



The producers who originally turned down Gable, Shearer, Taylor and Astaire get the jitters thinking of those lost millions.

# MILLION DOLLAR Headaches

HOLLYWOOD'S worst head-

aches can't be cured by a mere box of aspirin.

Bromos may relieve morning-after effects, but when it comes to the super-colossal, million-dollar type of headache suffered by all of Hollywood's producers, they are of no avail.

The headaches I mean are brought on by costly errors in judgment. Look at the producers who passed Clark Gable up before M-G-M nabbed him. Look at the fortune they lost thereby. Those are the million dollar headaches. And it is amazing, considering the number of astute producers in the film city and the neat fortunes they have piled up, how many of these costly pains they have brought upon themselves. Even Sam Goldwyn, considered by some the shrewdest of them all, has made a couple of expensive mistakes that must have sent him to bed groaning more than one night.

PROBABLY Sam's worst headache was brought about by his oversight of that now No. 1 box-office attraction, Robert Taylor. When he was just plain Arlington Brugh back in 1933, he was taken to the Goldwyn studios for a test for the Eddie Cantor picture, "Roman Scandals." Cantor, himself, made the test with Taylor and says it is the only time in his life he had his back to the camera. When Goldwyn saw the test with Arlington doing his stuff in a Roman toga, he shook his head and told the boy, "Go home and put some fat on your legs and then come back."

But Brugh didn't have to worry about his calves because Louis B. Mayer and the late Irving Thalberg saw possibilities in the boy, and signed him to a \$35-a-week contract. Within three years that \$35 was run up to \$3,500, and Goldwyn can figure that he is out a million anyway.

The Warner brothers and Carl Laemmle have had some choice headaches over Clark Gable. Gable was playing in "The Last Mile" on the stage in Los Angeles when a scout from Universal saw him and offered him a test. Laemmle couldn't see him as a screen actor. Later Warner Bros. gave him a test and it is said that when Jack Warner saw it he said, "I'm hiring actors, not ears." However, Gable did appear in one Warner Bros. picture, "Night Nurse" with Barbara Stanwyck.

If he didn't register with Warners he apparently did with Mayer, because M-G-M grabbed him the minute he was through at Warners. As soon as he had punched Norma Shearer on the chin in "A Free Soul" millions of fans were sighing over him.

The M-G-M boys, however, will have to go to the bottom of the class when you consider the case of Fred Astaire. Likewise Paramount. Fred, with Ginger Rogers, rated third in the list of the 10 leading boxoffice stars last year.

Paramount made a test of Fred

★ By Frances Morrin

Astaire several years ago. Written on his card in the Paramount files of actors' names is the following: "Fair screen personality—hair thinning—he also dances." M-G-M used him in one scene in "Dancing Lady" and then let him go. Some time later RKO got his contract.

As for his red-haired dancing partner, Ginger, she is another million-dollar headache shared by the Messrs. Warner. For they had Ginger under contract and didn't renew it. Now Ginger is the fair-haired girl at RKO and is showing her heels to most of the beauties on celluloid as a money maker.

THIS and Gable were not the only expensive blunders made by those clever fellows at Burbank. They once had under the roof of their screen menage that million-dollar boxoffice team, Bill Powell and Myrna Loy. Myrna had played Orientals so long she said she began to feel like one. She was dissatisfied. Warners felt that her screen career was washed up and didn't renew her option. Powell, too, had made a number of mediocre pictures at Warners and was fast losing his ability to pull the nickels and dimes into the boxoffice.

But Louis B. Mayer and the late Irving Thalberg took Powell and Loy under their wings, teamed them in "The Thin Man" and now they are two of the biggest money makers in this celluloid era.

Mayer, though, must have developed a splitting headache when he looked at the boxoffice returns on "Three Smart Girls." M-G-M had Deanna Durbin under contract for six months and all she did there was to make a short. When M-G-M didn't take up her option Charles R. Rogers, executive vice president in charge of production at Universal, was waiting right around the corner. And if she isn't a gold mine, I never saw one.

Even more interesting is the story of Charles Boyer, now sought after as a leading man by some of the biggest stars on the screen. He was a big star in Europe and was brought to Hollywood by M-G-M to play in the French version of "The Big House." Then some one did a very stupid piece of casting. Boyer played a bit, the part of Jean Harlow's chauffeur in "Red Headed Woman." He was so humiliated by this comedown that he left Hollywood and said he never wanted to see it again.

But time and Hollywood money eventually lured him back. Now Boyer is under contract to Walter Wanger and is making big money for himself and his producer.

PARAMOUNT executives believed that Wallace Beery was through a few years ago. M-G-M signed him and it took "Min and Bill" and "The Champ" to make those Paramount bigwigs realize that they had made a plenty expensive blunder. They, too, turned Margaret Sullivan down.

The story is that it was the late Irving Thalberg who let Norma Shearer, later to become his wife, out of Uni-

versal. He offered her a small salary to do a picture there with Reginald Denny and she asked for more money. He fired her. Later when he had moved to M-G-M and she was there playing bits, he was responsible for elevating her to stardom. She eventually came one of M-G-M's biggest money-makers.

Bette Davis, the No. 1 bad girl of the screen, was playing sugary ingenues at Universal a few years ago. She was dismissed. Broken-hearted and feeling that Hollywood held no future for her, she packed her trunks and was ready to go back to New York. Then Warner Bros. called her to make a test for "The Man Who Played God," in which George Arliss was to play the lead. Arliss liked Bette's test and was responsible for her being cast for the picture.

Even then Bette had to be loaned out to RKO to make "Of Human Bondage" before Warner Bros. realized her full possibilities as a dramatic actress. And if you think Warner Bros. don't realize what a juicy boxoffice plum they have in Bette, remember how bitterly they fought to keep her from breaking her contract with them last year. Thus did Universal make a blunder which has lost them shekels galore.

These are some of the most extravagant of the financial headaches suffered by major producers. There are numerous others, not in the million-dollar class but severe enough to cost the men in question more than a few wakeful hours.

TAKE the case of Adolph Zukor's minor brainstorm, for instance. He brought out to Paramount from the East a seventeen-year-old socialite by the name of Carmen Barnes who had written two sizzling novels on boarding school life. Zukor, so they say, planned to star the young lady in a screen play of her own authorship. He launched a huge publicity campaign. Carmen's pictures and stories of her life were plastered over the newspapers of the country. This cost Paramount studios thousands of dollars. But nothing was ever done with the fair Carmen. She never appeared on the screen.

Carl Laemmle footed the bills on several of these minor financial catastrophes at the old Universal. He hired John Murray Anderson, famous scenic designer, to do the sets for "King of Jazz." Then, expecting to do another big musical, he signed Anderson to a year's contract. He stayed at Universal for a year drawing a salary of \$2,500 a week and never made another picture.

Another high priced publicity campaign was launched by Warners a few years ago on a foreign importation, Lil Dagover. She was brought to Hollywood with a great blare of trumpets and columns of huzzas. She made one picture, "The Woman from Monte Carlo," with Walter Huston and that was the last of Lil.

Costly experiments all these. And what conclusions are to be drawn from these super-colossal headaches? Do they prove that the big-wigs of the industry are nitwits? Not at all. But it does prove that making motion pictures is the greatest trial-and-error business in the world; but that, even with mistakes, it's nice work if you can get it.



Headaches: from top, Deanna Durbin, Bette Davis, Lil Dagover, Carmen Barnes.