

THE EVOLUTION OF THE MOTION PICTURE

VI—LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE WITH THOMAS A. EDISON

An Exclusive Interview With the Master Inventor
The Sixth of a Series of Articles on the Motion Picture

By FREDERICK JAMES SMITH

THOMAS ALVA EDISON is one of the great men of all time. Since the dawn of history mankind has largely found fame in four fields of labor: war, literature, political intrigue, and invention. Yet the inventor stands pre-eminent. His perfected creations mean actual forward steps of utility for all the world.

Out in his laboratory at West Orange, N. J., Mr. Edison is daily laboring. The sixty-six years of his life have been devoted to humanity. To his genius are due the perfected duplex and quadruplex telegraph, the incandescent electric light, the fundamental systems of generating, regulating, distributing and measuring electric current for light, heat and power, the telephone transmitter, the phonograph, the motion picture and a host of other useful inventions. Not content, he still works for the sheer joy of it—delving into the future and transforming his dreams into realities.

Mr. Edison is a man of dynamic energy and dominant personality. His face is strong and vigorous. One forgets his silvery hair in the power of his eyes. Reflected there, beneath the heavy, overhanging half-gray eyebrows, is the meditating thought of the dreamer coupled with the shrewd insight of the doer. There is a strong note of preoccupation in his glance. He is aloof from the whirl of the present. When he walks he moves hurriedly, as if to guard against the loss of a single moment.

Yet there was no trace of hurry about the master inventor—the only man to equal Napoleon in making every second count—as he greeted me, leaned back comfortably in his chair, selected a long cigar and lighted it. Mr. Edison is rather deaf and so I had previously prepared a few questions generally outlining my interview. The inventor perused them and, when he had concluded, smoked thoughtfully for a few moments.

"I like to have questions," he said. "I haven't time for long interviews." Mr. Edison spoke with finality, yet he smiled at the same moment.

"Better photography, better actors and better technique in the studios, as well as the combination of

manufacturers to prevent the marketing of objectionable pictures through censorship, have been the great advance strides in motion pictures," Mr. Edison began.

He gazed for a moment into the circling clouds of cigar smoke.

"The moving picture will endure as long as poor people exist," the inventor continued. "It fills the same want in the lives of the masses that the five-cent trolley car filled. The motion picture fits into their income. The workers deserve and must have more amusement than the richer folk, who are able to afford the regular theater and other expensive pleasures."

Mr. Edison firmly believes that the film is a mighty lever for good. "The motion picture is the great educator of the poorer people. It incites their imagination by bringing the whole world before their eyes. It sets spectators thinking and raises their standard of living."

The inventor smoked on silently, as if mentally weighing the future.

"The next steps of advancement will center about better photography, with less flicker, the production of multiple reel screen dramas, colored pictures and possibly stereoscopic films with the effect of actual depth.

"We do not know yet how to attain the stereoscopic effect. I have no less than four suggestions a day from all parts of America, but not yet have I found one process which is practical.

"I have long been working on a method to secure photography in all natural colors in their right value." The wizard drew from his pocket a small strip of film—upon which a scene was reproduced in the tints of nature—and handed it to me.

"It is raw yet," Mr. Edison commented, "but it proves the possibility of color photography. We can take sixteen pictures a second. The Lumiere process requires several seconds for one picture. It is quite a technical feat to get motion photography in perfect coloring. Our Mr. Powrie has devoted five years to it and it is going to come. Then, with the stereoscopic effect, perfected talking pictures capable of operatic reproduction, and the elimination of the flicker, we shall have the whole thing.



THOMAS A. EDISON.

"All these improvements are very difficult. Still, there is nothing in reason but can be done. The things we cannot do are those of which we are ignorant. We will know more next year—for each year we advance."

"Do you think," I ventured to ask, "that the talking picture will displace the silent photoplay?"

"I do not think so," quickly responded Mr. Edison. "Both will be used. The talking picture, when perfected, will provide the poorer people with that other branch of entertainment, singing and music. We will see and hear little operettas, impossible with silent pictures."

"What is your estimation of the future educational value of pictures?" I asked.

"Books," declared the inventor with decision, "will soon be obsolete in the public schools. Scholars will be instructed through the eye. It is possible to teach every branch of human knowledge with the motion picture. Our school system will be completely changed inside of ten years.

"We have been working for some time on the school pictures. We have been studying and reproducing the life of the fly, mosquito, silk weaving moth, brown moth, gypsy moth, butterflies, scale and various other insects, as well as chemical crystallization. It proves conclusively the worth of motion pictures in chemistry, physics and other branches of study, making the scientific truths, difficult to understand from text books, plain and clear to children.

"I do not think every home will have its own projecting machine, although the wealthier people will possess them, no doubt. The cheapness of film entertainment is due to its popularity among the many. The expenses per capita are extremely small. In a home the cost would be very great. The future will see motion pictures more or less in the home, while in clubs, in theaters and in motion picture houses they will be most popular.

"The motion picture is destined to develop some of the most wonderful players in the world. The talking pictures demand and require good acting. The greatest evil I find lies in the poor voice accent of players. I have tried innumerable voices and the average of

(Continued on page 42)

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"Books will soon be obsolete in the public schools. Scholars will be instructed through the eye."

"In the years to come . . . the technique of the picture will be so perfect that the great actors and actresses will live in their own homes, while their picture reproductions will travel and spread their art"

