

Three Film Stars Get \$1,000,000 a Year Each

Motion Picture Business, at Pinnacle of Success, Sees No Sign of Waning Popularity—Tax Talk Stops Boasting of Profits

HE who runs and reads may have observed that the movie actors' salary contest which raged in the newspapers a year or more ago has been missing of late. New contracts have been made and new companies organized, and while there has been no diminution, in the size of salaries, no press-agent blurb about the millions paid to the World's Greatest Comedian or the Queen of the Movies has made the welkin ring.

This unwonted silence on the part of the movie makers who so recently were crying from the skyscraper tops the affluence that could pay such enormous salaries was due to a sudden and rude realization that their boasts were impressing the legislators who levy taxes, as well as the picture "fans" to whom the figures were addressed. The reaction came in the form of investigations held in various States, one of them in New York last Winter, to determine whether an industry that could afford to pay Charlie Chaplin \$670,000 a year might not be capable of paying a special tax. Now a war tax that promises to devour large slices of great incomes is impending, and between the threat of it and the probings of the State tax commissions the proverbial camel would pass through the needle's eye more quickly than boastful figures through the lips of a movie magnate.

No inference is intended that an evasion of any tax is contemplated by star or producer; these new money barons have merely adopted the policy of more experienced financiers that even silence is golden when the taxmakers are at work. Having assimilated this axiom the industry has adopted an unwritten rule that salaries of six figures must be discussed exclusively with the recipients and then only in the softest words. Thus has the chief joy of the press agent—the computing of approximate salaries—and of the gentle reader—the estimating of the true figures—been removed. Consider the mental anguish of the publicity man of the new Goldwyn Pictures Corporation when he had to announce the engagement by his company of Maxine Elliott and Mary Garden, or of the feelings of the young man who is paid to get Douglas Fairbanks's name in the paper when that star recently organized his own company without one audible gloat over his Gargantuan income.

The reader who has been staggered by the size of the reputed earnings of many movie stars has doubtless wondered how nearly they approximated the truth. In the following attempt to satisfy that curiosity it must always be borne in mind that the figures given are not authentic, since with the rigid self-enforced censorship of the producers it is more difficult to arrive at facts, but they may be accepted as substantially correct. Generally speaking it may be said that while the figures of the press agents were exaggerated they were not enlarged in greater ratio than are all figures, which, as every one who has watched the estimated value of estates dwindle or has observed the divergence in printed estimates of the size of crowds knows, have a way of compounding themselves at a constantly increasing rate of acceleration. Staggering sums are paid the most popular actors and actresses in the movies when all allowances for the exuberance of press agents and figures have been made.

About a year ago Charlie Chaplin, who had become the premier screen comedian, springing from the obscurity of an inconspicuous rôle in an English music hall pantomimic act to worldwide popularity as a movie clown, ended his contract with Essanay, the company that developed him, and came East to sell his services to the highest bidder. His popularity was attested by the crowds that clamored for admission whenever and wherever one of his films was exhibited and by unhygienic hosts of youthful imitators in every vacant lot and alley. Immediately there was a scramble for his services, in which practically every big producing

company participated. One company even sent one of its officers across the continent to accompany the actor to New York, and after his arrival he was kept a virtual captive for days while this concern's representatives labored with him.

Finally, after days of bidding, it was announced that the Mutual Film Corporation had signed a contract with the comedian, he to receive \$10,000 a week for a year for his services, with a cash bonus of \$150,000 for signing the contract; and a world gasped that a funny walk and a funny kick could earn so much. Mr. Chaplin was photographed accepting the bonus, smiling and looking east toward the Metropolitan Tower, and thanking President John R. Freuler with his hand on his new employer's shoulder as he gazed south. Then he boarded a special train and went west to begin earning his new salary.

The only ones who didn't gasp were the men who hired Chaplin, for they felt certain they would come out ahead.

Douglas Fairbanks. When the Triangle Film Corporation began its career with a blare of trumpets Mr. Fairbanks, an agreeable young actor unknown to the movies, was engaged for a term of years at a gradually increasing salary that averaged perhaps \$2,000 a week. He achieved a great vogue upon the exhibition of his first picture, "The Lamb," and as his popularity grew so did his dissatisfaction, until he finally got a legal release from his contract and organized his own company. Under the new arrangement, which is practically the same as Miss Pickford's, it is reported that Mr. Fairbanks will receive a guarantee of \$520,000 a year and a share of the profits that should bring the figure up to \$1,000,000.

These form the Big Three of the movies, but they are by no means the sole recipients of huge stipends. Ever since the movies have been an important

ures and whose annual income requires six to state. Anita Stewart's salary is estimated at \$2,000 a week, and Norma Talmadge, one of the younger group of stars, is credited with earning \$1,000 a week and a part of the profits. Clara Kimball Young was one of the first film actresses to form her own company, and it is asserted that her gross income from her pictures is between \$250,000 and \$325,000 a year. Roscoe ("Fatty") Arbuckle, Mabel Normand, Mae Marsh, and Olga Petrova are other stars the demands for whose films have won them substantial salaries.

Theda Bara is one of the sphinxes of the industry and nothing authentic can be stated about her salary, but it is rumored to be out of all proportion to her value as a star. The career of Miss Bara, the first and most famous of the vampires of the screen, has been spectacular. She leaped into fame with her first picture, an adaptation of Kipling's poem about the fool who made his prayer to "a rag, a bone, and a hank of hair," and ever since her pictures have been best sellers. That first picture, "A Fool There Was," has the enviable reputation of being the only picture of its length to have earned a profit of \$1,000,000.

These salaries of players who devote a part or all of their time to acting for the movies are pretty generally based on mathematical calculations; the fact that they get the money may be accepted as proof that they earn it, for the movie promoter is as shrewd a bargainer as any other man. It is the ubiquitousness of the movie that makes it the financial marvel it is, the possibility of the shadow of one person appearing in thousands of different places at one time. One hundred and fifty-five prints of Mr. Chaplin's films are distributed and shown synchronously and about eighty of Miss Pickford's. These prints work for indefinite periods until they wear out and are renewed, so that by the end of a year there are hundreds of films in circulation. Miss Bara's "A Fool There Was" is still a big seller, and some of Miss Pickford's early pictures enjoy a wide circulation today.

Film rentals are determined by two factors—the age of the film and the size of the theatre and community. Naturally, Miss Pickford's first picture, which has been seen by millions, would not be as valuable as her latest, nor could the manager of the Bijou Dream in Emporia, Kan., a town of 10,000 inhabitants, be expected to pay as much for the privilege of exhibiting it as the proprietor of the Strand, New York. The Strand and the Rialto have each paid as high as \$3,500 for a week's rental of a film, and the prices scale down from this to a few dollars.

It is estimated that there are 15,000 theatres in the United States, exclusive of vaudeville and other theatres in which pictures are shown as a part of a program, devoted to movies. There have been as many as 17,000 at one time, but the tendency the last few years has been toward fewer and larger theatres. The daily attendance in these theatres is variously estimated from 12,000,000 to 17,000,000 persons. Perhaps 15,000,000 would be a fair estimate. Sometimes attendance falls off in one section, due to local causes, as it did in New York last Summer during the infantile paralysis epidemic, but these losses are quite as often offset by gains in attendance in other places. The general consensus of opinion among trade authorities seems to be that while the movies may have reached the zenith of their popularity they have not passed it. They are at least holding their own, and students of the industry believe they will continue to do so as long as the standard of excellence is increased. The standard has risen steadily, as the constant fan knows. On the other hand, it is pointed out, the movie public can never be much greater except as the world's population increases, because the world and his wife now go to see the pictures.



Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford, and Charlie Chaplin, (from Left to Right,) the World's Three Most Popular Movie Stars, Whose Combined Earning Capacity Is Estimated at \$3,000,000 a Year. Picture Was Taken in California

There was nothing philanthropic about their offer; on the contrary, it was based on calculations which allowed them a handsome return for their investment and daring. It is generally accepted in film circles that Mr. Chaplin's Mutual contract did call for a \$10,000 weekly salary, with perhaps a percentage in the profits that would aggregate the amount of the alleged bonus, so that if this theory is true there was little discrepancy between the claim and the fact. As Mr. Freuler subsequently explained, the transaction was based on figures available from Mr. Chaplin's past record. The demand for his films was known and the possible revenue, granted that there was no appreciable diminution in his popularity, from the rental of eight new films could be computed.

The luck of Mr. Chaplin and the wide publicity it received cost the producers a lot of money which was diverted into the pockets of the players. Shortly after the announcement of Mr. Chaplin's coup Miss Pickford began to show signs of unrest. After her brief return to the speaking stage in David Belasco's production of "The Good Little Devil" Miss Pickford established herself as a great favorite in the photoplays in which the Famous Players Company starred her. She became, in fact, the most popular screen actress, and when her old contract finally expired she made a new arrangement, which is said to net her a yearly guarantee of \$520,000 and a percentage of the profits from her pictures that probably swells her earnings to the million mark.

Much the same thing happened to

amusement factor the producers have pursued George M. Cohan, and he has as persistently fled until recently, when he surrendered. The bid that brought about his capitulation was from the Arcraft Film Corporation, the same company that controls the Pickford and Fairbanks pictures, and is alleged to have been a guarantee of \$100,000 each for three pictures with a share of the profits on top of that. As it takes about six weeks to make a photoplay of this type, if this report is true Mr. Cohan will receive at least \$300,000 for eighteen weeks' work.

Arcraft recently signed Elsie Ferguson under a two years' contract which is said to guarantee her forty weeks' work each year at \$6,000 a week, and it is understood that if she cares to continue without rest she may do so at the same salary. If she should so elect, one does not need pencil and paper to figure that in two years Miss Ferguson can earn \$624,000.

It is said that Geraldine Farrar receives \$6,000 a week from the Jesse Lasky Company whenever she goes to California to pose before the camera, and even a Metropolitan Opera prima donna could not afford to overlook a little matter of \$60,000 picked up in vacation time. Billie Burke is known to have received \$50,000 for her first picture, and, while succeeding pictures without the element of novelty probably did not bring her so large a reward, she is still among the first twenty.

Marguerite Clark is another favorite whose weekly guarantee is in four fig-