

# YOUTH, the SPIRIT of the MOVIES

By **David Wark Griffith**



Mischievous Jackie Coogan Is the Most Youthful of Youthful Stars

**I**t is youth that wins war. And it is youth that wins audiences. Often, people inquire why movie stars are small in stature and youthful in appearance. Not all of those that are successful are so little—Constance Talmadge, for instance, is not—yet most of the movie heroines are.

Usually, they are little, and they are young. But why?

The answer is that just as all the world loves a lover, so all the world loves youth—youth with its dreams, youth with its eagerness for romance and adventure!

We all love youth. And, after all, few of us, even after we have passed forty, like plays merely as plays. One cannot easily like a play unless in some way it interprets our own lives for us. We have our families, our business, our professions, and we need diversion from our daily problems—that is why nearly twenty millions of us go to a movie every day. Still, we are always interested in youth. If we are past forty, we look back on our youth and think perhaps of things that might have been. And if we are not quite forty, we like to dream with youth of things that still may be. So, either way, we feel the spell of youth.

The older stage did not need in its plays young actors. Yet it needed youth. But, on the older stage, a woman of forty or more could play the part of youth—



Sarah Bernhardt plays such parts to this day. But before the camera the woman of forty is—the woman of forty. Truly, the camera is a horrible weapon! On the older stage, with deft make-up and lights dimmed a little, one could play the youthful part, but not before the camera. We have seen



Lillian Gish (Insert) and Her Sister Dorothy Are Among the Stars Who Have Won Fame "Because the World Loves Youth"

them try! On the older stage, we have seen a clever imitator act like a boy or girl, talk like a boy or girl, and look like a boy or girl, and still be forty! But no artist has yet been discovered who can at forty imitate youth successfully before the camera, which exaggerates age amazingly.

So we need youth!

We need youth because the most successful screen stars are not harassed by the technique of the older stage and the requirements of the

newer art are very largely different. So a new kind of actor has come to be—the screen actor—just as a new kind of writer is coming to be—the screen-writer. But that isn't all!

It was Victor Hugo, I think, who said you could count on it—a third of



Carol Dempster,  
ing Griffith  
the Producer's

a Young and Charm-  
Star, Demonstrates  
"Youth" Theory

your audience will be women, who want beauty and romance and emotion. Nearer two-thirds of all movie audiences, these days, are women. And women are not jealous of little women!

They are, we are told, less jealous of screen heroines than of heroines on the older stage. But they are not at all jealous of little women on the screen! So one producer told a visitor on the lot who inquired why screen heroines are usually so small.

But the real reason is youth!

We pick the little women because the world loves youth, with all its wistful sweetness.

I have found that if actors do not have sweetness inside them, you cannot get it into a photograph of them. No man on earth can bring out what isn't there. And I say this strictly. I think, in illustration, of little Mae Marsh, whom the critics have compared with Duse, even, and Sarah Bernhardt, and mentioned what one of them described as "a kind of aura before her face." On the screen she is always beautiful, and in life as well. She is a wonderful little girl who isn't strong at all, yet she takes care of her mother and is sending her sisters to school. She supports her family.

An audience loves a sweet and kindly face on the screen as in life. The surest guide in the world to lead us out of our daily troubles is a little star who is sweet and gentle and kind, like youth with all



A "Still" of Mr. Griffith and a Snapshot  
Taken During the Direction of One of His  
Great Pictures

its yearnings and simplicity.

For the new drama has the simplicity of youth—it has done away with bombastic, high-falutin' talk.

It is youth, too, that makes the world smile. We laugh at youth—when we are forty—but we smile with it too. And I think we are apt to over-estimate a laugh. We laugh all the time—a laugh means little to us.

A laugh is a fine thing in an audience, but it is not so good as a smile—a smile, especially, of the kind that binds pathos and humor together. We laugh at slap-stick comedy, but we did not laugh at Joe Jefferson, yet we smiled with him all the time.

In drama, after all, the laugh has its greatest value, probably, as a means of relaxation; but on the screen there are other means, for the whole world is your theater, and relaxation is distinctly a secondary problem.

You can get it in many ways—by accelerating the action, for instance, or by retarding it, by a quick change of close up, perhaps, or green fields, or a baby's hand or foot or winning smile.

But you must have youth—youth with its dreams and sweetness, youth with its romance and adventure! For in the theater, as in our families, we look to youth for beauty and often for example. We sit in the



Constance Talmadge,  
an Exception to the  
Rule That Only  
Little Women  
Express Youth



"Little Mae  
Marsh, whom  
the Critics Have  
Compared with  
Duse"

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twilight of the theater and in terms of youth, upon faces enlarged, we see thoughts that are personal to us, with the privilege of supplying our own words and messages

as they may fit our individual experiences in life.

There we see the truth in silence. Silence, then, becomes more eloquent than all the tongues of men. And the little stars do lead us!



**Mary Pickford for Some Time Has Been Living Evidence That "the Little Stars Do Lead Us!"**

*"How Does the Movie Director Work?" Frank O. Sanborn, motion picture authority and feature writer for this magazine, will take you behind the scenes in a graphically written article in the November issue.*