



Lend Us a Star!

By Jeannette Meehan

HOLLYWOOD.

YOU'VE seen them often—those little items which appear in some obscure corner of a trade paper or tacked on the end of some Hollywood column, just to fill up space. They read something like this—"Warner Bros. have borrowed Horatio Hero from M-G-M to star opposite Hilda Heroine in Warner's wonder-spectacle, 'Song for Susie'."

Nothing unusual about it—and yet that one short, untrimmed sentence is a brief summary of what probably has been a two-months' siege of conferences, bids, pledges, contracts and aspirins.

Why borrow a star? Let's take a concrete example. Paramount has spent a good many thousand dollars on the preparation of a period picture titled "Buccaneer." It was many weeks before the picture was to begin that Paramount realized that the only star on the lot suited to the role, Gary Cooper, would be working in "Souls at Sea" long enough to mess up the release date of "Buccaneer" if the company had to wait for him.

Well—borrowing is better than waiting.

A swashbuckling hero? Who better than Clark Gable? So the studio throws out a "feeler" and at first it's all very informal.

Things proceed something like this. A Paramount executive, a big one and a diplomat (usually Henry Herzburn), calls up an M-G-M executive (a big one) and invites him to lunch. So they have lunch, and throughout the greater part of the meal they talk about everything except the thing they came for. About French pastry time, Mr. Herzburn remarks, sort of off-hand-like, "By the way, how's Clark Gable doing? Swell, eh? I'm glad to hear it." So they both agree that Mr. Gable is doing all right.

Other "feelers" follow in rather routine order. Is the star very busy at M-G-M? How many pictures has he to make on this year's program? How soon will he have any time off? Then, at last—the real point! Paramount would like to borrow him for "Buccaneer."

It has all been very pleasant and friendly. They shake hands and it's a gentleman's agreement that, if circumstances prove propitious, it's a deal.

In this case Paramount didn't get the star they wanted because he had too many commitments at his own studio, but let's assume that they did.

FROM that luncheon on, things cease to be informal and are conducted along a definite course of procedure. It works the same way at all studios. The matter is taken up with the big-wigs in the front office. If they find the star is free, with no pictures pending at the time Paramount wants him, M-

G-M guarantees to deliver him on a certain date, "pending certain agreements."

Those "certain agreements" cover a lot of ground. The studio on the lending side of the transaction is in the driver's seat. Paramount must send over the script, and if M-G-M doesn't like it the deal is off, unless Paramount consents to change it.

Then there's the time element. If the M-G-M star goes to Paramount on July 1, and his own studio wants him for a picture on August 15, Paramount must guarantee to finish with him at that date. If they don't, which is usually the case, Paramount's production schedule defers to M-G-M's. The star returns to his own studio and the borrower has to jiggle the shooting program to catch the star in odd moments or on a day off between scenes.

Then there's the "billing." And what a problem that can be! The matter of billing has been known to hold up a loan-out for half a year. You may have been wondering where the star himself comes in. Don't worry, he "comes in," all right, and he enters with the billing.

Not so long ago two stars were to appear in a picture together on the Fox lot, the lady on a loan-out from another studio. Both their contracts with their own studios called for star billing, their names to appear "in solo," "above and before the title."

Now these two stars were very good friends. In fact they were romantically attached. But since actors seldom allow friendship to interfere with business, they both held out for top billing. They went right on dining and dancing together, while their respective studios dickered and demanded. In this case the lady won.

Usually, however, this problem is settled by giving both stars equal billing—but lend your ears. Not only does the star on loan get equal billing on the screen, but in "all matters including advertising, exploitation and publicity."

Thus, if the studio who borrows Robert Taylor has agreed to this, and they always do—and then someone sends out an advertising poster which says—"Coming . . . SALLY BROWN in 'HOW'S MY FRENCH' with Robert Taylor"—that studio will have a sizable suit on its hands.

THE studio that loans a star also has a say-so about the director, producer and cast of the picture in which their star is to appear. So does the star.

When all these matters have been amicably settled by the two studios, the star is called in. He reads the script and is told of the various conditions under which he is to be loaned. If he agrees unreservedly, it's a deal.

But the star may throw the screws in the whole business. He may want

Ida Lupino (right) is a valuable property at Paramount because she has spent a year away from the studio on loan-outs—at double her pay. . . . Clark Gable once was loaned to Columbia by M-G-M as a disciplinary measure. For Columbia he starred in "It Happened One Night," with Claudette Colbert, upper left—and won the Academy award!



the script changed even after his own studio has had it revised twice. Carole Lombard once had an entire script rewritten before she would consent to be loaned to Universal. She even picked the writers she wanted to work on it.

When Kay Francis and Claudette Colbert go out on loan they want to okay the proofs of all portrait and publicity stills. Most stars take along their own stand-ins. Carole Lombard wants to take along her pet cameraman from Paramount and Marlene Dietrich wants to take along the girl who does her hair and the woman who puts on her make-up, and the studio that borrows them pays the bills—and is very glad to do it.

Very few contracts allow a star the privilege of turning down a loan-out deal, but if the actor raises a row, and is sincere about it, nine times out of 10 he can get out of it—then the whole thing is off and everyone is right back where they started from.

In the case of "Buccaneer," when Paramount couldn't get Gable from M-G-M, or Errol Flynn from Warners, they signed Fredric March, who is a free lance star.

WHY lend a star? Well, why not? It's a matter of dollars and building personalities. The studio that borrows a star pays the studio that lends her **DOUBLE** her salary—which, considering the lofty figures of stars' salaries, runs to a tidy sum indeed.

Suppose someone should borrow Greta Garbo, whose salary is in the neighborhood of \$11,000 a week. M-

G-M would receive \$22,000 for every week she was off the lot. Of this sum the studio would receive one-half, the star one-half. That is the accepted policy among Hollywood studios, although there is no law governing the sum to be paid a borrowed star.

On the whole, producers as well as stars consider this borrowing and loaning business a healthy arrangement. For example, when Walter Wanger lent Madeleine Carroll to 20th Century-Fox for "Lloyds of London" and "On the Avenue," and later to David Selznick for "Prisoner of Zenda," he knew Miss Carroll would return to him a bigger and better star, with a larger public following and a background of additional experience.

However, producers are not above a little discipline for stars. M-G-M once sent Clark Gable over to Columbia as a "spanky." Clark had been ill and the studio thought he was stalling, so the latter thought to teach him a lesson by farming him out to a smaller studio.

Mr. Gable took himself over to Columbia, in the wake of a rather chilly breeze—and appeared in "It Happened One Night," for which he received the Academy award for the best male performance of the year.

Sometimes you run into a rather surprising scale of values.

Porter Hall and Ida Lupino are two of Paramount's really valuable properties, yet there was a 12-month period when neither of them made a picture on their home lot. They were out on loans all that time—at double their salaries.