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Meet the Boy Wonder of Hollywood

By Frederick L. Collins



25 years old—\$50,000 a year.

That's Irving Thalberg. Mr.

Collins quotes some of his rules of life. They might be found in any boy's copy book. But by sticking close to them Thalberg has been able to break all the rules ever made by man

“WHO’S the child with Elinor Glyn? Her son?”

“Elinor’s son?” laughed Hollywood’s oldest inhabitant.

“That’s her employer! Her boss! The baby magnate of moviedom! The *nix plus pluto* of infant prodigies. That’s Irving Thalberg!”

“Who’s Irving Thalberg?”

“Twenty-five years old. Fifty thousand a year. Hundred per cent chance to be the biggest man in the picture industry. That’s Thalberg.”

The young man so floridly described finished his dance with England’s wildest daughter, and oozed through movieland’s blackest and whitest shoulders to a glittering ring-side table. There was a large party at that table: stars, directors, authors, magnates; but the half-pint young man with the six-gallon brain slipped modestly into the seat of honor.

“Wherever Irving Thalberg sits,” continued my friend in his most Avon-esque manner, “is always the head of the table. I’ve known him all his life—which is something less than half of mine—from the time he was a popeyed Brooklyn schoolboy until he stepped into his present office to run the biggest studio in Culver City. In his odd moments as a boy—and he had some odd ones—he worked in his grandfather’s store, wrote ads for the Brooklyn ‘Eagle,’ went to night school, studied shorthand and Spanish. In a few

Irving Thalberg.

months he could run anything from a typewriter to an automobile, and was admiring Velasquez in the original.

"Then he took sick. And that was probably the best thing that ever happened to him, for he began to read: not Horatio Alger and Ethel Dell, but Epictetus and Bacon and old man Kant. Out of this assortment the boy evolved a few basic rules of life, and by sticking close to them he has been able to step out and break all the other rules that anybody else ever made.

"Here are three of Thalberg's gospels:

Paste These in Your Hat

"**N**EVER take any one man's opinion as final.'

"'Never think your own opinion is unassailable.'

"'Never expect help from anyone but yourself.'"

My friend sighed. "Rather pessimistic, that last one, but not a bad rule in this business of relatives—and revolutions."

The divertissement was over. The Chevalier Du Brac, from Paris's Montmartre, and Mademoiselle Dorothy, from Hollywood's equally famous Quarter, had tossed off a neat Apache dance. Max Fisher's bandsmen were tuning up on "The Limehouse Blues." Thalberg and his guests were again afoot.

He has a good presence, Thalberg: metallic rather than magnetic; clean-cut, direct, not at all flashy; he is well-poised and well-gaited; active without being in a hurry. There is a smiling sadness about his full, sensitive mouth; an incandescent brilliance in his small jetty eyes. His rebellious black hair, forced off his high, broad forehead, tops a set of small, conventionally-placed features, which stand up well under close analysis. He made me think of a beautifully executed miniature—the miniature of a great man.

"That was eight years ago," continued the oldest inhabitant, harking back to the Brooklyn sick-room. "After that I lost sight of Irving until he showed up here in Hollywood. In less than six months he was general manager of a big studio—a driving executive who knew what the public wanted and how to give it to them. In a year everybody was talking about him—and now look at him!"

As a result of a step-and-trot introduction, sandwiched between two breathless encores, I was invited to visit the *nix plus pluto* of baby magnates at his studio office on the following day.

Through the private office door came the soft voice of the big little man: "I authorize you"—he was evidently dictating a telegram—"to go as high as \$40,000 for '——'" He named a play then running on Broadway, the picture rights to which Thalberg's company subsequently purchased. My guide looked at me as if to say, "You see, he does say something;" and I

Irving Thalberg.

looked back as if to say, "I'll say he does."

Irving's life is full of little forty- and fifty-thousand-dollar items: plays and novels that have to be bought; directors and stars who have to be hired—and fired; sets that have to be built and paid for; casts that have to be picked and managed; hundreds of motion-picture productions that have to be made. For Irving—whisper it low, because these movie concerns hate publicity!—is production manager of the newest picture combination, the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Company. Before that high-sounding job was hung around his youthful shoulders, Irving was director general of Universal City. In other words, the boy has earned the right to his titles and to his pay envelopes by managing successfully the producing activities of two of the largest studios in the world—and by working like a young horse while he did it.

Thalberg always has worked. According to the best of his many newspaper biographers, Irving obtained his first job by inserting an advertisement in the "Journal of Commerce," in which he said he wanted a job that would break his back and wrench his brain. moving-picture corporations lived next door. He offered Thalberg a job. Irving declined. He didn't want a job on pull.

"When the famous man went away to Hollywood, the little man made a dash for the company's New York office. Without disclosing that he knew the head of the works, he talked the office manager into giving him a chance as a stenographer at thirty-five beans a week. When the boss came back, Irving was banging the belligerency out of a typewriter, and—"

Moral: Study Stenography

I KNEW the rest. I had long had a pet theory about the shortest and surest cut to business success—and something told me that this fifty-thousand-dollar boy wonder who now stood before me would prove my theory out of his own practice. And he did.

"I came to Hollywood," he began, "as private secretary—"

"Ah," I exclaimed, "that's the secret!"

"Yes," he said thoughtfully, "I believe it is. I was fortunate enough to get a job where I saw the business as a whole. Then my chance came to make good while the boss was away. And I worked hard. That's all."

I left the office of the biggest little man in Hollywood wondering if it were too late to take up stenography. I decided it probably was *for me*. But my son, if I ever have one, and he shows signs of growing a fifty-thousand-dollar brain—well, anyhow, he's going to be a private secretary!