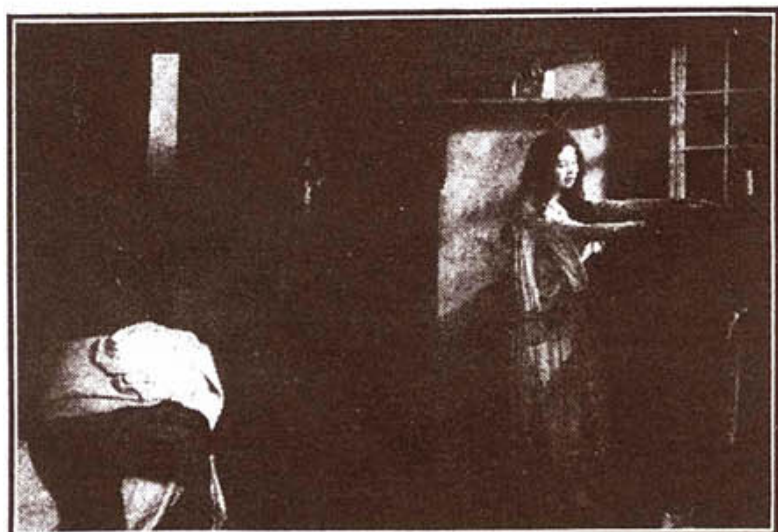
The delicacy and reverence of "The Kiss

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BERNHARDT AND COQUELIN ON THE "FILMS"

(In 1889, when the moving-picture camera was new, Bernhardt acted before it in "Hamlet" and Coquelin in "Les Précieuses Ridicules." The French have raised moving pictures to the rank of a high art, employing the most famous actors and the best stage management and scenery)



Photographs by the Biograph Company

"MOVING" DRAMAS—CLASSICAL AND ROMANTIC

(The left-hand scene is from Browning's "Pippa Passes," as done in motion pictures; the other, from Helen Hunt Jackson's "Ramona." To act this for the films, the entire company were sent to the exact locality used by the novelist, in Ventura County, California)

of Judas" is without a single false note of the theatric. I first saw it following a helter skelter comedy that had kept the house in a ripple of laughter. All became hushed and still. Even the clicking machine seemed detached and remote. When it was over, silence continued—until a woman laughed shrilly, half-hysterically, and the spell was broken. Everybody relaxed.

"The Life of Christ," the staging of which cost nearly \$10,000, became highly popular abroad. In America, within the last few months, Pathé Frères have disposed of \$150,000 of films, to theaters, lecture lyceums, churches and religious societies. Balzac's "Peau de Chagrin," "Duchess de Langeas," "La Grande Bretache" and other stories have been visualized. So has the work of Gautier, master picture painter himself. Hugo and Merimée furnish themes. Mistral, gentle poet of Provence, has had his "Meirelle" and "L'Arlesienne" charmingly illustrated.

Here is a final instance of the other kind of picture. Just as this magazine went to press, Acting Police Commissioner Bugher, of New York City, had issued this order to his force:

You will forthwith carefully inspect all moving picture shows in your precinct, and where any signs are displayed relative to the attempted assassination of Mayor Gaynor you will have same removed forthwith and forbid any pictures to be shown relative to the same.

WHAT EVERY COMMUNITY CAN DO

Enough examples have been given of moving pictures that are very bad and very good to show how simply the problem could be solved by organized supervision. Any religious or public-spirited organization can obtain from the National Board of Censors of New York City lists of pictures that have been approved, so that improper ones may rigidly be boycotted. Such an arrangement

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in every section of the country would clear the situation immensely. On the circulating library plan, catalogues could be examined, and the desirable films marked. Thus it would readily become apparent to both manufacturer and exhibitor what the better element of the public admired, and what it condemned.

The exclusion of improper books from public libraries and circulating libraries is pretty closely attended to. Yet no group of libraries in the world have ever possessed the influence over susceptible children, and over all minds in the formative and impressionable stage, that the motion picture exerts to-day. It is probably the greatest single force in shaping the American character.

