

THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES  
OF  
CARL LAEMMLE

---

JOHN DRINKWATER

**WILLIAM R. LIEB**  
**809 N. BEVERLY GLEN BLVD.**  
**LOS ANGELES 24, CALIF.**







Sincere appreciation  
of your friendship  
Andy

Thomas 1931



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2015

<https://archive.org/details/lifeadventuresof00gppu>

CARL LAEMMLE







Carl Lummel

THE  
LIFE AND ADVENTURES  
OF  
CARL LAEMMLE

BY  
JOHN DRINKWATER

FOREWORD BY  
WILL H. HAYS

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS LONDON

*The Knickerbocker Press*

1931

Copyright, 1931, by  
G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

All rights reserved. This book, or parts thereof, must  
not be reproduced in any form without permission.



Made in the United States of America



TO

CAROL LAEMMLE BERGERMAN

this story of her  
grandfather for  
her later cherishing

*Cordially,*

*Carl Laemmle*



## FOREWORD

To few men whose lives have been cast in the newer frontiers of civilization is the opportunity given to see, within their own period of vigour, the flowering of their wilderness into the land of their dreams.

Such an honoured and fortunate man is Carl Laemmle.

Within the past quarter century of his own lifetime a great artistic development has been unfolded to the world. Within that brief period the screen has become an astounding vehicle for expression of dramatic and pictorial art. From its early crudities has sprung a form of entertainment which knows no limits of race, of age or of geography in its appeal to mankind. It is one of the astonishing and sobering facts of human history.

The story of the motion picture, both as an art and as an industry, is inseparable from the story of its pioneers. As Carlyle has said of history so may we say of the motion picture industry: It is the "essence of innumerable biographies." Men dreamt the moving picture into being; men have dreamt of it as the great democracy of entertain-

ment; and men are dreaming of its vaster future in the fields of entertainment, information and education.

The pioneers of the screen were fired by the same vision that beckons men to the conquest of wilderness in territory or in thought. But the true pioneer is a dreamer, not a drudge. He struggles but to create. He dares but to achieve.

Of such stuff and with such vision is Carl Laemmle.

At the age of sixty-four he is still a vital figure in the industry which he helped to create. He has as great faith in its future as he had in its past. The motion picture industry has established, it is true, a vast agency of popular entertainment that has brought the stage, the concert hall and even the opera to the crossroads of the world. Year by year higher standards of public appreciation, linked to higher standards of motion picture production, enlarge its sphere of human service. Year by year technical and artistic progress bring the screen nearer to the day when it will reflect the highest possible entertainment forms to the most exacting and varied cultural groups. Its ultimate scope is the whole field of creative literature; of artistic and dramatic progress; of musical culture. The service that it can render covers the realms of entertainment, of information, of education.

What greater challenge to creative effort? Men

have recreated the flower of their thought through the media of ink, paper and type. Artists have transferred the beauty that moved them to lifeless canvas. Stone and clay have perpetuated the immortal genius of the great masters of the past. But with sound and colour, with motion and the promise of three-dimensional perspective, the screen as a medium of artistic creation stirs the faith and imagination of the future.

It is not without significance that John Drinkwater, the distinguished dramatic poet, whose charming and penetrating studies of Abraham Lincoln, Robert E. Lee, Robert Burns, Cromwell, Charles II and Pepys have established his status as a biographer, should have turned to industry for a new subject. There was a time when only kings and conquerors were considered fit subjects for the art of the biographer. Later the masters of art, science and literature were added to the rolls. And now leaders of industry whose achievements add to the history of progress have come within the circle of biographical interest.

John Drinkwater has found it possible, in the painting of a vivid and living portrait of a man, to portray the phenomenal growth and development of both an art and an industry. There is drama and there is romance in his pages—drama as great as any placed on the screen; romance as appealing as any contained in a scenario. With that power and felicity of expression which have

made him one of the foremost writers of the English speaking world, the author has set down the story of Carl Laemmle, without which the story of the birth and progress of the motion picture industry would be incomplete. In so doing, Mr. Drinkwater has written a book which should delight the philosopher, inform the student and enthrall the reader who seeks further knowledge of the most romantic enterprise in modern times.

WILL H. HAYS.

March 12, 1931.

## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I.—PRELUDE . . . . .	3
II.—LAUPHEIM AND ICHENHAUSEN . . . . .	11
III.—NEW YORK AND CHICAGO . . . . .	28
IV.—OSHKOSH, WISCONSIN . . . . .	48
V.—THE FILMS. INDEPENDENCE . . . . .	65
VI.—THE TRUST FIGHT . . . . .	83
VII.—ANTI-TRUST . . . . .	102
VIII.—VICTORY . . . . .	117
IX.—IMP . . . . .	131
X.—TOWARD UNIVERSAL . . . . .	153
XI.—UNIVERSAL CITY . . . . .	170
XII.—A MAN AND MOTION PICTURES . . . . .	188
XIII.—CHARACTER . . . . .	206

CHAPTER	PAGE
XIV.—THE "NEW UNIVERSAL" . . . . .	224
XV.—CARLE LAEMMLE JUNIOR AND THE FUTURE .	242
XVI.—CHARACTER AGAIN . . . . .	261
XVII.—IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME . . . . .	280



## ILLUSTRATIONS

	FACING PAGE
CARL LAEMMLE . . . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
THE BIRTHPLACE OF CARL LAEMMLE, LAUPHEIM, WÜRTEMBERG . . . . .	12
CARL LAEMMLE'S FATHER AND MOTHER . . . . .	20
THEODORE REGENSTEINER AND CARL LAEMMLE ABOUT 1885 . . . . .	34
AN ANTI-TRUST ADVERTISEMENT . . . . .	104
CARL LAEMMLE AND HIS FAMILY AT THE TIME OF THE ANTI-TRUST CAMPAIGN . . . . .	120
AN EARLY IMP COMPANY . . . . .	146
STORE ROOM, UNIVERSAL CITY, 1916 . . . . .	182
ACTORS' WAITING ROOM, UNIVERSAL CITY, 1916 . . . . .	182
UNIVERSAL CITY STREET CLEANERS, 1916 . . . . .	184
UNIVERSAL CITY POLICE, 1916 . . . . .	184
CHARLIE CHAPLIN AND CARL LAEMMLE . . . . .	198
CARL LAEMMLE AND MARY PICKFORD . . . . .	198
WOODROW WILSON AND CARL LAEMMLE . . . . .	212

	FACING PAGE
ANDRE HERRIOT AND CARL LAEMMLE . . .	212
UNIVERSAL CITY, CALIFORNIA, 1930 . . .	226
CARL LAEMMLE AND JACK DEMPSEY . . .	246
CARL LAEMMLE AND ERICH REMARQUE . . .	246
ROSABELLE LAEMMLE, CARL LAEMMLE AND CARL LAEMMLE, JUNIOR . . . . .	24 <sup>2</sup>
CARL LAEMMLE WITH SOME FRIENDS . . .	26 <sup>c</sup>
CARL LAEMMLE AND CAROL LAEMMLE BERGERMAN	286

CARL LAEMMLE



THE  
LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF  
CARL LAEMMLE

CHAPTER I

P R E L U D E

CARL LAEMMLE is a remarkable man. At the age of sixty-four he is one of the most prominent figures in an industry that is, they tell us, the fourth largest in the world. There is nothing remarkable in that. Every industry must have its leaders, and they are often a mediocre, unimpressive lot. No one could call Laemmle's talents mediocre, but even so there are industrial leaders in any quantity who with first rate ability are not notable. They may direct affairs of astonishing magnitude, but it will never be said of them, "let us now praise famous men," for they are not famous, but notorious. They have achieved success, but no more. Success, on this large scale, may denote intelligence, power, tenacity, but it does not necessarily denote character; indeed, it often

denotes a conspicuous lack of it. Many millions have been made, and piously disbursed, by mean, cruel, and unscrupulous men—bad men, in fact; and character implies goodness.

The minor psychologists of our time would have us believe that about goodness there is something drab and unattractive. To which the answer is that if it is that, it isn't good. The idea is, presumably, a survival in their minds of Victorian Sunday afternoons. But let us not be intimidated by amateurs of diabolism. If they find virtue dull, let them. For some of us the true tedium is induced by the crooks of international eminence who make fortunes, dominate gulls, and come to ends, complacent it may be, or apprehensive, but in any case unlamented. The richest man in the world may have a dry, featureless soul. He may engage none but market attention, and be of none but market significance.

To manufacture, control, or distribute more motor cars, more oil, more chewing gum, more cocoa, more newspapers than anyone else is in itself a wholly unimpressive achievement. I have known a good many of these high-fliers, and while a few have been men of uncommon intelligence and decency, others have been uncommonly stupid, and in the matter of decency not worth butter to their bread. It is not a question of these great fortunes being ill-gained or, what is rarer, ill-possessed. They have mostly been made in what

passes for fair competition, and if their making has left a trail of petty disasters, they are not altogether indefensible in terms of social economy. Once made, it must be allowed that they are spent often liberally enough. Indeed, it is difficult to see how it could be otherwise. To have millions on your hands is to be driven to some sort of enlightenment.

No; the true criterion has nothing to do with the foundation of institutes, the provision of model workshops, the endowment of churches, or the support of orchestras. Success means that you have succeeded against opposition, and by the use of agents. What, when you have come through, do the opposition and the agents think of you? That is the test. You may be excused the grievances of here and there a maladroit competitor or an unstable employee, but how, when the issue has been decided, do you stand in the general opinion of the other party and your own? There is a phrase of many connotations—a good fellow. In the best of these, do they think you are that? Not the good fellow of casual contacts in social amenities or sport, but the fellow who in the long routine of daily affairs has, exactly, been good. Who has, that is to say, been considerate of other people's dignity and of his own, has disdained to take mean advantage, and refused in any stress of circumstances to make the worse appear the better reason.

Such good fellows are, happily, plentiful. But most of them have not been tried by too searching an ordeal. The average career of moderate attainments imposes no very severe strain on a natural decency of spirit. Great success in great affairs is another matter. With it the strain intensifies, until a point is reached when character has to be rarely tough in fibre not to break. And more often than not, break it does. The acutest of all ethical observers knew very well what he was saying when he spoke of rich men and the Kingdom of Heaven. When the damage has been done, good opinion can be, and frequently is, bought, but the purchase does not bring regeneration. Cynicism about human nature is shabby enough, but it is more admirable than the sharp-nosed morality that dotes on petty inquisitions while disregarding those really awful prophecies about the needle's eye and being unspotted from the world.

Carl Laemmle is a rich man, but how rich I have no idea. Nor do I know much about his private habits. He has been married but once, and happily; his widowhood is comforted by the devotion of two children, one of whom is taking over control of his father's great Picture Corporation at a precocious age, while the other, Rosabelle Laemmle Bergerman, has at the moment when these lines are being written brought a granddaughter into the family. Of other domestic discretions or indiscretions that may have had a place



in Carl Laemmle's life I neither know nor wish to know anything. I understand that he plays poker for nickels or dollars with application and some skill, and that he has a palate for champagne which, it is whispered, he is in a position to indulge. He is generous in his benefactions, and he collects autographs. Also he rather fancies himself as a fancier of prize if unprofitable poultry. His taste in the arts is unpretentious, but it is his own and not Sir Joseph Duveen's. He has a partiality for race-courses, and usually contrives to put a little on the loser. When he is travelling, his aversion to solitude at breakfast taxes the ingenuity of his secretaries, who have to provide a daily quota of guests at unseasonable hours. He is a Jew, not disciplinarian in practice, and he dresses with scrupulous care. Good American as he is, he prefers to buy his ties in London.

Rich, then, but I should suppose not phenomenally so—by no means in the Rockefeller Ford class. And now, in his approaching age, a self-possessed gentleman of moderate and amiable tastes, proud of his success, and unspoilt by it. There is, it will be seen, nothing in all this to indicate him as remarkable. Such men are good company in the world, sound social assets, and fortunately they are to be found in their thousands. Nor does the distinction come of his having made his success in an industry that to-day attracts more popular attention than any other. This, let it be said at once,

is not a history of the Films. In telling this story, it will not be necessary to speculate on the future of the moving picture as an art, or even to ask what are its claims to be called an art at all. We have merely to accept it as a fact that on an unprecedented scale conditions the world's entertainment. In the organisation of this fact Carl Laemmle has for a quarter of a century played an important, and in some respects a decisive part. But even so, it is not our purpose to determine the precise nature or scope of his influence. It seems clear that his effect upon the economics of the film industry has been a wholesome one, but the claim need not be exaggerated. He assumes no authority as a technical or artistic pioneer. He has in his time been responsible for some very good pictures, and some not so good. He has consistently aimed at a high standard, but, like most of his colleagues, he has perhaps at times been uncertain what a high standard was. It is indicative of his natural staying power that with advancing years his assessment of quality has become surer; his latest films are his best. To the actual creative processes of the screen he has given no more than critical attention; that is to say, he has directed no pictures himself. There is nothing to suggest that he had talents in that direction.

And still we have not sighted our remarkable man. To have fought a dangerous and powerful trust almost single-handed, and thus to have re-

leased a growing industry from the stranglehold of monopoly, is an intrepid thing to have done; to have loosened up the conditions of employment and to have recognised from the first the proper status of the player, deserves well of the film-acting profession; to have founded a great producing organisation and to have kept it well in the forefront of enterprise and achievement, is a highly satisfactory record on which to reflect. But gifts equal to such occasions are never far to seek. They command high salaries, but not our scrutiny. If they alone were Carl Laemmle's credentials, he might be worth so many million dollars, but he would not be worth writing about.

And he is. The reason is simple, yet arresting. From obscure origins Carl Laemmle rose, with all the approved ritual of emigré romance, to a modest competence by attention to the sartorial needs of Oshkosh, Wisconsin. Then he drifted, for there was hardly more of design in it than that, into the motion picture business. For close on twenty-five years he has fought his way through a succession of crises in one of the most fiercely competitive of all industries. In doing this he has time after time had to stand toe to toe with his opponent in the middle of the ring and exchange blows meant to smash. As often as not he had not one opponent assailing him, but a dozen. Sometimes he won by a knockout, sometimes on points, but he nearly always won. There have been occasions when the

whole film industry has waited in suspense on the issue of the conflict. Laemmle's fights have always been conducted in a fever heat of emotion and in a blaze of publicity. The scene of his struggles has been one of hot tempers and highly strung nerves. Ruthless ambitions have been frustrated, and desperate greeds crossed by his determination. His career in all its successful circumstance has been one to provoke jealousy, fear, animosity. And at the age of sixty-four he has come through it with the high professional regard and the deep personal affections of an entire industry. They call him Uncle Carl. That is the record of a remarkable man.

## CHAPTER II

### LAUPHEIM AND ICHENHAUSEN

CARL LAEMMLE (German Lämmle, pronounced Lemly) was born on January 17th, 1867, at Laupheim in the South German kingdom of Württemberg. He was the tenth of thirteen children, the son of Julius Baruch and Rebekka. His father was in a modest way of business as a country estate agent, speculating thriftily in small parcels of land. He was known in his little town as a man whose word in all things was valid security. His fellow-townsmen sought him out as arbiter in their quarrels. He was forty-seven years of age when Carl was born, and his wife Rebekka eleven years younger. They were poor. Once a year they allowed themselves an excursion to Ulm, sixteen miles away, to hear an opera. There sometimes they saw Wagner himself.

Laupheim in the sixties was a town of some three thousand inhabitants. The Laemmle's house was of white plaster with red tiles and green shutters. On the ground floor was a central passage, on one side of which were two kitchens, one for use, one for the ornamental display of household

china. On the other side were three rooms, the first being the family sitting- and dining-room, with one corner reserved for the mother's work-table, and an alcove curtained off to accommodate an additional bed. Dark flowered wall-paper and patchwork rugs blended sombrely with the late Biediemeier furniture. On the walls were two severe family portraits, a clock with the dial set in the tower of a landscape in oils, and a case of butterflies. A large stove occupied a considerable corner of the space already unequal to its necessities. The room opened into another, the parental bedroom in which Carl and the other children were born. And again beyond that was the parlour, used only for ceremonial occasions. Upstairs were the children's bedrooms, some of which were let off when the elder boys went out into the world. A little strip of garden completed the premises.

During Carl's childhood, eight of his twelve brothers and sisters died; there was a dreadful month of scarlet fever, which sent a procession of little coffins to the Jewish burial ground. Even for the depleted family it was tough going, but somehow adversity found it as difficult as usual to subdue human fortitude. The Laemmlers made the best of what they decided not to consider a bad job, and Carl grew up into his teens in a cheerful if straitened environment. He went to the school house in the same road as his own home, and later to an establishment further removed



THE BIRTHPLACE OF CARL LAEMMLE. LAUPHEIM, WÜRTEMBERG







and known as the Latin School. There seem to be no records of untimely wisdom, but there is nebulous tradition that he was something of an athlete, indeed that "he seldom lost a race to boys in his own class." If this be the truth, it is highly creditable to him; I suppose he must have been a very small boy, since he has never been anything but a very small Uncle Carl.

The schooldays had diversions. There was bathing in a local brook, and on summer evenings there seems to have been an enthusiasm for cockchafers in the neighbouring fir-plantations—a pursuit the fascination of which, I confess, escapes me. He liked fishing, and the rings on a trout water still excite him.

The Laemmele house yet stands as it was when Carl was born. Not quite as it was; since its present owner, on his periodic visits to his native town from New York or California, delights to renew the memories but not the discomforts of his childhood, and has furnished bath and bedrooms with the porcelain luxury that inspires the lyrical mood in house-agents. Otherwise the dwelling is as little changed as Laupheim itself. If you sit of an evening with your cognac in the bar of the Gasthaus zum Ochsen, you know that no hand in a hundred years has disturbed the low-ceilinged room, with its smooth, worn tables and benches, and the large square desk, like a dock behind a railed top. Here, too, still sit the Württembergers

of a past century, slow, powerful men with dark wrinkled faces, a strange emphasis of bone in the contours. The talk is much what you would hear in a small country town in Gloucestershire or the Dakotas, crops and local politics, weather reports, births, marriages, and deaths. And there among them, but for some teasing impulse fifty years ago, might have been Carl Laemmle with his tall pot of Munich beer. Rounder in face than most of his fellows, and a good deal shorter in stature, but still a steady-going prudent Württemberger, with, perhaps, an unexpectedly twinkling eye.

Indeed, the odds were at least level that this was what would happen to the boy who in the seventies seemed to come by his inches so very slowly. When he goes back to Laupheim now, and calls a free bill for the evening to the Ochsen company, he knows how easily the leisured gravity of Southern Germany might have been deaf to the call of a new world. Laupheim has hardly moved since he left it. He has helped to provide it with public baths, a gymnasium, an agreeable little park, and now when it is making one of its rare expansions into the surrounding fields it has marked its sense of obligation by calling one of the new streets Carl Lämmle Strasse. We shall hear of larger munificences than there, but Laemmle in his solicitude for the people of his origin must reflect sometimes on the turn of chance that might so well have kept him always among them. And then there would

have been no monthly pension-roll, and no Carl Lämmle Strasse.

We find a reflection of the chance in his own family. When Carl decided on his American adventure, he had before him the example of an elder brother, Joseph, who had already gone off to try his luck. But there was another elder brother, Siegfried, who shared none of these disturbing inclinations. He took to travelling in wines through the towns of Southern Germany. After a time he found the calling uncongenial, but on his journeys he had acquired a habit of picking up antique odds and ends that took his fancy. He had, in fact, become something of a connoisseur, and left the wine business to open a shop in Munich as a dealer in those seductive wares that are miscellaneously known as *objets d'art*. Over this he still presides, a very pattern of Württemberg courtesy that declines to be stamped by the importunities of progress or startled by all the arcs of Hollywood. So uninstructed is he, that he still finds living virtue in old water-colour drawings, and navigator's instruments, and samplers, and little saints carved in wood. He sells these things, but reluctantly. The best of them he hides away in secluded corners, and displays them to visitors only as a mark of considered esteem. If Siegfried Laemmle disappears into the darkness and returns with an unlikely looking soap-box, you may conclude that he finds your taste not wholly negli-

ble. But usually of these finer pieces it seems that he has unhappily forgotten the price.

His brother Carl, for whom he has undisguised admiration, once proposed that he should set up a store in New York on one of the more impressive avenues, offering to supply adequate resources. Siegfried was very sensible of the kindness, but feared that he would be unable to learn the language. Also, he did not think that New York would make him happy. Even in Munich there is a good deal more going on than is necessary. Siegfried Laemmle thinks that his brother Carl has done wonders, but he has never had the smallest wish to emulate them. Not long ago he and his family went as Carl's guests on a magnificent tour of the American continent, extending over several months. He took an immense number of photographs, but otherwise made few advances towards intimacy with the great American people. He could not be induced to speak anything but his native German; on one occasion only so far forgetting himself, when he held a full house at poker, as to exclaim "Atta Boy!"

That is the sort of man that Siegfried is, and Carl might have been. There is in the elder brother, with his gentle culture and sensitive touch, a genuine simplicity of heart, inherited by Carl, too, from a soil that nourished the sweet and gracious arts of the peasant craftsmen of Southern Germany. It is the kind of quality that holds ten-

aciously to the roots of a man's being, very hard to eradicate, and it has never ceased to inform the character of a man who for nearly fifty years has lived in conditions that meant constant danger. There is probably no variety of intrigue and graft and double-crossing that he has not been called upon to parry with as little warning as was given to the minute-men. And he has never in a crisis been betrayed into giving back dirt for dirt.

Carl was sent to school when he was six years old, and stayed there until he was thirteen. His old associates, such as Benno Heumann, who to-day dispenses his benefactions in the town, are unable, with the most willing disposition, to remember anything notable about him. If he ran as strongly as report has it, he was none the less, it seems, a quiet, solicitous little boy, disliking games in which people might get hurt. He has been known to forbid the production of a rodeo scene in one of his pictures, not so much on account of his concern for the animals as for the cowboys, who doubtless thought him a meddlesome fellow for his pains. Similarly, he will travel a thousand miles to a race meeting on the flat, and refuses to look at a steeplechase. Though there may be no virtue in such susceptibilities, they are not unpleasing in a man who has been pretty thoroughly through the mill. Carl Laemmle's jaw can set firmly enough on more searching occasions.

The Laupheim school years passed by with a

not too irksome monotony of incident, though the modern child happily has no means of knowing what that monotony really was. Sometimes Carl would go on short business journeys with his father, and watch the serious little transactions by the way. Julius Baruch was a shrewd enough salesman to carry with him a parcel of trinkets for his clients' children, and if there should be one over at the end of the day's round, Carl might be in luck. But such indulgences were rare. Now and again there would be a family expedition. One Saturday morning Synagogue opened at six o'clock so that everyone might be able to get to Ulm in time for the dedication of the great cathedral that had taken five hundred years to complete.

On January 17th, 1880, Carl was thirteen, the age of Jewish manhood. Joseph was in America, and Siegfried already trading in his wines. There were also living one sister, Caroline, and Louis, the youngest brother. Reduced though the strain was on the family purse, the age of thirteen meant the necessity of looking for work. Rebekka Laemmler, devoted to children who adored her, had a shrewd sense of realities, shrewder, we may suspect than her husband, and it was she who took the matter of the young Carl's career in hand. She had a cousin who had married one Heilbronner, a butcher of Ichenhausen, another small country town,



forty miles away from Laupheim, over the Bavarian border. Through her she had obtained an introduction to a firm of general dealers, founded ten years before by S. G. Heller, whose name it still bears. It was a thriving little rural business, doing a wholesale and retail trade, chiefly in stationery goods and "novelties." The original Heller was at this time handing over the business to his son Aaron, who still directs it at the age of seventy-eight.

Carl was contracted to the Hellers as apprentice and errand boy, a small premium being paid for three years' indentures. On April 26th, three months after his thirteenth birthday, he travelled with his mother by rail to Gunzberg, and thence by mail coach from Laupheim to Ichenhausen, the journey taking five hours. They were met by Heilbronner, and spent the first night at his house. The next day the boy was handed over to his employers, with agonised protests that he must return to Laupheim with his mother. Keeping a stiff upper lip, she made unregarded explanations as to the impossibility of this, and departed as acutely miserable as the very forlorn small boy, whom she left behind to throw himself inconsolably on to the bed in the little timber-partitioned room that was to be his lodging.

He cried until he fell asleep exhausted. The next day he cried a great deal more, and refused to

eat anything. By the evening, however, he was extremely hungry, and allowed himself to be coaxed into thinking better of the situation. He found the Hellers kind, the food good, and within a week he had decided to do what credit he could to his job.

He stayed with the Hellers between three and four years, rising to the position of book-keeper and office manager. Out of his first six months' wages he saved two pounds, which he sent home. On the balance he clothed and kept himself in pocket-money. His association with the family became one of intimate friendship, and now a new generation of Hellers think with pardonable zeal that their house gave his early training to a man without whom modern civilisation would have been a very different story. The homage is as charming as it is unreserved. Uncle Carl in Ichenhausen to-day could probably have the moon if he asked for it.

During Carl's apprenticeship, his master Aaron Heller married, and the first child was a daughter who later became Louis Laemmle's wife, and so Carl's sister-in-law. The boy's determination to serve his employers well quickly became a settled habit. He also took lessons from old Mr. Heller, who was a pensioned teacher, in arithmetic and grammar, picking up as well a little English. On his first holiday at home, after a year's absence, during which he had written twice weekly to his





JULIUS BARUCH LAEMMLE

CARL LAEMMLE'S FATHER AND MOTHER



REBEKKA LAEMMLE



parents, by his mother's advice he brought with him a parcel of samples chosen from the Heller stock. With these she took him round the local shops and to other likely purchasers, and Carl returned to Ichenhausen with a proud little record of his first lesson in salesmanship. Aaron Heller was enchanted, and Carl at fourteen began to be a personage in the business. He was advanced in responsibilities, and allowed to write letters for the firm—this sort of letter:

4th May, 1881.

To Herr Albert Behrend of Berlin,—

An especially unlucky star must rule over the visiting cards for Jakob Bernheim which I ordered from you, since you have again misprinted them; as you will see from the enclosed specimen, Bernheim appears as Bernstein. I am returning this faulty consignment to be used at your discretion, and shall be obliged if you will substitute 100 cards with the name correctly printed.

Respectfully,

S. G. Heller,

per C. Lämmle.

And again:

23rd May, 1881.

To Frau Pauline Klein of Laupheim,—

Politely replying to your favour, you ordered from my Mr. Lämmle not 25 but 100 monograms, and it is my invariable custom not to supply goods

in excess of my orders. I regret, therefore, that I am unable to accept any returns, as I manufacture such goods only on commission and carry no stock of them. [In other words, pay up.]

Respectfully,

S. G. Heller,

per C. Lämmle.

In January, 1882, we have:

To L. Romhilah of Weimar,—

Mr. Göpfröth, Keppelmeister of Laupheim, has given me your address, and I beg to enquire what are your lowest prices for No. 3 cottage pianos, carriage paid.

Also, what reduction would there be on two pianos. I have in mind satisfactory service and delivery at reasonable rates. If the instrument satisfies me, you may rely on further custom from this neighbourhood.

An immediate reply will be appreciated.

With all esteem,

S. G. Heller,

per C. Lämmle.

And finally, on a domestic note, in November, 1882:

To Eberle and Werner, of Ulm.

After long delay I received our photographs yesterday. I regret to say that they do not please me. Those of myself are acceptable, but both the small and the large ones of my wife are displeasing.

I therefore return them post paid, and my wife will call at her convenience for a further sitting.

Respectfully,

S. G. Heller,

per Carl Lämmle.

These were not dictated letters. "Carl," we can hear the instructions, "write to—, and say so and so." The results are not bad going for a lad not turned fifteen; there is efficiency and a spice of abrupt humour in them. They remind us of a London lawyer who, when he was leaving for golf, happened on the note of an unpaid debt. No one but the office boy being in, he told him to send a suitable reminder. On referring to the copy-book he found:

Sir,—

Unless your debt is paid by Thursday next, we shall take such steps as will amaze you.

Yours truly —

At the end of his three years' apprenticeship, in 1883, Carl was free to seek work elsewhere if he chose. But at sixteen he realised that with the Hellers he was learning sound and well-principled ways of business, and that there was no present haste about making a move. He liked the family and the confidence was returned. It was a friendly home, well kept, with wholesome and sufficient food. To be in the Heller household, moreover,

was to be on amiable terms with the town, and on Saturday afternoons there were visits to Hochwang for checkers and a glass, or possibly two glasses, of beer. In the summer of his seventeenth year he was sent by his employers for the first time on to the road, travelling for a week through Württemberg and opening up new territory for the firm. He did well, and the prospects of his advancement were good. It was perhaps not too rash to hope that with perseverance he would rise to a partnership with the Hellers, and to-day the name of Heller and Laemmle might have been a respected one in the stationery and "novelty" business at Ichenhausen and its neighbourhood.

But in his mind were latent speculations of another sort. Joseph Laemmle's letters from America gave a very good account of New York and Chicago, which seemed to be places of larger opportunity than Laupheim and Ichenhausen. Moreover one of the Heller family, Leo, had paid a visit home from the same country during Carl's apprenticeship, and he too was enthusiastic about the social and financial vistas of this El Dorado. Carl's impressionable spirit quickened as he heard these things, and a hope began to shape itself that one day perhaps he, too, might set off to come by his own in this new world. What the new world precisely was he had no idea—probably it was something rather larger than Ulm, with several firms in a bigger way of business than S. G. Hel-

ler. In the meantime he had his apprenticeship to serve, and although he was bound by no formal articles he couldn't very well break his word to his family and employers to go through with it. Moreover, he was happy enough, and it was wise not to pay too much attention to these rumours of Flying Fame. They might be unsettling, and Carl was already quite level-headed in his control of himself. So they were tucked away into some corner of his mind for occasional contemplation.

Then, when his three years were up, the possibilities became active in his thought again. But a new difficulty arose. His mother, ambitious as she was for her children, thought that Carl was doing very well at Ichenhausen, and she had no mind for seeing another of her sons slipping out into a world altogether beyond her reach. She saw that Carl was restless, and she handled the situation with characteristic firmness. She made him promise that so long as she was alive he would not leave his own country. His word again was given, and that, it seemed, was an end of the matter. His mother was then fifty-two years of age, and in the ordinary course of nature she would live until Carl was a settled man of business, past his youth. And so he once more put American fancies behind him, and turned to the fortunes of the house of Heller, glad that he was now sufficiently well thought of to be sent into the neighbouring towns as Our Special Representative.

And then suddenly, in September, there was an urgent call from Laupheim. He hurried home, to find his mother dangerously ill. On the 2nd of October it was necessary to operate, and on the next day she died. Carl has been able to carry with him through life the knowledge that no mother could have been more truly loved and respected by a son. Life had gone sternly with Rebekka Laemmler, leaving her no margins. Always there had been more to do in the day than could reasonably be done, and always less than enough to do it with. Hers was the organising, devising brain of the family, and her best epitaph is that in the drag and strain of necessity she never forfeited her title to the devotion of her children.

But her death meant a radical change in Carl's designs for the future. However lamentably, he was released now from his promise. His father was not likely to interfere with whatever plans he might choose to make. Julius Baruch, then sixty-three years old, was not of the same decisive inclinations as his wife. Scrupulously upright, an accessible counsellor, and honouring his responsibilities, he was more philosophically disposed to let events do their own shaping. When, therefore, he saw that Carl was again becoming pre-occupied by thoughts of America, no objection was made.

The decision was not immediate. On his mother's death, Carl proposed to find work in



Laupheim, in order to be with his father. He wrote his letter of resignation to Aaron Heller, who received it graciously, and intimated that if ever the young man should wish to come back to his career in Ichenhausen, he would be welcome. For three months Carl stayed in Laupheim, but his father, whose tranquillity was anything but dull-eyed, saw that the crisis had released aspirations that were not to be quieted. For the boy's seventeenth birthday he gave him a steerage ticket for the S.S. *Neckar*, sailing between Bremerhaven and New York. It cost ninety marks, or twenty-two dollars and fifty cents. As this sum was not available at the moment in the Laemmle home, it was borrowed.

## CHAPTER III

### NEW YORK AND CHICAGO

ON January 28th, 1884, Carl Laemmle, aged seventeen, left Laupheim station, accompanied by Leo Hirschfeld, an old schoolfellow also bound for America. They were seen off by their families, Siegfried Laemmle going with them on their way as far as Stuttgart. When borrowing the money for Carl's passage, Julius Baruch had further raised a draft for fifty dollars on the New York house of a German bank. Also Carl took with him an album, which he still possesses, suitably inscribed by his relatives and friends. The *Neckar* sailed from Bremerhaven on January 31st. Forty-five years later he received a telegram:

Mayor James J. Walker of New York City cordially invites you to be a member of committee to meet S.S. *Bremen* on her initial trip Monday July twenty-second 1929.

And in the same year the North German Lloyd Company invited him to sail from Europe with special courtesies on the fifty thousand ton suc-

cessor of their three thousand ton *Neckar* in which he had made his first Atlantic voyage.

If Carl had been desolated on leaving Laupheim for Ichenhausen at thirteen, it was nothing to his present misery. Seventeen, after all, has not much more fortitude than thirteen, and Ichenhausen at worst had been only forty miles away from home. Now he was facing some unknown infinity of distance, and the golden prospects that he had framed in his fancy seemed strangely nebulous, hardly, indeed, to have any kind of reality. Certainly, although still a boy, he had been through a hard tutelage, and knew something about looking after himself, but as he went into the emigrant room of the *Neckar*, resolution and resources alike dwindled into a pitiful mockery. The room was dark, stifling, and occupied by a hundred other distraught and ill-found people. In the midst of his mental distress, Carl began at once to feel exceedingly unwell.

He and Hirschfeld picked up with two other German boys from Bavaria, Julius Hilder and Julius Klugman. Between them, including Carl's New York credit, they had something less than two hundred dollars. They decided that the accommodation allotted to them was intolerable, and that some part of their capital must be employed in getting it changed. One of the ship's petty officers was approached, and agreed to let them have his own cabin, with two upper and two

lower berths, for a consideration of thirty dollars between them. This absorbed an eighth part of Carl's fortune—an eighth, not a seventh, since in addition to his draft he had a few German marks and five American gold dollars which had been expressly left him by his mother. The necessity of parting with this precious little inheritance deepened his misery. Payment of his share of the cabin hire left him with but a mark or two in his pocket, and it was an abominably dirty cabin at that. But at least they had escaped from the effluvial congestion of their own compatriots with Slovaks, Poles and Russians.

Carl and his friend Hirschfeld were prostrated in their berths before nightfall, and there they remained during the thirteen days of the voyage. Carl was even beyond answering his companion's frequent enquiries as to whether there was any hope that the ship might be swallowed up by a merciful sea. Hilder and Klugman enjoyed intervals of convalescence, to talk revoltingly of herrings and potatoes. On February 13th, the ship was outside New York Harbour, where it was held up for twenty-four hours in a winter fog. When the fog cleared on the 14th, Klugman carried Carl up on to the deck to take his first view of Liberty seen through a chilling flurry of rain. El Dorado was an acutely discouraging spectacle. They were landed by the immigrant boat at Castle Garden,

an earlier and doubtless a less agreeable Ellis Island.

Their papers examined and approved, the four boys stepped, with no adequate enthusiasm, on to American soil. They had hardly enough English for a paragraph between them, and not more than fifty dollars apiece in their pockets. Hilder had a brother waiting for him, and Klugman a promised job in a furrier's at three dollars a week, which however he refused to take until they made it three fifty. Carl and Hirshfeld might as well have been stranded in the Arizona desert for any signs of succour that they could see. Hilder's brother took them to a boarding-house at the corner of Fifty-Ninth Street and Third Avenue, and there left them.

In the edifying sequel, each of Carl Laemmle's three fellow-immigrants made a fortune. Hilder took to "notions" and fancy goods, founding the largest importing house in New York. Klugman proved that the three fifty was not above his value, and made his million or so out of furs. Hirshfeld made his in candies, inventing a pink powder which by the agency of hot water may be transmuted into strawberry jelly.

Carl would have been very well content if on arriving in New York he could have been told that he too would one day achieve some such wealth no more remarkably. Like countless settlers in the

new world, his inducement was not fame but fortune. Working cheerfully enough in the little Ichenhausen store, he perceived none the less that there one was always likely to be driven hard to make a satisfactory living. In America, he supposed, it would be easier and the living more substantial—that was all. Now in New York, he clung to the hope that the dream would be realised, but the dream was no more romantic than that. He would take any kind of job that turned up, and be ready to take any other if it offered a few cents more on the way. For two or three weeks it seemed that there was a serious chance of missing realisation altogether. He answered advertisements, always to find that fifty other people had done the same thing. He was making alarming inroads on his reserve of funds. And then he was engaged by the keeper of a drug-store on the east side of Thirty-Eighth Street at four dollars a week. He swept the floor, washed bottles, and ran errands. But he didn't like the smells, and he didn't like his master, who dedicated one day a week to violent intoxication. He kept his eyes open for another place.

He got up every morning at four o'clock, in order that he might be downtown in time to get an early copy of the *New York Staatszeitung* as it came on to the streets. His interest was in its advertisement columns. Then one day he conceived the idea of writing to the editor of the Letter



Box or Briefkarten. For some years his family had lost touch with Joseph Laemmle, but every six months or so they received a copy of the *Illinois Staatszeitung*, which, although it was accompanied by no letter, they supposed to come from him. Could the editor by any chance help Mr. Carl Laemmle to ascertain the whereabouts of Mr. Joseph Laemmle, believed to be in Chicago? The editor in his reply column advised his correspondent to apply direct to the editor of the *Illinois* journal. Carl wrote, and the letter was brought to the notice of Washington Hesing, Vice-President of the paper, who was known for his strong German sympathies. He asked his secretary if he recognized the writing. The secretary, engaged on other matters, did not. He was instructed to read the letter. The secretary was Joseph Laemmle. That night a note left Chicago containing a ticket from New York and a ten dollar bill.

The first lesson that Carl learnt in Chicago was that in the new world there were no back stair approaches to success. His brother might be right-hand man to a Vice-President of the fourth estate, but the best he could do for him was to get him work in the Boston store as packer and inside errand boy, at his New York wage, four dollars a week. On the forty-hour journey from New York, Carl had renewed an intensive study of a German-English dictionary, feeling the neces-

sity of enlarging his equipment for the notable advancement that doubtless awaited him in Chicago. Now it was midsummer, infernally hot, and the odour of paste and brown paper was hardly less offensive than that of New York boluses on the East Side. And still it was four dollars a week, apparently the staple wage in El Dorado. Clearly it was time that something was done about it. He applied for naturalisation papers—for which he had to wait five years; and in his brother's office he was introduced to Theodore Regensteiner.

Regensteiner is still alive, and the head of I know not how vast a printing establishment in Chicago, where they do three or it may be six colour processes to perfection. That may not be impressive, but Regensteiner, with whom I drank excellent Rhine wine in Munich, is. He is a man who has come through steerage to saloon with all his humours tempered, and sound to the core. He was a boy with Carl Laemmle in those early Chicago days.

They lodged together, and were earning less than ten dollars a week between them. Eight were paid for board and lodging. There was an arrangement by which their meals were separately provided, and when Carl had no appetite at the moment for a favourite dish, he reserved it in the cupboard with a note on it, "This is mine," for Regensteiner's information. A considerate landlady made no extra charge for laundry, but a





THEODORE REGENSTEINER AND CARL LAEMMLE  
ABOUT 1885



margin of two dollars gave no scope to the natural tastes of two grown lads, and earnestly they considered the question of auxiliary means. Carl had a small residue of his original fifty dollars, and he contrived to borrow another fifty from a German acquaintance on Laupheim security. Thus capitalised, the partnership proposed to go into the newspaper business. Severe domestic economy was practised. Winter and summer they walked to their work, to save car fares; they shared the same room and bed; and they allowed themselves one weekly indulgence only. On Sunday evenings they visited the German theatre, queuing up at an early hour in order to get front gallery seats at twenty-five cents apiece. Here they saw an exciting range of German and translated classics, which furnished liberal themes for debate in the few waking minutes that they could be together during the week. After the theatre they went on to a saloon, where for ten cents each they could take a glass of beer, and be free of a snack table, at which customers were understood to behave with moderation. This condition they disregarded, and so came by one square meal a week.

Their passion—it was no less—for the drama was consummated when in 1886 Booth and Barrett visited Chicago in a Shakesperean repertory. They were engaged to appear as supers in *Julius Cæsar* at fifty cents a show. The great Romans,

we are told, were little men, and Carl had that qualification at least for the spear and toga. Economically, however, their success was equivocal, as they bought tickets for a number of young ladies who desired to see them act. On the topic of these young ladies, I may add, I found Regensteiner uncommunicative.

But for the newspaper enterprise. Regensteiner was working as draughtsman to a machinery company, and was full of inventive ideas. Under his direction a small cart was devised, capable of carrying a two hundred pound load. On Sunday mornings at four o'clock they made a round of the newspaper offices, and collected bundles of the *Chicago Tribune*, *Inter-Ocean*, *Herald* and *Westen*, which they dragged to the station. There the cart was slickly dismantled and tied up with the rope that had hauled it. Long before breakfast hour they were on their rounds, the cart re-assembled, through Kensington, Riverdale, Dalton and other outlying townships. Not until five o'clock in the afternoon was the last order delivered, and then a bolt back to Chicago to be in time for *Faust* or *William Tell*. When winter from the lakes made the roads impassable for wheels, they used a sled, also of Regensteiner's build. In this way they doubled their weekly earnings, which meant not only solvency, but relative affluence. Later on, when they had advanced as wage-earners, they sold the well-estab-

lished cart route to Carl's younger brother Louis, who had followed him from Laupheim.

But even with so handsome a supplement, income was not yet mounting on an impressive scale. For a good many years to come there was to be a steady increase, but no more than that. It was, in fact, not until 1906 that there was any prospect that Carl Laemmle would ever do more than make an ample competence in obscurity. In the meantime, his life, if not of national note, was active enough in adventure. There was nothing much in the way of romance about it; merely the inviolable faith of healthy youth that presently something considerable would happen.

Carl bettered his English, and after three suffocating months at the Boston store, he got a job with one Platskey, a silk agent. Prospects here seemed brighter, but on his third Monday morning he was told without warning that his place was to be taken by Platskey's nephew, and he was dismissed on the spot. This was serious, and for a time he was near to being derelict on the streets of Chicago, relieved only by an indulgent landlady and an odd dollar or two borrowed from Joseph. Then he found another place as office boy, this time at five dollars a week, with Meyer, Strauss, Goodman and Co., clothiers. In later years as a film magnate he gave a younger generation of the Meyers control of all his legal affairs in Chicago, but at the same time he was not

greatly impressed by the clothing business. He remained in it nine months, until July 1885. He had then been in America a year and a half, and his career to date had been far from encouraging. He had risen but one dollar a week, and although he was turned eighteen, he appeared to be destined for no more exalted a calling than that of errand boy. Decidedly, he had been better off in Ichenhausen. Even a mysterious "Batchelor's Button" which he had patented with Regensteiner was failing to attract the public. The newspaper business, while it made Sunday the most profitable day of the week, offered no opportunity for development. Regensteiner was finding the conquest of the world no easier. Together they decided on a change of occupation.

A sweltering July day in 1885 found them in a day-coach bound for South Dakota. Carl had heard from a Laupheimer connection who had settled there that it was a grand country for farming, and he had induced Regensteiner to join him in this new enterprise. Their train drew in to Mitchell station at four o'clock in the morning. They were to be met at seven, until which hour they slept on the station bench. Their friends arrived, to inform them that their first destination was to attend the funeral of a man—a Laemmle cousin—who had been struck by lightning. They repaired to a barn, where the body was placed in a hay-wagon, and taken to the cemetery, which

contained but one other grave. After this melancholy prelude, they proceeded on a ten hour ride to Yankton, in a cart that had no seats and was already overloaded by a harvesting machine. The sun would have been 120 in the shade, of which, however, there was none. The young men were distressingly clad, in thick cloth suits, stiff shirts and collars, narrow-brimmed sailor hats, and shoes of fashionable tightness. Much discommoded by the anatomy of the harvester, they made a dejected advance through the burning Dakota plains, Regensteiner at intervals consulting a Prayer Book which he carried in his pocket. Their refreshment consisted of two oranges apiece. Their unprotected faces bore marks of the journey for weeks to come.

They learnt to their mortification that they were not to be employed on the same farm, but were to be separated by a distance of four miles. Carl's master was an Irishman eighty years of age, farming land twenty miles from Yankton. The new hand's duties began at four in the morning, when he helped in milking a herd of twenty cows. On wet mornings certain preliminaries were dispensed with, and he was able to stay in bed until six; always before opening his eyes he offered up a short prayer that it might be raining good and hard.

He borrowed suitable clothes, including an alluring sombrero, and tried hard to look and be-



have like a farmer. But he found that he had few talents for the land, and, fit as he was, manual labour with iron pails and pitchforks in heat that bit through you was worse than running errands in Chicago. Moreover, there were other difficulties. Carl had been brought up in an orthodox Jewish home, and Yankton dietary depended largely on a staple of pork and ham. The friendly old Irishman was sympathetic, and Carl was allowed ample rations of chicken and eggs. Also, at his own request, he was excused attendance on the pig styes. But such distinctions did not foster the amenities of pioneer farming, and Carl soon ceased to cherish any ambition in the direction of teeming acres. On the whole, he would as soon be a sailor. And what had he come to this country for anyway? There was a great deal to be said for Württemberg. When he was not lifting things about, he had ample time for such reflections, riding an enigmatical pony as he watched the grazing cattle, without the smallest idea as to what he was expected to do about it.

On Sundays he met Regensteiner. They had taken the precaution of providing themselves with return tickets, and at the end of the first week, Regensteiner was for using them by the next available train. Carl felt just that way himself, but would not admit it. He already had a sense of humour, and when he looked at the real cowboys who seemed to enjoy this sort of thing and were



good at it, he knew that he and his friend were alien and rather ridiculous figures. But he was not going to be scared away by a week's disillusionment. He persuaded Regensteiner to give the experiment a fair trial. For seven weeks they clung on. Then Carl capitulated and, having set his hand to the plough, turned back to Chicago. He took with him seven dollars and fifty cents for his seven weeks' work.

The population of Chicago at this time was something above the half million mark, a figure to-day approaching three and a half. When Carl returned to the city at the end of August, 1885, deeply tanned and still wearing his sombrero, with which he somehow made a more dashing effect on the Michigan boulevard than in the Dakota cattleyards, his mind was fixed that something better than errand-running must be undertaken, and at once. In the columns of the *Tribune* he read that Messrs. Butler Bros., an enterprising young firm of general merchants, needed an entry clerk. He did not know what that meant, but he decided to attempt by bluff what had been denied to modest industry. He applied for the post, and on being asked by the employment manager whether he understood the duties involved, replied that he most certainly did. Which was by no means true, but he got the post, at six dollars a week. Then began an exercise of wits. He had to improvise the knowledge that he lacked, and in

this was dependent wholly on the good will of his fellow employees. Fortunately they took to him; word went round that this was a game kid who was up against it and deserved a chance. He got it. Making his entries of articles with names that he could not spell as they were called out to him by the dozen or gross, a friendly invoice clerk stationed himself within prompting distance.

Carl realised that he could not hope for much perseverance in these favours, and determined that he would never have to be told any word twice. With a concentrated effort, he had mastered the stock nomenclature within a week. Within six he had made himself an entry clerk to whom all mysteries were open, and then to his astonishment he was informed that his weekly salary—it was a wage no longer—was to be raised from six to seven dollars. The news so excited him that he ran incontinently out of the store to tell his brother, three streets away. Now, surely, he felt, a career had begun. Six months later, he was still further uplifted when the seven dollars became eight.

With what seemed to be a hold on success at last, he did a rash thing. He had been in America over two years, and he was seized by a desire to see his home again. He had managed to save enough money for a return steerage passage, and he approached Edward Butler, not to give notice, but to see whether he could get leave of absence.

Butler, a little startled, told him that if he went, and came to him again later in the year he would undertake to find him work. In the early summer of 1886 Carl returned to Laupheim with his brother Joseph, who had not been home for fifteen years. Carl was away for five months, reaching Chicago again at two o'clock of a November morning with precisely one nickel in his pocket. But his old room with Regensteiner was ready for him, and on the next day he called to remind Butler of his promise.

Having found a policy of daring to be effective with that gentleman, he now proposed that he should be re-engaged not as junior but as senior entry clerk. Asked if he knew the principles of book-keeping, he replied that book-keeping was his middle name. The answer went well, and he was taken on, this time at nine dollars a week. And again four months later, Butler made it ten.

In the spring of 1887 he left Butler to join Leo Heller, of L. Heller and Co., the brother of his old Ichenhausen master, as book-keeper. He received no advance in salary, but was attracted by the personal association, and the step in clerical status. He commenced as accountant by striking his first balance wrongly, and taking three months to spot the discrepancy. Heller was in the wholesale jewellery business, and Carl stayed with him until 1889, in which year he received his naturalisation papers and made a second journey to Laup-

heim. On his return he did not rejoin Heller, but went as assistant book-keeper to the Mandel Brothers' Store, again at ten dollars a week. After eighteen months he moved on, still book-keeping, to Nelson Morris and Co.'s stock yards, with two dollars increase. But he was unable to stand the stench and screams of the slaughtered animals, and left in 1890 to enter the firm of Otto Young and Co., wholesale jewellers, as bill clerk. Here he started at fifteen dollars a week, and in four years rose to be charges clerk and book-keeper at eighteen. He was then, in 1894, twenty-seven years of age, and had been ten years in the United States. With eighteen dollars a week, and with what was but a very moderately skilled position at an office desk, he could hardly be said to have shown a clean pair of heels to old Württemberg. But he was now an American citizen, and still not too old to suppose that something or anything might happen yet. That he had any conception of what it might be, there is nothing to suggest.

The struggle hitherto had been a tough and unpropitious one. Not until towards the end of his first Chicago decade was he in receipt of much more than a bare living wage, though thrift and simple tastes had enabled him to put a little aside. His friendship with Regensteiner was, perhaps, his most solid social asset in those days. They continued their newspaper and other little enterprises together, and their considerate conduct in

the Aschenheim and Weinberg families, where they lodged, gave them both an assurance of refuge in adversity. Carl, at least, never knew from day to day when it might be needed. It was a time of immensely rapid expansion in the middle-west, but it was also a time of economic instability, when although nothing could stop the growth of the great cities, few individual citizens could be securely counted on to stay the pace from one stock-taking to another. Occupation such as Carl was able to obtain was, in fact, hardly better than casual labour, and a worker had reason to count himself fortunate if he could keep one position for a twelve-month. Confident that whatever happened he would not be turned out of board and lodging meant a good deal for Carl's peace of mind during those precarious years. These generousities are not forgotten.

With Regensteiner, too, he educated himself towards those humanities for which he had a natural instinct that had of necessity been but little cultivated. He was mostly too busy acquiring a practical mastery of English to pay much attention to literature. He acquired in time an easy idiomatic control of his adopted language, which he speaks to-day with a graphic fluency that has, attractively enough, retained traces of his native accent. Being of German origin, and Southern German at that, his taste for, and in, music needs no indicating. If seats were to be had for the

available dimes, he and Regensteiner were always eager for a concert or an opera. Of their partiality for the playhouse we have heard, and they were even known on occasion to perform one-act plays themselves with their friends. The records of these doubtless enthusiastic if inexpert productions have not been preserved. And then there was Dr. Emil Hirsch, a Rabbi who delivered lectures of a liberal philosophic bent, just the sort of thing to germinate in a boy's active and hungry mind. At the age of twenty-seven, Carl had patiently constructed something of a background for a wealth of rough and ready experience, and he seemed to be as far from any kind of distinction as he had been when he lay forlornly in his *Neckar* berth ten years before.

And yet another twelve years were to pass without any more auspicious signs. In 1894 Carl moved from Chicago to Oshkosh. At Mandel's establishment one of his colleagues had been William Friedman, who had left to become "financial executive" to the Continental Clothing Company. Through him Carl was now offered a book-keeper's job in the Oshkosh branch of that firm. There was no immediate financial inducement—in fact the salary was to be less than his present earning. But Carl argued that people needed more clothes than jewellery, and that if he could secure a position of importance in such a house he might be able to get into contact with



the greater public from which he vaguely hoped still for some enriching gesture. It was merely an instinct, but he followed it. He was bidden God-speed at the station only by his brothers, Joseph, who had brought a wife back from Laupheim in 1887, and Louis, who had arrived in Chicago to follow the euphonious calling of a cake-baker. In the meantime, his father had died, in 1892, at the age of seventy-two. Carl had then made his third return from the States to Laupheim, to assist in putting the family affairs in order. Now, in 1894, as he left Chicago, the Württemberg days were beginning to fade into the distance, not of his memory and affection, but of his experience.

## CHAPTER IV

### OSHKOSH, WISCONSIN

I SAID that twelve years were to pass without indication of any conspicuous achievement. The assertion ought, perhaps, to be modified. At the end of that time Carl was still a small provincial tradesman, but in his own business he had made a mark, and he had trained his mind to methods that were later to be put to much more widely effective, and, indeed, notable uses.

The population of New York in the middle nineties was approximately two millions, that of Chicago a million. To nebulously constructive ideas about one knew not what in particular these vast centres of heterogeneous industry were coldly inaccessible. Barely to keep alive in them was as much as a young man with a rudimentary education and no special training could hope to do. Vague intimations of some unspecified powers were rudely kept in check by the insistent routine of earning a few necessary weekly dollars. The belief that it is easy to get on in the cyclonic rise of great cities, is entirely superstitious; on the other hand, it is desperately easy to go under. It was,



unquestionably, fortunate for Carl that before his vigour and enterprise had been impaired he left the vortex of Chicago for a small community of twenty-five thousand people. He was there to have some chance of letting his invention find itself.

Oshkosh, named after a Menominee Indian chief, is in the eastern part of Wisconsin State, on the west shore of Lake Winnebago, rather less than two hundred miles due north of Chicago. In the thirty-seven years since Carl Laemmle first went there, its population has nearly doubled. The centre of a luxurious lumber district, its prosperity has been built up largely in the wood-working trades, and when Laemmle—we may now discard the familiarities of boyhood—arrived there to sell clothing, his customers were mostly people supplying the lumber-men, or the lumber-men themselves. Cheap hard-wearing articles were demanded. The price of a man's suit ranged from nine dollars and ninety-eight cents—equivocative of eleven-pence-three-farthings—to eighteen dollars. The principal market was for the nine-ninety-eights, and the problem was how to sell these in the largest possible quantities.

It soon became Laemmle's personal problem. The head of the business, resident in Chicago, was Sam Stern. His name was not inapt. He had no democratic or pioneer delusions about the proper distance to be kept between master and men, and

once when visiting Oshkosh he was none too well pleased at having, owing to a shortage of rooms, to sleep with Laemmle overnight. But the necessary civilities of the occasion confirmed in his mind a growing impression that his young employee was rather a smart fellow. He so far unbent as to invite him to his home in Chicago, and, what was more to the purpose, he made him manager of his Oshkosh branch. This appointment was not confirmed until 1898, but in the meantime Laemmle had taken considerably more than a book-keeper's part in the direction of the store.

A chronological record of his Oshkosh years is not necessary. We need only to observe the development in his mind of certain ideas that were to govern his later career. He had to deal, precisely, with a tough lot of customers, and his first determination was that they should be well served. He was never sure but what one of them might be not only tough but crooked. A device much favoured by the wrong 'uns was to purchase a cheap article for the purpose of getting change on a bad cheque. To tell a lumber-jack that you suspected his cheque of being bad was a delicate undertaking. Sometimes the purchase was not so small. On one occasion a casual caller spent three hours in selecting a sixty dollar overcoat. His cheque was taken to Laemmle, who didn't like the look of it. The salesman, excited by the magnitude of the deal, insisted that only a man of

substance would spend three hours on a coat. The customer was leaving the town, and unless the cheque were accepted the sale would be lost. The salesman insisted, took responsibility on himself, and the cheque was fraudulent.

These risks, however, were occasional, and there was a steady volume of sound profitable trade to be done with men who were straight and stood on no ceremony. To give them rather better than good value for money was the first condition of success, and Laemmle had no scruples about making himself a nuisance if any supplies came in from headquarters below standard. If you bought a suit from the Continental, he saw to it that you could not get as good a one at the same price from any of his competitors. But quality was only half the battle. To sell a few good things at a small profit took you nowhere; the question was how to sell, and go on selling, a great many of them. And in his Oshkosh store Laemmle ruminated on the nature and the scope of that hair-raising word, publicity. He contemplated them to such effect that in after years, in a great industrial crisis, he was to prove himself so thoroughly their master that a knowledgeable enthusiast declared him to be "the greatest advertising genius since Barnum."

It is not necessary to dwell on the inane and strident horrors committed in publicity's name. It is an uncongenial theme. When we have seen

through and deplored the shams and vulgarities, the fact remains that advertising is the sap that quickens every vein of modern industrial life. It is, apparently, inseparable from reckless waste, gross quackery, and shameless exploitations, but in our scheme of things it is indispensable. Whether or not the scheme is a wholesome one is beside the point.

Laemmle, in any case, had no such misgivings. Competitive commerce for him was not a speculative theme, but a hard reality. A resolve that the competition should be fair did not mean that it would be urbane. Again we are on debatable ground. What exactly is fair competition in trade? I should suppose it to be making a more attractive offer than your rival and letting it be more widely known. It does not allow you to misrepresent his wares or his methods, and it does not allow you to manipulate the public or semi-public services against him. If you attempt to impose an inferior bargain on the public you will almost certainly be found out, and lose your custom; if you offer a superior bargain at the expense of your rival's deserts or by means of furtive intrigue against his interests, you ought in any decent ordering of society to be put out of business. But granted the good bargain and the clean methods, competition remains a condition of your enterprise. Giving your rival a square deal, you have still if possible to give him a beating. Even so mod-

erately stated, the position is hardly conducive to the finer altruisms.

Having made up his mind on the matter of quality, Laemmle in approaching the problem of selling in quantity began to realise certain essentials. Refinements of appeal, however appropriate they might be in marketing Tiffany diamonds or choice limited editions, were of remote concern to his purposes. He had cheap merchandise to sell to the average man, to millions of average men if they would buy, and his policy was to announce the fact as often and as loudly as possible. He had no fancy for secret advertising, and he realised that the advertisement which cost two hundred dollars last week was not worth two cents this unless there was a follow through. Quite crude perceptions, but fundamental. They began to take shape in the first months at the Oshkosh clothing store, and they resulted in the building and organisation of Universal City.

He started his campaign systematically, and conducted it with vigour and insight. He produced a revolutionary catalogue, showered it upon the Wisconsin counties, and reaped the rewards of a rapidly growing mail-business.

At the season of Thanksgiving, the Continental, that is Laemmle, gave a turkey to every purchaser of fifteen dollars worth of goods. One year a competitor announced that he would present a turkey with every twelve dollars worth.

Laemmle came back with a turkey for ten dollars outlay. The rival countered with eight, and finally the Continental took the town at two fifty. Laemmle that week reported no profits to Stern at Chicago, but the rival learnt not to go interfering about turkeys for the future.

To have become adept in this kind of ingenuity may seem to be a small showing for twelve years. In fact it was the well-laid approach to fame and fortune. The impresarios of the entertainment world often flatter themselves that they have their fingers on what they call the pulse of public taste. The conceit has cost them an infinite loss of pence, and, when they have had it, of self respect. No man has ever done anything worth doing in the show business by setting himself to give the public what he supposed it to want; many have made some reputation and money by giving it something in which, according to their taste whatever it might be, they themselves believed. Carl Laemmle in later years was to learn that this idea that you could follow the public lead was, in the designation that Mr. Henry Ford is said to have applied to history, bunk. The impresario can, however, even with undistinguished tastes, mould the public to his own will if he has the courage of his opinions and wits to advance them. Laemmle had the courage and the wits. It happened that from some unspoilt South German ancestry he had inherited a native sense of fitness,



so that when he became a controlling power in the entertainment world he instinctively preferred the genuine to the spurious. While employed by the Continental Clothing Company he rose from the obscurity of provincial book-keeping to the imperceptibly greater eminence of managership with a commission on profits. Also he learnt, not how to ascertain what the public wanted, but how to impress upon the public what he wanted it to want.

An Oshkosh friend of those days, Mr. Frank Stein recalls the care devoted always by Laemmle to making the store attractive. For any special occasion, appropriate window displays had to be devised. A musical festival meant busts of great composers suitably grouped in a setting of golden lyres. For Spring or Fall anniversaries there must be seasonable landscapes, the town being taken in admiration when "at one opening Fall the price cards were all cut to represent maple leaves and each one a different form and coloured by hand in autumn shades. I think they were the first of the kind in the country." There is something ambrosial still about those maple-leaves.

Laemmle's visit to Sam Stern in Chicago in the surprising rôle of social guest resulted, as we have seen, in commercial promotion at Oshkosh. But it had another consequence. Stern had a niece, Recha, who was staying in the house at the same time, recently arrived from Flieden in Germany.

Laemmle and she fell in love; they agreed to write to each other. In 1898, the year in which he became not only virtual but acknowledged manager of the Oshkosh store, they were married. These things are inscrutably a matter of luck; a circumstance of which church encyclicals are unaware to a gravely culpable degree. The luck of Carl Laemmle and Recha Stern held without a lapse for twenty-one years, when it was broken by the death of a beloved wife.

The honeymoon trip was deferred until 1904, when the Laemmles re-visited their German homes, taking with them their year-old daughter, Rosabelle. Returning to Oshkosh, Laemmle went on expanding his campaign and enlarging the business. The traders of his western territory began to talk about him. In 1905, when Oshkosh decided to preserve a group of its most eminent citizens, he took a modest place on the floor as junior member of the elected fifteen. Moreover, working on a salary and commission, he was at last beginning to put money in his purse.

He was now thirty-eight, and conscious that if he was to have a career, he ought to do something about it before he was forty. The Continental Clothing Company, nicely remunerative as it was proving to be, could hardly be regarded as a career. Nevertheless, twelve years with one substantial firm meant, it was to be supposed, a security that was not lightly to be sacrificed. He



now had a family to support, and had he been left undisturbed in his employment, he might well have postponed any departure from it indefinitely. He would then, doubtless, in due course have risen to preside over representative groups of Oshkosh worthies, and been known as Uncle Carl only to a few mildly dutiful nephews and nieces. On the whole, too, he was content in Oshkosh, "pedalling," in that same friend's recollection, "Napoleon up the street. Napoleon was his bike, a dark blue enamelled wheel, with the name Napoleon in nickel on the stem of the fork." In after years he liked to go back to the place, visiting his old lodgings, pottering—by courtesy of a later manager—behind the familiar counter of the Continental, and once being banquetted by the town's leading citizens. On such an occasion one of his companions remarked, "Good you left this place," and he replied simply, "No, I was happy here."

His hand, however, was forced in an unexpected way. His assumed security, it seemed, was not all that he supposed. His percentage on the profits of the business was already considerable, but in his opinion the distribution between himself and some of his salesmen was not equitable. He placed his views before Sam Stern, and was called to Chicago to discuss them. Stern liked him, and knew his value as a servant. To speak more strictly, he did not exactly know it. He made the

quite common error of believing that sentiment should not be allowed to interfere with business. There is little satisfaction to be found in the reconstruction of old quarrels that probably were stupid at the time, and from which the bitterness has long since passed. But the operations of Stern's mind are not difficult to perceive. Here was an employee asking for more money. Why pay it? Why indeed, not replace him by someone who would take less? It was bad business logic, but in concluding that Stern was short-sighted in the matter there is no reason to add that he was black-hearted. On some irrelevant question, he drove Laemmler into a quarrel. Laemmler, not without consternation, saw that he was being driven, and began to discern the reason. Had he been a little more accomplished in these things, he might have controlled himself to the soft answers that are said to turn away wrath. But his discretion failed him in the crisis.

And yet, did it? He had come down from Oshkosh uncertain whether he would go back with his percentage adjusted to his liking, but at least with no misgiving as to the stability of his position. And now suddenly he found himself in danger of being cut adrift from employment. He had known too much about that sort of thing in the old days; now, with his far greater responsibilities, the prospect was little less than terrifying. His duty to his family and himself was clear. He

must pull himself together, placate Stern, and go back to Oshkosh on the old terms, thankful that after all no worse had come of it. And then, as the two men began to raise their voices, did some latent and long-disciplined ambition assert itself in defiance of more prudent counsels? I suspect that this is what happened. Let discretion go hang, it prompted; take a risk. Take a big risk; you're going to be forty in a year. Do it now, or you'll never do it. Very well, here goes. "If you want my resignation, you can have it right now." As he heard the words come from his lips he was horrified. What the devil was he saying? And what the devil was Sam Stern saying? "I accept it"—that was what Sam Stern was saying. Accept what? Look here, what is all this about, anyway? An hour ago he had come into the room for an amiable business discussion, and now——

It should be added that Stern later behaved in the handsomest manner to his old employee. He interpreted liabilities under their contract in the most liberal manner, and when Laemmle, negotiating for his first lease in Chicago a few months later, was asked for guarantees altogether beyond his resources, it was Stern who voluntarily came forward with the necessary security.

The interview was the turning point in Laemmle's life, but at the moment he did not know it. He only knew that he had to go back to Oshkosh that night and tell his wife that he had

got the sack. He took the night train, and sat awake in a desperate confusion of mind until his arrival in the morning. In a few hours everybody in the town would know it—Carl Laemmle of the Continental had been sacked. Of course, he had resigned, but that would amount to nothing for a story. He had been a hot-headed fool. Hadn't he?

Recha Laemmle rose splendidly to the occasion. Her husband a fool? Not at all. He had done the right thing. They had savings enough to give them a chance of looking round, and there was no occasion for worry. This is the kind of quiet heroism that puts heart into a man, and it put heart into Laemmle. Within a day or two the perspectives began to straighten out. Perhaps he really had done the right thing. Yes, undoubtedly. Sam Stern should see. The Laemmles decided to go back to Chicago.

The man who had left the great city twelve years ago had been a small clerk with his finer faculties untried. Now he returned, troubled and aimless about the future, but with a sense of power and ideas that could function to a definite purpose. He did not know what he was going to do, but he knew now that if he could find right employment for them he had abilities that would lift him out of the tedious grooves of commerce. He had a friend, Robert H. Cochrane, an advertising agent who had handled a good deal of his

Oshkosh propaganda. Cochrane now urged him, whatever his new start might be, to go into business on his own account. He decided to follow the advice, and considered how best to utilise his experience in marketing large quantities of cheap goods. He wanted to sell something that everybody could and would buy, and the surest bid seemed to be the investment of his capital in establishing a chain of five and ten cent stores. The scheme was taking substantial shape in his mind, when his attention was diverted.

This, as I have said, is not a history of the film industry; neither is it a history of the evolution of the motion-picture process. Photographic principles were known to the ancients, and from the time at least when the American J. W. Draper produced a daguerreotype portrait of his sister in 1840, inventive minds were busy with the idea of representing motion by means of the camera. In the early seventies, Edward Murbridge, an English photographer who in 1867, the year of Laemmle's birth, had been employed by the United States Government to bring back pictures from the recently purchased territory of Alaska, was in California, taking a succession of instantaneous photographs with a row of cameras. He is said in this way to have demonstrated for the first time the true action of a horse in movement. In 1876, Jean A. Le Roy performed a variant of the same experiment with a pair of dancers,

passing through an illuminated apparatus a series of two hundred slides, each of a separately posed picture. In 1888 Louis le Prince was experimenting in Leeds. At the Chester meeting of the Photographic Convention of the United Kingdom in 1890, W. Friese Greene exhibited a camera which he claimed could take negatives at the rate of six hundred a minute; about fifteen hundred is the rate of the modern motion picture camera. In 1894, Le Roy in New York astonished a select audience of twenty-five leading impresarios by projecting on to a screen eighty feet of genuine cinematographic film; indeed he called his invention "The Marvellous Cinematograph." Eugene Lauste was already experimenting with sound films.

Investigations in the same direction were being simultaneously conducted in various parts of the world, although in most of the developments American ingenuity led the way. It may have been that there more actively than anywhere else was felt to be immense industrial opportunity waiting upon mechanical progress. Once let the camera prove itself capable of practical everyday use on the screen, there was a vast public, far greater than had ever been organised by any form of entertainment in history, ready for its product. When Friese Green and Le Roy showed the results of their experiments, it was clear that the mechanical problems were approaching solu-



tion. But it was not until the early years of the new century that a few business men began to foresee the commercial future of the film. Among these was Carl Laemmle. At the moment when he was contemplating his chain of stores, the moving picture was becoming popular as a side show run by business firms for advertising purposes, also in Vaudeville houses as a "chaser" to see the audience out at the end of the programme. Laemmle suddenly realised that it must shortly become an industry of capital importance in itself. He contributed nothing to the early science of motion photography, but he was among the first to see the possibilities of its application. He came into the business before it had attracted any considerable enterprise or executive ability. For a quarter of a century he was to be an important influence upon its nature and tendencies, during its expansion from insignificance to a dominating place in world showmanship. In 1900, there was no film industry. In 1905, its activities were so trifling that no record of its figures has been kept. By the most recent estimates there are now over twenty-two thousand motion picture theatres in the United States alone, representing a capital value of fourteen hundred million dollars; the combined pay roll of the producing companies and the sums paid by the public for admission are to-day computed in thousands of millions yearly. The conditions of this vast enterprise have in

many important respects been determined by Laemmle's insight and courage. His connection with it has brought him a fortune, and as one of the leaders of its economics he has shown a genuine concern also for the improvement of its taste and intelligence. He came through to his great position by way of a bitter and uncompromising struggle, and now in the evening of his career no one is to be found with a bad word for him.



## CHAPTER V

### THE FILMS. INDEPENDENCE

ONCE his intention was formed, Laemmle lost no time in its realisation. On his thirty-ninth birthday, January 17th, 1906, he was in Chicago, still meditating the advantages of chain stores. Within a month he had rented vacant premises on Milwaukee Avenue, and was converting them to the use of a nickelodeon, or five-cent picture house. He painted the building white, called it "The White Front," and kept it clean inside. It was a bid for feminine patronage, and it succeeded. Two months later he was able to open a second house, naming it "The Family Theatre." There for ten cents a man could take his wife or best girl to see what was then considered a good film in what was then considered comfort. Laemmle saw to it that the film was the best that could be got, and that the comfort was at least notably above that of rival nickelodeons.

Intervals between the pictures were enlivened by screen slides bearing such captions as "Ladies Please Remove Your Hats"; "Have You an Automobile?"; "It's Raining Outside"; "Don't Expec-

torate on the Floor"; "Please Don't Throw Peanut Shells on the Floor"; "No Whistling, please, during Illustrated Songs"; "If Intoxicated Your Patronage is Not Desired."

In October of the same year, his two theatres prosperously launched, he went a further step forward in the opening of The Laemmle Film Service. Its business, conducted at first in premises fifteen feet by thirty, was the distribution of films to theatre proprietors. Laemmle found that many of the existing services were slack in organisation and uncertain in delivery. It was not a question of bad faith, but of deficient business acumen. He decided to establish a service that should be known to every customer as unfailing in its undertakings. Its progress is indicated by the fact that early in 1907 Robert H. Cochrane paid two thousand five hundred dollars for a tenth interest in the business. Laemmle put the money back into the concern. During one year he three times had to move into larger premises.

Cochrane's association with Laemmle was to have far reaching effects. Born in 1879, Cochrane was twelve years younger than his associate. His early training as a journalist had equipped him with a direct, forceful style that was invaluable when he later turned his gifts to expert advertising. He knew how to get an advertisement read and how to leave an impression on the reader afterwards. That exactly was what Laemmle was look-

ing for. He was full of ideas and knew always the kind of thing that he wanted to say, but he was quick-witted enough to recognise a better talent than his own for the best way of saying it. In the coming years, when, in the fight against the Picture Trust, advertising was Laemmle's most effective weapon, he brought Cochrane into close co-operation in the conduct of a campaign that swept an industry off its feet, and brought what seemed to be invincible interests to surrender. When the victory had been won, Cochrane's fortunes were inseparably bound to Laemmle's. The two men have continued together with unbroken confidence, and to-day Cochrane is Vice-President of Laemmle's Universal Pictures Corporation.

By 1909 The Laemmle Film Service had become the largest distributor in the United States, which in this connotation meant the world. It had earned the unusual reputation of being both progressive and straight. Its customers were taught to expect the best goods on the best terms, and they were never let down. We may turn for a moment to note some of the contemporary events and personalities of the film business at that period. In 1906 William Fox was a cloth-sponger, Samuel Goldwyn a glove-dealer, Jesse Lasky the cornet in an orchestra, and Tom Mix a United States Marshal. In the same year, Adolph Zukor left furs for the theatre, and the Warner

Brothers were already exhibiting moving pictures. Will Hays, to-day the film over-lord, was about to make an entrance into national politics. One day a red-cheeked boy of fourteen walked into the Family Theatre and asked Laemmle for a job as piano player. He got it, eventually receiving as much as fifteen dollars a week. His name was Sam Katz. Down the street he found another youth doing a song turn. It was Abe Balaban, and the Balaban-Katz circuit of theatres was the consequence of the meeting.

When he opened his first theatres Laemmle's average takings were about two hundred dollars a week. He managed the houses himself, paying particular heed to questions of courtesy, cleanliness, fire risks and such amenities, did his own errands, and employed his sister-in-law to sell tickets. His enterprise was restless. With the founding of the Film Service he became an executive of daily increasing interests. He bought films outright so that his firm might have supplies for exclusive distribution, he made it his special concern to get into personal touch with as many of the smaller theatre proprietors as possible, and he kept on telling everybody that the future, an incalculably splendid future, was with the moving picture. He ingeniously took full page advertisements inciting Vaudeville managers to give the films better advertising; he warned them not to neglect their most saleable

commodity. In short, he was a man of high ability raised towards the pitch of genius by an irresistible faith. This was a small game yet—game is no bad word for these pioneer excitements—but, he announced in tones almost of dedication, it was very soon going to be a mighty big one.

The fixed purpose of a few men like Laemmle was persuading the world, and great capital resources were beginning to bid for the spoils of a cause that clearly was going to be won. By 1909 the film industry, though far from the magnitude that it was rapidly to achieve, was manifestly worth exploiting. The usual gangs of financial piracy were at work, getting their grappling hooks firmly into the threatened prey. Their field of operations was the producing side of the business, their object being to control the sources of supply. Once they could do this, they would be in a position to dictate terms to the consumers, both distributors and exhibitors. It was an attractive scheme, full of untold possibilities. There seemed to be but little difficulty in its way. A reasonable sense of common interests might at this stage easily consolidate the operations of the producers. The common interests, that is to say, of the producers themselves. They were at present a small and compact body, who could readily come to agreement on essential matters of policy. They met, they conferred, and they agreed. And then,

on January 1st, 1909, they summoned the distributors to a convention at the Imperial Hotel in New York City, to hear what were to be the future conditions of their business.

There was no reason to fear that the audience would not be docile, but docile or not, no concessions were to be made. The producers had unity, and they had power. They were the men who made the pictures, and in consequence were entitled to deliver them only on such terms as they chose. That, surely, must be clear to any but litigious or disaffected minds. In this exalted mood the dictators presented their demands, or, rather, their instructions.

At first came startling news of the formation of a body that was to be known as the Motion Picture Patents Company. It was to aim at absolute control of all existing Letters Patent connected with the moving picture business. Cameras, projection machines, celluloid film—in fact the entire range of the industry's material was to be procurable only from the combine. The leading manufacturers had already joined the ring. The preparations had been thorough, and every loophole of escape carefully wired.

The astonished distributors were then informed that under the Patents Company would be nine Licensees, who would enjoy a monopolistic right to make motion pictures. The hold-up was complete. And in order that the consumers might be



left in no doubt as to their subjection to the Trust, every theatre exhibitor in the United States would have to pay two dollars a week for a license to show films. Any distributor or proprietor who ventured to dispute the Trust's authority would be punished by immediate boycott; no pictures would be rented to him. In other words, the consumers, distributing and exhibiting, were to be compelled to co-operate with the Trust on its own terms.

The announcements were concluded, and the meeting declared to be at an end. The audience was not invited to express opinions; it was merely ordered to submit. The submission might be taken as read. There was not in the country a reel of film that the Trust did not control, nor the means of making one without the Trust's consent. It is not necessary to specify the constituent members of the Trust; it is enough to say that they included every leading film producer and manufacturer operating in the States. Resistance, they might be forgiven for supposing, was not to be feared. Indeed, it would need a great deal of ingenuity to see any possible point at which resistance could begin.

Laemmle's chance had come. How it could be any kind of chance neither he nor anyone else at the moment could say, but he went away from the Imperial Hotel with an instinct that chance it was. He and his rival distributors were in a fury of indignation, but he alone dared to ask himself

whether something could not be done about it. He decided that it could. What it might be he could not tell, but the fighting spirit in the man was quickened by a call to action far shriller and more challenging than any that he had heard before. He was convinced on the spot that the Trust was in every way an evil thing, menacing the whole future development of the industry, and proposing to crush competition by a merciless abuse of privilege. The whole character of this new tyranny was corrupt and demoralising—so he believed, and the belief was not captious, but a deep, a passionate conviction. It was not that Laemmle's personal interests were assailed. He was not a big enough man for the Trust to fear as an antagonist, but he was big enough to be welcomed as a confederate. Had he chosen at this time to comply with the Trust's demands, the accommodation would have been very richly rewarded. His refusal was inspired by genuine hatred for what he conceived to be abominable trade morals.

He considered the position. On reflection it became clear that the only hope lay in communicating his own sense of injustice to the rank and file of consumers throughout the country. Frontal attack on the Trust was hopeless, indeed there was no way in which it could be launched. But if a spirit of revolt could be organised in the consumers as a body, some effect might be made. It was a strategy that would entail immense courage, pa-



tience, and danger, but there was no alternative. And Laemmle saw at once that it presented hardly less difficulty than the frontal attack, that it would be but little easier to originate. He was the largest distributor in the country, but the prestige which that might give him among the exhibitors would vanish so soon as he had nothing to distribute, which would be immediately, unless he capitulated. He began to formulate a plan that in its daring and in its brilliant execution affords, I think, one of the most stirring episodes of modern industrial history.

It was based on no less formidable a realisation than that somehow in spite of the Trust he must produce pictures of his own, and somehow induce the exhibitors to defy the Trust by buying them. It was a gigantic undertaking, and Laemmle spent three months bracing himself to it. By April, 1909, his mind was made up, and on the 18th of that month *The Sunday Telegram* contained the following statement:

The monotony of absolute quietness in film circles, both among Independents and the Patents people, was broken last week when it was announced that the Laemmle Film Service, with nine branches, had gone independent.

Laemmle had given in his fortnight's notice to the Patents Company on the 12th. It was an unpleasant surprise for the Trust, but no worse than that;

certainly not a serious shock. Though Laemmlé would have been a valuable ally, if he wanted to ruin himself, let him. But he by no means contemplated ruin. Once his decision was made he attacked the Trust with a headlong vigour that by successive stages became inconvenient, dangerous, and finally annihilating. He knew from the first that the contest could not be a short one, and he prepared himself for a war of attrition. Seeing that the Trust had as many millions at its disposal as he had thousands, and seeing that it also had the entire field of action firmly under its strategic control, Laemmlé's design seemed little better than infatuation. But he was now in no mood to be daunted by any odds. He had become a gossamer; he had, moreover, an added domestic responsibility in a year-old son, Carl Junior. The world might declare victory to be impossible, but, for himself, defeat was not to be considered. He engaged with an almost demoniac impetuosity, that was in truth the only prudence.

He rented prominent advertising space in *The Show World* and *The Moving Picture News* on long contracts, and week after week he deluged the Trust with invective. But it was invective with a difference. There could be nothing mealy-mouthed about the charge that he was making. He was not a product of one of the older universities, and he was not addressing an academic de-

bating society. He was appealing as one of themselves to men reared in a rough school and accustomed to a crude slapstick idiom, rich in colour and lavish of emphasis. He and Cochrane between them used this instrument with an efficiency unexampled at the time. But if they abused with irrepressible gusto, they were careful that every word of invective should be securely founded. During three years and more of incessant denunciation, made in terms of reckless candour, they were never once betrayed into anything that resembled a mis-statement of fact. They were ruthless and they were offensive, but they were scrupulous in their veracity. In that lay the strength and, finally, the triumph of their cause. As months and years went by, and no pertinent answer was made to their highly scandalous accusations, public opinion began to assert itself, until in the end government action was taken and the Trust destroyed. But that was a far cry from Laemmle's announcement of April, 1909.

On the 24th, when his withdrawal from the Trust was known, he announced that he was "Swamped with Hundreds of Wildly Enthusiastic Letters and Telegrams, Congratulating Me On Becoming Independent." He added "A thousand thanks, fellow fighters, and a renewal of my iron clad promise to give you the best Films and the best service at all times in spite of Hades itself."

He claimed that his resignation sounded the death-knell of monopoly, and exclaimed "Good morning! Have you paid two dollars for a license to smoke your own pipe this week?" At the same time he issued this "Warning to Exhibitors":

You are going to hear more lies about independent films and about me within the next few weeks than you ever heard in your life. The film octopus and its exchanges are frantic and are circulating the most ridiculous stories they can manufacture. Read the following letter that came to me from Ira W. Jones, Green Bay, Wis., and then read my comment:

My dear Mr. Laemmle: A smart aleck from Chicago came to my place the other day and sprung it on me that I was liable to all kinds of fines and calamities for running your films, and said you had been kicked out of the Trust. I didn't throw him out bodily but am sorry since that I didn't. He said I couldn't leave the Trust for two years. Is there anything in that nonsense?

YOURS, IRA W. JONES.

Now listen to me:

First neither Mr. Jones, nor you, nor anybody else is liable to "fines and calamities" for running my films. It's so absurd that I may be making a mistake in even noticing it. But, in case anyone is in doubt, let him take it from me that if any fines or calamities are imposed upon any customer of mine, I will back the exhibitor with all the resources at my command and I'll win his fight for him or bust myself!

In the second place, you can quit using licensed films any minute you want to. You don't have to stick two years, two months, two hours or two minutes.

In the third place, you know that the Patents Company didn't "kick me out." You know they would give their heart and soul to keep me with them. You know that my refusal to buy any more licensed films was a death blow to them.

You are going to hear other lies about independent films. But if anyone comes into your place and tries to scare you with any sort of bluff, hand him one swift, speedy kick in the seating capacity and I'll pay the damages.

"As a whole," he said in an interview, "the outlook was never more promising. The Independents, as sure as water runs down hill, will win this fight with flying colours." In the middle of May, a month after his declaration, *The Motion Picture News*, a free journal, made a significant editorial announcement:

Mr. Carl Laemmle has been brought very much before the eyes of the trade during the past two or three weeks, owing to the stand he took regarding the Patents Company. The Trust has tried through its subsidized press, to belittle and browbeat the man who was its largest customer. We have no doubt in our mind that the loss of 250,000 dollars a year to the Associated Manufacturers of the Patents Company meant a severe blow and loss to them. The only way in which they can get back at Carl Laemmle is by trying to prejudice the trade against

him. We think the methods adopted by the Trust are the best advertisement Carl Laemmle could get. All honour is due to a man who can come out from one profession and adopt another and from a practically unknown man, rise to be *The King of Film Renters*. It was the hardest blow the Patents Company had received up to that time, and it almost paralysed them with amazement and chagrin.

This was all very encouraging, but the crucial problem of the situation was unsolved. Laemmle in promising his customers to give them still "The best Films and the best service at all times," was giving a bold, it might seem a gravely irresponsible pledge. Where was he to get the best films from? A certain amount of derelict stock was on the open market, but this could hardly serve his undertaking. The introduction of foreign films was an alternative, but the Trust was already making what, largely by Laemmle's agency, ultimately proved to be an abortive attempt to secure legislation against this. In the meantime an inadequate supply from abroad might hold off collapse for a month or two, and give Laemmle time to inaugurate the constructive scheme that was to be developed in conjunction with his exposure of the Trust. The hope was realised. J. J. Murdoch, founder of the International, helped the new enterprise in securing raw stock, and further by a considerable loan. In June, 1909, Laemmle emerged from the crisis with the announcement:



Extra !!

Carl Laemmle becomes a Film Manufacturer.  
Organises a New Company to be Totally Separate  
from the Laemmle Film Service.

During the intervening weeks he had worked ferociously. An enthusiast declared that it was impossible to photograph Laemmle, "he was too quick for the lens"; and another, "Laemmle works while he sleeps, but he never sleeps while he works. It is rumoured that he stays at the office so late at night that he meets himself coming to work in the morning. And the chances are that when he meets himself, he's got some brand new scheme to tell himself about."

A studio had been opened on East 14th Street, New York, in premises from which a three foot accumulation of dirt on the floors had to be cleared away. The contractor who owned the place asked a rental of two hundred dollars a month, and Laemmle gave a hundred. Delays in equipment, however, became serious, and Laemmle, with not a day to waste, sent William Ranous, his first director, out to Minneapolis to go forward with the making of a picture that had been suggested by James Bryson, the man who is to-day British manager of the Universal Pictures Corporation. A company of players who shared Laemmle's dislike for the Trust had been engaged, and cameras had been secured from a producing firm that had

recently gone out of business. The celluloid film, known as raw stock, was another matter. It was almost entirely in the control of Eastman, who was under agreement with the Trust to supply no independent producer. But the French firm Lumiere had recently opened an American office in New York, managed by Jules Brulatour. To him Laemmle turned, and finding the French Company unsympathetic to Trust authority, he was allowed a small ration of raw stock. The last obstacle to production was removed. He incorporated as "The Yankee Films Company." Dissatisfied with the name, he offered a prize for a better. "The Independent Moving Pictures Company of America" was suggested. Mr. Mapes of New York, who took the twenty-five dollars, was run close by Mr. Bradlet, also of New York, who, however, was awarded only a consolation prize for the same suggestion, since Mr. Mapes ingeniously adorned his entry with a trade-mark design bearing the legend "IMP." The name was to be famous in the film history of the following years. The first advertisement of the company, with Carl Laemmle as President, appeared in the early autumn:

#### First Release of IMP Films

#### Almost Ready.

There's no use pretending we are not excited about it, for we are. After weeks and months of terribly hard work and lavish outlay of coin, we are



about to throw the product of our new factory upon the market. Watch! Listen! Wait! We're not going to make any rash claims, but we do promise you the grandest American-made moving pictures you ever saw.

And on October 23rd, this was followed by:

At last! At last!

With a soul full of hope and a heart full of pride and enthusiasm, I now announce the

First Release of "IMP" Films

Monday, October 25th!

Film exchanges and exhibitors by the hundred have been urging me to hurry up with this first release, but to all alike I have said: "None of the going-off-half-cocked business for mine!" I have held back week after week to be absolutely certain that everything is in ship shape. And I now present

"HIAWATHA."

Length 988 feet. Taken at the Falls of Minnehaha in the Land of the Dacotahs. And you can bet it is classy or I wouldn't make it my first release. The title explains the nature of the picture. It is taken from Longfellow's masterpiece of poesy and it is a gem of photography and acting. Following this I will release some more pictorial corkers and some screamingly funny stuff, bearing the true stamp of American humour. Get "Hiawatha" and see if you

don't agree that it starts a brand new era in American moving pictures.

Carl Laemmle, President

My Motto will be: The best films that man's ingenuity can devise and the best films man's skill can execute. And no cheating on measurements.

All genuine "IMP" films bear this little trade mark which is fully protected by law. Address all IMP mail to

111, East 14th Street,  
New York, N. Y.

Laemmle held the release back until the 25th, because that was his father's birthday.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE TRUST FIGHT

LAEMMLE was now fighting not a lone hand, but with organised and progressive forces. It was a remarkable showing for six months, and thereafter he never allowed the campaign to lose momentum. Already in June the Trust had shown signs of apprehension, and Laemmle had not hesitated to make them public:

I have been notified by the film trust that I can have any or all of its new subjects that I might want, in spite of the fact that I am the biggest customer of the International Projecting and Producing Company. Did you ever hear anything to beat that? Did you ever expect such positive proof that the trust cannot stop the International people—*and knows that it can't?* This astonishing offer came direct from men who, to my absolute knowledge, are employed by film trust manufacturers. Of course they swear by all that's good that they are acting independently of the trust, but that's as transparent as glass. If they think it is dishonourable in me to publish what they told me "in strict confidence," let them remember that I gave public warning to everybody that I would expose the innermost

insides of the film situation every time I got hold of facts worth publishing. My whole purpose is to rip things wide open, let the exhibitors know precisely what is going on and trust them for my patronage. I don't want any exhibitor to hesitate about using my films for fear of disastrous consequences. I want him to know exactly what's what! And if anyone doesn't like my methods of exposure, he knows what he can do.

The Trust, reading that, realised that this fellow was turning out to be more than it had bargained for, but it was still not prepared for the monstrous irregularities of October. It was even less prepared to find that this insurgent IMP was ready to produce pictures at a most disconcerting rate. "Hiawatha" was followed by eleven more releases by the end of the year; in 1910 there were a hundred, three companies of players being in operation, and the directors were allowed a week for the making of each picture; in 1911 the number rose to a hundred and twenty, and twenty-four were released in the first five weeks of 1912, at the end of which time the company was merged in the new Sales Company, an association of Laemmle with other independent producers who by then had followed his example.

Laemmle had been a man to disregard, then one to fear, and now he was a man to break. In spite of difficulties, both of time and equipment, IMP pictures soon began to reach a surprisingly high

level of production. In February, 1912, that is to say little more than two years after the release of "Hiawatha," Laemmle could announce that west of Chicago he and his fellow independents were providing no less than fifty percent of the entire moving picture consumption. From the end of 1909, in short, Laemmle the distributor, with the aid of Laemmle the producer, was able to make reasonable redemption of his promise to give customers "best service of the best films." And the Trust, seeing incredible things come to pass, decided that Laemmle must be broken, having finally convinced itself that he could not be bought. "Again I renew my pledge to you," he wrote to his exhibitors in June, 1910, "that I will rot in Hades before I will join the Trust, or anything that looks like a Trust. How is *your* backbone?"

Moreover, by the time that IMP had established itself, the Trust was not only concerned by diminishing support, which was serious, Laemmle advertising at the end of a year that whereas in the first months of the combine seven thousand exhibitors had been paying the two dollars weekly for their licenses, less than four thousand were doing so now. This was bad enough; the potential income, entirely unearned, to the Trust from these licenses had been computed at a million dollars annually, and it was most disappointing to find it slipping away in this highly unsatisfactory fashion. But the defection of a licensee meant, of course,

something far more considerable than the loss of two dollars a week; it meant the loss of his exclusive patronage of Trust products. Further, the alarm that was slowly being engendered by these considerations, was aggravated by acute indignation as Laemmle week by week in the public prints castigated the Trust and all its doings in language of enthusiastic opprobrium. Casual insult might have been ignored, but when it was repeated with unflinching regularity and point on Tuesdays and Fridays throughout the year, it became intolerable. And so the Trust rose in its might to teach this traducer of powerful monopolists a lesson, only to find that he was obstinately disinclined to learn.

Certainly, the provocation was extreme. Cochrane invented a military figure designated as Gen. Flimco, who in an extensive series of cartoons was presented in unbecoming attitudes, grabbing, squealing, or dragooning. The accompanying letter-press exploited a variety of recurrent themes. First of these was the two dollar license imposition.

Don't let old Gen. Flimco shake you down for two bones a week or anything else! He is laughing openly and brazenly at every exhibitor who is enough of a soft mark to stand for such a hold-up and shake-down. If you got anything for the money it would be all right. But *what* do you get? Protection? Don't be absurd! You are *less* protected in his hands than anywhere else on God's green foot-

stool. Better films? If you think so it is because you probably have not seen any Independent films for the past few months. Or else you have been up against the *fake Independent* exchanges run for the purpose of hurting the independent game. No, dear old top, *you're not getting a blooming thing for your two dollars* and the sooner you admit it, the sooner you'll assert your independence. But, for the love of Profit, when you go independent, *go independent RIGHT!* Connect with the *biggest* and *best* film renter in the world—the one man who has fought to keep you from being gouged, plucked, skinned, pickled and parboiled while you were snoring at the switch!

Outrageous, but how was it to be answered? Somehow, the Trust could not think of any answer at all. "Have you paid your two dollars for a license to breathe this week?" Impudence, upstart impudence—and yet, there came a disquieting echo from simple-minded exhibitors, "Are we?" One of them from the West, forwarding his license money, had written, "If it is for graft it is all right. We're used to it out here." It was all very mortifying. Not to put too fine a point on it, damn Mr. Laemmle.

A Trust exchange in Memphis released a film before the scheduled date. The manager was fined five hundred dollars, being informed that he could pay in "spot cash" or leave. Laemmle told the world. Then there was the disagreeable business of what Laemmle disrespectfully called Old Mam-



ma Ten Percent. A dominating group of Trust exchanges agreed that any customer transferring his orders from one renter to another should be made to pay a penalty of ten per cent on his outlay. As the exhibitors in those experimental days of the trade were uncertain from month to month as to what distributing house would best suit them, there was a constant shifting of custom, and the ten per cent artifice meant that in the aggregate dealing as between exhibitors and renters, the exhibitors would be paying a premium for which no value whatever was given. Laemmle saw through the fraud at once, and denounced it in what was now becoming his painfully familiar style:

#### I Explore a Rotten Secret.

There is a secret agreement among certain film exchanges handling trust films whereby, etc. . . . The object of this is so self evident that it would sink through the think tank of an addle-pated Wooden Indian. It is a hold up, pure and simple. . . . You have an inalienable right to transact your business with whomsoever you will. . . . Assert your rights . . . and I'll protect you against all the imaginary dangers that you think are hiding around the corner waiting to bat you on the box office.

This was followed by:

Gracious! Gracious!

My exposure of the rotten secret regarding what some of the licensed exchanges are doing to the ex-

hibitors stirred up an awful *mess* last week. Some of the licensed exchange men said it was unsportsmanlike; others called it uglier names, but none of them had quite enough nerve to *deny* it.

And then, shortly afterwards:

She is Dead!!!

Murdered in Cold Bludddd by Carl Laemmle.

She's dead!

Old Mamma Ten Percent is dead!

Deadernell!

Get out the crepe! Sound the doleful drums of death. *Boom!* Let the mournful trombone croon its agonising dirge. *Oom-pah! Oom-pah!* Toll the bells.

*Ding-a-ling!*

For she's dead!

No more will Old Mamma Ten Percent dance jigs of joy on the flattened pocket-book of Mr. Exhibitor.

For she's deadernell! She died Monday, February 28th.

Old Mamma Ten Percent was a good *friend* of certain *Licensed Exchanges*. She made it impossible for an *exhibitor* to switch his business from one to another of them without paying a penalty of ten percent.

I published the story week after week, hammering it into the exhibitors until they took action and *demande*d that the penalty be abolished.

And again the Trust was conscious of unpleasant sensations in the head, and took impotent counsel with itself. In one shady move after another it

found itself exposed to Laemmle's extremely accurate sharpshooting. It proposed to allow only one film exchange in each State of the Union. Laemmle was down on the trick instantaneously. It would "confine each State's exhibitors to one source of supply and make them take what they can get or be eternally dodblasted! This can lead only to one thing in small towns where there are but two or three theatres. The weaker exhibitor in town will be forced out of business." Laemmle claimed over and over again that he was the friend of the little men. Here once more he was loyal to their interests. The Trust made no answer.

Another example of Trust tyranny was its attempt to dictate to exhibitors the prices of admission in their theatres. The nickelodeons, or five cent houses, were ordered to raise the charge to ten cents, or lose their licenses. The Trust knew that in many cases the proprietors could not carry the increase with their public, and that refusal was inevitable. It was refusal that the Trust hoped for. It hoped to drive the little man out, and to take over his business and his profits. "Quit laying yourself open to this persecution"—in other words, quit the Trust and come to honest independents. The Trust, true to form, was struck speechless.

Again: instructions were given that in future all exhibitors must pay not two dollars weekly, but a hundred and four dollars yearly, in advance.

Laemmle gave a hundred and four dollars to a friend who applied to the Trust for a year's license and paid the money. After a week or two he wrote saying that he desired to turn independent, and demanding the return of his unused payment. He was told that it was forfeit. Laemmle published the facts, and again the Trust could think of no language suitable to the occasion.

But Laemmle, who had so far been at worst an objectionable and somewhat expensive nuisance, was now become dangerous. There had fallen into his possession the following remarkable letter:

Motion Picture Patents Company,  
80, Fifth Avenue,  
New York City,  
May 9th, 1910.

Mr. R. M. Davidson,  
Lyric Theatre, 4442,  
134, Water St.,  
Binghamton, N. Y.

Gentlemen:

We have received through the Pittsburg Calcium Lt. & Film Co. application in your name for license for the Lyric Theatre.

Upon examining our records we find that you are in arrears for royalty for the period from July 19, 1909, to August 2nd, 1909, and from Jan. 3rd, 1910, to Jan. 10th, 1910, and from April 4th, 1910, to April 11th, 1910.

We will grant you a new license under the following conditions:

1st. That you pay the back royalties that have accrued, amounting to eight dollars.

2nd. That you use in your projecting machine only film made by a licensed manufacturer and obtained through a licensed exchange. This film must not be loaned or sub-rented.

3rd. That you pay us 104 dollars as advance royalties for so much of the year beginning May 2nd, 1910, during which you remain a licensee of this Company. If you voluntarily give up licensed service or if your license is terminated by us for breach of any conditions governing the use of licensed film before the end of said year, the said sum shall be considered as royalty for that portion of the year in which you were a licensee.

Your exchange has been notified that your service may be continued after May 16th, 1910, upon the above terms only.

Yours very truly,  
Motion Picture Patents Company.

He at once sent this document to press in his advertising columns, and, making an end of all discretion, stigmatised the Trust in plain terms as the rascal that it was:

I have just secured possession of the sensational letter reproduced below. Read it! It is a complete proof that the Trust's newest game is a desperate attempt to COMPEL EXHIBITORS TO PAY A YEAR'S "ROYALTIES" IN ADVANCE, in order to keep them from turning independent! I have always said the moving picture trust is the worst

managed trust in America. This letter clinches it! For instead of compelling the exhibitors to stick to the trust for a year, it will result in the most overwhelming landslide toward Independence that has ever happened in the history of the business. Read that part of the letter marked "3rd." It is fool-proof. A child can understand it. It is a dead give-away! It means that you must pay 104 dollars "royalty" *in advance*. If you quit the trust exchanges the week or the month after you've paid up, the trust keeps your 104 dollars. Not satisfied with your two dollars a week in weekly payments, the trust now reaches out for a year's chunk in advance. One thing more: The letter is printed in the form of a circular with blank spaces left to be filled in by typewriter. This is trivial, except that it shows that ALL EXHIBITORS are going to get these letters, and that the letter does not apply merely to one or two isolated cases. Read that "3rd Condition" again. Take it home and play it on your pianola. Play it upside down, sidewise, before and behind. Tell, when you're all through, tell me what you think of it !!!

Even a plate-armoured Trust does not relish that kind of exposure. But three months later, that is in August, 1910, its faith in taciturnity was to be yet more severely tried. This time Laemmle was able to publish a letter from one of the Trust's auxiliaries, which read:

Denver Film Exchange,  
Denver, Colo.,  
August 26, 1910.

Mr. W. F. Aldrach,  
Palace Theatre,  
Great Bend, Kans.

Dear Sir:

A few weeks ago your operator ruined two reels and we called your attention to the fact at the time. Explaining that we would later put in a claim for the damage. The writer returned from New York a few days ago and this matter was thoroughly discussed with the final understanding that you must pay for the damage.

To-day we find you sent in the Forgiven reel absolutely ruined. It is not our desire to be harsh or unreasonable in any manner, but you must now pay fifty dollars in partial settlement of the damage done by you. I shall to-night wire the General Film Company of this decision.

For your information I will say that this exchange was sold to the General Film Company several days ago and the writer is now western manager of this concern which has absorbed nearly every exchange in the United States, including the Kleino Optical Company as well as the Yale exchanges in Kansas City and St. Louis and the Pittsburg Calcium Light Company.

The writer cannot overlook expressing the opinion that it was actions such as this which prompted the formation of the General Film Company which now has absolute charge of the business. We advised you in a very friendly manner just before leaving for the east regarding the value of the films and notice that you have again erased our value and reduced it to fifty dollars. It is not the writer's intention at this time to go into any



lengthy explanation, but you will realise that if you intend to stay in the business and avoid expensive law suits it will be necessary for you to conform your methods with those of every honest exhibitor. You will find that by doing this the General Film Company will look after your interests to the very highest degree while if you do not care to treat their property with consideration, of course you will expect to have trouble with a concern the size of which is quite ample to crush you very quickly.

Yours truly,

Denver Film Exchange.

Laemmle's observations on this sinister communication were characteristically to the point. And now the Trust began to experience really grave misgivings. If it was unpleasant to have the letter to the exhibitor of Binghamton, N. Y., submitted to the eyes of inquisitive strangers, it was far more serious to be publicly associated with this one to the exhibitor of Great Bend, Kans. It was, when read in the cold light of publicity, an exceedingly ugly letter. The federal laws of the United States had certain very suggestive things to say on the subject of impeding trade by menaces. American sentiment was very willing to be quiescent in the matter of nefarious Trusts, but once it was roused it could be savage. And, unless something were done to stop his mouth, this fellow Laemmle looked perilously like rousing it.

Indeed, the symptoms were already disturbing.

A fortnight after his publication of the Denver letter, Laemmle announced that "Old Gen. Flimco is not only the worst-managed but the worst-scared trust in America. Right now he has the worst case of panic-ache a trust ever suffered from." The panic was not invention. The *Denver Post* had come out with an article headed:

MOVING PICTURE AND FILM TRUST  
FACES PROBING  
ACTION TO BE STARTED SOON BY  
GOVERNMENT AND STATE OFFICIALS  
EVIDENCE IS OBTAINED  
EXTRACT FROM LETTER TO  
AN INDEPENDENT IN WHICH  
THREATS ARE MADE.

All very alarmist, no doubt, but at the same time not a little alarming.

In April of this same year, 1910, Laemmle had celebrated the first anniversary of his independence by reviewing the events of a twelvemonth. In doing so he observed, "I have been the bull's-eye for a most villainous attack of vituperation, lying and abuse, all of which was done under cover and not in the open as I have conducted my fight." Both the charge and the claim were warranted. He had made his accusations, very searching accusations, not only without the smallest regard for

secrecy, but with a steady resolution that they should obtain the widest possible publicity. The Trust, full of black things in its heart, ventured on no public defence. It could only hope that this would be construed as an indication of dignified innocence. The hope was vain. Its silence was taken by an uncomfortably large number of people for what it was, a plain inability to say anything to its own credit.

But if open rebuttal of Laemmle's charge was deemed to be impolitic, there were alternative methods of counter-attack. The most promising of these was to entangle Laemmle in litigation, and reduce him if possible to bankruptcy in the process. The Trust knew that on the merits of the quarrel it was not likely to obtain decisions in the courts, but it knew also that even a winning case could, by means of postponements and appeals, be made intolerably tedious and costly. Laemmle was known to be in consultation with two lawyers, one in Chicago and one in New York. Inspired by the news, the Trust issued retainers to a squad of seventeen. Ordinarily speaking, the society of seventeen lawyers might seem to be rather an embarrassment than otherwise in the affairs of life, but this was no ordinary occasion. The intention was to demoralise Laemmle by letting loose about him a swarm of actions, with a view not to winning verdicts but to wearing down his stamina. He claimed to be bearing the brunt of Indepen-

dence; very well, he should learn how vexatious the brunt could be.

It was a neat conception, with only one weakness, but that a vital one. From first to last the Trust made the mistake of under-estimating Laemmle's staying power. It was, perhaps, his most remarkable quality, so remarkable, in fact, as to amount in its kind to genius. Such energy of determination as brought Laemmle through his historic ordeal is rare in any case. When it appears in industry, it is far more often than not found to be using unscrupulous means to unscrupulous ends. Rare in itself, it is very much rarer when it beats through all opposition to a fixed mark, and in doing so sacrifices neither integrity nor self-respect. Laemmle in his fight with the Trust cut what to patrician eyes may seem queer capers; there was nothing studied or marmoreal in his bearing. The circumstances of his crusade were less those of a romantic tournament than of a street-brawl. It was rough-house, with bludgeons about, and coarse, thrusting speech. It may be a painful scene to fastidious nerves, but it is one in which Shakespeare would have delighted. Laemmle adopted and, indeed, often improvised a technique suited to the occasion. He laid about him, he barracked, he called names, he pulled profane faces. He never lost his head, but he fought with a wild-cat fury. And when it was all over, and he had redeemed a dozen forlorn situations,

he came out of it a generous, clean-hearted, unspoil gentleman. There was greatness of character in that.

This by way of parenthesis. The Trust was not interested in Laemmle's business morals; morals being little in its line. Ethical misconceptions were, from its point of view, of no matter, but it was gravely and at last mortally to its disadvantage that it also misconceived the man's fighting weight. It was almost a physical equation. Laemmle, champion of the "little fellows," had himself become known as "The Little Fellow" in the trade. It really was ridiculous for an out-size in Trusts to take serious notice of this figure of five-feet two inches. There is a legend that as a young man he once observed to a dancing partner that the floor was rough, when she replied, "How do you know—you haven't been on it all night." But many exhibitors, forming impressions from the fight that he was putting up, thought of him as six feet in his stockings; one even made it eight.

Early in 1910, the English *Bioscope* journal illuminated Trust mentality for its readers:

Independent side is conspicuously weak in leaders, or men who know their own minds. What the Independent side wants is one or two strong men to pull them through their difficulties. Frankly these men are not apparent as yet. The Trust knows they have little to beat either in brains or in money, so that too much importance must not be attached to

any temporary defeats which the Trust may sustain.

The Trust bias is clear; but then the writer adds, darkly:

If it [the Trust] is to be broken up, which is doubtful, it will be done by legislative means.

*Bioscope* offers no explanation as to how the Trust was to be broken by legislation unless someone with brains could be found to direct and lead the attack. Since, it seems, his appearance was not anticipated, the fear of legislative correction might well be a remote one. Though if *Bioscope* and the Trust had but known it, the man was already there, and the legislation would come.

But for the moment the Trust was preoccupied not with legislation but with litigation. The one was a displeasing but quite obscure possibility; the other, a present succour. Satisfied that if ever the time came they could circumvent the dangers of the one, they now turned to the congenial task of breaking Laemmle's back with the burdens of the other.

On February 4th, 1910, the following announcement appeared in the press:

To-day in the United States Circuit Court in New York City, Richard Dyer, representing the Motion Picture Patents Company, applied for a continuance in their injunction suit against Carl Laemmle,



and Independent Moving Pictures Company—Emerson Newell of New York, Edward Maher of Chicago, earnestly demanded a trial: but Judge Hand finally granted a continuance to the Motion Picture Combination for three weeks in order to give them an opportunity to prepare a defence to the claim of Mr. Laemmle that the Motion Picture Patents Company is an unlawful “conspiracy of monopolists” and violating the Sherman Anti-Trust Act. A large number of Independent manufacturers were present in court and gave Mr. Laemmle their warmest greetings and assurance of moral support in his determined fight for freedom of trade in the moving picture business.

The “warmest greetings and assurance of moral support” were gratifying—very. But those “three weeks in order to give them an opportunity to prepare a defence” were ominous. The decision meant that impetuous ideas about vindicating the right, and putting oppressors in their place, were to be severely curbed by the law’s delays. That suited the Trust exactly. It could stand the strain much longer than Laemmle. Or so it believed; nearly four years were taken to prove that it was mistaken.



## CHAPTER VII

### ANTI-TRUST

THE action of 1910, in which year IMP became the principal unit of the Motion Picture Distributing and Sales Company, hung about the courts until 1912, when the name of the concern was changed to The Universal Film Manufacturing Company. Asked why he had sold IMP to the Universal, Laemmle replied: "Because I believe it is the best thing that can happen to promote strength and permanency to the Independent film movement. I believe if we had not taken the step the Independent ranks would have been unable to withstand the repeated assaults from within and without. . . . The object is to solidify all the Independents, the exhibitors, the exchanges, and the manufacturers."

The earliest presidents of the Sales company were Laemmle, Charles Baumann, and Jules Brulatour, who had been supplying raw stock to the Independents, and who in 1912 persuaded Eastman to sell in the open market. This was a concession of the first importance to Laemmle and his associates. Hitherto, on the mornings when delivery of Lumiere film was expected from the

Paris factory, they had gathered hungrily round Brulatour's New York office, waiting for famine rations of a trade staple. Now they could count on ample and regular consignments, received not as a precarious favour, but securely in the normal way of business. The moral effect of Eastman's action in selling to Independents was great, and its practical result was an immense improvement in the efficiency of Independent production.

When Laemmle was elected President of the Sales Company, as it was known in brief, the *Motion Picture News* wrote:

The honour was ungrudgingly given to the man who has proven himself to be the bulwark of the Independent movement. Had it not been for Carl Laemmle, very little progress would have been made in the Independent section. . . . He has been, in our opinion, the greatest thorn in the flesh of the Patents Company, and this rankles deep and sore.

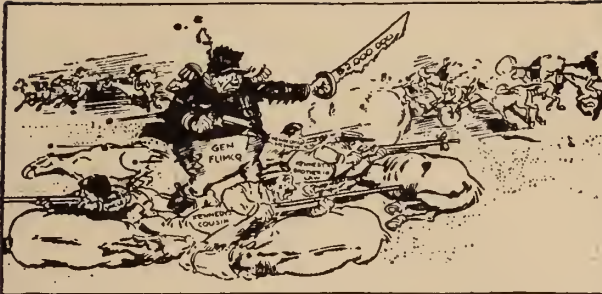
Laemmle was, indeed, by this time not only a very powerful but a very popular figure among his associates. In the earliest days of his moving-picture career, he was asked what sort of contract he demanded from his customers. He replied that he demanded none. To rely merely upon a man's word was a method startling to a trade not greatly given to confidence in the other fellow's good faith. But the method had told; there was not

now a man in his own party who did not believe him to be honourable, and not a man in the Trust who did not know him to be incorruptible. And even the enemy, in its rank and file, could sometimes be inspired by the example of a chivalry that was unruffled in the heat of a desperate conflict. When Laemmle's Montreal office was burnt out in 1910, two Trust companies in the town offered him accommodation while he was re-organising.

At the headquarters of the Trust, however, there was no consent to such amenities. There the spirit was implacable; it was also unprincipled. Independence must be crushed. That was the ruling theme; and Independence was now epitomised in Carl Laemmle. He was not only leading the revolt: he was responsible for the weekly philippics that were peppering the Trust with derision and contempt. In 1912, the Sales Company at length secured a judgment in the action above noted. Suggestions in the meantime had been conveyed to Laemmle, and to Cochrane, his most formidable ally. They might, it seemed, in certain eventualities, be granted a license as Independents—a prospect of unique attractions. The insinuations were disregarded, and the last hopes of compromise were abandoned. It was, Laemmle desired the Trust to know, to be a fight to a finish. The Trust thereupon began to conduct itself in the manner proper to rogue elephants.

The Sales Company, Carl Laemmle President,

**"GEN. FLIMCO'S LAST STAND"**



**Old Flimmyboy, surrounded by Independent Indlans, has about as much chance as a snowball in Hades. Shot full of holes, punctured and perforated from peanut-head to pants, he is making one final rally and bluff by shooting threatening letters to exhibitors and publishing dieful interviews in cities where he has "bought" exchanges. We are making arrangements with the artist now for the General's obsequies and burial. While the hand is mournfully playing "Has Anybody Here Seen Kennedy" over the grave, you will be making arrangements to hook up with Old Doctor Laemmle who will cure you of all such/diseases as "Repeaters," "Dropsy of the Film," "Rainstorms" and "Pip of the Cashbox" Send for Dr. Laemmle's loose-leaf supplementary film list to-day.**

CARL LAEMMLE, President



**The Laemmle Film Service**

HEADQUARTERS: 196-198 Lake Street, CHICAGO  
 MINNEAPOLIS PORTLAND OMAHA  
 SALT LAKE CITY. EVANSVILLE

The Biggest and Best Film Renter in the World.

AN ANTI-TRUST ADVERTISEMENT



announced its first legal triumph with unfamiliar restraint:

## VICTORY! VICTORY!

The Motion Picture Distributing and Sales Company Wins Important Legal Decision.

Judge Hand, of the United States District Court of the Southern District of New York, has just decided an important patent suit, brought by the Motion Picture Patents Company, known as the Trust, against the Independent Moving Pictures Company of America, for alleged infringement of the Latham Patent No. 707934. The Latham Patent No. 707934 claimed the continuous feed by means of sprocket and perforated film, also the loop or slack portion of film which supplies the intermittent feed.

Judge Hand decided in favour of the Independent Moving Pictures Company by dismissing the Bill of Complaint on the ground of NON-INFRINGEMENT, WITH COSTS.

Motion Picture Distributing and Sales Company,  
111 East 14th Street, New York City.

But elsewhere at the same moment, Laemmle improved the occasion in strains of choicest invective:

## GEN. FLIMCO'S LAST STAND.

Old Flimco boy, surrounded by Independent Indians, has about as much chance as a snowball in Hades. Shot full of holes, punctured and perforated from peanut-head to pants, he is making one final rally and bluff by shooting threatening letters to exhibitors . . . etc.

Cochrane considered the verdict in this action to be the foundation of the campaign's ultimate success. But it had been a perilously near thing. "At one stage of the suit," wrote Cochrane, "C. L. was licked. He was up against the stone wall of patent laws, regulations, procedure and red tape." Once the Sales Company was at the point of defeat. Laemmle was given a day in which to produce evidence of prior use of perforations similar to those of the sprocket holes on films. Failing this the Trust would establish its claim to a basic patent. Laemmle and his lawyers were at a loss from which there seemed to be no hope of recovery. And then, at the last moment, somebody was inspired by the perforations on a roll of toilet-paper. The argument was taken into court, and upheld.

The Trust itself was a vigorous and resourceful fighter, with an authority that yet was not the result merely of aggressive qualities. It worked restlessly to improve the product of its own licensees, and insisted that square dealing should be practised as between themselves. But the principles upon which it was founded were not allowed to be open to discussion. For the Trust, abstract ethical theories had no fascination. Here was a practical organisation which assured a maximum of profit to the people fortunate enough to control it. Small traders, being men of no enterprise, needed, in their own interests, to be kept firmly under discipline. In their own interests, and in those of a



happy Trust, to which their contribution in the way of license fees, royalties, fines and other impositions meant a matter of some millions annually. Let everyone but acquiesce, and all would be well. Should anyone be so ill advised as to resist, he must be severely corrected, and still all would be well. It was one of those large conceptions by which the master minds of industry are sometimes irradiated.

Finding that there was an unexpected amount of correction to be done, the Trust applied itself systematically to the task. It established a highly efficient intelligence department, distributing its agents secretly throughout the trade. If you were in the Trust and broke a Trust rule, you never knew what report might be sent in to headquarters by the other license-holder up the street. If this should be said to violate the principle of honour among trustlings, you had yourself to thank, since Trust rules were not made to be broken. If you were an Independent, you did not thereby escape vigilance. A few intractable distributors met clandestinely in St. Louis to discuss their grievances. Every precaution had been taken to keep the occasion from outside knowledge; there seemed to be no possibility of leakage. In the midst of their conference they received a wire from the Trust in New York wishing them luck.

It is hardly too much to say that the fight between the Trust and Independents resolved itself

into a fight between the Trust and Laemmle. The one had behind it almost unlimited capital resources, and the terrorist power of huge vested interests that held the trade in an economic vice. The other was supported by the confidence and by very little of the money of a somewhat ragged if loyal regiment. And if Laemmle was no fool, he certainly had no fool to reckon with.

The Trust was suspicious of Laemmle from the first. When certain Directors confidently declared that the opposition was not worth considering, they were warned by shrewder counsels to keep an eye on this volatile little Teuton. He was nothing to fear, but he was worth watching. Volatile Teutonism, bred to American citizenship in the rigours of the middle-west, suggested latent powers. As the Independent publicity grew in vehemence and effect, and IMP became active, it was increasingly clear that this intelligence had not been rated too high. The Trust staff were even recommended to learn what they could from Laemmle's methods, advice that flattered them. But the Trust, while recognising the intelligence, still was not afraid of it. Although Laemmle had become a nuisance, big Trusts do not get into a state about nuisances; they merely remove them. And so, Laemmle must be removed.

As time went on, and Gen. Flimco showed signs of nervous disorder under repeated lashings, it was suspected that the process might take longer

than had been supposed. In fact, Laemmle, infernally leagued with Cochrane, was beginning to make the Trust jumpy. The Trust resented that. It resented being compelled to bother about what these outlaws would say next. It pleased the Trust to call them outlaws; but then the Trust was notoriously careless in its specifications. Nevertheless, the Trust jumpy was by no means the Trust scared. It was necessary to be more condign than had been expected, that was all.

In February, 1910, was incorporated The General Film Company. It was Laemmle's Gen. Flimco. The Motion Pictures Patents Company remained in being, and these two bodies henceforward represented the combined activities of the Trust. It was this combination that undertook Laemmle's effacement.

It turned to its seventeen lawyers. They advised that the Flimco advertisements were malicious, and could be adjudicated as such in court. The Trust asked for nothing better than to take Laemmle into court as often as possible, but it was not going there on this particular suit. There was a sight too much truth in these lampoons; it was taking no risk of being told by some court, insensible of the respect due to big Trusts, that it was the truth. It instructed the seventeen lawyers to guess again.

This time they did better. Patents: why not sink Laemmle in the morasses of patent law? The

Trust liked that. Injunction suits—let there be injunction suits in large numbers, let them flock in from all quarters, let the federal courts and the state courts buzz with them. Scour the country for infringements; set spies on to every independent camera, projecting machine, reel of film, that could be found. Let actions breed and multiply, spread them over the widest possible area, drag them over the longest possible periods. Argue, temporise, postpone, appeal—let these be terms of their constant thought.

The lawyers were charmed. Seldom had a roving commission been so liberally given. They were to experience all the delights and rewards of sailing under the Jolly Roger, and none of its risks. They embarked for all points of the compass with unbounded zeal, to the refrain of seventeen men on a dead man's chest. To drop the metaphor, in the space of three years they brought two hundred and eighty-nine actions against the Sales Company, that is to say, against Laemmle, in the courts, and when the issue was at last settled by the destruction not of Laemmle but of the Trust, defendant costs had amounted to three hundred thousand dollars.

To be involved in a law-suit is generally acknowledged to be a debilitating experience. What it may be like to be involved in law-suits over three years at the rate of a hundred or so a year is, I suppose, the peculiar privilege of Carl Laemmle

among living men to know. As the record cannot have been approached before, and is not likely to be equalled in the future, we may take it as a classic. All remarkable feats of endurance are apt to follow natural law by dwindling in perspective, and it needs some effort even dimly to reconstruct the strain endured by Laemmle under an offensive of unexampled ferocity in its kind. The figures are worth repeating: two hundred and eighty-nine actions in less than three years. Astonishing is a word very inadequate for his survival. The Trust was astonished when he survived the first score or so of suits; when the hundred mark was passed and Laemmle was still upstanding, astonishment gave place to alarm; and when two hundred and eighty-nine had not by one tremor relaxed the set of that now terrifying chin, the Trust lay down and took the count.

In the meantime, many secondary devices were employed in discomfort of the outlaw. A rumour was circulated that he was going out of the picture business. He replied that far from going out he was daily getting deeper in—that, indeed, he now had three hundred people working for him. Today there are something over six thousand on his weekly pay-roll. Spies abounded with an insatiable curiosity concerning his cameras, and even “strong-arm” methods were not disdained.

The Trust had no scruples about molestation. Laemmle’s people, his directors and players and

officials, could not move to and from the New York studios with safety. That is to say, they would not have been able to do so had not Laemmle employed more and better auxiliaries of his own. They worked, as it were, on commission. For every Trust auxiliary who was induced to get to hell out of this, the rate was five dollars. Sometimes the Patents gang got into the studios as workers. When they were detected by their opposite numbers in the Laemmle service, battles would ensue that were fought across the city into Hell's Kitchen. It was all very deplorable. Gentlemen, we believe, do not do these things. And yet, Carl Laemmle remains inalienably a gentleman. He objected to his employees being beaten up. He was not going to be put out of business by those methods. Being a scant five-foot, he could not do much in the pugilist line himself, and so, with characteristic efficiency, he enlisted a fancy of his own. It may be partiality, but I feel that his men in buckram must have been of a more attractive type than his adversary's.

In the record of these events, a special tribute should be paid to one Tony Gaudio, chief cameraman of IMP, who, in the words of an annotator, "thought the sun rose and set on Laemmle." The Trust had a particular anxiety to be acquainted with the anatomy of Tony's cameras—he had a humble pair of them. An agent of the Trust called upon him. In the interests of science the agent



would very much like to possess photographs of the insides of Tony's cameras. Money was no object; he was an extremely rich scientist. What, for example, about ten thousand dollars for two photographs? Ten thousand dollars was more money than Tony had ever heard of. And he told the Trust, whom he recognised at sight, to move on while it had breath to tell the tale.

While the Trust was delivering its main attack, it neglected no minor tactic of aggression. As the quality of IMP releases improved, even licensed exhibitors began to demand them, and the Trust was forced to allow its exchanges some discretion. The veto, if not removed, was relaxed. But efforts were made to induce the combined exchanges of an area to give it practical effect by themselves refusing to supply IMP productions. "A few days ago," wrote Laemmle in one of his weekly bulletins, "several film exchanges in Pittsburgh formed an agreement for the purpose of 'killing the IMP Company.' The result was that they simultaneously cancelled their standing orders for IMP films." He appealed to the exhibitors to support productions that "I firmly believe are the best in the world at this very moment." If the exchanges were refusing to supply them, then the exhibitor was being made to suffer "in order that your exchange may wreak its petty spite upon me. If you are content to stand for this, well and good. But if you want IMP films, if you really believe that they



are the best money makers for you, then the thing for you to do is to trade with an exchange which will give you the films you demand. . . . You can even force my bitterest enemies to buy IMP films and furnish you with them regularly." And then, true to his policy of letting the public know the exact condition of his affairs, he printed a list of the exchanges, thirty-two of them, which at the time were taking all IMP productions. It was the kind of candour that was irresistible.

In some of its methods, the Trust, infatuated with a sense of its own power and security, was beginning to move dangerously on to the far side of discretion. *The Motion Picture News*, which under the editorship of Alfred H. Saunders throughout the struggle supported Laemmle for no other reason than that it believed in his cause, came out with a story that must be given in its own words:

For the second time in less than eight months the Independent Motion Picture Company of America has caught the Motion Picture Trust red-handed in the vilest sort of Trust warfare, namely:

Carl Laemmle made an agreement with W. D. Boyce, publisher of the *Chicago Blade and Saturday Ledger*, whereby Mr. Boyce delivered to the "IMP" Company all the negative of 10,000 feet taken during his 65,000 dollar expedition through Africa.

A few days before the IMP released the film en-

titled "In Africa," Mr. A. M. Kennedy, Western representative of Motion Picture Patents Company, wrote the following letter (in part) to Mr. Boyce (in an endeavour to break a lawful contract).

"Mr. Boyce: If you will break your contract with the IMP Company and succeed in enjoining that company from putting your African pictures on the market, *we will pay you* 2,500 dollars, and we will further agree to stand all expenses of the lawsuit and set our entire force of lawyers (seventeen—it was believed) at work putting the injunction into effect.

"Motion Picture Patents Company.

"(Signed) A. M. Kennedy, Western Representative."

They pleaded with him, begged and cajoled him, had his personal friends call on him and exert all their influences toward inducing him to break his contract. They offered him 6,500 dollars spot cash in a wild and desperate endeavour to change his mind. But Mr. Boyce said that a verbal contract with Carl Laemmle stood as staunchly with him as a written one.

This was shocking, and its publication was a shock even to the Trust. The campaign of destruction by legal suits was making not unsatisfactory progress. Laemmle, indeed, was putting up an unexpectedly stubborn resistance, but he was showing some signs of distress. He had himself been provoked into filing a suit against the Trust under an Act that offered a defendant relief from what

was known as Multiplicity of Suits. Although the court gave him some momentary consideration, the seventeen lawyers were equal to seeing that it amounted to nothing. It was very reassuring to note these anxieties. The pace, clearly, was beginning to tell. No individual suit was of great consequence, and occasionally, as in Judge Hand's decision of 1912, one of them might come to an unforeseen and inconvenient end. But cumulatively they were driving Laemmle so hard that when a little later the cherished design of consummating them in an action of really serious proportions could be carried out, he would have neither energy nor resources left with which to save himself in his extremity. At least, that is what the Trust kept on telling itself that it felt about it. It refused to entertain any suspicion that it might be mistaken, as it was.

But it was aware of a faint uneasiness when this narrative about Mr. Boyce of Chicago was given to the world. The allegations were grave; also they were demonstrably true. The Trust, in consequence, at last began to ask itself questions, and not without reason. The time was approaching when it would find itself called upon to answer very ugly questions indeed; when it would be told by the United States in high court that in the interests of industrial decency it must get out.

## CHAPTER VIII

### VICTORY

So far back as 1909, Independent criticism of the Trust had been noticed in Congress. In February of that year a motion had been passed in the House of Representatives at Washington, whereby it was

Resolved that the Secretary of Commerce and Labour is requested to institute a thorough investigation immediately, of the so-called "combination" on the part of the manufacturers of motion picture machines and films thereof in the United States to control prices, with a view to discerning how far an agreement with the various manufacturers of such products operates to fix the price of motion picture machines and films produced in the United States, the causes of the ability of the manufacturers to combine, and the cost to the consumers and users renting from said so-called "moving picture combination" and with suggestions as to remedies: also with a view to criminally prosecuting parties, combined to control and manipulate the market and the prices of moving picture machines and films.

That, as the Trust knew, was a good deal less formidable than it sounds. The prescribed investigation would, it might be assumed, drift to a peace-

ful end in departmental routine. Neither public feeling nor legislation against Trusts was at that moment as active as they were shortly to become under the presidency of William H. Taft. Entering office on March 4th, 1909, in the following January he sent a message to Congress, declaring his hostility towards "all schemes to stifle competition and raise prices." By that time the investigation ordered by the resolution of February, 1909, had been in progress for nearly a year, and nothing had come of it. There was little reason to fear that anything would. Taft's pronouncement might momentarily disturb the dust that was doubtless settling on the departmental papers, but it was hardly more dangerous than that. In the result, the Trust was to enjoy its monopolistic privileges for a further three years without interference.

During those years the privileges were exercised with the utmost rigour. The licenses of over five hundred theatres convicted of having exhibited independent films were cancelled, and applications for a further hundred and fifty refused. The hardship of the small proprietor was alleviated by the increasing supply of IMP productions, but that was not within the Trust's intention, which was ruthlessly to break opposition. Had it not been for Laemmle's indefatigable and wholly unforeseen energy, hundreds of small men would have had to close down. As Taft's administration approached

its end, it seemed likely that after all his term would not see any effective revival of Trust legislation. But in the summer of 1912, Woodrow Wilson, during his campaign as democratic candidate, re-opened the subject, asserting his belief in the then somewhat moribund doctrine that "a private monopoly is indefensible and intolerable." Industrial reform became a prominent electoral issue, and once again conspicuous to the official mind. Carl Laemmle and his associates saw their opportunity, and seized it. Senators, Congressmen, political journalists, campaign managers—anyone who had direct or indirect influence upon the administrative chiefs at Washington was lobbied, admonished, challenged. Laemmle's appeals could not be dismissed as expedients of self-interest. Everyone knew him to have his career and his fortune at stake, but everyone knew also that the question raised was one of the widest public concern.

For above three years now Laemmle had spared nothing of himself in exposing what he fiercely believed to be a fraudulent conspiracy against an industry to which he had devoted himself. For it really was a devotion. Laemmle wanted to make money and he wanted the delights of success; but he also was one of the very few men in the business who had a genuine feeling for motion-pictures. He liked them personally, he believed not only in their commercial but in their artistic and edu-



cational possibilities, and although not a director himself he took delight in seeing fine and sincere workmanship in his studios for its own sake. His stand against the Trust was definitely a confession of faith. It could have been nothing else. Submission to the Trust would at any time have enriched him at his own valuation. But he believed that if the Trust were not destroyed, the future of his cherished industry would be obstructionist, unintelligent, and dishonourable. The fear to this extent may be said to have been groundless, that if Laemmle had not broken the Trust, someone else would. In the nature of things, being what it was, it could not survive. But the fear was Laemmle's inspiration, and he was the instrument by which the inevitable was achieved.

We have seen the odds against which he had conducted his three years' crusade. They had, by any common reckoning, been insupportable, and he had supported them. Now, when he went about prophesying in the name of Woodrow Wilson's declaration, the recollection of his long reiterated charges gathered to one ringing impact on men's minds. The sense of realisation communicated itself to Washington. At last the almost impossible but unconquerable hope was to be realised. On August 15th, 1912, the United States of America filed a petition against the Motion Pictures Patents Company and the General





CARL LAEMMLE AND HIS FAMILY AT THE TIME OF THE  
ANTI-TRUST CAMPAIGN



Film Company, demanding their dissolution as corrupt and unlawful associations.

There had long been rumours that the government was preparing to take action. Other Trusts had been in difficulties, those controlling shoe-machines and kindling wood, for example. But the film Trust went confidently forward until the blow fell. For years Laemmle had been crying on his top notes "I'll hit you!" "I'll hit you!" "I'll hit you!"—and now the Trust unaccountably felt as though it had been trailed on a dark night and bludgeoned from behind. Yet not unaccountably, since big bullies are apt to be blockheads into the bargain.

The government brief was an impressive document. There were no signs of haste in its preparation, but it was prepared to grind exceedingly small. With such diffidence as becomes a layman under the spell of legal prose, it may be summarised as follows. The Trust affected the film industry in all its branches. It had been formed in the latter part of 1908 (a month or two before the announcements at the Imperial Hotel), adopting uniform business methods and non-competitive prices. Hitherto the market had been open. The conspiracy had imposed upon commerce the following disabilities:

(1) The Trust manufacturers, that is to say practically all manufacturers then operating in the

United States, agree to supply their products exclusively to confederate exchanges. The list of these could be enlarged only by consent of the combine.

(2) A corresponding list of theatres was drawn up. No exchange could deal with any theatre not included therein.

(3) All prices from all manufacturers to all exchanges must be the same.

(4) No new manufacturers could deal with existing exchanges without the consent of the combine.

(5) Penalties were stipulated and enforced. Any exchange dealing with an unlicensed manufacturer, and any exhibitor dealing with an unlicensed exchange, could be fined or suspended at the discretion of the Trust.

(6) All offenders suffering the latter penalty were named on a black-list circulated to the trade. To deal with any one of these meant inclusion on the same list.

(7) A fee of two dollars weekly was exacted from all exhibitors. This was designated as a royalty on projecting machines. But these in fact had in the great majority of cases been purchased without any such liability. In default of this payment, the supply of films was withdrawn.

(8) The Trust had entered into an agreement with the Eastman Kodak Company, whereby the then only available supply of raw stock in the

United States should be distributed only to manufacturers within the combine.

(9) [This must be given verbatim.] Instead of selling films outright as had been the custom in the trade preceding the formation of the combination, manufacturers adopted a uniform method of leasing the films in order that, by writs of replevin [replevin: defined by Chambers as an action "to recover goods distrained upon giving a pledge or security to try the right to them at law"] that might recover possession of the same, if the exchangeman or exhibitor violated any restrictions imposed by the combination. Hundreds of replevin suits have been brought as a means of terrorising exchanges and exhibitors and compelling them to observe the rules against distributing or displaying independent pictures.

(N.B.—the ominous tone in "terrorising"; N.B. also the implication of "independent" pictures.)

(10) In its good time, the Trust formed its own distributing exchanges, known as the General Film Company. It became the sole distributing agency of the defendants. [A very displeasing word that, "defendants."] This had been accomplished by the purchase, at the Trust's price, of nearly all independent exchanges. When an exchange thought the price inadequate, it was starved of supplies, and forced to go out of business. In case the court might be interested in

figures, a hundred and sixteen exchanges had been handling Trust products in 1909; of these, in 1912, one exchange, not specified, was still carrying on.

(11) The regulations of the Trust had been, and still were, enforced with despotic power.

Thus the preamble. These activities, obviously, were "unlawful under many decisions of the Supreme Court." It remained to consider the defence. This, it seems, was that the acquisition of patent rights legalised acts that would otherwise have been unlawful. We—the United States of America, maintain on the contrary:

(1) That Patent laws could not take precedence of the Sherman Act against oppression of commerce.

(2) That motion-picture film was not, by any strict interpretation of the law, a patented commodity. And even if the Trust could prove monopolistic rights in a certain brand of film, it could claim no right to withhold its licenses from producers using a brand unpatented—[i.e. *Eastman v. Lumiere*]. Again, in any case, the Sherman Act rendered all such arbitrary measures illegal.

In short, the Sherman Act transcended Patent law. Proceeding to more generalised submissions, the United States brief maintained that by Congressional mandate "the flow of trade in the channels of Interstate Commerce should remain free

and natural," and that any violation of this principle was illegal. Further, that the two defendant companies were guilty in considered terms of such interference. Further, again, that the "so-called" license arrangements were likewise illegal, and should be forbidden. Although, to reduce the case to its elements, it would be unnecessary to forbid anything if the United States were supported in the rational plea that this corrupt organisation should be dissolved. In conclusion of this intermediate section of the brief, the attention of the court was respectfully directed to twelve rulings in the affairs of the Standard Oil Company and the Tobacco Corporations. Finally, the validity of most of the alleged patents pleaded by the Trust was seriously disputed. Before 1908, nobody had considered the film industry worth bothering about. Its material had been traded at trifling costs and with no reservations. A precedent had thereby been constituted. Edison had attempted to prove his claim to governing patent rights, and had failed. The menace of Sherman, in short, was over all these pretensions of the Trust.

The best war-story tells us that General Pershing, newly arrived in France, halted at the head of his staff to salute a conspicuous statue with "Lafayette, we are here." Later scepticism discredits the incident. In the same way I am prepared to hear that a lady-mayor of New York



never paid the celebrated compliment, "Queen, you've said a mouthful." But there can be no doubt that the United States Attorney General had on the occasion under record said a very considerable mouthful indeed. Here was a complete and dramatic revolution of events. Since 1909 the Trust had been hounding Laemmle to destruction. He had, it is true, behaved in a manner that ill became a quarry marked for the kill, but that nevertheless was his destined rôle. And now, suddenly, the Trust found that it was itself the quarry, with Laemmle implacably in pursuit. For there could be no doubt about it; as the Attorney General unfolded the case for the prosecution, the voice behind that damning and inescapable indictment was the voice of Laemmle.

The first hearing of the case was held on January 8th, 1913, Edwin P. Grosvenor, special assistant to the Attorney General, appearing for the United States. On January 15th, the first witnesses were heard behind closed doors at the Hotel McAlpin, New York. The Trust had secured a federal order that the evidence should be taken in camera. A move was immediately made in Congress to have this decree rescinded, and on March 3rd, his last day in office, President Taft signed a bill providing that all testimony in cases brought under anti-trust law must be given in public. And so the world was to hear in open court what the film Trust had to say for itself.

In the course of the investigation a hundred and twenty witnesses were called, and three thousand six hundred pages of testimony taken. It was not until the middle of April, 1914, twenty months after the suit had been filed, that the hearings were closed. By that time it was clear that the revelations, inexorable as they were tedious, had damaged the Trust beyond repair. The truth, obscured through interminable delays by the smoke-screen of seventeen lawyers, had at last been painfully disclosed, and a very ill-featured truth it proved to be. The evidence taken, a further eighteen months were to pass before the Court handed down its final judgment. Assured though the result might seem, it was for Laemmle a period of prolonged suspense. Surely, after all that, but one verdict was possible? And yet, seventeen lawyers never resting, the caprices of human reason, the fallibilities and loop-holes of the law—who knew what even now might happen? All the auguries were fair; but if after all the issue should betray the promise? It could never be re-opened. If the Trust could survive this ordeal, it would henceforth be invulnerable, and the effort that had been so gallantly endured through nearly five years, could not permanently withstand this monstrous weight of combined interest. The enterprise and the achievements of Independence had been possible only in the conviction that the Trust would ultimately be destroyed. So long as

that faith held, no difficulties were insuperable. But a Trust firmly established by legal sanction would be another matter altogether. The inspiration of the free men would wither, and their energy, becoming aimless, wither also. The final challenge of Independence, represented by Laemmle, had now been delivered. If it succeeded, the future was his; if it failed, he would know his effort to be exhausted and he would either dwindle into the Trust or out of the business. It is small wonder that, with even an outside chance against him, the eighteen-month interval between the closing of the Court and the announcement of its decision, was one of acute anxiety, calling up the last reserves of his fortitude.

At length the long deferred deliverance came, and it was unconditional. On October 15th, 1915, the United States government ordered the Film Trust to discontinue all unlawful practices. Since the entire organisation was founded on activities that were themselves defined as unlawful, the order in effect meant the dissolution of the Trust into its constituent units, each one of which, if it remained in operation, must do so without privilege in a free and open market. The monopolistic power of the Trust was broken, and without it the Trust ceased to be. Anticipating this end, the monopolists had made prudent use of the law's delay. In abolishing the Trust as such, the Court ordered among other things that all the two dol-

lar fees paid under duress should be returned to the defrauded exhibitors. The government, with a view to making the order effective, sought to attach the bank account of the combine. But the Patents Company and Gen. Filmco had gone silently away, leaving behind them closed doors and empty offices. The fortunes that had been made by exploiting an industry slid furtively into the backwaters of sundry private accounts. No compensation for wrongs done was recoverable. The Trust had to be written off as a bad debtor, bad to the core. But it was exterminated. When at an earlier date the Trust had begun to suffer serious inroads on its business through Independent competition, one of its lawyers had said—“Laemmle is the man to whom, more than any other, is due the large damage inflicted on the Motion Pictures Patents Company.”

And now, when the finding of the Court was known, one of the Trust leaders made a generous admission in defeat: “My hat’s off to Carl Laemmle. There’s no use denying that the man is the keenest fighter we’ve had to contend with, and that his Filmco advertisements have hurt us more than any other one thing.”

News of the judgment was brought by a messenger to Laemmle as he was crossing the street. Passers-by were mildly astonished to see a small gentleman in his early middle-age making strange demonstrations in the middle of a net-work of

car-tracks. He was, in fact, behaving rather like an intoxicated small gentleman. He was cheering gently to himself, and performing the evolutions of a jig, heedless of approaching cars. He certainly must be inebriated; or perhaps not feeling very well. Sympathetic hands led him to the security of the side-walk. Would the messenger kindly say that again, very slowly and clearly? "The Trust is ordered—!" Nineteen-nine to nineteen-fifteen. He had done it. Against inconceivable odds, he had done it. Why not a little song and dance in the street if he liked? Just once more, please. Quite. I understand. "People—" what a spree it would be to tell all those people—"The Trust is bust."

In the moment of his triumph Laemmle remembered all that Robert Cochrane had done to make it possible. Never once had that co-operation failed. And now the whole weary business was through. It was a great ending, but it had come none too soon. Laemmle could look back on it in the knowledge that not only had he won, but that he had won a dirty fight with clean hands. Nevertheless, in the elation of a success so splendid, he was conscious of unutterable relief. Breaking-point, he now knew, had been nearer than ever in the heat of conflict he had allowed himself to realise. In after days he said that the wealth of Ford and Rockefeller could not induce him to go through those five years again.

## CHAPTER IX

### IMP

THE strain of uninterrupted attack had, indeed, been enormous. There were frequent occasions when Laemmle could have been blamed by nobody if he had refused to go on with what must often have seemed a hopelessly unequal contest. It is doubtful whether the thought ever entered his head, but even his buoyant courage must sometimes have been sorely tried.

And, during those years, not only was he engaged in an attack that demanded a sustained concentration of energy, he was the executive head of a young and rapidly expanding producing firm, in the success of which lay the only hope of destroying the Trust. Good management of the concern known successively as IMP and Universal was an essential part of the anti-Trust campaign, but it was a part only. It was a full-time job, but while doing it Laemmle could never for a day relax his vigilance in other directions. For offence or defence alike he and his Allies in the Sales Company, firms such as Rex and Nestor, and men such as Herbert Miles and J. V. Ward,



had constantly to be prepared. Every movement of the Trust had to be watched. If it was threatening, forces had to be deployed to meet it; if it was unguarded, it had to be put to immediate advantage. Laemmle, that is to say, had simultaneously to attend to the organisation of a producing company and the disorganisation of a Trust, either of which occupations would have been ample employment for any man.

Further, his work as an Independent producer was carried on in a stifling atmosphere of suspicion, and, as we have seen, hampered by tactics of hooliganism. What would in any case have been an exacting task was embarrassed at every turn by the conditions of its undertaking. Not only was it exceedingly difficult to come by the necessary apparatus of the trade, it was equally difficult to induce players to take the risk of cutting loose from what was supposed to be Trust protection. In the early stages of IMP production, 1910, Laemmle wanted to engage Costello, then an idol of the screen. An emissary called on the favourite, who was scrubbing a horse in the barn. No; he was afraid that it would be impossible for Mr. Laemmle to secure his services, since the Vitagraph people were paying him a prohibitive salary, namely seventy-five dollars a week. The agent, he learnt, was authorised to offer twice that sum. Costello stopped whistling, and stared incredulously at the caller. He was as-



sured that the offer was a firm one. In that case, he should like a short time for consideration. A few days later he notified Laemmle that he must decline the proposal, the Trust having informed him that IMP was in a very shaky condition. Laemmle retorted by offering to deposit several weeks' salary in the bank on the hundred and fifty dollar basis. Costello would really like that—also he would like to work for IMP—but, well, on the whole he was afraid that the security wasn't good enough. The incident was one of many like it.

Nevertheless, the firm advanced steadily in the quality of its product and in its appeal to the public. In June, 1910, it was announced in the press that IMP had leased a "lot" in New York City, covering fifteen thousand square feet of space at the corner of 105th Street and Columbus Avenue. It was, as the Trust noted, the largest acquisition of land made to date by any motion-picture company in the city. It was in November of the same year that Laemmle himself moved from Chicago to New York, leaving Robert Cochrane in charge of the campaign from the middle-west. Cochrane followed a year or so later. About this time, too, as the double pressure of IMP and Trust activities increased, Laemmle sold his Film Service. Nine exchanges had been opened; in Chicago, 1906; Evansville, Memphis, and Omaha, 1907; Minneapolis, Portland, Oregon, Salt

Lake City, Montreal, and Winnepeg, 1908. Of these, at the time of the sale, Chicago, Minneapolis, and Omaha were offered, with the addition of Des Moines, either separately or as a group. The announcement in *The Implet*, the journal of IMP, was characteristic of its writer. "I have lived ten years in the past five, trying to give attention to the IMP and to my exchanges"—he was speaking of the period since he opened the first in Chicago. It was the simple confession, not of a tired man, but of one who was finding the pace pretty hot. He proceeded:

Imp has grown to such world-wide importance that it is a tremendous problem in itself—a vast business with endless ramifications. The Imp spends *eight to twelve thousand dollars per week* in America alone. I can't spend that money to best advantage if my time is divided between the Imp and my exchanges. Whoever buys the Laemmle Film Service exchanges will have exactly the same opportunities to make money that I have had. The Imp *has never favoured* the Laemmle exchanges and *never will*, no matter who owns them. I have jealously kept my promise, made when I organised the Imp company, that the Imp would be managed without fear or favour. I have kept the two concerns divorced absolutely, though I've given part of my time to each. If you buy the Laemmle exchanges you buy a *solid, substantial, profitable business*—nothing intangible, nothing unsafe or uncertain.

He was not prepared to sacrifice the business, but he would sell it at a figure that would give the purchaser a handsome profit on his investment. Each branch was prosperous, and each managed by men who had survived the strict processes of Laemmle's selection. And then, with a solicitude that in twenty-five years has never failed to mark his contact with his employees:

The new owners of my exchanges could do no better than continue these men in office, provided the men in question are willing.

When Laemmle was told of the Trust leader's assertion that the Flimco advertisements had done more damage to the combine than anything else, he replied, "I'm glad to hear that they admit it; but let me tell you one thing. All the Flimco ads in the world would not make exhibitors stick to the Independent cause if we were not turning out the kind of films they want. We work hard to win exhibitors to the Independent cause, but we work ten times harder to keep them. . . ." Here was no subtlety or fine-spun idealism, but a plain matter of fact sense of reality. For Laemmle, the film business was a business. The difference between him and a great many other men of whom this was true, was that he earnestly wanted to make it a clean business, a useful business, a dignified business. He wanted to see it become a

great public service, and he believed that it could do so. Whatever his artistic aspirations and insight may or may not have been, this was an honourable and far from a common ideal. It is often said of very rich men that the accumulation of money in itself means nothing to them, and it is generally untrue. But it has always been strictly true of Carl Laemmle. He had to wait a long time—until he was forty—before making any. Since then he has at one time and another made a great deal. But he would at any time cheerfully have gone back to zero rather than do anything that would curb the enterprise, interfere with the freedom, or demoralise the tone of the industry that he regarded as a mission. To regard motion-pictures as a mission may strike many people as an odd state of mind, but there it is. Not that there was anything exclusive in Laemmle's vision. On the contrary, his ambition was to bring not only the average man into his fold, but also the uneducated, the illiterate, the dull. In so far as his bid was for the largest possible popular support, he was, manifestly enough, no lonely apostle of creative light. I am not sure that in the long run the faith that he then professed has not been proved beyond his foresight. There are indications to-day that the screen after all may raise the standard of popular entertainment, at least, as nothing else has done or could do. For some of these indications Laemmle himself is responsible

through his most recent work as a producer. It is pleasant to think of so tough and spirited a career conquering yet other worlds towards its close.

But in those early Independent days, it would be idle to pretend that the screen ever rose above elementary artistic significance. The distinction between Laemmle and most of his rivals was not that he was making it highly distinguished by the best standards—those of literature and the “legitimate” stage for example—but that he was honestly trying to make it as good as he could. To do that he was prepared to take any risk and make any sacrifice. But he remained a realist, and knew that nothing could be done without a firm grasp of the enterprise as a business. In that passage quoted about winning and keeping exhibitors, the conclusion really ran, “We work ten times harder to keep them by producing films that will help them make money.” This was no more mercenary than it was high-falutin’. It was the commonsense of a man who happened to be putting it to uncommonly attractive uses.

Business, somebody has said, is business; it certainly was very strenuously that in those days along the film rout from Chicago to New York. One had to be hardy, alert, shrewd, to stand the racket at all; to stand it at once honourably and successfully, one had to be a match for tigers and monkeys, while continuing to invite the soul. It

was a searching test, and Laemmle was neither defeated nor defiled.

Under his friendly discipline, enthusiasm in the studio soon showed results. "Imp films will compare favourably with the product of any manufacturing concern, licensed or unlicensed, in story, plot, photography and acting." This opinion of an impartial critic was reflected in the demand from the theatres. Laemmle in his advertisements affected no modesty in boosting his wares, but he toiled incessantly by day and schemed by night to give his pictures the quality that he craved. His adventures by the way were manifold.

The mechanical outfit in those days was as temperamental as a leading lady in these. One of the early directors (Messrs. Donald Ogden Stuart and A. P. Herbert will like to know that his name was Bill Haddock), gives us a glimpse of the consequent emergencies:

I remember one picture that was shot at the rate of about two scenes a day, the routine was something like this; rehearse a scene and take it; rehearse the next and start to take that, BANG! Camera out of order and down town it would go to a machine shop for repairs. Rehearse the balance of the scenes to be made in that set, and then shoot craps or play poker, until the camera came back, and that was usually not until late afternoon or evening, then take one more shot and go home. Just ditto this for the balance of the picture and you have the story.



At the Cleveland National Convention of the Exchange League in 1911, the Patents Company warned the Keith circuit that if during the convention they allowed any Independent film to be shown at the Hippodrome in that city, the Cleveland and all other Keith licenses would be cancelled. The threat was too powerful to be ignored, and it meant a boycott of Sales Company productions at a time when potential customers were assembled in force. Protests were useless; the Hippodrome simply dare not disobey Trust orders. The Independents moored a raft on the Ohio River, nailed a screen up on it, and gave nightly performances. Free accommodation for the audience was provided on the river front. The enterprise became the talk of the Convention.

If Laemmle failed to impress Costello with his prospects, he had better luck elsewhere. One of his first successes was the acquisition of Florence Lawrence, then famous as "The Biograph Girl." This was in 1909, and in the same year an up-standing young man of good looks, visiting the studio, was persuaded to put on grease paint and try a small part as a screen test. This proving satisfactory, he was invited to join the company. William De Mille, also impressed by the novice's possibilities, stepped in with an offer of a hundred dollars a week in the theatre from which he had not yet extended his activities to the screen, but with no guarantee as to its duration. Laemmle



offered seventy-five, but on a fifty-two week contract, and King Baggot signed up as the first IMP leading man. He and Florence Lawrence were the mainstay of the firm's productions until the lady, unaccountably disposed towards a quiet life and much to the astonishment of her employers, retired at the end of the year into the country to cultivate roses. In 1913, however, Laemmle, incited by repeated appeals from the more articulate section of "fans," induced her to return to the screen.

In 1910, Florence Lawrence was the heroine of one of the early moving-picture sensations. A rumour was released from ill-disposed quarters that she had been killed in St. Louis. It was a poor, half-witted ruse, intended in some nebulous way to unsettle the Independent public. The New York press made a feature of the report which merely had to be left alone to discredit itself, since Miss Lawrence was at the moment showing her best form in the IMP studio. But Laemmle saw a much more advantageous way of dealing with the canard than that. He took up the resounding note of New York publicity, and sent out urgent announcements that Florence Lawrence was being escorted by King Baggot on the next train to St. Louis, to satisfy a city that she was not dead at all. It was a master-stroke. It was the first time that the film public had been given an opportunity of seeing their favourites in person. They

were now to see two of them in what Laemmle recognised to be highly favourable emotional circumstances. The stars were received at the station by a crowd in a stampede of excitement, and St. Louis became a riot. They were booked to make personal appearances at two theatres in the town. The enthusiasm of Miss Lawrence's admirers did its best to confirm the rumour which she had come to dispel. On her way to the first theatre, they demonstrated their affection by tearing the buttons from her coat, the trimmings from her hat, and the hat from her head. She fainted, and, on being rescued, refused to proceed without an adequate body-guard. A body-guard was provided, very willing, but not adequate. The personal appearance in St. Louis was a roaring success, and Miss Lawrence returned to New York still alive. The incident, doubtless, inclined her thoughts to the cultivation of roses.

The St. Louis exploit was symptomatic of a policy that owed its inception to Laemmle's acute sense of popular mentality. The Trust producers, confident that what they had for sale must be bought, looked upon their players as employees about whom it was necessary to make no public fuss. Short of actual anonymity, the early film-actors were indulged only in the most secluded personal reputations. This submission of the individual to the whole may be a laudable practice in itself; I remember well the enthusiasm with

which, as a member of the Pilgrim Players at Birmingham, I allowed my name to be omitted from the programme and induced other actors to do the same. But then, our audience was composed of very highly cultivated people, usually about eighteen of them. When you are aiming at an audience of eighteen millions, you have to be rather less exclusive in your methods, and Laemmle realised from the first, as hardly any of his rivals did, that the creation of "stars" was a necessary part of the business. When the Biograph people heralded Florence Lawrence as "The Biograph Girl," he knew that they were on the right tack. And he was quick to better the instruction.

It was the settled policy of IMP from the first to find players worth advertisement, and to give them all they could ask of it. When Laemmle sent Florence Lawrence and King Baggot down to St. Louis, obviously he was not in the least concerned about a rumour that could not do him the slightest harm. But he saw a first rate opportunity of encouraging the personal interest of some thousands of people in his two leading players. These things to-day are the commonplace—perhaps too common—of showmanship technique, but twenty years ago they were revolutionary.

The manager of the Oshkosh clothing store was showing in this new business that he possessed that very rare combination of qualities,

imagination and a sense of reality. At the age of forty-two he found himself dealing with temperamental, highly sensitive, impulsive people, of a kind that hitherto had never approached his orbit. By some far-rooted instinct, he understood them at sight. He handled them shrewdly and generously, treated them as colleagues, recognised their merits, respected their opinions, and was tolerant of their little ways. He was indisputably the boss, and he did no bossing. In return they adored him, gave him all that their talents could give, and stood devotedly behind him in his fight for independence.

Alongside this human, flexible conception of studio life, went always a meticulous precision in administrative detail. If you had dealings with Laemmle, you knew exactly where you were. Goods were delivered, accounts paid, appointments kept scrupulously to time. There are not a few film companies who twenty years afterwards might profit by Laemmle's example in those experimental days. You did not say one thing this week and another thing next; you did not allow two of your agents simultaneously to put up different versions of the same proposal; and you did not encourage hopes that you had no intention of gratifying. Laemmle, in short, was an astute man of business with vision and a conscience. It is a formidable equipment. At the end of its first year's trading IMP had netted

fifty thousand dollars, and Laemmle was the most popular man in the trade.

King Baggot's rise to fame with Laemmle was one of the romances of early moving-picture history. Within six months of his first engagement with IMP he had become a national favourite. He directed most of his own pictures, and wrote many of them. In these days of million or two million dollar films, it is illuminating to look back to 1910, when Baggot—and there were others like him—would undertake, if put to it, to write and produce a story in a single day. They may not always have been very good stories. But they are not always very good now.

Baggot's salary had been raised from seventy-five to a hundred dollars a week, when a notable circumstance brought it further and unexpected increment. Florence Lawrence having departed to her roses, it became necessary to find another leading lady. One of the first films that Laemmle had handled as an exhibitor had been a Biograph production heavily charged with pathos. A poor blind fiddler, returning to his lamentable attic with an empty cup, was followed up the broken stairs by a little boy who had a few pence from the sale of newspapers. The poor blind man's need being manifestly so much greater than his, the little boy poured his pence into the accusing cup, and, it is to be presumed, stole silently away. It doesn't sound as though it was much of a picture,

though I may be wrong about that. But it retains this interest; the little boy was really a little girl, and her name was Mary Pickford.

Someone, so tradition asserts, had given her a boy's suit as a talisman for success in her first important part. That was in 1907. Now in 1910, she was still with Biograph, not encouraged by the Trust in personal aspirations, but famous at a hundred dollars a week as Little Mary. She was already known for the gifts that were later to secure for her one of the most remarkable reputations of this or any other age. Suddenly, the general press was roused, and the Trust press infuriated, by the announcement that Miss Pickford had forsaken Biograph for Carl Laemmle's IMP. The salary was to be a hundred and seventy-five dollars a week—seventy-five above the Biograph figure, and Laemmle further undertook to let the public know in future that Little Mary had a second name. It was to put King Baggot at his ease concerning this new star in the IMP firmament that Laemmle raised his hundred dollars to a hundred and twenty-five, and shortly afterwards to a hundred and fifty. "Little Mary" was too celebrated to be allowed wholly to drop out of public notice, but thenceforth Miss Mary Pickford began to appear in "copy" sanctioned by the IMP publicity bureau.

In 1927, on the occasion of Carl Laemmle's sixtieth birthday, Miss Pickford rose at a banquet



given in his honour to add her tribute to the many that made the evening memorable. She looked back to the beginnings of a craft to which she herself had brought so much renown. "Those were strange days," she said, adding, on a note of charming humour, "and we were strange folks." There had been some dark, even dangerous times, but now, when "our beloved screen" had come to maturity and great power, those difficult years in retrospect seemed happy and pleasant. She could at this hour recall many names and faces, some now forgotten, some famous. "But"—and the words are worth noting since, directed by such emotions, the truth has a way of superseding mere compliment—"But more distinctly than all others, there remains the memory of the man in whose honour this banquet is held to-night. You will remember him no less clearly, I am sure. He gave most of us opportunities, and all of us valuable assistance at a time when we needed it sorely." There is no rhetoric here. As he heard this lady speak, Carl Laemmle's mind must have made a rapid count of the years—Laupheim, Ichenhausen, the New York drug-store and its drunken proprietor, the newspaper barrow in Chicago suburbs, slaughter-houses, Oshkosh two-pieces at nine-ninety-eight, nickelodeons, Flimco, furtive cameras in a New York studio, Federal Court judgments, The Biograph Girl and King Baggot and Little Mary, and then on to Universal City.





**THE IMP COMPAN**  
 STUDIO GROUP  
 THE IMP LATER BECAME  
 THE UNIVERSAL  
 KEY TO PHOTOGRAPH  
 NO. 1 MARY PICKFORD  
 2 OWEN MOORE  
 3 KING BAGGOTT  
 4 THOMAS INCE  
 5 JACK PICKFORD  
 6 ISABEL PALE  
 7 LOU BRIDGES  
 8 LOU BRIDGES  
 9 VERA JENNY  
 10 MRS DAVID MILES  
 11 JOE MACDONALD  
 12 HAYWARD MACK  
 13 MRS JOE MACDONALD  
 14 JOHN HARVEY  
 15 GEORGE LOANE TUCKER  
 16 DAVID MILES  
 17 MRS PICKFORD  
 18 ROBERT DALEY  
 19 TONY GAUDIO

AN EARLY IMP COMPANY



To any spots that showed weakness in his organisation, Laemmle gave immediate attention; no wastage of effort escaped him. When IMP was making three releases weekly, he noticed that the Thursday sales fell short of those for Monday and Saturday. A full page advertisement appeared at once, directing the special notice of exhibitors to the very high quality of Thursday's films. Let them look through their order list and see what beauties they had missed on Thursdays. Was it by any chance that some of them felt that they could afford two IMP films a week only? If so, he begged to inform them that they were "saving at the spigot and wasting at the bung." Let them broaden their business views, and see the result for themselves. Parsimony meant ruin. Not to have IMP films, and all IMP films, Thursdays included, was to shut out of their theatres the very people they most needed to attract, the people who knew a good film when they saw it, the people who were going to keep the motion-picture business alive. Don't stint—"don't make the Indian on every penny screech before you let go of it."

By no means every picture made was released, but Laemmle seized the chance of a little salvage from the discarded products.

\$45,000 GONE TO HELL

So ran the headline. Yes, IMP "has \$45,000

worth of negatives which never have been and never will be released. Why? Because they don't measure up to the Imp standard. . . . In some of the films the photography is defective; in others the plot is not so strong as it looked when in manuscript form; in others there are other defects. At any rate they are not good enough to bear the name of Imp." Further, readers were informed, IMP could save two thousand dollars a week for the next year "by letting out some of its high-salaried performers, producers, and experts in other departments and employing cheaper people instead. The Imp could save untold thousands every month by using cheaper raw-stock, cheaper equipment cheaper everything. *But quality would suffer.*"

The italics here are retained, but in quoting Laemmle's advertisements I have not attempted to reproduce the typistic ingenuity with which he and Cochrane caught the attention of their readers. Capitals, italics, graduations of font, paragraphic form, all were orchestrated weekly with exacting care. The effect may not always have been chaste, but it was never dull. To turn over the pages of any moving picture journal of that period, is to realise that, in this, Laemmle scored heavily all the time over almost every contemporary advertiser. The usual column is featureless, heavy, congested. Laemmle and Cochrane may have been rather shocking to the culture of

Bostonian parlours, but they sparkled. When you came to that page, you paused upon it. Moreover, what you read had a way of being, with a rasping, spontaneous idiom that precisely suited the occasion, uncommonly good prose. Anti-Trust and IMP advertisements were on the same hand; two examples from the former illustrate its cunning:

And that's not all. Hundreds of exhibitors are refusing to pay a cent of license money. Yet they still get all the films they want. Therefore if you're paying real money for a license that isn't worth the paper it is printed on, you can see why you are a full cousin to that gentleman known as Mr. E. Z. [American Zee] Mark. Don't be milked! Get your dander up! Turn independent. Advertise your independence to the people of your own town and they'll back you up just the way the Independents all over the West are backing me up.

And:

But conditions are changed. As soon as moving picture exhibitors were told exactly what old Gen. Flimco was up to and how to spoil his little plans, they jumped on his calloused hide with both feet and much earnestness. Old Gen. Flimco began to lose flesh and prestige and cash. He is now a sorry shadow of his former self. All this merely goes to show what you exhibitors can do when you work in unison and harmony. You have the power to control this business. Use your power. Drive out every rascal now in the game. Clean up!

If a primary function of style is to bring your meaning to the mark, here is the work of no poor stylist.

In the announcement about the dollars in hell, we may observe another example of Laemmle's policy of taking the public into his confidence. He knew that intimacies of this kind would please large numbers of people who had no personal contacts with great affairs. It was the sort of thing that would make small-town conversation—"I see the IMP concern has thrown forty-five thousand dollars' worth of film into the discard. Not up to their standard. Have you seen—?" It is detail that tells. In any first-rate work the detail is good; if the detail is careless, indefinite, spongy, the work, however promising or even effective its general conception may be, will remain second-rate at best. Laemmle, as one of the constructive leaders of film independence, was a nailer for detail. He was at it all the time, inquisitive, shrewd, far-sighted. As he became rich and powerful, associating with celebrities and courted by success, he was quick to realise the scope of the new world that he was conquering, but he never forgot that he knew all about errand-boys, book-keepers, bottle-washers and small store salesmen from New York via Chicago to Oshkosh, Wis.

If the early days of motion pictures were relatively no less prolific of rubbish than the later,

Laemmle made his pioneer contribution to a more intelligent state of things. "Hiawatha" was followed by "The Death of Minnehaha," and among other releases of twenty years ago were "Ivanhoe," de Maupassant's "Piece of String" and "The Scarlet Letter," the last named being advertised with the recommendation—"Get a copy of the book from the Public Library, and you will better understand the story." Classics have suffered uses on the film that would hardly dare such a challenge. Also, Laemmle was topographically enterprising. He sent a company of sixteen to the Hawaiian Islands for three months, to explore a landscape hitherto unknown to the screen. With the production of Paul J. Rainey's African Hunt Film, the originator of its kind, Laemmle passed into the sphere of high-cost production. A hundred thousand feet of film were used, two hundred and fifty thousand dollars spent—both unprecedented figures—it was the first moving picture to be noticed by responsible dramatic critics, it staggered all records by running fifteen months in New York and being played simultaneously in seven other American cities, it was the first film to be shown in a "legitimate" London theatre, and it made a very tidy fortune. I regret to say that one of the aforesaid critics, then in the sixtieth year of his career, wrote of it:



Nothing has ever thrilled me as this, the finest of all dramas of terra natura. This marvellous play and spectacle produced and directed by the One and Living God, Who, to show His versatility, built the stage, painted the scenery, and created the character types to enact the roles.

Nevertheless, the film, shown in 1912, was an enormous success. Six years before, when Laemmle had come back from Oshkosh to Chicago, with his mind brooding on the five and ten cent store, his brother Joseph had taken him to see his first nickelodeon. He bought a handful of beans, and stood outside the theatre to count how many people went in during a given time. The result was promising, and encouraged his thoughts to higher things. And now, six years later, it would have taken a sturdy harvest of beans to count the people going in to see his own productions.

## CHAPTER X

### TOWARD UNIVERSAL

EARLY in 1911, a curious adventure had befallen Laemmle and his IMP company. The storm of litigation raised by the Trust had for the moment succeeded in making independent production in the States virtually impossible. Injunctions, patent blockades, and terrorism, while leaving Laemmle's determination unshaken, did effect a temporary paralysis of his activities. He was confident that the pressure would relax, but in the meantime the necessity of maintaining his scheduled rate of releases was being hampered in a critical degree by New York conditions. Laemmle has a favourite little apothegm, which he likes to have about the place, always ready to his call. It is a simple, unassuming affair, like a small spelling exercise, but for five and twenty years it has had a cherished and oracular significance for him. It reads, "It Can Be Done." Taking stock now of the IMP situation in New York, it was clear that something had to be done.

The director-in-chief of productions at the time was C. A. Willatt, known more familiarly as

Doc. He had been employed by Vitagraph; further, he had married the daughter of that company's president. William T. Rock was a very powerful person, and when his son-in-law approached Laemmle with a view of joining the IMP organisation, the champion of Independence was on his very efficient guard. An interview, however, removed all suspicion. It seemed that even in the Trust one might differ from one's father-in-law, and William Rock at that. Laemmle was convinced that Willatt really was minded for revolt, and engaged him. His judgment was not at fault. Doc. proved to be a valuable ally.

It was he who at the present crisis was given charge of the expedition that was to carry IMP through its difficulties. Calling the company together, he informed them of Laemmle's decision that producing operations must be transferred to Cuba, beyond the zone of Trust authority. Any member, naturally, was at liberty to call off his contract if he or she chose. All told, they numbered seventy-two, and there was not one resignation. What Carl Laemmle said was all right for them. Seventy-two strong they sailed from New York, Tom Ince, Owen Moore, Jack Pickford, King Baggot and Mary Pickford among them. Tony Gaudio was there, too, with his cameras.

Within two days of their arrival in Cuba, work was in full swing. But they had not yet wholly escaped from the long arm of Trust obstruction.

A mysterious individual appeared, announcing that he had patent rights to the IMP title in the dominions of Cuba. He might be disposed to part with it for a suitable consideration, suitable meaning something in five figures. It seemed, incidentally, that he owned the patent rights for Cuba in the trade names of several other well-known American products. He was confidently expecting the arrival of representatives from firms celebrated for typewriters, for pianos, for sewing machines, when he would allow them also to go about their Cuban business at a price. It grieved him to be a hindrance to so many charming people as had now arrived from New York, but he like others had to take his opportunities.

The plague of it was that he really had good documentary evidence in support of his manifestly fraudulent claim. Cochrane was on the spot by the quickest overland route, told the impostor to go to the devil, the company to carry on, and filed a suit in the Cuban courts to cover emergencies. The suit was successful, the ingenious defendant being informed that he hadn't any patents at all, which he is said to have found very disappointing.

Other inconveniences remained. The communal camp, though not equipped with modern comforts, was very good fun, for a time at least. The commissariat was fair to good. And then, one day, it was not so good, not even fair. Certain

dishes of a very unpalatable nature appeared. Complaints to the Cuban chef were sullenly received. He was a very expert chef, he would like them to understand, with high-class testimonials, and if they didn't like his confections, they could get someone else. This, as he knew, would not be easy; and still the unsavoury messes came to table. Signs of panic appeared—but, surely, even the Trust would not dare anything so monstrous. A strict investigation was ordered. An enterprising property boy, foreseeing a general dearth of commodities as time went on, had brought a five pound tin of cold cream from New York, designing illicit profits from the company when the shortage came. On arrival, thinking that the Cuban climate might not be good for it, he had surreptitiously placed it in the cold storage larder, where the cook had taken it for an unfamiliar brand of imported lard.

There was no difficulty in shipping negatives to New York as they were made, but as the supply of raw stock began to run out, the problem of renewing it was serious. It was one thing to wait on Lumiere's doorstep in New York and carry away under your arm what ration you could get; it was quite another to negotiate it through all the hazards between New York and Cuba. It was then that Willatt heard that his wife was about to make a trip to the island with her father. The president of Vitagraph would have courtesy

of the ports. Doc. suggested to his wife that she should fill a large trunk with raw stock, to be procured according to instructions, enclosed. The trunk would come through unmolested with the family luggage. Mrs. Willatt, forsaking all and cleaving only, did as her husband asked, and the situation was relieved. William T. Rock in Cuba was distant about his son-in-law. Young rebels were not lightly to be endured. One came to Cuba for health, not to give countenance to scamps who had bolted to that fellow Laemmle. He, William T. Rock, was one of the elect now in process of breaking the said Laemmle into little pieces. And in the meantime, if he had but known it, he was conveying blessed raw-stock to a Laemmle panting for celluloid as desperately as ever hart for ice-water. The sequel, in William Rock's domestic economy, is not divulged.

Ingenuous looking travellers with early Kodaks lingered curiously by the wayside of IMP activities. What surprising luck to come upon great film stars in action. Might they be allowed—? Just a little snap, such a souvenir to take back to the home town. And then Tony Gaudio observed that one of the tourists was taking pictures not of Miss Pickford or King Baggot, but of his, Tony Gaudio's, camera. Before one could say Jack, the stranger was off down the road, back into the town, showing remarkable paces, and with the American consul, talking volubly of injunctions.



He could produce the evidence in ten minutes—he had it in his Kodak. His luck was out. The consul didn't take to him, and he had heard unattractive reports about a Trust in New York. He refused to sign the accommodating papers, and the Kodak abruptly lost interest in Cuban landscape.

Another enquiring soul met with ruder treatment. While King Baggot was directing a picture, the men of the company laid off to dig a deep trench, required for the scene. The ground was tough and the weather hot. A stranger with innocent eyes loitered to watch proceedings. King Baggot, on reflection, was not so sure that the eyes were so innocent. He opened conversation, which the stranger encountered somewhat shyly. Baggot said Trust, then he said detective, then he said dirty spy. Having no coat on, there was no necessity to remove it, and he invited the dirty spy to prepare for a thrashing that would teach him not to interfere with honest people trying to make an honest living. Baggot was known to a million fans for his physical attractions, but at that moment the deputy of the Trust hated the sight of him. Deputy explained that he didn't want to fight, that he was no sort of hand at fighting. Baggot retorted that he was not required to fight, but to get a hiding. Deputy pleaded that he couldn't bear a hiding, that it wasn't in his contract, that he was a poor fish anyway. Baggot relented. Terms were offered; the eavesdropper



could either be beaten, or dig the ditch. He dug the ditch, and returned to New York with an unfavourable report on the manners of Mr. Laemmle's employees.

The first Cuban IMP film was released on February 20th, 1911. Three days later followed "Artful Kate," the first of a "Little Mary" series made on the island. It was a romantic comedy, with a Cuban-American love affair as its theme, and the press considered Miss Pickford to be "at her best as a Spanish beauty." The Cuban productions found a ready market, and at the time were the sensation of the trade. It was an unusually severe winter in New York, and the new pictures, set in the tropical scenes of Havana, were a very opportune novelty. Laemmle's expedient for escaping Trust tactics was resulting in added prestige and gratifying profits. But as the months went on, the strain began to tell on the company. The very exacting work on which they were engaged was made harder by the Cuban climate. The adventure lost its freshness, the discomforts that had been amusing became tiresome, and nerves began to suffer. Two of the leading men fell out with each other, and expected their wives to be parties to the feud. The ladies, who had no quarrel, acquiesced for the sake of appearances, and met clandestinely in the dusk to deplore the caprices of leading husbands. At the end of nine months everybody had had enough

of it, and, the situation at home having eased, the company returned to New York. Miss Pickford told Laemmle that she needed a rest, and that afterwards she would like to work again with D. W. Griffith, who had directed her earlier pictures. Laemmle knew the loss to be a serious one, and her contract showed a valuable term still unexpired. With no hesitation he tore it up, and in perfect good humour parted with the brightest of his stars. The concession was never forgotten. Little Mary went on to the establishment of her career as Mary Pickford, and it was to Laemmle that she owed the emancipation.

We have now reviewed the methods of Laemmle's double strategy against the Trust; the Flimco exposure and the Independent productions. The Trust passes out of our story, which now moves on towards Universal City, and fifteen years of progress by no means free of anxieties, but with the great issue cleared and a vastly expanding field of activity opening up month by month. IMP, founded in 1909, became a unit of the Sales Company in 1910, and the Universal in 1912. Laemmle was successively president of the three companies. Before the opening of Universal City, he was concerned in a managerial crisis of some moment. It has been recorded at length in Mr. Terry Ramsaye's "Million and One Nights."

In 1913, George Loane Tucker was a young

member of Laemmle's stock company. The one-reel programme pictures that were of necessity the staple product of the studio were neither inspired nor inspiring. They amounted for the most part, to little more than tedious hack-work. Tucker suddenly conceived the idea of breaking loose into something urgent and spectacular. He decided to make an exposure on an impressive scale of the White Slave traffic. He spoke about it to some of his colleagues. They were enthusiastic. One of them had a father who had been a police outfitter, with an inside knowledge of the New York underworld. It was estimated that five thousand dollars would be needed to make the picture, a sum representing the cost of about half a dozen ordinary one-reelers.

Tucker laid the scheme before Laemmle, asking for permission to go ahead. Laemmle, open as he was to new ideas, at that moment was distracted by a legion of old ones that were agitating the critical stages of the Trust enquiry. Tucker took discouraging news back to the studio. The Universal chief was not prepared just now to discuss an experimental outlay of five thousand dollars with a young man of no credentials. Thereupon, Tucker induced four of his friends in the company to join him in a private speculation. They were Herbert Brenon, King Baggot, Jack Cohn, then film cutter and editor of Universal releases and to-day Vice-President of Columbia

Pictures, and Bob Daly. The five conspirators were to be responsible for a thousand dollars apiece. When the picture was made, it was to be shown to Laemmle, and if he turned it down they undertook to face the loss.

The next thing was to make it. Luckily for them, the IMP studio manager was just then sent to Europe on business, and his deputy, called in from another studio, already had more work on his hands than he liked. His supervision was perfunctory, and during his frequent absences the young men produced "Traffic in Souls," a scene at a time in the short intervals afforded by their regular work. In four weeks it was finished, ten reels long, and with no titles. At this point of the proceedings Tucker went to England, leaving Jack Cohn in possession of the ten unedited reels. Cohn kept the treasure secretly in the company safe, and worked on it at night. In a month he had cut it to six reels, and written the titles. He took it down to the head offices at 1600 Broadway.

Laemmle agreed to look at it. It was taken to the projection room, and the chief with some of his lieutenants followed reluctantly to look at "Tucker's Folly." But that day, the spasmodic course of the enquiry had been thrown into one of its periodic convulsions, and no sooner were the Universal authorities seated in the theatre than they fell into a heated debate on policy. The film

clicked its unheeded way across the screen, and when silence indicated that it was over, the audience left, still in voluble dispute on more important things. As a private view it was one hundred per cent wash out.

Cohn brooded through the evening into the night on his failure. Then he was inspired by despair. He rose, dressed, and went to Laemmle's house. He would not go away without an interview. Laemmle came down—Cohn, breathing hard but standing well up to his job, said: "You didn't see that picture. You were talking business all the time. You can't do two things at once—anyway, not those two things. Give it a chance."

The appeal was not likely to be lost on Laemmle. There was in it an echo too familiar, falling from some distant Chicago counting-house. He agreed to see the picture the next day. He saw it, and was convinced. But serious practical difficulties were in the way of its distribution. Laemmle himself might be willing to take a risk, but what about his fellow-directors? For the risk was a big one. The few long pictures hitherto made had been shown in legitimate theatres or opera-houses. A six-reeler in a motion picture theatre was unheard of, and the launching of "Traffic in Souls" would mean heavy capital investment. Were these considerations to be swept aside by a bunch of high-spirited youngsters? However, Laemmle liked the enthusiasm, and,

now he had seen it, he liked the picture. He was prepared to take a long shot. He promised Cohn he would do what he could, and summoned a board-meeting to announce his proposal to back the venture.

The board met. It seemed that the president had committed them. There were voices of disapproval. Investigation showed that the cost already amounted to five thousand seven hundred dollars. Were they expected to throw money about to that tune merely to humour a novice's high-flown fancy? If the president had undertaken to do this, he had exceeded his powers. With all due respect, and so on—but they were here to make money, not to squander it. "Squander" was a word that stung, and Laemmler was on his feet, telling them heatedly that if that was it he would buy the picture himself, and pay the company ten thousand dollars for it. That settled it. If it was worth ten thousand to him, it was worth it to them. By order of the board, "Traffic in Souls" was to be placed upon the market.

The Shuberts suggested their theatre system as being the most promising means of distribution. They saw the picture, were impressed by it, and bought a third interest for thirty-three thousand dollars. Complainants on the board looked sheepish when they met the president. Within a few weeks the picture was being shown simultane-



ously at twenty-eight theatres in the New York area alone. Its gross takings amounted to just under a hundred thousand dollars, and Laemmle was booked for Universal City.

There had been other incidents of a breezy nature in Universal affairs. At a meeting of stockholders, it was known that Laemmle was negotiating for available holdings that would give him control of the corporation. The transaction was to be confirmed at the meeting. A director, who wished to keep Laemmle out of this dominating position, placed confederates in the street below the board room window, and an advance party in the corridors outside. At a given signal, the room was invaded, the company registers and seal were seized and thrown out of the window to the men below, who bolted with them. The meeting broke up in confusion, and court aid had to be enlisted in recovery of the books.

Laemmle secured his stock. The man who was so exacting in his attention to detail, was seldom denied in his larger designs. He was too resourceful for that. He was prolific in ideas, ready always to try them out, and as ready to discard them if they proved useless or impracticable. In 1909 he opened a music publishing business in Chicago, ran it unsuccessfully for eighteen months, found that it was taking time from his other work, and sold it. It is on record that within six weeks of



opening, he had his songs on sale at every department store in the city, but the experiment cost him fifty thousand dollars.

A more remarkable venture was his effort in 1908 to bring talking pictures on to the market. In that year, as an exchangeman, he advertised Greenbaum's Synchronoscope in these words:

The greatest improvement in the moving-picture business. If you believe I am a good prophet, order a Synchronoscope now, for I tell you that talking pictures are the coming craze in all America.

He went beyond advertising the invention; he used it. He rented the Majestic Theatre at Evansville, Indiana, during the summer months when it was closed as a vaudeville house, and there he used the new machine, of which he held the American agency from its German manufacturers. Twenty years afterwards, in 1929, an old employee wrote in a letter:

I think you will remember that we installed a talking picture outfit in the Majestic and played to packed houses all summer during the warm weather.

I have never seen anything about this in the trade papers so I thought I would refresh your memory. . . . You made the attachment on a Powers machine; we had such stars as Caruso, Madame Sembrich, Julian Eltinge . . . and the entertainment was wonderful.

In another advertisement at this time, Laemmle asserted: "Sometime you'll have to have a Synchroscope in order to stay in business." The sometime was a long time coming: but here it is.

Film production in the early days was a tough, rough business, and it is not necessary to exalt Carl Laemmle as a purist among vandals. Nevertheless, he was through the smother of it all a definite influence for good. He had a natural distaste for nastiness, and more than once took strong measures to drive it from the screen. His pictures in general may not have shown a subtler sense of moral values than was common, but he had no use for this kind of thing, which actually appeared in print:

Wanted.

Stag Films suitable for smokers, clubs, etc., the same advertisement concluding:

Wanted: Pathe Passion Play (Hand Coloured).  
Must be in first class condition.

Let us add, that, far from contemplating art by the more exclusive standards of Bloomsbury or Greenwich Village, Laemmle sometimes suffered it to serve the ends of a social zeal engendered in the purlieus of New York and Chicago poverty. He was, in fact, by no means above a bit of propaganda. In the campaign, for example, to improve labour conditions and forbid the employment of children in sweating shops, he preached

unashamedly through the medium of his studios.

When IMP joined the Sales Company in 1910, between five and six thousand exhibitors, taking heart from Laemmle's exposures of the Trust, had turned independent. This offered a greatly widened scope to independent production, and IMP by that time was but one of several units forming the new corporation. Laemmle's election to the presidency of the whole marked him as the most commanding figure in the trade outside the Trust. The position was consolidated when later, in 1912, the Sales Company, enlarging its organisation, became the Universal, and again put Laemmle in control. A meeting of producers was called on this latter occasion to decide upon a new name. After some hours of fruitless discussion, Laemmle, who had been standing by the window, looking down on to the Broadway traffic, exclaimed: "Gentlemen, I have it. Universal. The Universal Pictures Corporation." He enlarged on the virtues of the name—as, what could be more universal than this entertainment for the masses that they were producing, and were going to produce in ever expanding volume? The idea went, and was adopted.

Walking away from the meeting, Cochrane congratulated him on so happy an inspiration. Had he had it long in mind? No, Laemmle, to confess the truth, had been too busy to give it a thought. Indeed, he was thinking of other things

while looking out of the window, when he saw on the top of a passing delivery wagon the name "Universal Pipe Fittings." That van ought to be in the museum of Universal City, if they could afford museums in such places.

## CHAPTER XI

### UNIVERSAL CITY

THIS chapter shall be opened with a brief history in figures. In 1911, the population of Hollywood was 5,000. In 1914 it was 12,000; in 1919, 35,000; in 1921, 60,000; in 1925, 130,000; in 1927, 145,000; and to-day it is 160,000.

One of the first Californian moving-picture studios was opened by the Nestor Company in 1911. It was situated at Sunset and Gower, and in October of the same year it was bought by Laemmle. His first visit to the site from New York was discouraging. It rained as it does in Seattle or London, and the visibility for picture-making seemed extremely poor. Moreover, on the tour of inspection Laemmle's car got stuck in the mud, and had to be pushed out by Jumbo, the elephant, who was in the neighbourhood playing a part at the time.

In 1912, Laemmle opened a second Californian studio, at Edendale, outside Los Angeles. Early in 1914, just before the hearings in the Government Anti-Trust suit were closed, he had conceived the idea of Universal City, and in March he bought

two hundred and thirty acres of land in the San Fernando valley, ten miles out of Los Angeles on the El Camino Real, the highway that originally connected the missions from San Diego to San Francisco. It was a scene familiarly associated in his mind with the Indian stories of his boyhood. He paid a hundred and sixty-five thousand dollars for the site, and this time it was generally considered by friends and competitors alike that he had lost his senses. It was whispered that the strain of the Trust fight had at last gone to the poor fellow's head. A beautiful valley, no doubt, but who wanted to spend a hundred and sixty-five thousand dollars on scenery? It is easy to-day to laugh at the critics, but when Laemmle made his purchase it needed an uncommonly long vision to make anything of a man who was building for the future on that scale. So long, indeed, that nobody but Laemmle had it. And the building began at once. The purchase was completed in March, 1914, the first ground was broken in October, and in the following March Universal City was opened.

The conception, the building, the opening, and the subsequent development of the city, constitute the romantic triumph of a curiously complex mind. In the ten years of his American apprenticeship, when Laemmle could get no further than petty clerking, he realised almost daily how desperately easy it was for a man to go under in this

roaring turmoil of splendid opportunities. What sustained him, as the years went by, was that he never quite forgot that after all the opportunities were actually there. When he moved to Oshkosh, they seemed to come a little nearer to the foreground of his life, but only a little. For twelve years he went on advancing from a few dollars to a rather more considerable few dollars, and still the opportunities remained at best in the misty middle-distance. To be rising forty, and the manager of a small-town clothing store, is a very mild conquest of circumstance. But the real value of the Oshkosh days to Laemmle was that during them he learnt the importance, the capital importance of executive detail. Attention to it became a fixed and unrelaxing habit of his mind. When he had his momentous but disconcerting interview with Sam Stern, the opportunities were not only no nearer than they had been, they receded for a time towards eclipse on a far horizon. Laemmle's salvation in the crisis was that, by a concentrated effort of vision, he still did not quite lose sight of them. Forty, out of a job, with no connections that amounted to anything, and with savings that would be absorbed by the smallest of unlucky ventures, Carl Laemmle in 1906 looked like the longest kind of odds outsider in the American Stakes. But, beyond the acutest observation—and it is more than unlikely that at that time anyone living would have given five thousand dollars a



year for his future—he had resources that even yet might bring the outsider home. He was a trained executive, and he still saw the almost vanishing gleam on the horizon.

In other words, Carl Laemmle at forty was, although nobody knew it, a superb opportunist whom, so far, opportunity had unaccountably missed. And then, suddenly, it encountered him, teeming, solicitous, unexplored. With no warning, he came upon his young, virile, cross-bred industry, waiting for brains and energy to use it. The opening of Universal City in 1915 was the consummation of that happy meeting. During the first effective decade of motion picture history, Laemmle had excelled all his rivals in vigour, insight, perseverance, and faith. He had not advanced the screen to the status of a great art, but he more than any other man had made it an influence upon the social life of the world that was to gather unexampled impetus in the coming years.

Controversy as to whether the motion picture will eventually destroy the drama of the traditional theatre seems to me futile. I will, therefore, not discuss it, but merely assert that it won't. Further, I am heartily in accord with the opinions so freely expressed that an alarming percentage of film activity is vulgar, banal, and insignificant, though, in parenthesis, I might add that the percentage shown by the traditional theatre is hardly

more inspiring. The plain facts remain; in the United States alone thirty thousand people pay for entrance to picture houses each minute during exhibition hours. In a week this amounts to more than the total population of the country. And throughout the world something of the same sort is happening. Nothing remotely like it had ever happened before, and in 1906 nobody dreamt that anything like it ever could happen. And yet one man had wild fancies that the future was great with some such extravagant promise. It was Laemmle himself, wild as his fancies might be, who chiefly sent the promise on its way to fulfilment by a steady, practical grasp of the situation as it developed convulsively from day to day.

The social aspect of this phenomenon may be exemplified by a story broadcast recently by Will H. Hays, the man appointed by the united film interests of America as general mentor:

The motion picture within the 30 years of its existence has become a necessity. No story ever written for the screen is as dramatic as the story of the screen itself. In one of our great cities recently there was a theatre strike. The theatres were closed. For two nights a million people milled about the streets bereft of entertainment. The city authorities sent word that the theatres would have to re-open. It was necessary for the well being of the city that a place of amusement and relaxation be provided for that vast citizenry and so the theatres were opened.

Turning to the much more debatable aspect of the question, the potentialities of the film as an art, I make free of a conversation that I had last year with Winthrop Ames, one of the ablest and most imaginative men of the theatre now living.

I took the line that democracy, while it was an inevitable and on the whole desirable phase of political evolution, was a continually increasing menace to the integrity of the artist. I quoted the films in support of my case. The film industry, by an irresistible economic force, was more and more attracting the creative talent of the world to its service. But the great film companies, catering for an audience so vast as to make any earlier figures trifling, had to accommodate themselves at every turn to the demands of the very low common intelligence of that huge assembly. The creative talent had either to abstain from participation in the very seductive rewards, or accommodate itself also to the tastes of the morons and the hicks.

Marginally, let me cite the following case. One of the principal film organisations suddenly became conscious of the fact that its productions were being derided by the more responsible journals. In a fugitive moment of shame it appointed a well-known man of letters to exercise some censorship upon its taste and intelligence. He was given a large salary and a long contract. After a few months he was sent for by the president, who enquired: "Do you know how many chamber-

maids there are in the United States and Canada?" He did not know. "Eight millions. And do you know how many car conductors and drivers there are in the United States and Canada?" No, he did not. "Ten millions. That is eighteen millions. And they average three visits to the movies every week. That is fifty-four millions a week. That is the best subscription for any enterprise that you could have. And you are forgetting the chambermaids. You think only of the fine ladies. But the fine ladies only go to the pictures when their chambermaids tell them to. You must consider the chambermaids."

The eminent man of letters said that was not the way he looked at it. He was thereupon told that, if that were so, he had better go and look at it from some other place. And in the result he was given three years' salary to quit, and leave the moving pictures in peace and plenty with their chambermaids.

That is a faithful record, and its significance cannot be evaded. But Winthrop Ames knew all about that, and still had something to say. Aristocratic patronage of the arts, he agreed with me, had made for exacting standards. Democratic patronage, on the other hand, was debasing the hall-mark. And then he made his point—a memorable one, I think. The debasement was transitional. Effective patronage of the arts went with wealth. Wealth to-day was passing from the few

to the many. The redistribution meant a greatly diminished dictatorship for the individual, but an incalculably increased range of patronage. Creative art in the coming generation or two—one could say nothing of later cyclical chances—would live, economically, by the suffrages not of milords but of millions. For the moment, the millions, with their increased purchasing power, had not learnt how to exercise it. They had not acquired taste. But the acquisition of taste—and this is true by the demonstration of history—had always followed the acquisition of wealth. Wealth in this new connotation he took to mean the possession of a surplus when the necessities of life had been met. And he believed that in the future the influence of a vast democracy on art would be as wholesome as that of a secluded aristocracy had ever been in the past.

Speculation waits upon its proof. In the meantime, we cannot but recognise that the medium through which more than any other the issue is being put to the test is the moving picture. And already there are indications that Winthrop Ames is on the side of discretion in his diagnosis. It is a very significant fact that some of the most intelligent and imaginative of recent moving pictures have also been among the most popular. A popular moving picture means popular to an extent beyond any competition. For example, one of the most remarkable theatrical successes of recent

years is Noel Coward's "Bitter Sweet." In fifteen months it played at His Majesty's Theatre in London to a million people. A film, of unquestionable artistic integrity, has just played to over half a million in London in five weeks, and to that figure several times multiplied in other parts of the world during the same period.

These are facts from which deductions may be made as the reader chooses. The point to our present purpose is that they are facts consequent upon the effort made by Carl Laemmle during the ten years that preceded the opening of Universal City. They were years when Laemmle, with all his ambitious enterprise, thought no opportunity so small that it might be neglected. He went out of his way to encourage the most inconsiderable person who might show an interest in moving pictures, and so perhaps might add a straw's weight to the gathering onset. A man wrote to him wishing to buy a machine; he offered ten cents down in postage stamps, and five cents a week thereafter in payment. Laemmle promised to let him have the machine, and a five-cent money order arrived weekly for some time, until it was unhappily discovered that the purchaser was not quite right in his head. It is a queer little footnote, one of many, to the spirited chronicles of early Independence. When Laemmle was building patiently towards Universal City, he never failed in the rare capacity for being able at



once to take both the large and the near view. His place in the history of moving pictures is not to be confused with that of men using wholly different gifts to other ends—D. W. Griffith, for example, in the older generation, and John Murray Anderson in the younger. But in the early organisation of the medium through which the imagination of such men was to express itself, Laemmle must always be remembered as the ablest, the wisest, and the most intrepid of the pioneers.

When Universal City was opened, its chief was in his forty-eighth year. It is interesting to note that in his earlier portraits we see a shrewd, not unhumorous face, but one of little distinction. As he got older, the distinction came. As effort smoothed out into authority, the lines and contours showed the steady moulding of character and personality. Nothing in a full span of life is a surer index of essential worth than this refinement of a man's looks. A man who is better looking at sixty than he was at thirty carries with him highly valuable credentials. Laemmle affords a striking example of the alchemy.

Chicago, Sunday, March 7th, 1915. This afternoon at six o'clock a special train of four compartment cars, a diner, a buffet, and a drawing room car, left the Dearborn station over the Sante Fe, en route to the opening of Universal City in the land of orange groves.

To the inspiring strains of Tipperary and Auld



Lang Syne a concourse of friends and interested sightseers waved "bon voyage" to the distinguished members of a most unusual pilgrimage. As a matter of sober fact, the assemblage—after an itinerary of exceptional scope—will be present at an event that can never again happen in the history of the world.

They are to witness the opening of the first municipality—the first city or community—to be devoted exclusively to the manufacture of motion pictures. The city—this Universal City of which the picture world has talked for months—is the realisation of a dream by Carl Laemmle not more than ten years ago.

It was no immoderate strain for the occasion. The special train reached Denver on Tuesday morning. The party was led by a brass band to the capital, where state honours were accorded, and then dinner at the Savoy Hotel, graced by the impressive presence of Buffalo Bill in the chair. Two days were spent at the Grand Canyon, and Los Angeles was reached at mid-day on Saturday. Here Laemmle, Cochrane, and the Universal general staff were received by the pageantry of the early screen come to life, players of all sorts and sizes from the studios, nickelodeon heroes and great beauties and famous clowns, and "all the cowboys, cowgirls, cavalrymen and Indians connected with the West Coast Plant."

Thence, on Monday, March 15th, 1915, to the gates of Universal City, four miles beyond Hollywood, where a crowd of ten thousand people was

waiting. Miss Laura Oakley, chief of the Universal City police, handed Carl Laemmle a gold key giving him entrance to the new municipality. He placed it in the lock, and, as he turned it, released a super-flashlight connection of which he had been given no warning. For an instant, apocalypse appeared to envelop an alarmed and unassuming small gentleman as he stood at the gates of his Jerusalem. He recovered his balance, and, amidst scenes of transpontine fervour enlivened by the crackle of six-shooters, entered to behold a remarkable spectacle.

The site is a historic one. A bronze tablet across the road marks the spot where in 1846 the treaty was made by the Mexican General Andr e Pico and Colonel Fremont of the U.S. Army, whereby California was ceded to the United States. Here, in 1915, the visitors found a city that had come into being within a few months, solely and completely equipped for the large-scale production of motion pictures. There was a main stage, four hundred feet by a hundred and fifty in extent, with every kind of natural scenery at hand for alternative use, and a smaller stage for minor productions. Eighty dressing rooms and the company offices were furnished with electric light and running water. There were three pumping stations, a great concrete reservoir, a hospital, two restaurants capable of serving twelve hundred people, and an exhaustive range of shops, forges,

garages and mills. Horses and cattle by the hundred, cats, dogs, sheep, mules, monkeys, parrots, had liberties without the arena houses that contained a miscellany of wild animals from all quarters of the globe. Cowboys from distant ranches and Indians from distant reservations had settled in shack and camp after their own tastes. Macadamized roads, a police department, fire brigade, public utility services; libraries, green houses, an omnibus system and a school—here was a community, enjoying full municipal rights, supplied by a specially constructed spur of the Southern Pacific Railroad, self-contained and self-sufficient, ready to show the world what movies meant to do.

That, at least, was the specification. On that March day in 1915, I dare say the contractors hadn't made their final disappearance; indeed, this was a city destined never to stop being built. Some of these amenities may belong to a later date, but in 1915 the place was in effective working order. Since then the expansion has been unceasing. Mindful of its insatiable demands, Laemmle has called his Universal City the Bottomless Pit. Now you may see, permanently set, the "Streets of the World," ready for any outdoor scene that may be needed—you may walk in Monte Carlo, Cairo, Paris, Tokio, Madrid, London, Berlin, Constantinople, where you will. The two stages have become six—possibly while the words are being written the six have become a dozen—all



STORE ROOM, UNIVERSAL CITY, 1916



ACTORS' WAITING ROOM, UNIVERSAL CITY, 1916



equipped for sound. On the roofs of three of them is spread out a sign—"Universal Pictures—Quiet," in fifty-foot letters, to warn away the aeroplanes lest the sensitive microphones should pick up the noise of their engines. And now the principal thoroughfare of the city is Laemmle Boulevard.

But no events of the past fifteen years can dull the recollection of that triumphant day. For triumph it was. The details of it now may read like the prospectus of an obsolete town-planning scheme, but when Carl Laemmle entered Universal City on that March morning in 1915, a magician entered wonderland, no less. The opportunist had come magnificently into his own. The making and the form of the inheritance that was to thrive to the orchestration of innumerable reels, is a romance of far finer quality than many that adorn the screen itself. The romance has now settled into an urbane, but by no means dull or unvigilant maturity. In 1915, Universal City was a hive, and nothing but a hive of industry. A very enlightened hive, to be sure, with its hospital, and class-rooms—intended, be it noted, "not only for the children who live on the studio lot, but also for screen players who are still of school age"—and running water and sanitary dust-carts; but still exclusively a hive. To-day, the poultry ranch has made a symbolic extension. Dedicated to the culture of pure white Leghorns, it has thirty-nine buildings of its own. It can ac-



commodate five thousand adult birds, and eight thousand chickens of the smallest grade. Going his rounds with a hand-bin of the best corn, Laemmle thinks his investment a good one. In the more restless microcosm of 1915 white Leghorns had no place. It may be added that in the same year Universal, by way of keeping busy, also opened a large new eastern studio at Fort Lee in New Jersey.

Everybody with any experience of the world of the theatre knows that it daily sees the birth of portentous secrets that are in general circulation within twenty-four hours. It used not to be so. If Henry Irving had a managerial secret, for example, it was known to nobody but himself and Bram Stoker, and possibly his leading lady when she was Miss Ellen Terry. Further, to Irving and his like, personal contact of the player with the public was a fashionable whim sternly to be discouraged. It amounted to a breach of professional etiquette, and tarnished the glamour that was one of the chief assets of the theatre. I think on the whole that, by ideal standards, Irving was right. I think that gossip about the domestic and business economy of the theatre is as unfortunate as it is nearly always misinformed; and I think that if fewer of our players shone in society more of them might shine on the stage. At the same time, I do not think that these are matters of vital consequence either way, and I am sure that with the





UNIVERSAL CITY STREET CLEANERS, 1916



UNIVERSAL CITY POLICE, 1916



rise of a democratic press to vast circulations that in point of fact as vastly exaggerate its power, the ideals of Irving and his school were bound to be discarded.

In the earliest days of film production, the operations of the studio were kept strictly from public view, and, under Trust regency, the players were not encouraged to seek a personal popularity that would give them inflated ideas as to their market value. Laemmle, as we have seen, was the first producer to give his players all the personal advertisement that he could devise, and one of his first innovations at Universal City was to open picture-making to public inspection. His view was that the policy would stimulate interest. He built a grand stand from which as many visitors as chose to come could see the director and his company at work on the central stage. The concession could affect no more than a minute percentage of the moving-picture public, but it was unquestionably an adroit move. The few who could take advantage of it acted as an incalculable kind of leaven on the whole. One person so privileged would send out alluring reports to who knew how wide a circle of friends and friends' friends. The advent of the talking machine made the practice impossible; but Laemmle, so sure was he of its value, was one of the last producers to relinquish it.

Another of the regulations laid down at Uni-

versal City was that no performer should be asked to take the smallest personal risk in the execution of his duties. A player who felt that the most trivial hazard was involved in his part had a prescriptive right to decline it without prejudice to his employment.

Shortly after Universal City had been opened, Laemmle had an opportunity of showing the spirit in which he proposed to conduct business competition. Thomas H. Ince, who had been one of his early players, and then a director at forty-five dollars a week, was now producing on his own account, and at the time engaged in a studio at Santa Monica, on an ambitious picture to be called "The Battle of Gettysburg." When the work was half completed, his entire outfit, consisting of studio, properties and costumes, was destroyed by fire. He was operating on a small margin, had no apparent means of finishing the picture, and was faced by ruin. Laemmle was in New York when he received news of his rival's misfortune, and immediately wired instructions to California that Ince was to have unrestricted use of the Universal plant and stores; the telegram concluded: "Do not charge a cent for them." Ince, when the offer was communicated to him by the Universal manager, was with difficulty persuaded that it was not an inferior form of humour. When at length he was convinced, he merely, but sufficiently, said, "There is no other

man who would do that." Ince died in 1924, before his time, and Laemmle bought his Beverley Hills estate, Dios Dorados, from his widow. The price is said to have been three-quarters of a million dollars. It is a lovely place, but the sum was not an easy one. There was once a wit who, having borrowed five pounds, proposed to borrow ten, with the observation that one good turn deserved another. It is a philosophy that has always been congenial to Laemmle's mind. He feels under a lasting obligation to anyone whom he has once obliged. Sometimes it may be awkward. But Dios Dorados is a lovely place.

An earlier incident, also occasioned by a fire, is in place here. Laemmle himself was burnt out, at Omaha, Nebraska. As had been the case at Montreal, a competitor, but this time not a Trust competitor, provided him with temporary premises. Laemmle in due course made full reimbursement; and at the same time took large advertising space in the trade papers to record his public thanks for the generous and timely aid. We like men who can both give and take with grace.

## CHAPTER XII

### A MAN AND MOTION PICTURES

By the time he is fifty, a man's character is moulded, and his powers are mature. The character may yet re-act in unsuspected ways to tests that it has not hitherto endured, and the powers may yet be put to greatly enlarged achievement. Thomas Hardy, in his superb "Ancient to Ancients," written when he was approaching eighty, threw out the challenge:

And yet, though ours be failing frames,  
Gentlemen,  
So were some others' history names,  
Who trod their track light-limbed and fast  
As these youths, and not alien  
From enterprise, to their long last,  
Gentlemen.

Sophocles, Plato, Socrates,  
Gentlemen.  
Pythagoras, Thucydides,  
Herodotus, and Homer—yea,  
Clement, Augustin, Origen,  
Burnt brightlier towards their setting-day,  
Gentlemen.

It is one of the popular fallacies of the present time that this is particularly the age of youth. It is a fallacy flattered by demagogic politicians and journalists whose windy rhetoric finds inadequate response from minds of some experience, and who have moreover a solicitude for the flapper vote. It is all very silly. In the first place, youth is not nearly so susceptible to flattery as is commonly supposed in the bright old press. If you tell the average intelligent boy of twenty-five that he is really the brains and the backbone of the country, he will take you for a feather-wit; and you will fare no better with the average girl. The youth of this age is splendid; as it always has been. Except in a few periodical journals that perform the unusual feat of being over-bred and under-bred at the same time, there are no signs of the disrespect of youth for its elders of which we hear so much from writers who appear to think that night clubs have something to do with the social life of the nation. I do not believe that the chivalry of the relations between youth and maturity has ever been sounder than it is to-day, and it is, as always, one of the most charming and wholesome aspects of national life. When we are told that youth wants to turn the old fogeys out, what is really happening is that some old fogey is trying to seduce youth into helping him to turn some other old fogey out. Youth, in fact, neither talks nor thinks that way, and it has never had less reason



to do so than at the present time. Far from being conspicuously the day of youth, it is quite astonishingly the day of middle and even advancing age. To consider one kind of activity alone, literature, and in one country only. Take away from Hardy, Bridges, Shaw, Wells, Galsworthy, and Yeats the work done since the age of fifty, and you would in every case take away something of the highest importance. And who among the younger men excels not the early but the recent work of these? By all the tokens, never was there a time when the man of fifty could more confidently look forward to achievements yet to come; the man of fifty, that is to say, who may be spoken of in terms of any considerable achievement at all. On current form, given A. at thirty and B. at fifty, with equal native endowments, I would take B.'s chance on the next ten years every time.

Laemmle at fifty had won his big fight and established himself. His character was fixed, and the nature of his powers declared. In the following fourteen years, the character was to remain true to itself, and the powers were to find ample employment. If, when he was fifty, Laemmle's career had passed its more spectacular phases, it was entering upon a new period of relatively tranquil construction. His achievement up to 1915 was, in its own sphere, epoch-making. Since then it has been less precarious, and less dramatic. In later years he has, with tireless husbandry and

clear judgment reaped the rich rewards of a pioneer ardour that cleared its soil of most formidable rocks and weeds. The labour was long and anxious; it has since been long and secure. And throughout, the assurance of achievement has been firm. It is time to see what the fundamental nature of the achievement is.

The gentle reader will, perhaps, indulge me while my narrative makes a brief discursion of a personal nature. When it was announced that I was writing the life of Carl Laemmle, a number of anxious critics asked, Why? Lincoln, Lee, Byron, Charles II, Charles Fox, Pepys—yes, certainly; but Carl Laemmle? Wasn't that a very odd thing for the biographer of Lincoln, Lee, Byron, and the rest, to do? I regret to say that on inquiry I found that many of the interrogators had a far less intimate knowledge of my work upon those eminent subjects than I could have wished. Indeed, I was surprised to find among those friends who were so careful for my alleged reputation, so many who had a virginal innocence of the works by which I had acquired it.

But there were others, and more pertinent—does that connote, less impertinent?—querists, who whether they talked wisely or not, knew what they were talking about. E. V. Knox, the incomparable "Evoe" of *Punch*, honoured the project with a poem in what I flatter myself was his best vein. The burden of it was that while he

knew something of my other subjects and, I am proud to add, of my treatment of them, he had never heard of Carl Laemmle, who, he inferred, had made sex sparkle on the screen. It was very good-humoured, very witty, exquisitely pointed to a comma, and, in the best public school tradition, very costive. Who should Laemmle be, whom Evoe does not know? Who, indeed. Something to do with those vulgar movies. Sex, and all that. Living on roots, doubtless, in the deserts of California. Never been to Eton or any such place, never played a straight bat against fast bowling; used to wearing a bowler hat with his tuxedo. Chews gum, probably, and eats his cigars. Found in infancy on the Hoboken Subway, wrapped in a Tammany blanket. Square-jawed and one hundred per cent, festooned with cuspids, apprizing brunettes and blondes. And how.

Let me not be mistaken. I have cared for poetry more than for anything in my imaginative life—far more. And I take Evoe to share with A. P. Herbert the distinction of being the best writer of light verse in my time. But how does so subtle, so gentle, and so honest a mind commit itself to these levities? I once asked the assistant in a bookseller's shop—English shop—"Have you 'The Three Musketeers'?" The response was, "Are they books?" How Evoe would have laughed, in his modest, considerate way.

And then there is my friend, Hugh Walpole, to

borrow the opening favoured in the debates of the British Broadcasting Corporation. Again, let me clear the ground. I think Hugh Walpole the best novelist under fifty now writing in England. My opinion does not amount to much, since my knowledge of contemporary fiction is perfunctory. Nevertheless, I have read enough stories in my time to know that he tells one in a manner that would not have shamed the acknowledged masters. Moreover, I can say "my friend" with a long-tried confidence. Very well. He, too, is scrupulous for my soul. He contributes instructive letters on current literary topics to a great New York newspaper. In one of these, distinguished by such prose as: "For myself, the most satisfactory, possibly the most lasting, book that the autumn will produce may very possibly be Professor Trevelyan's *Blenheim*," he writes:

We are threatened with biographies of every conceivable person, ranging from Lazarus to Carl Laemmle, the latter to be compiled, of all surprising things, by Mr. John Drinkwater, who has also written a "Life of Pepys," and I hope that in changing from the Royal Navy of King Charles to the rich palaces of Hollywood Mr. Drinkwater will not lose his head.

And then, alas, "Of serious important biographies I see no sign."

Pepys, who we observe is "written" as against

Laemmle "compiled," might perhaps have been given the benefit of the doubt pending publication. But what is all this about "of all surprising things?" I have recently been reading Mr. Walpole's *Rogue Herries*. It is a splendid book, full of swing and energy. There are suggestions here and there of a rush of history to the head, but the yarn is a first-rate one, planned and told on a generous scale. But by what right, by what experience of life, by what knowledge of character, does Mr. Walpole assume that Francis Herries is a more interesting person than Carl Laemmle? Clearly, he may have given the one a far better show than I am giving the other. But the failure then on my part is in my treatment, not in my subject. Happier as Herries may be in his biographer than Laemmle, he seems to me in himself to be of much less significance. The element of invention is irrelevant. Boswell's *Life of Johnson* was not easier to write than *Tom Jones*; and if it be observed that I am not Boswell, I dare say Mr. Walpole would still doff his cap to Fielding.

Mr. Augustus John paints portraits. Indeed, he has painted one of Mr. Walpole. What would Mr. Walpole have felt about it if someone had written, "Mr. Hugh Walpole's portrait is being painted, of all surprising things, by Mr. Augustus John?" But Mr. Walpole is surprised that I should be writing the life of Carl Laemmle, surprised, that must mean if it means anything, that I should

think it worth writing. Since, when he wrote the words, he plainly knew as little about Laemmle as I suspect he knew about Lazarus, the surprise was frivolous, if, indeed, it was not simulated to spice a paragraph. I don't think Mr. Walpole really hoped I shouldn't lose my head in "the rich palaces of Hollywood"; I think the mail was going out to-morrow and only the first of three columns was finished. Oddly enough, while literary criticism is not one of Mr. Walpole's long suits, he writes at the end of the letter in question: "The fascination of narrative, the power of creating character, will always attract the individual genius and it does not matter in the least what form the result of that attraction chooses to take."

Here, in his last sentence, Mr. Walpole for the first time in three columns says something important; but he says it, I think, without realising the nature of its importance. He has been deploring the "rush and hurry of life" that "seems to be killing the younger poets, the more serious historians, the more masterly biographers." But, he adds, he does not wish to end on a note of pessimism, and is happy to see the situation saved by the vigorous if congested state of the novel. So, what matter after all if there be "no sign of serious, important biographies," seeing that "the fascination of narrative—etc.," and that "individual genius" is finding full scope in the art of fiction, to which, let me say, he himself lends so much distinction. But



does Mr. Walpole really suppose that there is inherently more creative energy, more power of shaping character, in the latest novels of Mr. Maugham, Mr. Priestley, and Mr. Brett Young, than there is in Sir Edward Parry's *Queen Caroline*, Miss Viola Meynell's *Life of her mother*, and Mr. Harold Nicolson's of his father? The idea that in some way it is easier to create in terms of documentary evidence than it is to create in terms of invention, is nothing but a crude literary superstition. Invention, indeed, is a word that cannot properly be used in this antithetical sense. There is every whit as much invention in a good biography as in a good novel, and Mr. Walpole ought to know better than to predicate of any subject, whatever the intended form may be, that it is not "important." To adopt the B.B.C. debating manner more precisely, my dear Hugh, and to adopt the words so often quoted by Mr. T. W. H. Crossland in his finer dialectical moments, tilly-fally.

Let us turn from these hallucinations in verse and prose, to the facts. In the quieter moods of his later years Carl Laemmle had been reflecting on the strange story of which, from Laupheim to Universal City, he had been the protagonist. Under his supervision a vast accumulation of data had been gathered together, covering every aspect of his career. It had taken eight years to collect and classify this material. It was shown to me, and



I found some thousands of pages packed with detail of almost endless variety, a great deal of it belonging to the waste tissue of obsolete events, irrecoverable personalities, business and domestic commonplaces, and unilluminating statistics. And yet, obviously, it was a dossier of remarkable interest. Very properly, nothing had been considered too trifling or too remote for inclusion, but the process of selection and elimination at once promised to be an exciting one. For, obscured in this voluble profusion, there lay the outline of an absorbing story. With what excitement would one have come across such virgin evidence had it been about an Elizabethan merchant or a Mayflower pioneer. And how with less excitement now? Here was material as chaotic, as strange, as uncoordinated, and as vital as the stuff of life itself. To detach this outline, then to model it in three dimensions and quicken it into a living figure, seemed to present those problems of narrative and character of which Mr. Walpole speaks so enticingly.

The interest of the narrative in itself has, by now, I hope, appeared. Whatever it may have lost in the telling, I am sure that the story is a good one. The character that the narrative releases in action is even more notable. The career has passed from its secluded and humble origins, through a youth of failure, for it was no better than that, to an entirely undistinguished maturity; at the

age of forty, with no apparent prospects to encourage the ambition that still survived, suddenly the career plunged into public activity, made what seemed impossible bids, fought its way through a prolonged crisis of unscrupulous and demented fury, and arrived at fame, fortune, and a secure and respected age. And throughout this adventure, the character engaged in it has remained upright, generous, unruffled. The temper that could be steel on occasion, has never turned mean or ugly. Power, that has been quite ruthless in its opposition to tyranny, has never become tyrannical. A liberal and shrewd intelligence has neither sold the pass nor affected intuitions beyond its natural scope. And a personality tested by privation, controversial bitterness, rough company and slippery jacks, has never allowed these evil communications to corrupt its good manners. In 1912, in the midst of the anti-Trust fight, an editorial said: "Carl Laemmle is a jolly good fellow, and deservedly popular with exhibitors." It was a simple testimonial, but, in its context, it was no shallow compliment. The truth is that we may search the annals of industrial conflict in vain to find a better fellow. Such probity, as modest as it has been uncloistered, tried by the common usage of competitive anxiety and fear, and serenely taking itself as a matter of course, is very attractive.

What of the particular industry in which this achievement of character has been made? It is not



CARL LAEMMLE AND  
MARY PICKFORD



CHARLIE CHAPLIN AND  
CARL LAEMMLE



necessary to share Laemmle's own evangelical belief in the importance and the future of moving-pictures to allow at least that here is a medium of great and unexplored possibilities, and one that has already extended the range of popular entertainment to daily millions of people hitherto inaccessible as an audience. The obstacle in the way of an artistic progress that shall be in any way commensurable with the economic progress of the screen, is twofold in kind. It is useless to disregard the fact that these economic possibilities have attracted to the industry a great number of people who, even with good intentions, have neither standards nor background to guide them. The picture-house has, in the minds of many educated folk, become synonymous with poor taste, low educational culture, and trivial mentality. The people holding this view may mostly belong to an older generation that has been discouraged by the prolonged emancipation of the screen from mere ignorance. Some there are who still deny that even yet the emancipation is on the way. There are signs that they are wrong, and clearly the opinion that the film is intellectually lost in the outer darkness is irresponsible and uninformed. Nevertheless, there remains the serious fact that many of the present controllers of the industry have no artistic perceptions, and, indeed, openly talk of art as though it were something pretentious and necessarily unpopular. With the advent of the

spoken word to screen production, this trouble is greatly intensified. It is difficult to know whether the action and significance of a moving picture are of any distinction unless you know something of the best that has been achieved by the creative mind of man; but since the screen employs a technique that in many respects is novel and self-determined, an acute natural instinct may sometimes form valuable artistic judgments on its products without the aid of more than a smattering of artistic education. It will not often happen, but it is not impossible. But the spoken word introduces into picture-production an element that leaves the uneducated intelligence helpless, whether it happens to be naturally acute or not. An illiterate person may, by the grace of natural wit, know whether a moving-picture is well constructed, whether the emotions that it arouses are genuine or spurious, and even whether its brainwork is above the level of a night-club or a purity-league. But the illiterate person when it comes to a question of literacy, founders out of hand. Messrs. — and — and —, whose names must not be mentioned, were uncertain mentors at best of the silent screen; there can be no uncertainty as to what their influence would be on the spoken word.

But the trouble goes deeper than that. There are in the motion picture business many producers and directors of fine intentions and a correspond-

ing culture. They want to do the good thing, and they know what the good thing is. How far is it possible for them to escape from those same economic conditions? If the potential market for a picture be  $x$  millions, dare they produce work that almost certainly will not attract more than  $b$  millions? And if not, can they resist the drag from the intellectual low level of the  $x$  millions? In Hollywood four or five years ago I was privileged to see the private test of a new picture by one of the most famous screen actors. He and his managers sat together, making occasional whispered comments. But one member of the small audience kept apart, and at intervals he would cry "Stop!" His function was to adjust his mind to that of the elemental bone-head. Any incident that he judged would be obscure or confusing to that capacity, was challenged, and marked either to be cut or modified. The arbitrator was a man of keen and well-furnished understanding, with a special aptitude, it seemed, for simulating mentality of inferior grades. I must confess that his standard was, to my inexperience, incredibly low, but he assured me that it was an accurate one. The actor himself, who was his own impresario, would utter an occasional word of ineffectual protest, and fade away; more often he merely raised his hands in despair and said nothing. The drag was irresistible.

On the other hand, there is the incontestable



fact that quite recently several intelligent producers have shown the courage of their enlightenment, and have been richly rewarded by the results. More and more the best pictures are ranking also as the most successful pictures. Unless the signs are deceptive, and there is nothing to suggest that they are, there is reason, at least, for moderating our misgivings. I do not believe that the screen can ever drive the three-dimensional presence of the living actor from the stage, and I am sure that the traditional theatre will always exercise an irreplaceable appeal. In my book, *The Art of Theatregoing*, I analysed at length the reasons for my belief that the screen can never rival the living stage in essential significance. Certain achievements of photography, and, still more, the potentialities of the speaking-picture, make the reasons less conclusive, even to myself, though I think the argument, which need not be restated here, remains unaffected in fundamentals. But that the screen will for years to come—permanently it may be—draw its thousands while the theatre draws its hundreds, there can be no reasonable doubt. The rising standard of screen production, of which to-day there is clear evidence, is highly reassuring for the future of democratic entertainment. It may even have a greater significance.

Such is the industry in the service of which Carl Laemmle's character has been proved. What the

man is most concerns us; but hardly less are we interested in the occasion of his being it. And, on the whole, to have done well, very notably well, by the moving-picture industry, is, I take it, as high and laudable a record as most. Hardy, Einstein, Abercrombie, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Delius, Paul Nash, Manship, Ronald Ross, Edward Lutyens—such names in our reckoning are *hors concours*. But then: oil, automobiles, ferro-concrete, sardines, certified circulations, Graf-Zepelins? I see Laemmle of the Movies more readily welcomed at the Round Table than any of these. Politics, even with a portfolio, episcopal—even archiepiscopal—lawn, the marshal's baton, the woosack? Again, hard cash apart, I would back Laemmle's credit in the world audit against any of these.

Once when I had a severe cold in the nose, I went to see England play Scotland at Rugby football. Although in my normal condition I can stand being pushed against a brick wall with another man, my indisposition then made me feel indescribably puny. Those classic three-quarter-backs looked so splendid, so fast, so independent of handkerchiefs. I was later reminded of myself by a small tyke who sat next to me when I was watching Georges Carpentier fight Joe Beckett. "'It 'im Joe, 'it 'im," he cried during the few moments available, "'it 'im, 'it 'is bloody 'ed off." He was a ridiculous little tyke, who would have

fainted if a wench had thrown a brussels sprout at him in the Old Kent Road. Joe Beckett was too slow in the wits for the superb and agile Frenchman, but he was a great fellow in his way, his muscles rippling under a fleckless gypsy tan, one who had fought through country booths to the heavy-weight championship of England. And the tyke yelling at him was a little vulgarian, eligible only, as the anti-Trust manifesto would have said, for a kick in the pants. That is how I felt watching Ronny—I never spoke to him, but we all called him Ronny—Poulton as he left the flower of the Scottish defence guessing—just a vulgarian who had got into the wrong seat.

Carl Laemmle's vocation is of a kind that surrounds him with small tykes yelling and short-winded people with colds in the nose—with vulgarians in fact. Not vulgarians only—there were many stalwart and hygienic gentlemen both at Twickenham and the Albert Hall. But with vulgarians plentiful enough to give a grace of colour to the allegation, when Walpole dines with Knox, that the whole affair is vulgar. (As an aside, let me record that I once smote Hugh's bowler-hat—wearing a cap myself—over his eyes when he shouted "Cambridge" as Oxford scored a try.) And that is, let us realise, one of the equivocations into which we are landed by the very strange values by which we live to-day.

Vulgar? The Nuremberg madonnas, Bavarian

landscapes with exquisitely modelled feudal keeps, Siegfried's reluctant "Atta Boy," five dearly cherished gold dollar pieces for a decenter cabin, distaste for the bad smells in a New York drug-store, terror in the shambles of Chicago, maple-leaves in Oshkosh, clean chairs in the nickelodeon of Milwaukee Avenue, the two hundred and fortieth injunction suit by this morning's mail, "don't charge Tom Ince one cent for this," white Leghorns, the simple pleasures of an autograph album at Beverley Hills, Rosabelle's daughter, "All Quiet on the Western Front." If that, if these, be vulgar, what price glory?

In the present year, 1930, Laemmle announced a new principle as governing the policy of his Universal Pictures Corporation. "A New Day," he called it, "in Universal History." Hitherto the company had chiefly been concerned to produce large numbers of the "programme pictures" to which its great clientele of exhibitors had been accustomed. Henceforward, the resources of Universal City were to be applied to the annual production of a few pictures representing the best talent that the industry could command. It is good to be as flexible as that in the middle sixties.

## CHAPTER XIII

### CHARACTER

THE first picture made at Universal City was "Damon and Pythias" (who, my dear Hugh, was Pythias?), featuring a great chariot race of the kind that later became celebrated on the screen in "Ben Hur." Other exercises towards the light in early Universal days were "Richelieu," "Washington at Valley Forge," and "Neptune's Daughter," the last being made for the purpose of showing how well Annette Kellerman could swim. The errand-boy from Chicago, later the clothier of Oshkosh, presented stories by masters in Italian, French, German, Swedish and Danish literature.

Laemmle also startled the trade by giving women commissions to direct his pictures. Lois Weber, the most famous of them, Ida May Park, and Cleo Madison, were among the pioneers of his revolutionary suffrage. A list of the celebrities who have worked for Laemmle would almost become a Who's Who of Picture Players. Many of them found their first engagement with him, and to many more he gave early opportunities. Lon Chaney was his "character man" at thirty-five

dollars. Harold Lloyd, in his book *An American Comedy*, wrote:

The crest of my "Universal" experience came [in 1913] with "Samson and Delilah," a pretentious four reel effort of J. Farrell MacDonald, out of which I drew eight or nine straight five-dollar pay checks—an unusual break. . . . Extras who got on regularly were identified with one director. I was more or less attached to J. Farrell MacDonald. In MacDonald's unit I worked up from three dollars a day occasionally to five dollars a day with five weeks' work guaranteed—and picked up a character bit now and then.

I suppose Mr. Lloyd's earning power subsequently reached something in the neighbourhood of five dollars a minute. Among others who played or directed for Universal, in the days when their careers were yet to make, were Mae Murray, Herbert Brenon, Pearl White, Lew Cody, Betty Compson, Carmel Myers, Rex Ingram, Rudolph Valentino and Eric von Stroheim. To these should be added such international names as Sarah Bernhardt, Anna Pavlova, and Marie Tempest, all of whom have appeared in Universal films. And of reputations made under Laemmle by players in later years a catalogue might be given from A to Z. It is on record that Charlie Chaplin was once at the point of signing a Universal contract, but at the last moment the arrangement fell through; and I don't think that Douglas Fairbanks has ever



played for Laemmle. Otherwise, Laemmle's payroll must record the first great generation of film players with but few notable omissions.

Of Laemmle's accessibility and initiative, an example is afforded in the story of his association with Eric von Stroheim. At the end of the war von Stroheim, an Austrian, was drifting about Hollywood with a scenario in his pocket which nobody would read. Racial prejudice had defeated him when he walked out to Universal City, not having the necessary cents for a car-fare. There also he was refused a hearing, and in final desperation he went to Laemmle's house. It was evening, and the family was at dinner. The servant, not caring for the stranger's appearance, refused him admission. Von Stroheim protested loudly. "I only want to see him for ten minutes." It was overheard by Laemmle, who left the table and went to the door.

"Who wants to see me for ten minutes?" Von Stroheim on the doorstep made frantic efforts to explain in one, before he should be shut out, what his business was. Laemmle had a theatre engagement, but would give him ten minutes exactly.

They went in, and talked till midnight, the family being sent off to the theatre alone. The result of the interview was the production of "Blind Husbands," the establishment of von Stroheim's reputation, and a sequel of somewhat unhappy extravagance unique in the annals of Universal man-



agement. But there was no other man in the business who at that time would have given von Stroheim his chance, and even Laemmle might have been excused if he had declined to cancel his theatre appointment merely to oblige a gesticulating intruder who said he had a very good scenario. At that rate, one would suppose, he might have given up the attempt to keep any appointments at all.

Von Stroheim's nationality may have appealed to Laemmle's native sympathies. In the controversy that preceded America's entry into the war, Woodrow Wilson's critics abroad had not the faintest conception of the magnitude of his task. Whatever his own views might be, and however readily the policy of participation might be supported in the east, the conversion of opinion in the middle and far west from its traditional, and quite natural, indifference to European affairs, was inevitably a slow and often an apparently impossible undertaking. Among other sources of difficulty was the large American population of German origin. It was a source of peculiar complexity, of which the case of Carl Laemmle furnishes a characteristic example.

It is nearly always futile to approach American problems in terms of past experience, since there is generally no past experience to the point. The American race to-day is constituted of a diversity of elements for which there is not remotely any

example. Immigration in the past has taken into America every extreme of character. On the one hand, you would find, in the westward bound steerage, the purgings of the European countries, ill-conditioned rebels, fugitives from justice, incurable malcontents, a motley of the wasters and misfits of society; and on the other hand you would find a strong infusion of hardy and intrepid idealists, men of fine stock and character, seeking wider scope for constructive and lawful ambitions than they could come by at home.

It is the supreme achievement, as it is the supreme mystery, of the American commonwealth, that it has been able to transmute these diverse and discordant elements into a genuinely national type with a dominant national consciousness. It will be long before history is able to define the precise psychological nature and significance of this remarkable process, but in the meantime there is the fact, plain to any instructed observation. The alien who becomes a naturalised American citizen does much more than sign a paper and take an oath. He becomes, not only in name, but in outlook, in perceptions, in habits and in loyalties, something that he was not before. It is, indeed, not too much to say that his conduct, his ways of thought, even his nature itself are affected by the change. In short, he not only becomes a citizen of America, he becomes an American.

But, even so, he is likely to retain some senti-

mental affection for the land of his origin. Particularly will this be so with men who, like Laemmle, left it neither under suspicion nor in protest. The tale of benefactions done by prosperous Americans to their native towns abroad is a long and honourable one, and when, in 1914, Germany went to war, it was inevitable that she should engage the romantic sympathies of thousands of perfectly loyal Americans for whom, whatever their political views, the event was full of memories.

Such a one was Carl Laemmle. The citizen of a neutral state, punctilious as he might be in the public observance of neutrality, could not but remember the little boy of Laupheim. When at length the American decision was made, Laemmle was, quite simply, one of a hundred and twenty million compatriots who confirmed it. When I recently saw his old friend Regensteiner, I asked how they felt when America went into the war. "Why, like Americans, of course." The answer was exact, and final.

At Christmas, 1915, Woodrow Wilson, in reply to a proposal that through the medium of the screen he should address a seasonable message to the nation, wrote to Laemmle, with diplomatic charm, that he wished he could do that sort of thing, but that it was just the sort of thing he could not do.

By the end of 1917, however, tongues were

loosed, and Laemmle was able to publish an impressive sheet of messages circulated through the picture-houses. The President still was silent, but the Vice-President spoke, Mr. Lloyd George, Lord Northcliffe, General Pershing, Cardinal Gibbons, six members of the Cabinet, ambassadors, University Presidents, State Governors (twenty-nine of them) and as many Senators—they all spoke, urging, scolding, praising, praying. Mr. Lloyd George appealed to “the ever-growing league of free nations,” Lord Northcliffe appealed for Ships! Ships! Ships!—for nine million tons of new shipping, Vice-President Marshall disclaimed any desire to kill the German Emperor, but exorcised his shadow from “a liberty-loving” America, while the Governor of Delaware announced that his State was in the war with the slogan “peace never until forever.” There is a terrible kind of tarnish on the words as we read them now, but the accents come back to all of us with a familiar if ghostly ring. I can find it in my heart to hope that Carl Laemmle did not himself write one of the headlines to the sheet: “This brilliant symposium is an unparalleled motion picture and journalistic achievement.” Though men said strange things in those days; and in any case propaganda was nowhere distinguished by its dignity. Laemmle by that time was, like the rest of the world, thinking and speaking in terms of patriotism. He had asked these notabilities for ex-



ANDRE HERRIOT AND CARL LAEMMLE



WOODROW WILSON AND CARL LAEMMLE



pressions of opinion. He wanted to make the answers go, and the best he knew was his own way of doing it. These things are not truly seen in the calm light of reflection. In 1915 he had been an enthusiastic supporter of Mr. Ford's proposal to sail somewhere in the Ark of Peace. Now he was an American at war.

One message arrived too late for inclusion in the manifesto; though, perhaps, it was not quite in tone with the rest. It was from that brave, obstinate Paladin of American politics, William Jennings Bryan. He wrote:

January 13, 1917.

My dear Mr. Laemmle,—

Am very sorry I could not get an answer to you in time for your Christmas edition. If it is not too late you may say for me: When, except in case of invasion, declarations of war are submitted to the people for ratification before hostilities begin—then ambitious rulers and greedy commercial interests will be unable to plunge nations into unnecessary conflicts.

Yours truly,

W. J. Bryan.

This letter is printed by permission of Mrs. Ruth Bryan Owen, the writer's daughter. "Ambitious rulers"—"greedy commercial interests"—"unnecessary conflicts"—not quite the language, perhaps, for the occasion. When it was read, there may have been a faint sense of relief that after all



it had not come in time for the Christmas edition. For Laemmle was now in the war; as the dormouse put it, well in.

A belligerent, not in arms, Laemmle behaved according to the general code, which operates crudely but, nevertheless, effectively. But when the American patriot had no further occasion for his patriotism, the little Laupheim boy asserted himself again, and succour had to be sent to those friendly Württemberger and Bavarian people who were in the grip of ruin and despair. After the war, Laemmle went back to see Germany. He had also started in the *Saturday Evening Post* a regular weekly column as a publicity medium for Universal, a column which has since become famous in the film world. On his return to America, he put this column to a very remarkable use. In 1923, when anti-German feeling in America, as in other allied countries, showed few signs of abating, Laemmle opened a campaign for the relief of the people from whom he had come. He sent large sums of money from his private fortune to Laupheim, stipulating always that they should be divided equally between Jewish and Christian families. But private benefactions were not enough. Laemmle was the head, indeed, the proprietor, of a great business that was sensitive in a peculiar degree to the fluctuation of public favour. For the chief to be known as privately aiding the German people was indiscreet; for him to make a

public declaration and appeal in the matter, and to associate these openly with his business interests, was, it must have seemed in the common view, foolhardy. Laemmle faced the risk.

The *Saturday Evening Post*, as is well known, reached a public of huge dimensions. "Watch This Column" was, and still is, the standing title of Laemmle's weekly contribution. And one week, late in 1923, this was the column to be watched:

### IT WAS PITIFUL BEYOND WORDS

I appeal to you, good Samaritans, and to my friends and acquaintances throughout the world, to send me money and clothing old and new, for the stricken people of Germany. I have already distributed, partly in person, great amounts of goods sent by friends. . . .

Possibly many of you haven't forgotten the war and maybe some hatred still lingers in your hearts, yet it is an American trait to forget and forgive, to soften and sympathise, when real distress steps over the threshold. There is no other nation in the world so quick to respond to a call for help.

Can you imagine going back to your old home town and finding your old acquaintances starving—the prominent families . . . going frequently without anything to eat and so utterly bereft of pride that they begged you for a dollar or a dime or anything you would give? That's what happened to me last summer, when times were not one-tenth so bad as they are to-day.

The fact that these folks were enemies of America, in deed if not in heart—that they were misled by a

fool Kaiser, thirsty for power and compelled to become a part of his war machine, all slipped from my mind and the desire to help became uppermost. Yet, I am an American who profoundly respects all American beliefs and institutions.

Will *you* help? Will you send me any kind of help you can afford—food, clothing, hats, shoes, money? All the employees of Universal are contributing, and weekly we are sending cases of supplies to Germany. We all feel that it is incumbent upon us in the name of Humanity.

Carl Laemmle,  
President.

## UNIVERSAL

Laemmle continued the campaign for a year or more, and, if it comes to that, there are many families in Laupheim to-day who are on his monthly pay-roll. In 1924 the *Saturday Evening Post* was still carrying his appeals:

I am doing everything possible for the starving stricken people of Germany. Will you help? Will you send money, or clothing, or anything that you can afford? I will distribute it at my own expense. Conditions over there are pitiful in the extreme. Will you forget the war and remember only the call of humanity?

and again:

Have you sent me a donation for the starving people of Germany, food, clothes, money? I am

distributing everything at my own expense. Will you help? Conditions over there are pitiful.

In the result, some hundreds of cases of food and clothing were shipped to Laupheim, Frankfurt, Stuttgart, Munich and other cities, all freight charges being shared by Universal and the North German Lloyd line. Laemmle made it his personal concern to see that every necessitous family of his near acquaintance in Laupheim received a box of provisions monthly.

It is very nice to be charitable when you are rich, to make handsome presents, patronise the subscription lists, and respond generously to all the casual solicitations that come your way. If you are exceedingly rich, it is doubtless even more satisfactory to do the thing on a large scale, organising your endowments for the relief of suffering and the advancement of mankind, appointing competent and highly paid administrators of your benefactions. But when, with a great and very exacting business on your hands, you commit yourself over a period of some years to the personal supervision of a charity, difficult to collect and even more difficult to distribute; when you make yourself daily responsible for the even-handed adjustment of its very exorbitant detail, demanding endless tact and judgment—then the satisfaction, one may suppose, must become a very strenuous experience. Laemmle, characteristically, chose the

exacting way. He was not content to hand over the considerable spare cash at his disposal and leave it at that; not content to lend his support obscurely to charitable funds that had no business connections to lose. He must give money, lots of it; but he must further give time, energy, thought, and he must throw prudence overboard. All his life he had fought things through, and he fought this through as the rest. Everyone will tell you that there is no friendlier fellow—mostly it would be “little fellow”—then Uncle Carl. But his is no soft, easy nature rousing to sudden energies. For all its simple generousities, it keeps taut, vigilant, ready to attack. His has never been the courage that “mounteth with occasion.” His German relief campaign was the work of a steadily intrepid will.

The *Saturday Evening Post* weekly column, of which mention has been made, is itself another example of Laemmle’s restless determination to make difficulties for himself if he thinks that to overcome them will be to the advantage of his schemes. It takes the form of a personal letter to picture-goers, informing them of current activities at Universal City, and inviting their co-operation in the way of advice, suggestions, and criticism. The consequence is an enormous mail from every quarter of the States, containing proposals of every conceivable kind, mostly futile and very long-winded. To take one class of

correspondent alone. Even the smallest theatrical enterprise is embarrassed by the incessant stream of unsolicited manuscripts that flows into the office. I once heard Harley Granville-Barker relate of Bernard Shaw that at a dinner-party he found himself sitting next to an undistinguished stranger, who was a little put out of countenance by the honour. After a silence, the great dramatist asked confidentially, "What became of that five act verse tragedy of yours?" His companion, a little startled, replied, "Oh—nothing. . . . But how did you know I had written one?" "I didn't," answered Mr. Shaw, "but it was a pretty safe opening, wasn't it?"

Run a group of community players or a Sunday evening producing society, and see what happens to you in this respect without any advances on your own part. Laemmle is the head of one of the largest producing enterprises in the world. In a paper that has a three million circulation and probably five times as many readers, he asks authors, and particularly young or unknown authors, to send him in their plays, stories, scenarios; and, if you have lively gifts that way, you can imagine what happens to him. If one person in ten has written a play, story, or scenario, each of the other nine knows of a play, story, or scenario that he can warmly recommend. And then there are the multitudes who cherish a burning desire to see a given star in a given part, who



think that a given star is a dumb-bell, who would like to know something about the domestic lives of stars, how much stars earn and whether stars make good mothers, who would like three best poses of a star at ten cents each and will Mr. Laemmle please choose these personally, in consultation with the star if possible, who can tell Mr. Laemmle that the motion pictures are salvation, who can tell him that they are cheese-cakes.

A large staff is employed in sorting out this mass of correspondence. There is a certain amount of negligible rubbish, but far less than might be supposed. A few letters contain suggestions of some interest, and these are put aside for Laemmle's attention. But not these only; there are thousands a year that offer some plausible occasion for establishing personal contact between Universal and its patrons, and these too are all filed for the chief's desk, not to be removed until each one has been marked with the familiar "Noted. C. L." in blue pencil. And not only that; every one of these must be answered, in a large number of cases at Laemmle's own dictation, and in every case over his signature. There are many business men of great interests who cannot bear to depute any part of their authority. Laemmle is not of these. He refuses to regard his employees as added responsibilities; he pays them well to take responsibilities off his own mind. But he knows where to



stop, and it is short of letting any of these anxious correspondents think that they are beneath the notice of the Universal chief himself. How is this for say three minutes from the crowded hours of a long day with all its major problems of administration and policy?—

To —

Iowa.

Dear Mr. —

I hope you will pardon the delay in answering your interesting letter. The huge volume of mail I have been receiving of late has made it impossible for me to give the correspondence my earlier attention.

I am glad to have the opportunity of discussing with you some of the story material you suggested we consider.

The first three will have to be left out, because they are the property of another company. I refer to "Cappy Ricks," "The Understanding Heart," and "Turn to the Right."

We are going to read Peter B. Kyne's story, "Love and War" which is appearing in the Country Home, and I will let you know at another writing just what we think of it. It occurred to me, however, that it may be too soon to try to put on the market another golf picture. One was produced not long ago. However, we shall see.

I wish you were able to see more of our pictures, especially since you have been kind enough to express your interest in them. Do you ever journey to nearby cities for your screen entertainment? Per-

haps if I had this information, I could direct you to some theatres showing our films.

Thanking you again for your letter.

Cordially,

Carl Laemmle,  
President.

An ordinary enough letter in itself, but extraordinary in its circumstances. Mr. — of — Iowa, receiving it, feels, very naturally that Carl Laemmle thinks him quite an important person. Which, in fact, Carl Laemmle does do. And there are persons who have to be given the same comforting assurance at the rate of dozens a day. They tell their friends that they have had a letter from Carl Laemmle, who thinks it by no means improbable that he will have to write another later on. They constitute themselves as scouts up and down the country, reporting on the reception of Universal pictures, spreading Universal news, regarding themselves as Universals agents, and all because they have had a civil letter not from the Universal Pictures Corporation, but from Carl Laemmle, President.

There are thousands of them, tens of thousands from Miami to Seattle and San Diego to Cape Cod. It is the most effective publicity device in the business, and it is this because it has a foundation of unaffected cordiality. It is not a mere catch-penny trick. There really is nobody who is beneath

the notice of this avid, genuinely democratic mind. An amateur of mechanics submits a scheme for perspective microphony. "Noted. C. L." And then, "I have talked the matter over with some of my associates, but it is the consensus of opinion that the idea is impractical." Nor is it civilly just that and "thank you." It proceeds: "I more than appreciate your interest, however, *and shall be very glad indeed to hear from you at any time when suggestions come to mind.*" Here's asking for trouble indeed. But not so for Laemmle. He actually will be very glad indeed to hear again. When Laemmle writes one of these letters, he wants his correspondent's quarters or dollars at the box office, but he also wants his good-will for its own sake. In a man of so many amusing and vivid contacts, it may seem a strange partiality; but there it is, and under the touch, perhaps we should say in the grip, of his informing genius, it has been the secret of his success.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE ‘‘NEW UNIVERSAL’’

IN 1920, Carl Laemmle and R. H. Cochrane bought out P. A. Powers, the third controlling interest in Universal, and as president and vice-president took over the sole proprietorship. In 1925, the corporation issued its first stock to the public, and became established on the New York Stock Exchange.

These two men made Universal, and they have kept the name in honour. At the International Sales Convention held in May, 1930, Will H. Hays addressed a great meeting of the Universal Exchanges. In case there should be anyone who does not know it, Will Hays on these matters is a witness of unique authority. When he was elected by the united film industry to his great position as commander-in-chief of moving picture interests, he came from a long record of public service that had finally elevated him to Cabinet rank, and he was chosen as a man whose favour could never be under suspicion, and whose word would be everywhere respected. I recently had a glimpse of him in Berlin when he was engaged in negotiations of

peculiar delicacy and of critical importance to the trade at large. I can only say that any Cabinet would be graced and fortified by such a man. Here was a mind whose compliment carried weight, a responsible, experienced mind, used to great affairs and shrewd in its enthusiasms. In opening his address, Mr. Hays said:

Mr. Robert H. Cochrane, the vice-president of your Company, is the member for Universal on our Board of Directors. He has never failed to help toward right purposes. From the time we began eight years ago until this hour, I honour him in his position, I love him as a friend. He is a very distinguished citizen, and a very thorough man.

To Mr. Laemmle I stand at attention in respect, regard and affection. Laemmle's name, Uncle Carl Laemmle's name, his stamina and integrity have meant very, very much to me, my friends, to this work, to this Company, and to the whole industry. I just hope that he lives another sixty odd years and that he stays always in the business.

Those are certificates of character that any man might covet. And, from that source, they could go only by desert.

While the story of Universal City from the time of its inauguration in 1915 until the present day has been a credit to the industry, it has not been one of quite uninterrupted prosperity. In these later years of super-production, the advance commitments of a company on its pictures are so

heavy that one or two box-office failures may make serious inroads on the reserves built up during periods of success. Further, the advent of the sound machine meant for everyone in the business a total revaluation of assets and policy. It was to consider this situation that the New York Convention above cited was chiefly concerned. For two days the chairman of the Convention had been expounding the new Universal programme in great detail to the salesmen of the corporation, who had assembled from all parts of the world. The report of these early sessions covers a hundred and fifty pages of type, and I had not supposed that a business exposition could be so absorbing. For myself, I began to read it in duty, and continued in pleasure. The chairman in his address ranged freely over the topics of finance, salesmanship, business ethics, discipline, past mistakes, and the future of moving pictures in general and of Universal in particular. If I had been a member of his audience, he might sometimes have provoked me to insubordinate questions, but he certainly would never for a moment have lost hold on my attention.

Mostly, too, it would have been the attention of approval. The company had discarded for ever the principle of mass-production; in future relatively few pictures were to be made, but these were to be of the highest excellence that the resources of Universal City could achieve. "All Quiet on the





UNIVERSAL CITY, CALIFORNIA, 1930





Western Front" and "The King of Jazz" were to be the first redemptions of the pledge. In pursuance of this policy the heads of Universal had staked a very large part of their own capital and of that under their control. It may here be said parenthetically that since the Convention in April the hopes founded on the campaign have been realised beyond all expectations, but our present interest is to reconstruct the psychological mood in which the Convention actually met.

The revolution proposed was radical. A great army of salesmen were being asked to put on the market a product of which they had little or no antecedent knowledge. Where they had sold a dozen "Programme" pictures for ephemeral use month by month, they would now have to sell one picture that must hold the market for a year. An entirely novel aspect of salesmanship was being presented to them, one that demanded different, and rarer, qualities. The chairman had to be tactful. It was likely that among the eager staff gathered before him there were some individuals who would prove unequal to the new occasion. For them, the future was a bleak one; but it was not the chairman's business to allow apprehensions to chill the ardours of his call to action. For two days he spoke on a note of high enthusiasm, and then, on the second afternoon, in the words of the report, "As Mr. Laemmle entered the room, the audience arose and applauded."

The note had risen to a yet higher pitch. There was not a man among them who did not regard their great little chief with affection. They were on tip-toe for him. They expected him to say some crowning word in the vein of challenging optimism that had been so effectively employed hour after hour by their dynamic chairman. Instead, he said:

I never knew how tired I was until I arrived here yesterday. I found out I was completely worn out. I am not sick, but just worn out. I am not fit to talk to you. When I talk to you I want to be fit.

He sat down. For a moment it was all a little disconcerting, but for a moment only. The minds of the audience flashed back over the story of the past twenty years. Never in the business had there been such a fighter, never, indeed, had American industry known a stiffer, truer spirit. Very well; if he said he was tired for the moment, that was all right. It was just like him to say it, simply like that. No simulation of a brave front, no easy bid for sympathetic admiration. Just a tired little gentleman saying to his friends, "I am tired today—I shall be all right to-morrow—I'll speak to you then." There was nothing to be alarmed about—they knew the reserves of stamina that had never failed their leader, and were not going to fail him yet. As he sat down they could have

hugged him. And then followed a notable little dialogue, reported verbatim thus:

*Chairman.* I think it is lovely of you to come down. The fact that you came when we didn't expect you is a fitting sign. You look very well to-day.

*Mr. Laemmle.* I am tired, otherwise I am all right.

*Chairman.* I won't embarrass you. We have the minutes over here. We have said some things that we hope you won't mind.

*Mr. Laemmle.* Bring in the contracts and never mind the other stuff.

The chairman returned to his charge, and resumed the high-spirited strain that had been dominant since the opening of the Convention. He talked through the rest of Sunday, he talked or led the talk through Monday and on till Tuesday noon. He was addressing not only his staff of American salesmen, but also the foreign chiefs from most of the countries that were consumers of Universal product. The opportunity was there, and it would not come again. He had to send these men back to their work, some to peddle a small territory, some to supervise the sales of a continent, with a burning conviction that their world had been enlarged and their mission exalted by the new policy that he was disclosing to them. The situation called for candour, and he supplied it. The fact was that Universal, having for years led the way in picture production, had more

recently fallen behind several of its great competitors in this increasingly important matter of quality. The new market, such was the theme, was no longer willing to absorb unlimited quantities of the conventional two or even five-reel stuff that had become a staple product of the Universal City studios. The decision had been made to start afresh, and now a new compact was to be made between the corporation and its salesmen. Universal City had led once, now it was to lead again. For a time it had been outstripped by rivals who had bettered its own example, but example now it was once more to become to the industry.

The undertaking on the part of the executive and producing staff in California was this; the future product of Universal City should be the best that brain and money could devise. They had the equipment, they had the technical ability, and they would spend freely, even prodigally, to secure the co-operation of the best creative intelligence that could be induced to work for the screen. The chairman insisted that the day of the trade-mark had passed. In the modern market no man could sell pictures merely because they were Universal pictures. The time had been when that could be done; it had gone. But the pledge that he now gave, on behalf of Carl Laemmle and his Californian associates, was that in future a salesman who was asked to sell a Universal picture should be asked always to sell a picture

that in its kind would survive the test of quality against any rivalry. That was Laemmle's part of the compact. Their part was to go out with an evangelical faith in the new enterprise. For three days the chairman admonished them on this text with an onset that was no less evangelical itself. And then, on Tuesday afternoon, "Mr. Carl Laemmle and R. H. Cochrane entered the Convention," and again "the members arose and applauded." Making way for the president, the chairman said:

I have worked for him for a long time. We have gotten along. He has been a very fine boss and a very fine gentleman to work with, and above all he has had the vision to carry on when all the others failed. I think Mr. Laemmle is by far the dean of this industry. He knows how I feel, and he knows how you feel. Mr. Laemmle, the floor is yours.

"The members arose and applauded." The speech that followed was remarkable. Many long years ago, at his Family Theatre in Chicago he had been much inconvenienced by an epidemic of gate-crashing. A carefully selected vigilance committee, under the muscular leadership of "Hirschie" Miller and "Nails" Norton, had suppressed the outbreak. Well: he had been forty then; now he was sixty-three, and, it seemed, there were difficulties still. Here he was, facing an audience of men upon whose capability in

a crisis—their good-will was not to be questioned—depended the fate of his life's work. If they failed him, it meant the end; not personal ruin, but the end of the hopes based on a sudden but serious decision, the end of that rich and shining promise which was already his son's inheritance. Once before, interviewing Sam Stern in Chicago, his mind had made those rapid evolutions that are common to such occasions. This putting it to the touch, to win or to lose it all—was that very prudent when you were well past sixty? Anyway, they had always been telling him that he was not prudent, and he had never yet failed to vindicate his risks. He was not going to fail now—he was confident, and justly, that his New Era would prosper. But now he had to speak to the men by whom its prosperity must be built. He started by saying that neither the chairman nor Cochrane had been able to suggest any new topics to him, whereupon the vice-president interpolated the remark: "You have used all my stuff." That, too, carried the mind back twenty odd years, to the Flimco manifesto. Laemmle proceeded:

When I was here Sunday, your chairman introduced you men one by one, and he gave every one a marvellous send-off, which, of course, pleased me very much. Nevertheless, I could not help but do a little thinking, to the effect that if . . . all of you are as wonderful as he told me you were, why in hell



[the expletive, strangely enough, was unusual] didn't we get the business this year? That is what I would like to know.

It does not appear from the official report that at this point anyone arose and applauded. Laemmle went on:

We haven't done well lately. I am not going to say anything more on the subject, because you will see a few tears if I do. I am not going to talk long, but I just want you to know that I am not at all happy at what has happened in the last two years or so.

He was not being melodramatic about tears, and he was blaming nobody. After all, he himself had controlled Universal, and if there was any blame on hand, he knew well enough where to place it. The responsibility was his, but, nevertheless, why in hell didn't we get the business this year?

We can break our necks out at Universal City and the Home Office, and scheme and plan and work twenty-six hours a day, but if you men don't do your share of the work, it all goes for nothing.

Still nobody applauded. It was, in fact, an exceedingly quiet audience that was listening to him now. He was not scolding them, but he was being the realist, or, more precisely, the practical idealist that he had always been. It made them feel rather uncomfortable, but they liked it. These

men, some of them clever, some not so clever, some farsighted, some not, were good servants. They did not suffer from the curious malaise that incites some people, when their infallibility is questioned, to give in their notice. None of them had any intention of leaving Universal unless they were pushed out or translated to higher things. In fact they knew the value of their jobs, and proposed to keep them. And here was the good boss telling them that the credentials in general were not quite in order. There was no menace in his tones, but there was inevitably a touch of it in his words. It was neither ugly nor reproachful, but it played like a cool air upon the somewhat excited temperature of his audience. He too wanted to encourage them, to paint the future in attractive colours, but first he was scrupulous that, whatever might be the paradise to come, they should not make a fool's paradise of the Convention. The warning was given, simply, incisively. The draught that it let into the room was a wholesome one, and every listener was braced by it. And then the speaker passed to more comfortable topics.

He confirmed the pledge given by the chairman. Universal City would provide them with the best that it could do, and in giving effect to this policy there would be no compromise. Naturally, he could not undertake always to send them out with goods that would sweep the

market. If anyone could prove himself to be eighty per cent right in his forecasts of what would and what would not sell, he, as president of Universal, was prepared to pay that man a salary of a hundred thousand dollars a year. "That is a standing offer. What do I hear? Is there anyone in the room that can do it?" There was not.

He then took up the antique theme of what the public wants. "I don't care what you want or what I want, it is what the public wants that counts, because in the end they have to pay and they have the say." But he followed this with the sensible confession. "Nobody knows." Laemmle himself had learnt that long enough since, and he had learnt too that the only rational guiding principle was to do the best you know. That was the fixed intention of Universal thenceforth. At the same time, his reference to public demands was by no means irrelevant. These men to whom he was speaking were moving about making a thousand contacts, and he wanted them to know that no impression that they formed of the popular mood was too insignificant to be reported to headquarters. Let them write to him as often as they liked. Any suggestion they made would have his personal consideration, and even when it came to nothing it would remind him of their active interest in Universal affairs. He liked to be reminded of that.

It was the Laemmle of "Watch This Column" in the *Saturday Evening Post* speaking, and now more intimately to a more intimate audience. He was not telling them what a fine group of fellows they were; he was telling each man individually that he was Carl Laemmle's friend and colleague in a great enterprise. This was the sort of encouragement that really told. Every man there took the assurance directly to himself, convinced of its good faith. The conviction was sound. Every man was made to feel important, because in fact to Laemmle he was important. There was nothing here of the austere and slightly patronising note upon which votes of thanks to the employees are passed at annual meetings of shareholders. This was not the president of Universal condescending upon his staff; it was Uncle Carl, who had sold nine-ninety-eights in Oshkosh, talking confidentially to a very miscellaneous lot of nephews.

Then he talked business detail: "don't wait with your selling season until the other fellow has sold his merchandise." He talked about dynamite. "You don't have to take off your hat to anybody. You have merchandise as good as the best. I want to be modest about it." And in conclusion:

From now on, don't make a bee-line to the dump when you are selling our pictures. [There was no tension now, and this brought "Applause."] Go to the best houses first and the dumps last. We want to sell to everybody, but we have to have the houses

that can pay the most money first. If we can't get them, we might just as well quit now. We have to sell to the very best theatres in America. I am going to watch that, and particularly when the contracts begin to roll in. If you don't sell to the best theatres in America, you might just as well throw up the sponge now. [An interpolation: "In the world."] That is right. I forgot the foreign contingent. In other words, get every last dollar that the law allows, and then some. That is all, gentlemen. Thank you very much.

He had finished. He had been talking for a very short time, hardly more than a quarter of an hour. It was mostly a dry, matter-of-fact little speech, delivered without flourish or rhetorical effect. "I am not a speaker," he told them, "I can think a lot better than I can talk." In fact, he dislikes public speaking, and avoids it whenever he can; its graces have never come easily to him, and he is frank with himself about it as in everything. Save for a passage in which he referred to the strain of over-work that had kept his son away from the Convention, he said nothing that had an emotional colouring in the words, and even then he kept himself humorously in hand: "The poor boy is pretty nearly all in. . . . I never in my whole life saw anybody work as hard as he did, night after night until twelve, one, two, three, four and five in the morning. I am sorry to say I have no influence over him. He has a head of his own. I can't do anything with him."

For the rest, it was all restrained, literal statement. "We are starting a new policy, a new Universal, so to speak. It is making its bow to the industry. We are going to see what happens." He had made his points with the severest verbal economy. "I am going to watch the sales as I never watched them before. I will know what every man is doing from week to week." The nephews looked at each other. Only once did he indulge, discreetly, in compliment: "All I want to say is that we have an organisation we can well be proud of, and it is being strengthened all the time." Was there, even in this, a hint of new and other nephews—be on your best behaviour, and all that? There was no word of moral uplift, business integrity, the social mission of the cinema.

In future, we are not going to make million dollar pictures unless the subject in hand calls for a million dollars. We are going to spend on a picture whatever is necessary to make it box office. It doesn't make any difference to you, and you don't care, whether a picture costs a nickel or a million dollars, so long as it is box office. Is that so? (Applause.)

"How shocking," may murmur the amateurs of Stravinsky, Proust, or Van Gogh, cultivating their enthusiasm on pounds or dollars made in markets where buy low and sell high is both creed and gospel. But how stupid of the amateurs.



Carl Laemmle may not know Stravinsky and Proust very well, but he has a living knowledge of Wagners and Beethoven and Schiller. And even in terms of the screen he could speak in other than box office language. In his speech he had said:

When we succeed in what we are trying to do, you will have a regular walk-away from the others. [You will be selling] the different kind of picture, like our "All Quiet on the Western Front" . . . if there was anything in my life I am proud of, it is this picture. It is, to my mind, a picture that will live for ever . . .

That is as may be; but, right or wrong in his divination, Laemmle here was speaking with the pride of a man who has done something for faith as well as dollars. The realism of "Is it box-office?" was, in other words, inseparably bound to his own incurable idealism after all. But the purpose of his Convention speech was to stress the realism and nothing else. Whatever place there might be in his industry for spirited adventures, there was no place for prophets crying in the wilderness. With this new policy of quality instead of quantity, he told them, "We cannot do the business we ought to do . . . unless we sell a tremendous volume of every picture that is released. You understand that, don't you?" "Yes" they assured him, they did understand.



That was all he wanted. Let them realise that the new super-product of Universal City must be on a scale beyond anything that they had hitherto attempted, and all would be well. Without that, they would all go out of business. Therefore, box-office was the theme. This was not the place to advance one's personal taste for Beethoven and Schiller; not the place even to make more than a casual reference to one's pride in the intellectual or artistic work of this or that picture. The appeal was couched in no lofty strain. Just this: The market was ready for quality production; Universal City was ready to supply it; let them, his audience, see to it that it was sold, "for the last dollar that the law allows, and then some."

And yet, that fifteen minutes of unheroic oratory was charged with a far deeper significance than appears in the external aspect of its unassuming periods. It was, indeed, quick with a man's character, and that man a born leader. He spoke in a materialistic idiom; but there was not a man among his hearers who needed to be told that through a long and often desperately straitened career he had never sacrificed a principle to dollars. There was not a man who did not know that their chief cared as passionately for the integrity of his Universal City as any Prelate for the integrity of his See, or Minister for that of his Cabinet. When the chief had finished speaking, the chairman, in thanking him, said, "I think I might

add that it is your pleasure at this time that you are now going to make the kind of pictures that you have been wanting to make all your life. Is that right?" And Laemmle answered, "Right."

Laemmle's audience, in fact, knew their man. They knew the dry, not to say sly, manner that could be assumed at will. He was generous in praise of good work, but he could be withering when it wasn't good. Taken to see a film alleged to be funny, he had been asked at the end what he thought of it. Not much. "But, Mr. Laemmle, you were asleep most of the time." "Yes; I am always awakened at once by laughter." He was known for his personal generousities, but a stranger in his office, beginning to load him with extravagant compliment, was cut short by, "Sir, you exaggerate. How much do you want?" His audience knew these things. But they knew the rest as well. They had a grateful sense of security in serving under one of whom Rupert Hughes said to me when I told him I was going to write this book: "That's good. Carl Laemmle is the whitest man in the industry."

## CHAPTER XV

### CARL LAEMMLE JUNIOR AND THE FUTURE

THE Chairman, who presided over the events of the preceding chapter, was in close association with Carl Laemmle as chief over a period of six years. He learnt his habits; knew, for example, how any journey had to be equipped with frugal but essential rations of black bread and sweet butter. Also he learnt the more ponderable ways of his mind and character. It so happens that since the Convention of April, 1930, this gentleman has left Universal, quite amicably, for other employment. He tells me that not only was Laemmle the most memorable figure in the early days of motion-picture development, but that his hold on the imagination of this extraordinary microcosm has at no time diminished since.

When Laemmle made the fifteen minute speech of which a summary has been given, his business life was, indeed, but then emerging from a convulsion of the most alarming nature. The decision to reorganise Universal policy has been noted as being sudden. It was; but this does not mean

that it was made without long and anxious consideration of the argument for and against reform. A mind so constituted as Laemmle's could ultimately come to but one conclusion, and when that conclusion was reached the mandate for reconstruction was immediate and comprehensive. But in the meantime there had been a period of demoralising indecision. Robert H. Cochrane, who followed Laemmle in the list of Convention speakers, put the case with an American wit that would have delighted Abraham Lincoln:

I have lived out of town for about seventeen years, out in the country. When I want to stay in town and go to the theatre, Mrs. Cochrane drives in and brings a suit-case with my evening clothes. I change up in the office and I look darn pretty when I'm through. Last night I got all ready to dress and everything was there except a very necessary article—there was no pants. I had on a dark suit, very much like this one, so I bluffed it out. I wore the pants to my business suit and my upper works were all legitimate.

That made me think of Universal. We have been going around with soup and fish on the upper part and a misfit pair of pants, for a number of years. From now on it is full dress from Universal in the class of pictures we are going to make and in the way you men are going to handle them.

The confusion of taste with fashion is a common error. They are frequently regarded as being

one and the same thing, whereas they are almost antithetical. Taste is rare and constant; fashion prevalent and mutable. Keats and Cotman living were not popular, but authentic taste knew the great poems and the great drawings as surely in the eighteen-twenties as in the nineteen-twenties. The fact that at the earlier date many people of intelligent culture did not recognise the greatness merely indicates the limitations of their taste. Their successors to-day recognise the greatness only because it is recommended to them by the cumulative best judgment of a hundred years. But fashion is of a far wider, far more ephemeral scope. It is unsafe to say of any fashion that it may not presently be revived for a season, but of none is it possible to believe that it will be durable. No one can accuse me of antiquated taste for liking the *Ode to a Nightingale* or *Greta Bridge*, but if I walk down Bond Street wearing Dundreary weepers, or, on hearing somebody's Blues, declare my musical preference for Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay, I must expect to be rated as an eccentric.

Moving-pictures hitherto have been under the jurisdiction not of taste but of fashion. Mechanical progress alone has been enough to throw the sensation of one year into the discard of the next. And the popular nature of the fashion has effected an even wilder fluctuation. I suppose a ten pound offer would buy most million dollar films

outright once they have been taken off the circuits. So that it is not idle, when we are still but a few months from the event, to ask whether the promise of that New York Convention has been fulfilled. If it has, we need not look for a present advance from the standard of fashion to that of taste, but we may believe that the new policy has been supported by an energy that should be sufficient to keep Universal in the van of film enterprise for years to come, and, it may even be, bring on the day when what is already the most democratic and the most popular of all entertainment mediums, may become also a serious means of creative expression.

Our Convention chairman, with no personal interest now to sever, gave it as his opinion that the pledges had unquestionably been made good, and that Universal had to-day reasserted its old position, not to say supremacy. My own observation is an insufficient guide. "All Quiet" is unquestionably a superb achievement of its kind, its urgency marred but very occasionally by a false note. It hardly challenges us at all as a work of art; that would necessitate beauty, invention, form, which it has not. We cannot think of it in terms of masterpieces from Euripides through Shakespeare to Ibsen and Shaw. But if it is not a great work of art, perhaps not a work of art at all, it is a great moving picture. "The King of Jazz" seems to me to be another matter alto-



gether. It certainly is not great in any sense. It contains some rubbish, and it is often well below the sentimental level of a Viennese wineshop. But it has in its better moments, which are many, qualities that give it more artistic significance than anything that I have seen on the screen. Over and over again John Murray Anderson uses the medium with genuine wit and invention. The picture, as a whole, is lacking in design, a consequence probably of its focusing point, but the latter part achieves a unity of its own, and for the first time in my experience I found myself being stirred by beauty on the screen. "The King of Jazz" is definitely an achievement in its own gay, inconsequent way, but much more is it an indication of what may yet be done with men like Anderson to do it.

Seeing these two pictures, and excited by such sincerities, one's misgiving was the sharper when they were followed by such an equivocal piece of stale melodrama as "East is West." The new standard of production again is evident, though less notably, but the new vitality is in total eclipse. It is hard to believe that, by recent standards, this can pass even as good entertainment. Melodrama is well enough on the screen, as in the theatre, and the most ardent reformer can have no wish to exclude so engaging a form from the picture-houses. But in the screen version of "East is West" the melodrama itself misfires.





CARL LAEMMLE AND JACK DEMPSEY



CARL LAEMMLE AND ERICH REMARQUE



One poor picture more or less would be little to make a song about, were it not for the particular circumstances. "East is West" ought not to have been a successor to "All Quiet on the Western Front" and "The King of Jazz." With that, we will forget it, and turn to a more congenial topic.

In 1929, Laemmle, daring as usual, made his son, Carl Laemmle Junior, director-in-chief of production at Universal City. The young executive had just passed his twenty-first birthday, and in the gossip of the trade his promotion was attributed to mere family sentiment. But his father though fond was not foolish. He had watched the boy anxiously, critically, and believed that he would be equal to big things in the business. He decided to load him with responsibility early, to give him a leading part in the inception and launching of a policy of which, it was to be hoped, he would one day be in first control. Under paternal supervision, which was to become interference only in the case of emergency, Carl Laemmle Junior, therefore, was told to go ahead with the provision of pictures that would meet the demands of the new principle of quality production. And his first two pictures under these orders were "All Quiet" and "The King of Jazz." He chose the subjects, chose the directors, Lewis Milestone and John Murray Anderson, did his own casting, and co-ordinated both productions

as they were going through the studios. People told him in advance that "All Quiet" was a futile choice, that it was a tragedy, that it had no love interest, that it was morbid. When "The King of Jazz" was being made they called it "Universal's Folly." He read Remarque's book over and over again, and believed in him. He watched Murray Anderson at work, and believed in him. He went through with both projects, and at twenty-two is responsible for a couple of the most remarkable achievements yet claimed by the screen, both of them properly honoured by major rewards from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

That is splendid; really splendid. If Carl Leammle Junior can accustom the world of popular entertainment to that, his own, level of taste, he may well justify John Murray Anderson's remark to me, "The boy is the white hope of the films." But I don't believe that "East is West" is his taste. It suggests that he has been listening to someone who told him that this was the sort of thing that people wanted. That is not in accordance with the bond. What he himself wants is all right, and vast audiences have said so of his two remarkable productions. He must stand by that. And then, if he does not work himself out too soon, he will add a brighter lustre to a much honoured name.

Such opportunities have rarely come to so



ROSABELLE LAEMMLE (NOW BERGERMAN), CARL LAEMMLE AND CARL LAEMMLE, JUNIOR



young a man. He has immense resources, is gifted with initiative and intuition, and is prepared to back his fancy. His success would be very popular. People like him as they like his father, and the older men in his employment have a genuine respect for him. He will make mistakes, and the best that could be wished him is that they will be mistakes not of timidity and compromise, but of courage and imagination. I think they will be, and if so, few of them will prove really to be mistakes in the end. But every time he releases a picture that is below his own taste, he will be giving an exceedingly dangerous hostage to fortune. His responsibility is greater, perhaps, than he or anyone else at the present time realises. He has the gifts and the character to bear it. His use of these may have an incalculable influence upon the future of moving picture production. I think he is to be trusted.

One of the problems that his generation will be called upon to face during the coming years is that of film taste and morals. If talking-pictures are going to raise their intellectual level, as by the evidence of the best things recently done we may hope they will, a great part of their potential audience will not remain content with the crude and elementary standards of taste and morals that prevail on the screen at present. At the end of 1929, the producing companies met, under the presidency of Mr. Hays, to draw up a code regu-



lating these aspects of picture production. The document then delivered to the industry is an extraordinary one, and worth some analysis. It is a curious reflection of two extreme influences that are working upon the corporate mind of the picture world. In some clauses it shows a plainly confessed anxiety to keep the ignorant, coarse, and sensational elements of the business in order; in others it shows a tendency to encourage liberal and enlightened progress. The code was the product of a committee of nine, representing the many interests of the industry as a whole. Carl Laemmle Junior, at the age of twenty-one, was one of its members.

A subsidiary instrument was also drawn, which provided for a uniform interpretation of the code. Under its provisions a company may submit its scripts to the committee, or association, before proceeding to production. In practice, almost universal advantage is taken of this option. Either the script is passed as conforming to regulations, suggestions are made as to its correction, or it is rejected as being unsuitable. This preliminary investigation does not bind the producer; it merely gives him a lead as to what the committee's opinion of the finished picture is likely to be. When that in turn is submitted, the endorsement is either given or withheld. Although the findings of the committee have no legal sanction, their refusal to pass a picture amounts to a trade

veto. The regulations laid down may be summarised as follows. The preamble reads:

Motion picture producers recognise the high trust and confidence which have been placed in them by the people of the world and which have made motion pictures a universal form of entertainment.

They recognise their responsibility to the public because of this trust and because entertainment and art are important influences in the life of a nation.

Hence, though regarding motion pictures primarily as entertainment without any explicit purpose of teaching or propaganda, they know that the motion picture within its own field of entertainment may be directly responsible for spiritual or moral progress, for higher types of social life, and for much correct thinking.

That is a good beginning. General principles of the code are then epitomised, thus:

1. No picture shall be produced which will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence the sympathy of the audience should never be thrown to the side of crime, wrong-doing, evil or sin.

2. Correct standards of life, subject only to the requirements of drama and entertainment, shall be presented.

3. Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed, nor shall sympathy be created for its violation.

These are then particularised:

1. As to crime. It "shall not be presented in such a way as to throw sympathy with crime as against law and justice. It shall not be presented in such a way as to excite imitation." "Brutal killings are not to be presented in detail." And then, on a note of genuine inspiration, "Revenge in modern times shall not be justified." The qualification, "subject only to the requirements of drama and entertainment" will have been noted above. We are, therefore, prepared, in the detailed list of offences against the law that are not to be exhibited, to read that "The use of liquor in American life, when not required by the plot or for characterisation, will not be shown.

2. As to sex. Adultery, scenes of passion, seduction and rape may not be shown unless "essential to the plot." And then, more explicitly, and again with a liberal thrust, seduction and rape "are never the proper subjects for comedy." Sex perversion, white slavery, and miscegenation are banned.

3.—10. Sundry and reasonably obvious rulings under headings "Vulgarity"; "Obscenity"; "Profanity"; "Costume"; "Dances"; and "Religion"—no ridicule may be thrown on any religious faith, and ministers of religion "should not be used as comic characters or villains"; "Locations"—"the treatment of bedrooms must be governed by good taste and delicacy"; and "National Feelings"—no national flag may be derided, and "the history, institutions, prominent people and citizenry of other nations shall be treated with respect."

11. Titles. Salacious, indecent, or obscene titles shall not be used.

12. "Repellent Subjects. The following subjects

must be treated within the careful limits of good taste:

(a) Actual hangings or electrocutions as legal punishments for crime.

(b) Third Degree methods.

(c) Brutality and possibly gruesomeness.

(d) Branding of people or animals.

(e) Apparent cruelty to children and animals.

(f) The sale of women, or a woman selling her virtue.

(g) Surgical operations.

It will be seen that the governing intention of the code is two-fold; on the one hand not to be too arbitrary to the detriment of individual talent and invention, and on the other to inculcate a general standard of decency and fitness. Mr. Hays, referring to the code at the Universal Convention in 1930, claimed that it was "not censorship in any sense." Well, though literally that may be so, in effect it is censorship plainly enough. It is, however, a censorship designed for latitude of interpretation. Setting personal prejudice against censorship of any sort aside, there is nothing in the moral aspects of the code to which reasonable objection can be taken. On the whole these, in any case, are consonant with public opinion, and censorship or no censorship they adjust themselves fairly enough in ordinary practice. Also, this code, in its flexibility, is far less obnoxious or dangerous than our official cen-

sorship of the stage in England. It does not, for example, say that in no circumstances may the Almighty be presented on the stage, and so forbid the production of so lovely and reverent a play as "The Green Pastures."

But the attitude of the code towards taste is a matter of far deeper significance. There is not, either on the screen or in the theatre, any formidable desire to outrage decency. If censorship of every kind were abolished, there would not be the smallest risk of audiences being debauched by pornography, blasphemy, or sadism. There is always the highly vexed question of serious work that is subversive in character, but the lot of this in the theatres must always be difficult in any case, and it is unlikely that the difficulty is affected either way by censorship. The fact remains that ninety-nine per cent of the work designed for the stage or screen, serious and trivial alike, desires no offence against the rules of such a censorship as that exercised by the code; the other one per cent is, it may be said, excluded only by the more rigid censorship of our Lord Chamberlain's Office in England.

The danger of demoralised taste is a much more insidious thing than the danger of demoralised morals. Solicitude on this score reveals itself more than once in the code, and in his Convention speech Mr. Hays said that the purpose of the code was "in no sense to lessen the breadth

and vitality of the screen," but rather to increase them, and, in precise words, "to insure good taste, and that we propose to have." This insistence on taste cannot have been accidental. It revealed, I am sure, the recognition of an exceedingly grave menace. The menace is one that is to be found everywhere to-day in the sphere of popular entertainment, but it appears in its most aggravated form in the sphere of moving-pictures. It is the menace not of immorality, but of rank and unashamed vulgarity.

The pictures, says the preamble to the code, may be responsible for "much correct thinking." The phrase is a notable one. Obviously, direct moral teaching was not in the mind of its originators. The reference, doubtless, was to a sound intellectual habit that the pictures, with their unexampled range of popular contact, might help to cultivate in the rising democracy of the world. The hope is not far fetched. But an essential condition of its realisation is a general betterment of taste. Are the picture people seeking to effect that? The question, it is clear, much occupied the minds of that committee as it drafted its code under Mr. Hay's presidency. That this was so is by far the most encouraging circumstance of the investigation and its subsequent rulings. But at present the answer to the question is by no means wholly reassuring.

The issue will have to be fought out to a de-



cisive conclusion. It may be in time that there will be small cinemas, corresponding to the little theatres of the repertory movement, where a more exclusive type of film is shown to a more exclusive type of audience, but, even so, this will effect but a fractional percentage of picture production and its public. And all the indications lead us to believe that the common custom of the industry will be to make each picture in the hope of capturing the whole of that public—with the possible exception of the infinitesimal group—and that there will be no place for several different standards of taste. There is in this no alarmist fear that the standard, whatever it is, will be one of mechanical mass production. All Greek tragedies were not alike because all Greek tragedies were spiritually, intellectually, and imaginatively noble. Nor will all pictures be alike because they conform in general to, we will not say a finely fastidious, but a seemingly taste, or to a depraved taste. The coming years will have to decide which of these it is to be. Whether, for example, it shall be the taste of a John Murray Anderson, or the taste of a moving-picture journal, I regret to say an English one, which recently placed under the photograph of a moving-picture star, the legend:

The Embodiment of "He" . . .

And then:



Fourteen stone of red meat, bone, brawn, and tender heart describes burly . . .

The writer of this revolting stuff no doubt supposes himself to be in touch with his public, and that this sort of thing satisfies a popular demand. If he is right, if he is right to any considerable extent, the fact is extremely depressing. It is worse than that; it is of the gravest possible danger to the future of the picture industry. The taste here displayed denotes a much more serious malady than any of the things that periodically experience the pains and penalties of censorship. It is here that Carl Laemmle, Junior, and others who with him are going to lead the new generation of picture production must recognise by far the most formidable obstacle in the path of progress. They will have to make such vulgarity impossible, or it will destroy them. There is nothing to suggest that in any case the screen will lead civilisation, but there is no reason why, under proper direction, it should not at least help to promote it; and civilisation simply cannot march to that tune.

The hope of the situation I believe to be that the fourteen stone of red meat idiom does not represent any important body of popular taste at all. And I think that there is far too ready an inclination in the general establishment of the moving-picture industry to undervalue popular

taste in the same way. Managing directors, branch managers, distributors, salesmen, exhibitors, in all ranks may be found men given to the same pernicious fallacy. We are told that the public will tolerate nothing that savours of uplift, instruction, education, and what not. But these objections are in fact almost entirely the inventions not of the public but of the picture men themselves. Who objects to uplift? And what does uplift mean? I have put the question to several gentlemen to whom the word is dear, and not one of them has been able to give the faintest indication of what it meant, or of what he meant by it. What picture, good in itself, has failed because of its uplifting quality? Will Carl Laemmle, Junior, kindly do the cause of rational films a real service by forbidding anyone in his employ to use the word "uplift" and all words like it, on pain of instant dismissal? Let them be dropped in the picture studios and offices, and we shall hear no more of them.

This is a problem that Carl Laemmle hands down to his son unsolved. It is one to which he himself has, perhaps, in the nature of things given no very deep consideration. A man of gentle and gracious native instincts, as we have seen, he has spent most of his moving-picture life in too bitter and primitive a struggle, in too rough an environment, to weigh this question in its nicer implications. Even his perspectives on the more

conventional morals of the screen have been a little distorted at times by practical exorbitancies. He has always given his fearless support to such aims as those embodied in the code, and yet on occasions he could disparage his own admirable motives by writing:

I have made many thousands of pictures during the years I have been in this business, and out of all the huge list there are less than ten productions which cause me regret. They were made in the days when I permitted myself to be fooled as to the real wants and desires of the great mass of people.

It will never happen again.

If an honest confession is good for the soul, then the atonement must be on the level. That is why I give you my solemn pledge to keep Universal pictures clean and wholesome.

Pictures need not be mushy just because they are clean. Pictures need not be *risque* to contain a "kick."

So I am not embarking on strange seas when I give my pledge. I am not trying out anything that is new to the Universal organisation. But even if it were entirely new, I would still know that the picture for the clean mind is the only picture that will live.

It is a very human document, with its blend of courage and humility, of deference and vision. It is such a confession, half opportunist and half heroic as might have been made by some Eliza-

bethan seaman, himself a compound of Glorianian courtier, pirate, poet, and empire-builder.

But that other question of taste could hardly be assiduously explored in a school accustomed to the invasions of drunken drug-store keepers, rough-house lumbermen, Trust bullies, and New York thugs. This was a refinement of the motion-picture problem not beyond Laemmle's scope, but beyond his pressing and crucial occasions. He took a part second to none in establishing the film as an open market, a world-wide industry, and a social factor of apparently unlimited potentiality. At the age of sixty, he faced an entirely new situation in the business that he largely had created, with undiminished vigour and insight. Crowding upon his estate now comes an unforeseen host of creative intelligences. He is not abashed, not even surprised. But it no longer rests with him to determine what the issue shall be. His satisfaction now, a dear one, is in the knowledge that he is bequeathing his work and his name to one who bids fair to make it worthy.

## CHAPTER XVI

### CHARACTER AGAIN

IN May, 1930, Mr. David Wallach, attorney of Brooklyn, wrote the following letter:

MY DEAR MR. LAEMMLE:—

I found the enclosed in the *New York Evening Post* of May 13th, and was reminded of a little incident concerning you, which might be of interest to you.

Away back in 1907 or 1908, you occupied desk space in my father's office in the Flatiron Building, New York, in which place you kept a moving-picture machine (it was the synchroscope sound machine), and I was told that you were at that time pioneering in the moving-picture field. I was a small boy then, and there were times when you were away from the office and not in communication with it for weeks at a time. Those were the days that I used to come to visit my father and toy with your apparatus.

One night I overheard a conversation between my father and my mother, during which conversation my father was telling my mother about you and your business, and how sorry he felt for you, because you apparently were working very hard to put your ideas across and were finding it a slow

and tedious process. Evidently you must have held several conversations with my father about your dreams in this industry, as he quoted you a great deal. He once said to my mother, to think that in this modern age (please remember that this is still 1907 or 08), a man with your ability and energy, to waste his time on a little toy, and if it wasn't for the fact that it was a toy, he, himself, would have been willing to invest some money, but because he had been fooled so many times, he wasn't going to put another penny into a business that didn't seem to have any future and dealt with a toy, and my mother at that time agreed with him. . . .

Very truly yours,

DAVID A. WALLACH.

In a subsequent letter, Mr. Wallach added:

Mr. Laemmle paid the munificent sum of six dollars per month for the use of the office in my father's suite in the Flatiron Building, New York, in 1907 or 1908. I was a youngster then, and when I came to the office in Mr. Laemmle's absence, in order to be kept out of mischief, I was permitted to play with the "magic lantern," as his motion-picture machine . . . was . . . called . . . I also remember that my father feared very much that he might be tempted to invest some of his money in the motion-picture business.

Six dollars a month; and now, twenty-four years later, the tenant is chief of a production business that has its own city, and main offices in Argentine, Brazil, Chili, Peru, India, Japan,



Java, the Philippines, Straits Settlements, China, Australia, New Zealand, Mexico, Cuba, Panama, Venezuela, Austria, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Egypt, France, Germany, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and Great Britain, with agents in half a dozen other countries, and something like sixty branch offices. In any circumstances the record would be an imposing one; when we remember that it has been achieved with clean hands, and that it has brought to its protagonist not only fortune, but the respect, and indeed the affection, of the industry through which he has fought a very stubborn way, it becomes inspiring.

Little remains to be added to the business story of this career. It has been notable for pertinacity and character. As these lines are being written, we are within a few months of its twenty-fifth anniversary. The chicken farm, the autograph album, and the quiet enchantments of Dios Dorados, receive more attention in these days than formerly. And now there is a grand-daughter with yet more peremptory claims. But in the California studios or at the Fifth Avenue offices, Laemmle still keeps actively in touch with the great business that he is committing to the care of a new generation. "My success," he once said, "is neither luck nor happenchance." It was won by that inexhaustible capacity for work that appears in all these men of commanding attainment. Laemmle is one of the fortunate few who



can contemplate his use of it without misgiving or self-reproach.

The pertinacity has thus declared itself. The character is reflected in its fair fame everywhere. It was no formal sense of compliment that brought together the leaders of motion-picture production to do Laemmle honour in 1926 in celebration of his twentieth year in the business, and brought them together again for the same purpose in the following year on his sixtieth birthday. At the beginning of this book I spoke of the attractions, not infrequently disputed, of goodness. After a close scrutiny of this man's life story, I find them enhanced. I am simple-minded enough to be moved by the plain, unsophisticated goodness of a man who has done so much, done it so hardily and often so dangerously. I have talked about him with his employees, his competitors, his own people and friends of the old days, actors, men-of-letters, picture folk from Will Hays to office boys, and I have heard but one opinion. Laemmle's anniversaries, it is said, cannot come too often, for they are excuses to do well by a man who has so steadfastly done well by his fellows.

Laemmle's popularity has two sources, straight dealing and a really democratic interest in people, all sorts and conditions of people. He likes to walk about Universal City, stopping to talk with anyone who seems not to be too busy, irrespective

of position. It being a nice morning for a stroll, it would be pleasant to have a chat with Robert Cochrane; or it would be pleasant also to have a chat with a boy from the poultry yard or a telephone operator on her way to lunch. If a foreign lad brings him a message, a few minutes will be devoted to correcting mispronunciations. Laemmle enjoys the society of youngsters with the world before them, and no less he enjoys that of people who have made the world their own. His collection of autographs is symptomatic; he has an unaffected and amiable enthusiasm for anyone who has done his job notably, no matter what it is. Fritz Kreisler, Billy Sunday, Henry Ford, Ty Cobb, Charles Evans Hughes, Woolworth of the stores, Charlie Chaplin, Edwin Markham, Buffalo Bill, Jack Dempsey, Calvin Coolidge, Rupert Hughes, André Herriot, Erich Remarque—he derives a quite unspoilt satisfaction from ten minutes or an evening with any of them. This human curiosity covers a far field. Laemmle looks for personal news of his staff the world over, and every day, with unfailing regularity, a copy of the local newspaper is posted to him from Laupheim.

Stepping into one of the basket wheelers on the board-walk at Atlantic City, he asked the dishevelled old coloured man, who was to take him for an hour's ride, how business was. Naturally, business was far from good. "Never mind: it

may be better before the day is out," which proved handsomely to be the case. Giving liberally to two Jewish charitable organisations in Southern Germany, at the same time he sent a substantial contribution to the fund for repairing the spire of a Catholic church in Württemberg. The sisters of the Catholic convent at Günzburg near Laupheim being in severely straitened circumstances, it was Carl, the son of Julius and Rebekka, who gave them relief. When he went to receive their thanks, they recited to him a poem of their own composition, very anxious in its gratitude. A girl from Laemmlé's office, while away on sick-leave, wrote asking that some work might be sent for her to do, so that she could with an easier mind take the weekly expenses and salary that she was receiving. Regular instalments of discarded manuscripts were forwarded to her, she typed them, and returned them to the office with the copies, which were thereupon destroyed. I hope she heard of the friendly deception when she recovered and went back to her employment, as she did. A very small exhibitor from a very small town wrote to Laemmlé that he had lost money on a Universal picture, which made him very unhappy. The president did not like him to be unhappy and sent his personal cheque to cover the deficit.

In 1929, on sailing for his annual trip to Europe, Laemmlé was given an album congratulat-

ing him on the twenty-third anniversary of his entry into the business, and signed by almost every exhibitor in the States. In making the presentation, Mr. Peter Woodhull, president of the Motion Picture Theatre Owners of America, said:

I know of no substitute for Carl Laemmle in this industry. You couldn't fool this industry and the people in it, and I sincerely hope, Sir—that you will live long to take part in the great progress that is going on at the present time.

I think it was William Lowell who said, that times need new men and new methods and that laws become old quickly and that the laws that suited our fathers' time, do not suit us. I believe that is true; and in the progress of business, perhaps we do need new methods and new faces; but we never can supersede men of your type. I say this sincerely because you and I have known each other for many years. I don't believe there is a man who has come into contact with more officials in the industry than I, and it ought to be a great source of gratification to me to bring you the message, that when they vilify other officials, justly or unjustly, I have never heard anyone say anything derogatory of Carl Laemmle—that is honest. If there have been errors of omission or commission, which will come in any big business machine such as ours, no one has ever said that Carl Laemmle knew anything about them. This album has no intrinsic value, but I believe it comes to you surrounded in an atmosphere of sincerity. I know you are going to cherish it.

In 1926, William Fox had said on a similar occasion, "You are the man with the greatest courage of all I knew in the picture business . . . and for you I have always had the greatest silent admiration, one I never expressed to you until this time." And tributes of a lighter grace have not been wanting. When he went south in 1929 to be a guest of honour at the New Orleans *Mardi Gras*, the Jockey Club named one of the events at its spring meeting The Carl Laemmle Handicap, and there was a scene of hardly temperate enthusiasm when he presented a loving cup to the winner.

A story told by a film journal in 1926 affords a striking instance of the natural integrity that had added soundness to the personal grace of Laemmle's reputation:

If Carl Laemmle's word is as good as gold, it was evident many years ago. His word was given in Milwaukee when the theatre owners of the country were in need of something more than verbal encouragement. Universal Pictures Corporation gave his word to contribute \$50,000. It was purely a matter of verbal sincerity. The first day for the material execution of these pledges fell due, and as you all know, some of them were executed, and some of them were not. Some of the pledgees wrote long letters. Some of the pledgees spoke long sentences, but Carl Laemmle had spoken at Milwaukee. He had nothing further to write about, nothing further to say except to submit . . . his



CARL LAEMMLE (CENTRE) WITH SOME FRIENDS







cheque for \$10,000. On the next date for the execution of these Milwaukee pledges, some fell by the wayside with alibis long and short. Others just forgot, but Carl Laemmle's sincerity remained steadfast. National headquarters received another cheque for \$10,000.00 from the chieftain of the Universal Pictures Corporation, and so it has been on each and every one of these dates.

On this occasion Laemmle was told that it was being said that he had fulfilled the unwritten obligation because he was alive to the advertisement value of such conduct. He merely said, "How can people think things like that?"

In 1926, at the age of fifty-nine, Laemmle narrowly survived a serious illness. That in itself is not notable, but the circumstances are. He embarked from New York one midsummer day with his daughter Rosabelle and his son on the *Beren-garia*, making for his European visit. As he got on the boat he was feeling unwell, and a few hours after sailing was suffering severe pain. The ship's surgeon was uncertain in his diagnosis, and Dr. Draper of Columbia University, who was a passenger, was called in for consultation. He considered the seat of the trouble to be the appendix:

The next morning the symptoms were aggravated, and Rosabelle Laemmle, sent a wireless message to Dr. Heiman, her father's physician in New York:

Come at once. Compensation no consideration. Drop your practice. Sail on *Majestic* to-day. Father very ill. Keep confidential. Communicate by radio.

Dr. Heiman immediately telephoned to Washington, and secured an emergency passport. His wife had arrived home from London on the previous day; her trunk was still unpacked. She agreed to return with her husband, the last vacant state room on the *Majestic* was booked, and eleven hours after the summons was received, Dr. Heiman sailed.

For four days the *Berengaria* exchanged wireless messages with the *Majestic* forty-eight hours behind her on the Atlantic. Several times daily the patient's condition was reported, and advice as to treatment returned. Only in a last emergency was an operation to be performed on the boat. In the meantime, communication was made with London, Dr. Dunhill, of St. Bartholomew's Hospital, being asked to have the *Berengaria* met at Southampton. He sent a colleague, Dr. Ross, who attended a desperately sick man to a Park Lane nursing-home.

A radiogram from the American on the incoming *Majestic* gave the Englishman a full history of the case, and made suggestions as to immediate measures to be taken. Students of comparative economy may be interested to know that the wireless messages cost two hundred and fifty pounds. Acting in accordance with the informa-

tion before him, Dr. Dunhill conducted a tapping operation with a local anæsthetic. Laemmle stood this, but Dr. Heiman arrived forty-eight hours later to find him in an exhausted condition, the continuous and acute pain having worn his resistance to a thread, and the heart being on the point of collapse.

There followed a struggle in which the two doctors worked with a disinterested co-operation that was a credit to medicine. Stimulative resources kept the merest spark of life from extinction, but on the fifth day after the operation, total collapse of the patient took place. An immediate blood transfusion was given, and Laemmle rallied for twenty-four hours. A second collapse followed, another blood transfusion was given, and four hours later yet a third. Five doctors in consultation agreed that there was but the faintest element of hope.

The American proposed a saline injection with a large size hypodermic needle in the region of the heart. It was objected that the cold shock would be beyond the patient's utterly enfeebled power of resistance. Dr. Heiman suggested the use of a thermos bottle whereby the fluid could be run in at a safe temperature. It was agreed by the consultants that at least no harm would be done by this, and with now apparently nothing to lose, Dr. Heiman prepared his solution. At the first injection a quart was given, being al-

lowed to flow slowly about the tissues of the breast.

We need not attach undue importance to this measure in itself, but it probably provided the critical atom of energy that enabled the blood transfusion to take effect. In any case, as the saline solution spread over the tissues, there came a faint reaction from the all but extinct pulse. Another quart injection was made, and then another. Laemmle, motionless in a pallor as of death, called up from some secret reserves of physical character a last unconscious but desperate defiance. For twenty-eight hours his American and English physicians sat at his bed-side, watching minute by minute the movement of the pulse. Almost imperceptibly it brightened. A mouthful of orange-juice was swallowed, later another, and then half a pint. The defiance was making good. Other fluid nourishment was taken, the pulse gathered life, and at the end of the twenty-eight hour vigil the crisis passed. Five weeks later Laemmle left the nursing home, and after a further week in London went on to Carlsbad in a state of cheerful convalescence.

Our comparative economist again may like to know what Dr. Heiman's fee was for services that covered a period of seven weeks from the day he left New York. I cannot enlighten him; but Laemmle, regarding it as inadequate, made his own estimate at twenty-five thousand dollars.

When news reached Universal City that their chief was out of danger, two thousand employees assembled in the open and offered thanksgiving. The scene was a strange one. Players, directors, clerks, mechanics, labourers, stars and casuals, all the vivid human patchwork that enlivens the daily commerce of a great picture "lot," deeply stirred, some to tears, some to prayer, and all to unfeigned gratitude that Uncle Carl was coming back to them.

And when he reached New York there was a mayoral committee on the pier, and a blaze of jazz along Fifth Avenue. These people of the movies, bless their silly hearts, are so volatile in their emotions, so readily demonstrative. We contemplate them indulgently as they festoon themselves for this unspectacular gentleman who, after twenty years of creditable plain-dealing, has been snatched from the valley of the shadow. Funny, sensational people, with their misplaced, shallow sentiment. How much more discreetly do we spend our enthusiasms, investing, for example, the fearful tragedy of Beauvais with mock heroics, or awarding civic garlands to the lady who first ate a legislative apple. They give no civil decorations in America; on the other hand, it is not on record that Carl Laemmle ever exclaimed to his cheering escorts: "Please, I want everyone to call me Lemmy."

The Universal employees not only met and

prayed; they subscribed a sum of money for the purchase of one of those tangible tokens of esteem that are so palatably the salt of good-will. It seemed, however, that the hero of the occasion already possessed most of the things that he would like. But he had endowed a room in the Los Angeles Orthopædic Foundation, and it was decided to devote the money to the better equipment of this. Laemmle thought that was a very acceptable present indeed. The first occupant of the room when it was opened, it may be noted, had been the son of a rival motion-picture producer. He was a small and poor rival, which again shows what sentimental ways they have.

Like many men who have fought hard, Laemmle is a pacifist. Threaten him with injustice, and he will fight like a fury; but leave him alone, and there is no firmer faith than his in the principle of live and let live. The thought of actual war fills him with terror. Although his son was immediately responsible for "All Quiet," it was naturally with his own sanction, and his satisfaction in the picture was largely due to his belief that it was effective anti-war propaganda. The following passage from a speech broadcast in America by David Schenker shows that the belief was shared in other quarters:

In the State of Thuringia, Germany, the Minister of Education, Dr. Frick, a member of the fascist



party, has banned Erich Maria Remarque's book, "All Quiet on the Western Front," from public and high schools. The fascist organ announcing this momentous decision says, "It is time to stop the infection of the schools with pacifist propaganda." I wonder if Dr. Frick has banned the Bible, for if he hasn't, I certainly think he should, because he will find that the Bible is a very pacifistic book. For Dr. Frick's information, let me quote Isaiah, the prophet, predicting the coming of the time when there will be good will among men, said, "They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift sword against nation, and neither shall they learn war any more."

Yes, Dr. Frick, the Bible is a pacifist book, and thank God some people still read the Bible. Mr. Carl Laemmle must be a reader of the Bible, because he has seen the vision of Isaiah and that is why he bought the picture rights to "All Quiet on the Western Front."

A reviewer in the *Dayton Sunday Journal* recently made the somewhat startling statement:

Carl Laemmle, who produced "All Quiet on the Western Front," has been mentioned as a possible recipient of the Nobel peace prize. If such a consummation comes about a dual purpose will be served, for not only will this pioneer of the motion-picture industry be receiving a well-merited reward but recognition will be given to the influence of the cinema art as it relates to matters of world concern.



And yet, not really so startling after all. The suggestion is irresponsible in overlooking the claims of Erich Remarque in the matter, but a joint award to Remarque, Laemmle, and possibly Lewis Milestone would by no means be irresponsible. Another writer, Kenneth C. Beaton, has put the case so reasonably that I take leave to borrow his words:

Three times the prize has come to America; in 1906 to Theodore Roosevelt, in 1912 to Elihu Root, and in 1918 to Woodrow Wilson. Roosevelt got it for his activities in bringing to an end the Russian-Japanese war, Root for his participation in the organisation of a Permanent Court of Arbitration, and Wilson for his efforts in connection with the world war.

Statesmen, all of these men, and perhaps it does appear to be a far cry from them to Carl Laemmle. But it really isn't. Let's take Wilson and Laemmle for instance. Somewhere, back in the heads of both of these men, there was, in the one instance and there is in the other, a desire to do something for the good of mankind. Wilson died in the doing of it, but Laemmle has gone along and is still going, and if you have ever talked with him you will know that his dream is always of something a little bigger than just making pictures that will "click" in the box-offices.

I won't say for Uncle Carl that he is always clear in his ideas as to what he should do, but I do know that when you know him you must accept him as a disciple of peace and good-will to all mankind.

And, anyway, it was Carl Laemmle who made

it possible for the world to see "All Quiet on the Western Front." And I don't know how many reviews of this picture I have read, but I do know that in all of them there has been the suggestion that nothing that has ever been done in print or on the stage or on the screen, or by statesmen wearing the halo of presidential or kingly favour, has been more potent in pointing out the devastating horrors of a world war.

And why, therefore, should not Carl Laemmle have the Nobel Peace Prize? Why shouldn't Will Hays and Louis Mayer and Joseph Schenck and Sam Goldwyn and all the rest of those who are interested in the screen go out into the big world and proclaim the right of Uncle Carl to the 35,000 dollar prize and the honour that goes with it? Rightly they may ask what Roosevelt or Root or Wilson and any of the rest of the foreign gentlemen or of the peace societies who have been awarded the prize, ever did more for the peace of the world than Carl Laemmle has with "Western Front."

These men and societies to whom the award heretofore has been made mostly have started at the top and worked downward. Carl Laemmle has started at the bottom. He has started with the youth that pays its way into the picture theatres throughout the world. He has made it possible for everyone to see past the mouthings of frock-coated orators; past the million dollar-a-year man; past the circulation-seeking newspapers; past all of these and into the twilight of life where youth goes on the world's battlefields, not knowing what it is all about, and dies, not knowing what the answer is.

We see this man of large achievement, himself projected on to a screen of rapid and kaleidoscopic change, equally intent on small or memorable events. To a friend at Marietta Springs he proposed a hand at poker; yes, if the friend may set the stakes. Agreed; and Laemmle with his companion sits down to an evening at a one cent limit. He wins twenty-eight cents, and is as well content as if it were twenty-eight hundred dollars. His sixtieth birthday banquet is attended by seven hundred film celebrities; the stewards are Rupert Hughes, Marcus Loew, Samuel Goldwyn, Douglas Fairbanks, Jesse Lasky, Irving Thalberg, Will Hays and Mary Pickford, whose first IMP picture, made sixteen years ago, is shown for the entertainment of the company. Somebody effusively kisses Laemmle's hand; he is somebody not ethically in favour, and Laemmle's companion notes the hand being furtively brushed against the hem of the table-cloth. A boy on the "lot" has been negligent, and is to be discharged. Laemmle hears of it. What is the boy's explanation? He has not been asked to give one. That will not do. Everyone must always be given a chance to explain, and generally, if he cannot do it very well, a chance to explain better another time. Abraham Lincoln once wrote to Stanton, his Secretary of War:

My dear Sir,—

. . . Blumenberg, at Baltimore, I think he should have a hearing. He has suffered for us and served us well—had the rope around his neck for being our friend—raised troops—fought, and been wounded. He should not be dismissed in a way that disgraces and ruins him without a hearing.

Yours truly,

A. LINCOLN.

Lincoln knew how Stanton would hate that, and he had a deep respect for Stanton. But there was Blumenberg. And somebody important, doubtless, is much displeased at not being permitted to discharge an office boy when he will. Laemmle has no wish to offend somebody important; but there is the office boy.

## CHAPTER XVII

### IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME

A CERTAIN portrait and a handkerchief have never left his pocket since the day in January, 1919, when Mrs. Laemmle died. They had been married for twenty-two years. Through many vicissitudes of fortune that blessing had remained constant.

His daughter was then fifteen years old, his son eleven. In them he has kept his youth, and an unfading memory. He has a simple, humorous talent for home-life, and it has never been allowed to rust. He postponed an important business meeting in Chicago in order not to miss his son's twenty-first birthday party in Los Angeles, and when Rosabelle was married there was no vacant number on his dance programme. I am told that he was unerring in his choice of good-looking partners. And a jest is as pleasing to him as a pretty girl. His general manager was about to leave for Europe. Laemmle asked how long he intended to be away, and was told three months. "That's great. I'll save five hundred dollars a

month on poker for three months"—he has, in fact, the reputation among his friends of being the world's unluckiest player—"Good-bye, and good luck." Touring in Yellowstone Park with Siegfried Laemmle, he remarked as the car was halted for the fiftieth time to accommodate his brother's Kodak, "Say, I'm the Laemmle that's Universal Pictures. You lay off."

The confidence shown by Laemmle in his son, is in keeping with his general attitude towards youth. He delights in young people, delights particularly in giving young talent its opportunity. He is accessible to any youngster with an idea, sometimes, perhaps, too accessible. His managers and his secretaries, as Jack Ross and Harry Zehner, have known their difficulties in keeping him from the blandishments of eager-eyed young people who peddle in the confines of Universal City and Fifth Avenue with a large assortment of mares' nests, white elephants and very well-cooked chestnuts. But Laemmle, in his enthusiasm for youth, and young himself in spirit as he is, makes no concealment of his 'loyalty to old habits, old friends, and old experience. Many a weighty decision made in reference to the standards of modern business has been influenced by some example drawn from the humble occasions of the Continental Store in Oshkosh thirty years ago. A crowned head or the President of a republic is likely to remind him of the cobbler who mended

his shoes in Laupheim when Wagner was writing "Parsifal." He kept a locomobile ten years after it was obsolete, because he liked the back seat better than any that he could find in later cars. Wherever he travels he takes with him a special make of feather pillow for which no substitute would be tolerable. When he passes through Chicago, he is unsettled if a porter of his old acquaintance is not waiting on the platform for the train. But the porter is always there. His family was in serious financial straits: but that, it seems, is no longer the case.

Also, Laemmle's lifelong habit for detail has remained with him. He wants daily accounts of all his operations, and they must be exact to a dollar. If he finds a letter going out of his offices overstamped, attention is drawn to it, and he is an adept at eliminating unnecessary words from telegrams and cables. Switches and taps, he believes, are intended to economise, not to waste, light and water. He emulates King George III in arranging his personal time-table to the minute—he will make an appointment for 11:27 A.M. or 3:12 P.M. He keeps an infinite litter of memoranda, mostly noted on odd scraps and tags of paper, suggestions from every kind of source, fugitive ideas, strays of information, instructive figures, miscellaneous impressions.

But this precise regulation of trifles is not allowed to impair the breath and vigour of his busi-



ness methods. When abroad in 1929 his cable bill amounted to a thousand pounds. On a journey he refuses to pass any place of interest that can be reached, he will stop anywhere to see a race or fish a stream, and when the United States Fisheries accorded him the rare privilege of visiting their trout hatchery at Peale Island he was in a flutter of delight about it. But on his journeys, too, he must be met at every stopping place by his local staff, and five minutes or a day devoted to the adjustment of Universal affairs.

Laemmle's anxiety to give everyone a chance, and anyone who may need it a second chance, is strikingly exemplified in an incident that took place in 1915. Samuel Mott Osborne, chief warden at Sing Sing prison, was actively interested in finding openings for convicts who had served their terms with good records. Laemmle offered to find employment for two of these. They went to him, the past was treated as a sealed book, and every opportunity was given them for advancement. It is reassuring to know that under new names they made good, and that to-day they are both happily established in jobs to which they have done credit.

With Laemmle, too, originated the practice of exhibiting pictures in Sing Sing for the benefit of the inmates. One of these was shown as "The Photoplay Without a Name," and Laemmle offered a prize of fifty dollars for the best title submitted by a convict. From a melancholy aggregate

of four thousand entries, "Folly's Crucible" was selected. The winner left prison a few weeks later, and subscribed ten dollars of his prize to the Mutual Welfare League.

In 1926 Laemmle gave a scholarship for the best study of Victor Hugo's works; among the examiners was Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler, in itself a sufficient testimony of the status of the endowment. A year later he inaugurated The Laemmle Award—since discontinued—an annual prize of five thousand dollars to be given to the journalist, man or woman, who in the ordinary course of business made the most constructive suggestions for the advancement of motion-picture production.

Generous in these large financial matters, Laemmle is punctilious in small ones. It is his practice to settle all personal bills within twenty-four hours, and he is disturbed if he hears of an employee being in debt. Learning that one of the boys on his staff owed another ten dollars, he paid the sum, and gave the debtor a suitable raise with the warning that he was not to owe anyone ten dollars again.

Carl Laemmle likes movement. When driving in his car, no longer the locomobile, his seat is in the right-hand corner. That is his special place, and no one, not even his son or daughter, would think of taking it when he is out with them. There he sits, a quiet, contented man as age comes on,

rich as ever in ardours, but happy now sometimes to let contemplation succeed more urgent moods. He will time the mileage, glad when he finds that he has done so to a few seconds. Or he will hum to himself the airs of Wagner, or Gilbert and Sullivan, or Puccini. At most of the places on the road there are people to be seen. He has an encyclopædic memory for friends, indeed for acquaintances, and he will stop merely to visit the relatives of an employee. It is seldom that he fails to remember a name, even to its middle initial. And always in the stillness of his mind is the recollection of those other friends whom he left in Laupheim half a century ago. When he visited his birthplace in his sixtieth year half the town turned out to do him homage.

In Laupheim I myself saw them at another time. It was then the fiftieth anniversary of some military event, and the burghers passed on parade, not at all discouraged by a steady July rain. In a motley of faded uniforms and yet more faded frock coats that once were black, some walked, shouldering umbrellas in default of muskets, others drove in fiacres that might have seen service at Sedan. Banners borne on poles across the street were decorated with symbolic sausages and loaves of bread, whatever their significance might be. A thousand medals, polished to a starry lustre, twinkled on the heavy gloom of the day. A few martial looking Uhlans with their lances escorted

the procession, and they seemed to belong to an order that had paid in its checks. But the veterans in their tarnished uniforms, frock coats, and top hats, were mostly youths in Laupheim when Carl Laemmle was a child. These were the men who went to his home in homage, thanking him that he had aided their town, his town, at need.

As he drives in the right-hand corner seat of his car, Laemmle remembers them, and above all he remembers certain graves in the Jewish burial ground. He remembers street-corners, and staircases, and shop windows; a little blue pond in Blaubeuren. Since then he has seen so much more than is dreamt of in Laupheim philosophy, seen so many things in New York and Chicago and Oshkosh and California, fought such a devil of a fight, and made is it some six thousand motion-pictures. He has become an Honorary Member of this association, a Fellow of that society, the last surviving active pioneer of the great industry that he helped to make, and one of its most powerful executives in the new age of sound. But the old Württemberger strain survives, and through all the turbulent years the quiet voices of Laupheim and Ichenhausen have never quite been stilled. As he drives in his car, he hears them, with an unregretful tenderness, knowing that he was destined from the first for a wider, more experimental, less tranquil state than that of their daily intercourse, but knowing too that there has always



CARL LAEMMLE AND CAROL  
LAEMMLE BERGERMAN



remained in him something not alien from their tones.

Of his own generation, Siegfried and Louis alone are left with him, Joseph, who sent him his ticket to come to Chicago from New York in 1884, having died in 1929 past the age of seventy-five. His own children have but a rumour of the old world in their blood, and now the little girl, Julius Baruch's great-grand-daughter, comes with a span of a hundred and ten years bridging the four generations. If she should live to be an old lady, she may tell her own great-grandchildren of an ancestor who was born in Southern Germany in 1820, the year which saw the death of the English King against whom Washington had revolted. But she will tell them more of that old man's son who came to their America in a year when Ulysses Grant was dying, Woodrow Wilson was doing graduate work at the Johns Hopkins University, John D. Rockefeller's conquest of the Oil Regions had become absolute, and Robert Frost, Carl Sandberg and Vachel Lindsay were in the nursery.

What, in that far time, may have become of motion-pictures we cannot know. But whatever their future may be, the days of their inception can never be a story without its own romance. In it, Carl Laemmle must remain one of the most memorable figures, a hard fighter, a clear-sighted pioneer, a determined leader, a good man. Among



the special treasures of his mind are these words, once spoken by Abraham Lincoln:

I do the very best I know how, the very best I can: and I mean to keep doing so until the end. If the end brings me out all right, what is said against me won't amount to anything. If the end brings me out wrong, ten thousand angels swearing I was right would make no difference.

Uncle Carl Laemmle, too, will keep on doing that until the end.

THE END





Scanned from the collection of  
David Pierce

Coordinated by the  
Media History Digital Library  
[www.mediahistoryproject.org](http://www.mediahistoryproject.org)

This book is provided for purposes of  
scholarship or research under the provisions of  
Section 108h  
of the Copyright Law of the United States.

If you believe this work has been scanned  
in error, please contact us at  
<http://archive.org/about/terms.php>

