

Since FILMS Were YOUNG—

—Jack Raymond, popular British director, has been concerned with them. Here is an appreciation of his career

by MAX BREEN

A FEW weeks ago I told you in these pages about one of the "young veterans" of British films—Sinclair Hill, who had just celebrated his twenty-fifth anniversary in films.

And here is one with a couple more years' experience behind him—Jack Raymond; and yet his career began with talkies!

Try to figure that out.

I'm willing to bet that unless you're a very keen follower of directors, this name will be unfamiliar to you, for Jack is one of the most retiring of men, who shies away from publicity like a restive horse; but if you only knew it, your screen entertainment is very largely bound up in the career of this quiet, matter-of-fact man, whose name is regarded with respect by everyone in the industry.

It took me a matter of three weeks to nail him down to an interview; he was very courteous about it, very willing to cooperate in any way he could . . . but it most curiously happened that whenever I was down at the studio he was seeing rushes, or in the cutting-room, or in the laboratory, or in conference. . . .

And when at last I pinned him, he said, "I don't know what there is to interest anyone in my life."

Well, judge for yourselves. When Jack Raymond first contacted films, one of the most important production-centres in the world was a little brick building down at Walton-on-Thames, where the Hepworth Stock Company operated.

That was in 1910, when Alma Taylor, Chrissie White, Stuart Rome, Henry Edwards, Lionelle Howard, and Violet Hopson were the reigning stars of the day; so one might almost say that the history of Jack Raymond is also the history of British film production.

It happened that Wilson Barrett, the famous actor—grandfather of the present actor of that name—was a great friend of Jack Raymond's father; and he pulled strings at Walton (where he had a friend named Frank Wilson, a director) to get young Jack a job in front of the cameras.

So simple—but it certainly started something.

Just in case you've been puzzling over my remark about talkies, let me put you out of your misery by explaining that in these days Vivaphone was all the rage—with the "i" long, as in "arrive."

Until the photo-electric cell was applied to films, this was the closest approximation to perfect sound film; it consisted of a gramophone which was synchronised (more or less!) with the movements of the actors on the screen. A needle on a tiny dial showed the operator whether to speed-up or slow-down the record. It had rather a curious effect; I remember the thing quite well, and its numerous imitators, including the clumsily-named Chronomegaphone; occasionally the record lost a little ground at the

beginning of the film (which only ran for four or five minutes, anyway), and the operator would speed up the record so that it gained appreciably; the great thing was apparently to ensure their both finishing together, even if it took the whole film for the sound to catch up.

Jack Raymond's first contact with this fearsome business was as a mere member of the "crowd"; but before long he was promoted to a much more important role.

The procedure was to buy gramophone records of songs by the favourite music-hall artistes of the day—George Robey, Harry Lauder (not yet titled), Whit Cunliffe, and so on—and an actor in the studio would play them over and over until he had memorised not only the words but the timing, including even any imperfection in the record (it was not uncommon in those days for gramophone records to suffer from hiccoughs).

Then the actor would be photographed by the ordinary movie-camera, singing the song with appropriate gestures; he didn't have to be able to sing—it was George Robey's or Harry Lauder's voice (or something like it) which the audience heard when film and gramophone were started off together in the cinema.

As movie-cameras in those days were hand-cranked, that added another complication to the business of film-making; the cranking was pretty regular, but the human element was bound to creep in, when the operator became excited or tired.

Jack Raymond was the actor seen on the screen, singing in the voices of a dozen different stars of the day.

Vivaphone was so popular that a couple of Hepworth engineers were sent to New York to demonstrate it there; in fact, between 1910 and 1914 the bulk of the British studios' revenue came from the United States.

What a different tale to-day!

Jack's first story film was *A Detective for a Day*, which ran to 350 feet (about 3½ minutes) and "stood 'em up" wherever it was shown; in fact, until 1914 he appeared in pretty nearly every film made in those parts, in every capacity from "extra" to hero.

His next venue was the Cricks and Martin studio at Wimbledon, and he also played at the old Barker studio at Ealing Green, almost adjoining the present A.T.P. studios.

When he went to Twickenham it was known as the Alliance Studio, and a plain board floor protected the expensive maple-wood floor, laid for the building's original purpose of roller-skating rink.

There Fred Paul was directing the Jeffrey Farnol story *The Money Moon*, and he offered young Raymond the job of assisting him; and that was almost the end of Jack Raymond, actor, and the beginning of Jack Raymond, director.

He worked with Paul for two years—on *The Lights of Home*, among others—and then Jack directed, on his own, a long series of Grand Guignol short films—about 30 or 40 of them—at Clapham.

He was an assistant at Shepherds Bush when films were made by daylight under the famous glass roof—and what a furnace that place could



Jack Raymond, whose screen career began with talkies—twenty-seven years ago!

be on a sunny day! Then he directed a couple of shorts there, and that was the end of his apprenticeship.

He directed *Somehow Good* for Pathe, and *Second to None*, a stirring martial "meller," for Dinah Shurey Productions, before starting his long association with British and Dominions.

You've seen a number of his films, if you see British films at all. *Splinters* was his first talkie, and he followed that up with *Up for the Cup*, *The Speckled Band*, *Mischief*, *Say It With Music*, *Night of the Garter*, *Sorrell and Son* (a particularly fine effort), *Girls Please*, *King of Paris*, *Where's George*, *Come Out of the Pantry*, *When Knights Were Bold*, and many others.

For a while he left the director's chair to become production supervisor, but he gravitated back to direction, and recently made the Gordon Harker film *The Frog* for Herbert Wilcox.

His latest is *The Rat*, starring Ruth Chatterton and Anton Walbrook.

As you can see by the above list, he has directed all the most successful Sydney Howard films, and in addition has handled such famous players as Sir Cedric Hardwicke, Jack Buchanan, Ralph Lynn, Fay Compton, H. B. Warner, and a host of others.

Jack's meat and drink is films; he is also reported to dream about them at night; and having seen British films (during and after the War) sink to an almost imperceptible level, he is still filled with surprise that they should now mean anything at all.

It is thanks largely to Jack Raymond and his kind that they do.

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