

Bad Manners in the Movies

Why Screen Heroes Don't Always Rise and Remove Their



Here Are James Kirkwood, in "Man, Woman and Marriage," Seated, and a Cast Supporter, Hat on, Calmly Puffing a Cigar in the Presence of Dorothy Phillips, Who Doesn't Seem to See the Faux Pas.

HAVE you ever seen a man—in the movies—precede a woman out of a room; or stand, with hat on, in her presence; or otherwise display bad manners? If you have, did you think it was caused by stupidity on the part of a \$3000-a-week director? Or did you attribute it to the actor himself? Well, in either case you were wrong, if Marguerite Clark, film star, is right. For she says:

That it is not the fault of the director. Neither is it the fault of the actor. In fact, she says it is the fault of no one and, in truth, is not a fault. Because, so she says, it is done deliberately—think of it—with malice aforethought! It is done because it is necessary, declares this dainty little actress, who is two inches short of having five feet of stature. She explains why it is done deliberately. And she blames it all on what might be termed the finesse of the pictures.

So confident is she that the movies can be taught good manners that she has started a school of etiquette for movie actors and actresses. She declares she will eliminate all evidences of bad breeding and will produce plays calculated to meet the approval of a Lord Chesterfield. And the first pupils will be those in the cast of the plays she is now beginning to produce.

By Marguerite Clark

MANNERS of motion pictures! Who ever heard of such a thing? Mark you, though, I am not referring to the manners of the actors and actresses who ap-



The Distinguished Lionel Barrymore in "The Great Adventure" Doesn't Give a Whoop for Convention in This Scene, Appearing in Shirtsleeves and Unbuttoned Collar Before Man and Woman Visitors.

pear in motion pictures. I am speaking of the manners of the productions themselves. The action of many motion pictures violate all the rules of etiquette and politeness. Bad manners are so general in pictures that they are tolerated. The public does not seem to expect persons on the screen to conduct themselves with the same politeness they would demand of those with whom they associate, or even from the same actors and actresses of the screen.

Motion picture folk have long recognized the firm foothold which bad manners have found in their work, but as most of them are due to technical reasons, they have persisted through years and years. For instance, who ever would expect an escort of a lady in real life to pass through a door first? Yet it happens almost every time in an exit or an entrance occurs in motion pictures, and the reason is simple. The method of manufacturing motion pictures demands that the star shall make the last exit and usually in productions where this situation would occur the star

is a woman. Therefore, the man goes out first to give the star a chance to make a smiling exit on an unblocked screen.

That is one of the commonest bad manners of the screen which could be easily corrected. Another one, however, that is not so simple is caused by the difference in stature between men and women. You know the camera emphasizes contrast of any kind, and in a banquet or any other scenes where men and women enter to sit down, the women in taking their places first so emphasize the height of the men that the effect is that the men are bound to shoot right out of the top of the picture. That is the reason why you see so many scenes where a man will come in and sink into a chair while the woman remains standing until after he is seated. Bad manners again, but not so easily corrected as the kind first mentioned.

Directors Are Waking Up

Innumerable other instances will occur to those who will take the trouble to remember the details of the scenes. Some are caused by easily

Hats in the Presence of a Lady Is Explained by Marguerite Clark, Who Proposes to Play the Schoolma'am in a New School of Stage Etiquette.



Marguerite Clark, Who Wants to Play Schoolma'am in the New Theatrical Etiquette School.

the actor at the desk should not rise. And if he does he may spoil the picture.

"From this you see the director really must look from without within and from within without. He is the public looking in and the director looking out. His mind exercises a double function. So, it is not surprising that quite often he commits a breach of etiquette which he would not commit if he were instinctively and inherently a gentleman of breeding.

"Actors as a rule go through scenes and do things the significance of which they do not realize until they have done them. They are trained to assume instantly this or that expression or body pose and it is this instantaneous action that produces the excellence of the acting. You see, if a man were told, for instance, that he were to

One of the Rules in Miss Clark's School of Etiquette Is: Gentlemen Will Kindly Remove Their Hats While Conversing Indoors with a Woman.

corrected customs while a number of others are caused by technical obstacles which are not so easily overcome. They can be overcome, however, by thoughtful changing of the story or careful position of the camera and other technical arrangements. However, directors are beginning to pay more attention to this phase of production, and the time is coming when the screen will teach good manners.

I have just completed my first independent production, "Scrambled Wives," and am releasing it through Associated First National Pictures, Inc. "Scrambled Wives" is "the best mannered picture" in which I have ever appeared. Now that I am an independent producer I am going to do all that I can to reform the manners of motion pictures, and "Scrambled Wives" offered me my first opportunity along these lines.

A Well-Mannered Movie

In "Scrambled Wives" I simply insisted, despite the fact that it is a farce comedy, that the manners all the way through should be good. Mr. Griffith (Arthur, not D. W.), who directed the production, agreed with me about that, and some of the things which I thought were insurmountable he got away from in the easiest possible way.

I know other directors and stars are thinking the same thing, and in the future children will be able to acquire good manners by imitating their favorite actors and actresses on the screen.

The foregoing explanation by Miss Clark, however, was not that volunteered by men in the business of producing films. They had a wholly different conception of it, a conception they did not wish to announce publicly for obvious reasons. As one put it the explanation ran something like this:

"The real cause of the bad manners in the movies is the utter ignorance and illiteracy of some of the directors. These men, who get salaries running around \$3000 a week, are alone responsible for the various 'bills.' The movies never will be free of evidences of bad manners until they engage men who know something about good manners. It is a fact that many of the most brilliant minds neither know nor appreciate etiquette. They are too busy to bother about such things. And as far as the desire to centre the star on the screen is concerned that is not so because in many cases the star is not selected until after the picture has been shown. Often an obscure actor or actress is thus brought to the centre of the stage out of obscurity.

"In some instances, however, there are directors who have so much on their minds that the breaches of etiquette slip into their pictures. To make this clear to the public one should bear in



It Seems Quite Impolite for J. Barney Sherry to Remain Seated While Agnes Ayres Is Standing, but the Movie Photographer's Camera Focus Demanded That He Either Keep His Seat or "Lose His Head."

mind just what the director's job is. When most folk see a movie they believe that the film is wonderful because of the actors and actresses that appear in it. This is not the truth by a long shot. If they noted the name of the director they would have the name they should repeat for praise or blame at the end. For the director more than the actor or actress appearing in the star role in the play, is responsible.

"Actors and actresses are nothing but automata in the hands of the motion picture director. They not only act as he indicates, they must think as he indicates. For instance, if a man is seated at his desk in the course of the making of a picture and a woman enters and the man instinctively arises without specific orders to do so from the director he would probably be called down. This seems harsh. At the same time it shows how that act of bad manners is often committed. The cameraman may be in the rear of the seated actor. There may be any number of reasons why

wear an expression of hatred, the chances are that the look would be studied and ineffective. But, coming without preconception the look is as real as it could be and thus it is snapped."

The writer has noted these errors from time to time, particularly anachronisms. He once saw a motion picture of mediæval scenes. One of the actresses wore a wrist watch. Otherwise her costume was perfect. In another instance in a picture based on revolutionary times in this country the hero, garbed in a uniform of the Continental army and a cocked hat, and carrying a flintlock took a bag of smoking tobacco from his pocket and rolled a cigarette. Having done this he replaced the bag and left the well known round tag hanging out.

In "The Jucklins," a recent play well acted and beautifully photographed, the hero, arrested for murder, appears for trial after "weary waiting" in the same shirt he wore when he surrendered to the sheriff.