

THE MAN WHO "CUTS" the STARS

MEET Harold Young, the American film editor who wields the scissors for Alexander Korda. In an interview with Beatrix Moore he reveals the secrets of the cutting room.



One of Merle Oberon's scenes in "Don Juan" was made perfect by cutting



A scene from "The Scarlet Pimpernel" with Leslie Howard and Nigel Bruce. A selection of this description selected by the editor

WALKING into a British film studio to-day is an almost uncanny experience. You have to persuade yourself at times that you are not on a Hollywood lot. For you will, as likely as not, find some of Hollywood's best-known figures at work—acting, writing, directing, photographing, or designing.

In the London Film Company's studios the other day, for instance, I ran across Alexander Korda's latest importation in the person of Harold Young, film editor of some of California's most famous pictures and now a member of the well-known Korda "team."

Here I must ashamedly confess that up to that moment I had only the haziest idea of the functions of such persons as "film editors."

A film editor, however, ranks officially as the third most important person in the process of film making.

Unofficially, he is almost the "all highest" of the studio. On the word of advice from his mouth and the knife of his cutting machine hangs literally the whole fate—the success or failure—of the picture.

Mr. Harold Young, at the moment I was lucky enough to catch him, was enjoying a temporary lull in work, as production had hardly begun on the first sequences of *The Scarlet Pimpernel*. How hard that work is, and the real estimate of its importance, can perhaps be realised when I say that a film editor is responsible for dealing in the normal way with 40,000 feet of film, out of which an average of only about 8,000 feet will be finally used for a normal feature.

This means that about 32,000 feet of celluloid has to be scrapped, and on the film editor's shoulders rests the responsibility of selection and composition.

"Film editing is an excellent training for film directing," said Mr. Young modestly. (After I had learnt some of the inner workings of his job, I felt that the director's work was child's play in comparison.) "Indeed, in America I have already directed several pictures, and I hope, before

long, to launch permanently into directorship."

In the cause of British pictures I hope Mr. Young's ambition will soon materialise, for he has novel and progressive ideas on film production, and his experience of the methods in both Hollywood and England should prove invaluable.

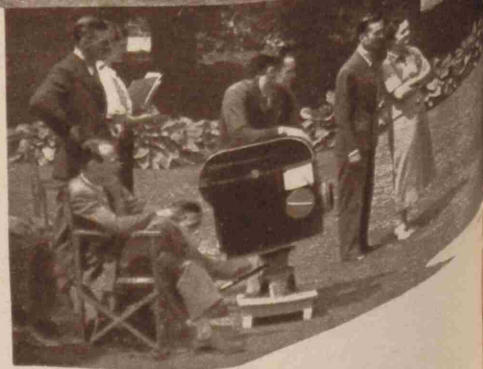
"The film editor must stay on the set all day with the director," said Mr. Young, "in an advisory capacity, to discuss the smoothest and most artistic continuity of sequences. But the real work begins at the end of the day when we see the 'rushes' in the studio kinema, and review the day's work on the screen.

Consider for a minute some of our difficulties. Perhaps one of the performers scheduled to be on the set is suddenly called away to another engagement and, in consequence, Scene 8 must be shot instead of Scene 1. Even this scene is not necessarily shot in its right sequence; owing to various causes, it may be taken in odd bits.

"For example, all the 'key shots' may be shot first or all the 'mediums.' The result at the end of the day is, as can be imagined, a kind of scenic cross-word puzzle, which the editor and his assistants must piece together.

"We are given almost unlimited freedom, and we try as far as possible to avoid making set rules, because what can be applied successfully to one kind of production is not necessarily the right treatment for another, and real art should always be 'elastic'!

"There are a hundred details to consider in the arrangement. Whether, for example, a dramatic



close-up is seen to advantage after a particular long shot preceding it. Whether there are too many 'medium' shots in succession. Whether one section has stolen all the action, and so on. For all this, the film editor is responsible.

"We are even allowed to alter the dialogue. Sometimes on seeing the 'rushes' we find that one of the 'plum' lines of dialogue is no longer necessary, because the action has, after all, explained it; and there is nothing more boring to an audience, and therefore more fatal to the picture, than carrying unnecessary 'dead wood.'