

HOW TO GIVE A PICTURE-PLAY

By Alexander Black

[Inventor of Picture-Plays, and Author of "A Capital Courtship," "Photography Indoors and Out," etc.]



RECEPTION SCENE FROM "A CAPITAL COURTSHIP"



"PICTURE-PLAY" is a story told in photographic pictures taken from life. It is presented through the medium of the stereopticon, a spoken accompaniment or monologue supplying the elements that cannot be expressed by the pictures. Although a picture-play such as "Miss Jerry" or "A Capital Courtship" calls for elaborate appointments and much outlay, there is no reason why shorter "plays" should not be made by any amateur in photography, even without the aid of a gallery or expensive materials. The use of a gallery for building the indoor scenes may be obviated by telling the story in outdoor scenes, or indoor scenes may be contrived with real interiors by daylight, gaslight or electric light.

Scenes in an actual room should be made with a clear foreground, and from points of view at which the figures will appear in good relief. Artificial light will be useful in cases where the action is supposed to move in the evening, and must fall at an angle suggesting artificial illumination. In a studio I admit the light from the side for daylight scenes and from the top for evening scenes. Outdoor scenes simplify the problem of lighting. Thus a little romance based on a summer experience of a romantic sort makes an excellent theme for a picture-play.

The picture-play being in the first place a story told with pictures, the best story for



FRAGMENT FROM "MISS JERRY"

such use will be one written with the people, the scenes and the action in mind. As there always will be a picture before the eye there must be no element in the story that cannot be expressed in a picture; that cannot be expressed without discordant effect during the continuation of a picture or during the transition from one picture to another.

ALLOW about fifty words for each picture—that is to say, for each change in the grouping of the characters. If the writer of the story (or the adapter of a story already in existence) is making the pictures he should have the pictures in mind from the beginning, and know what may be expressed in the pictures, or what it is worth while trying to express in them. Otherwise there will be frequent need for changes in the text. What the pictures cannot be made to say the text must be made to say—if it need to be said at all.

No camera is too small for use in making a picture-play, but preferably the negative should not be smaller than 3¼x4¼ inches. The effect of action is produced by taking

sets of pictures from one viewpoint, the background, indoors or outdoors, registering perfectly in dissolving on the screen, as is indicated in the series at the end of this page. As one picture is dissolved into the other on the screen the figures seem to move because they have been photographed in a different position each time, while the background in each scene shows no movement as the pictures succeed one another, for the reason that it has been photographed repeatedly from the one viewpoint. Choose backgrounds interesting in themselves, that will photograph effectively and that will throw the figures into some relief. The great difficulty in posing is to get the effect of naturalness under conditions not at all natural. Be content with simple poses. Seek to avoid a conscious look in the sitters—even if you have to turn them with their backs to the camera. Not to exaggerate the figures for screen presentation never have them more than half the height of the plate or film, and endeavor to have a standard height for all figures that are supposed to be in the immediate foreground during the play.

IN MAKING a number of negatives from the one viewpoint keep the camera absolutely stationary during the entire scene. Any object that is supposed to be stationary throughout the scene must not, of course, be disturbed until the set of pictures is completed.

Let us say that the pictures will change three times a minute. Avoid effects of action that will not bear a duration of twenty seconds. Prefer moments just before or just after action. Sacrifice theoretical and impossible "action" for the sake of naturalness. For example, as you would not wish the young man who is introduced to hold the young lady's hand for twenty seconds, say they shook hands, if you wish, and show them immediately after having done so, and should any one possibly kiss any one else consider relationship and all other collateral facts before photographing the situation. There is, however, no reason why there should not be all sorts of amusing or dramatic tableaux at intervals, or at the close of divisions in the story.

Every amateur, and particularly one who has worked with a small camera and a wide-angle lens, knows the dangers of awkward distortion in photographing a group. Generally speaking, the greater the distance from the group to the camera the less the danger of exaggeration in the proportions of figures near the camera and those less near. The reception scene from "A Capital Courtship," which is reproduced on this page, was photographed at a distance of sixty feet. Long range is particularly necessary with a long-focus lens for the reason that the whole scene should be in focus.

UNDER any circumstances, and particularly at close quarters, it is necessary to make the setting and to arrange the figures as nearly as possible on the same plane—that is to say, as nearly as possible at the same distance from the camera. The diagram accompanying the scene from "A Capital Courtship" will show the manner in which I sought to produce the effect of vista while keeping the figures within a plane not more than eight or nine feet deep. The figures were, in fact, in all such groups packed uncomfortably close that those nearest and farthest might actually not be at greatly different distances from the lens. This is necessary with a long-focus lens to insure approximate focus, and with a short-focus lens to avoid distortion. Keep in mind the character who is supposed to be talking and arrange your composition accordingly.

All the pictures—at least those in each scene—should be made to fit precisely the same mat or frame in the lantern slides. The form should be smaller from the top to the bottom than from side to side.

IF THE negatives are small enough the slides may be made by contact in a printing frame. The duplicate backgrounds should register absolutely. Register them from the top and right-hand edges, as slides are inverted in the lantern and "fed" to a register always from one side. If you do not make the slides yourself impress this necessity upon the maker of them. Of course it is essential that the slides be developed so as to give them a uniform quality. Number the slides plainly, and place corresponding numbers, preferably in a distinguishing color, like red, in the manuscript, a duplicate of which is placed in the hands of the person

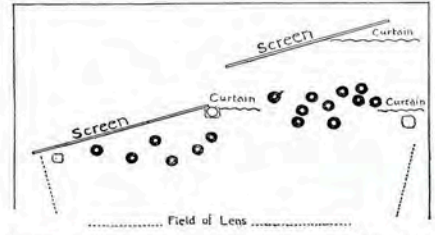


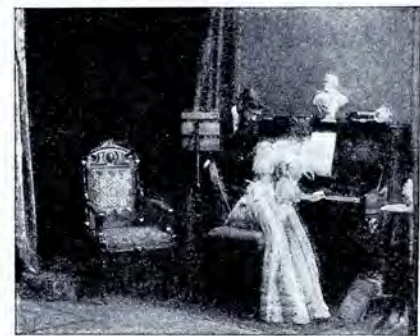
DIAGRAM OF ARRANGEMENT FOR A PICTURE-PLAY

who operates the lantern, or of one delegated to assist him. The operator will then be able to understand at a glance that he must change the picture every time he meets a new number in the manuscript before him.

A dissolving (double) lantern is necessary to produce the picture-play effect, though a single lantern with a quick "winker" may be a useful substitute. In a small room a gas or oil light will suffice. The most brilliant serviceable light is oxyhydrogen—which should not be used save by those who thoroughly understand it, and who are conscious of its danger. The lantern should be firmly placed to avoid the slightest jarring.

IF THE negatives are made on small plates and the photographer makes his own lantern slides the expense of the pictures for a half-hour picture-play need not exceed twelve dollars—six dollars for negatives and six dollars for slides. Slides made by a professional will cost about fifty cents apiece.

A good single lantern suitable for small quarters need not cost over twenty-five dollars. A dissolving (double) lantern will cost from fifty dollars upward. In large cities lantern and operator may be hired.



SCENES FROM "MISS AMERICA"