

S.M.P.E. PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Roscoe, New York, October 5, 1925

IT IS with a feeling of genuine pleasure that I come before you once more to say a few words in opening our annual autumn convention. This, I believe, is the twenty-first regular meeting of the Society, and since it is our custom to meet twice each year, it follows that we are just entering the eleventh year of our existence. We are therefore a relatively young organization, and I feel that we should all be very proud of the great progress which has been made in this relatively short period of time.

In this swiftly moving twentieth century, most of us as individuals lead lives that are filled full to overflowing with work and play. We are swept onward by a rapidly moving tide of events with little opportunity to consider whence we have come and whither we are going. While in general it is futile to look backward into the past or to attempt to speculate on what the future may hold, it is desirable sometimes to pause a little and to consider how far we have come and to plan the course to be followed in the future.

Our life as an organization is similar to that of the individual. The motion picture industry has grown so rapidly, inventions and improvements have come so thick and fast, that we as a society have been completely occupied in our attempt to keep up with the procession and we have had little time to deliberately consider the progress we have been making. We have been busy with the details of our daily society life, planning for meetings, getting the papers program ready, publishing the *TRANSACTIONS*, collecting dues, hunting for new members, and all such things necessary to the welfare of our organization. It may be worth while, therefore, to pause a little and consider our present position. Perhaps we might ask ourselves such questions as these: Are we proceeding in the right direction? How much of what we set out to do has been accomplished? What remains to be done? Has our growth been as great as could be expected? In what directions lie the most fruitful fields for future work?

Before attempting to answer these questions, let us refresh our memories as to the purpose for which the Society was organized. In the words of the framers of our constitution the object of our

existence is "Advancement in the theory and practice of motion picture engineering and the allied arts and sciences, standardization of the mechanisms and practices employed therein, and the maintenance of a high professional standing among its members." Just how can we as a society contribute to the "advancement in the theory and practice of motion picture engineering?" Obviously, with our present financial resources we cannot hope to maintain a research laboratory; nor can we operate studios, laboratories, exchanges, or theatres, or in fact any of the actual units which compose the industry. Our influence must, therefore, be more or less indirect. We must encourage, stimulate, and assist the individuals and corporations actually engaged in the production, distribution, and exhibition of motion pictures.

This we accomplish largely by means of our semi-annual meetings at which papers dealing with theoretical and practical subjects of interest to many phases of the industry are read. These papers are published in the *TRANSACTIONS* and hence reach many who cannot attend our meetings. In this way knowledge is disseminated, and a permanent reference library is being built up. The discussion of the papers are of no little value. They stimulate thought and frequently result in the birth of new ideas which later are developed and applied. The very fact that our papers committee has to work so hard to get papers for our programs proves that the work is valuable; for, if some individuals were not thus coaxed, cajoled, or bullied into writing papers, much highly specialized and valuable knowledge would never become available for the use of others. Frequently the individual does not realize that his knowledge is of great value to others. He becomes so familiar with the details of his own work that he does not realize its highly specialized character and that a knowledge of it might be of great interest and help to others working along the same lines. A very forceful illustration of this state of affairs came to my notice recently. It happened that I had the pleasure of visiting a large producing plant and of being shown many interesting things. A member of this organization, and one actively engaged in the production of motion pictures, had explained and demonstrated how a particular thing is accomplished which to me was of great interest and on which I am sure it would be impossible to find any adequate information anywhere in the literature. On being asked why he did not write a paper for the S. M. P. E. describing this procedure, he replied that he did not suppose it would be of interest to anyone.

It appears that there was no objection whatever to the publication of the information, but he simply had not realized that it was of any value to anyone else. After considerable urging he agreed to prepare a paper for us on the subject which will probably be given at our next meeting. This exactly illustrates how valuable our activities may be in making available technical information. It also illustrates the difficulties with which our papers committee is confronted. There is no doubt that ample material is available for our programs. The question is how to find it, and to persuade busy men to prepare the material for publication. This illustrates also how difficult it is for a single individual, without the assistance of an active committee and other members of the society, to obtain the technical papers required for a well balanced program. No one person can be in intimate touch with all of the diverse phases of the motion picture industry, and it is only by the co-operation of several individuals that the best results can be obtained.

In any large and growing industry standardization is of utmost importance. We have been very active in advocating standardization and in establishing standards for mechanism and practice. Much remains to be done, however, and I feel this is one of the activities of utmost importance, one which should be given a great deal of attention during the coming years. Efforts towards standardization in our own country have been fairly successful, but in an industry of such world-wide distribution national standardization is not sufficient. We must have international standards. We are in continuous communication with the English, French, and German motion picture groups, and a start towards international standards was made at the Sixth International Congress of Photography held in Paris last July. Some action was taken the details of which will doubtless be set before you by Mr. Porter, the chairman of our Standards Committee.

A permanent commission in America is to be formed to take care of arrangements for the Seventh International Congress which will probably be held in 1930. Dr. C. E. K. Mees, one of our own members, will probably be the permanent chairman of this commission, and we as a Society have been asked to appoint one or two other representatives to serve on this commission. A definite logical program for standardization should be prepared for presentation at the next international congress, and it is not too soon to start active preparation of this. This is a matter which should be kept constantly in mind.

Thus far our efforts towards standardization have been concerned chiefly with mechanisms and film dimensions. This work needs to be greatly extended and broadened. Conditions under which motion pictures are projected are, at the present time, very diverse and in many cases unfavorable. There seems to be little doubt that great improvement can be achieved in this direction. The question of standardizing positive film density, screen brightness, reflection characteristics of screen surfaces, etc., has been discussed at various times in our sessions. Apparently there are many difficulties to be encountered in any such program. However, there is no reason to believe that these difficulties are insurmountable. We must admit, however, that the problem is a very complicated one. Many factors including not only purely objective quantities measurable by precise physical methods, but also some of a subjective nature involving laws of physiological and psychological optics must be considered. I do feel, however, that the matter should be given careful consideration, and while it may be impossible to establish rigid standards, I do believe that the average quality of the projected picture can be greatly improved by the recommendation of ideal values with fairly wide tolerance limits.

The question of membership growth is one that deserves serious attention. In 1922 we had a total membership of 180, while at the close of 1924 this had increased to 210. During the two years between the dates mentioned, a much larger number of new members were obtained, but the resignations occurring during that time kept the actual increase down to 30. The rate of growth of membership during the past two years is therefore much less than during the two or three years preceding 1922. The reason for this falling off in the rate of growth is not entirely self-evident. Is it a lack of activities on our part in going out after new members? Is it due to the fact that we have already drawn into the organization practically all of those available? Probably the answer is that it is due somewhat to each of these causes. While the motion picture industry on the whole seems to be enjoying a healthy growth, there is no doubt that it is tending to reach a condition of equilibrium and it is possible that the number of individuals connected with the industry who are eligible to membership in our society is not increasing to any great extent. I feel that if we are to add materially to our membership we must do something to interest those in somewhat different fields of motion picture work than those to which most of us at present belong. I sometimes feel

that the very name of our society, including as it does the word "engineers," discourages from joining a great many men who really should be members and who would both benefit by association with us and bring valuable contributions to the organization. We have not been able apparently to interest sufficiently men in the production and exhibition branches of the industry. There is little doubt that many people working in these fields should be drawn into the organization. I feel, therefore, that it is only by broadening the scope of our activities that we can hope to obtain an appreciable increase in membership. The future activities of the society, therefore, should be planned to go ahead not only with the type of work which we have been carrying on in the past but to branch out into other phases of the industry to which in the past we have given too little attention.

This brings us face to face with the future. Along what lines should we attempt to extend our activities? Of course, I can only express my own opinion, and I do not feel that I am especially qualified to make authoritative statements on this subject. However, I have given the matter considerable thought and perhaps a few suggestions, even though they be tempered by personal viewpoint, may be of value to those who in the future are to be responsible for our activities. Undoubtedly we may expect a certain increase in the number of motion picture theatres and a great improvement in the average quality of these theatres. There is much valuable work that can be done in improving the production and exhibition of theatrical films. The question of architectural design of the theatre is one which I think should be given particular attention. In only a few cases have motion picture theatres been built according to the best possible design for the exhibition of motion pictures. I believe that this society, by the use of judicious propaganda could have a profound influence toward the betterment of conditions, and this is one of the things on which I hope the Society will concentrate in the future.

It is, however, in the non-theatrical field that I believe the greatest future development will occur. The recent introduction of amateur motion picture photography has opened a tremendous field for the application of motion pictures. I see no reason why we should not be as much or more concerned with this field than with the theatrical.

The application of motion pictures to educational work is also just in its infancy. Here again our organization ought to find a fertile field for its endeavors. There is little doubt that certain subjects

can be taught more efficiently by visual methods than by any other. There is much work to be done, however, in determining the best methods of using this new teaching device and how to make films particularly adapted to teaching purposes. Already the motion picture is being used in many of our best schools and universities for showing to entire classes things which in the past could be shown only to individuals and even then under rather unfavorable conditions. Motion pictures are being applied in almost every field of scientific research, and the possibilities, it seems, are practically unlimited.

The use of the motion picture in advertising may also develop to great proportions. There seems to be little doubt that salesmen equipped with properly made films and projectors can appeal to their customers much more efficiently and persuasively than by any other method. This is another phase of development in which we should be vitally interested and which we should encourage.

I have already suggested the desirability of broadening our field of activities. This, I feel, is so important that I wish to return to it again and pay particular emphasis to the need for such action. The majority of the membership of this Society consists of individuals who are interested largely in the technical scientific problems of the industry. Very few of us have any extensive knowledge of many of the problems involved in the making of a finished feature film. Nevertheless, we should be interested in these problems, and those who are particularly concerned with them should be interested in our part of the work. A better understanding and co-operation between all of those who contribute to the production of the film will undoubtedly be of benefit. Anything that will produce a closer co-operation between the producer, director, art director, lighting engineer, laboratory man, camera man, projectionist, distributor, and all those who at some point contribute to the production of a picture will react to the ultimate benefit of the industry and hence to the ultimate benefit of every individual connected therewith. We should be interested not only in the production of pictures which are better technically (that is from the standpoint of photographic and mechanical quality) but also from the standpoint of literary, dramatic, and moral character. The fact that we are not intimately concerned with the literary and dramatic material does not mean that we should be indifferent to its quality. I have heard the opinion expressed in a discussion relative to the quality of motion picture productions that the literary merit of the average motion picture is greater than that

of the average novelistic literature being produced at the present time. The propounder of this statement, therefore, argues that the quality of the motion picture is all that could be expected under these conditions. It seems to me this argument is not sound, for the modern motion picture need not depend on modern literature entirely for its subject matter when the best of literary efforts for the past several hundred years may be utilized. You may feel that it is entirely beyond our province to concern ourselves with subject matter, but I point out again that the statement of the object of our organization as found in our constitution is that we are supposed to contribute to the advancement not only of the theory and practice of motion picture engineering, but also to the allied *arts* and sciences.

I feel that my remarks have been somewhat disconnected and that I am taking up entirely too much of your valuable time, and, while there is much more that could be said on this very interesting subject, I shall not pursue the argument further, but hope that what I have said may stimulate others of you to think along similar lines.

In this, my valedictory as your chief executive, I should show myself ungrateful indeed if I did not take the opportunity to express my thanks to those who have so ably assisted me during my administration. It has been a keen pleasure to do my part in conducting the affairs of the organization, and I can truthfully say that I have been loyally supported by every individual member. For this support and loyalty I render my best thanks. To the officers also I owe a great debt of gratitude for the way in which they have each discharged their duties. In no other organization with which I have been connected have I found such universal willingness on the part of the members to work for the society. If the two years of my incumbency of this office have been successful, it is due entirely to the loyal support of officers and members. It would be impossible to thank adequately all those who have assisted me. I do, however, wish to take this opportunity to express my thanks particularly to one or two who have, it seems to me, given most generously of their time and efforts. As you know, Mr. J. C. Kroesen has been chairman of the Publicity Committee for some time. He has given to this work many, many hours of his own time, and he has always been willing to take on even heavier burdens. I doubt if the Society has any conception of the amount of work involved in carrying on the activities of even so small an organization as ours. And to Mr. Kroesen I express my sincere

appreciation. The chairman of our Publication Committee also has a very difficult task, a task, in fact, which could be very materially lightened by a little more work and thought on the part of the contributors to our TRANSACTIONS. To Mr. Little for his careful and efficient labors in connection with the publication of our TRANSACTIONS, I also tender my most hearty thanks. The other committees have also worked diligently and to them I express my appreciation.