Mary Fuller

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The Bernhart of the Moving Picture
The Story of Mary Fuller, the Well Known Heroine in
"What Happened to Mary" and Many Other Popular Film Plays

Mary Fuller's place among the artists of the screen is that of Sarah Bernhardt's in the spoken drama. Miss Fuller is the "Queen of the Screen." She isn't as great an actress as Bernhardt, but she is young yet. The great French tragedienne is old enough to be her grandmother.

In the three years that Miss Fuller has been with the "movies" she has created and acted more parts than the divine Sarah has in all her long career on the stage. Through the films' multiplication of her personality on the screens she plays in a single night to a larger audience that Mme. Bernhardt does on a whole tour.

Miss Fuller is a versatile and finished actress. Also, she is a dreamer, a scholar and an idealist. She has an incredible capacity for hard work and an ambition that is boundless. Many of the plays she acts in she writes herself.

"There are a great many uninteresting pictures on the market to-day," she says. "This is due to several reasons. One of these is, perhaps, a censorship that is too strict, too narrow. Another is a lack of perception in the choosing of scenarios and in their production. This is due to haste, to the ever-present pressure of time. Staging and producing a scenario, as a rule, is as much hurried as getting out a daily newspaper. It has to be. The demand of the public for "something new" is incessant. Therefore, the output of pictures is a matter of quantity. It is a question of so many miles of film each week. Whether the scenery and action shall be of the best along every foot of the way is something that no one has time to consider carefully.

"But a great improvement in all these things is coming. It is near at hand. The real pictures of to-morrow will be feature subjects. They will be in many reels, as some of them already are, constituting a whole evening's entertainment. They will be perfect as to photography, acting and mounting. But most of all, they will each have a story that is strong, well knit and vital to everyone. They will tell things that will touch the souls of the multitude that sees them.

Miss Fuller's Aims

"I hope to help make such pictures and to put on the screen some big, fine character studies that will live in the minds and hearts of the audience. By such things as these I may inspire those who see me, give them a lift over some hard bit of the rugged road. But even if I do not inspire my audiences I shall feel that I have succeeded if I bring them happiness. If I can accomplish both – give the people hope as well as joy – I shall be satisfied and feel that my own life is being well lived."

Viewed as mere words, Miss Fuller's aspirations are not much different from those of any other actress who loves her work and lives for it. But Miss Fuller is in earnest. Behind these ambitious hopes are several years of notable achievement, first on the legitimate stage and later in the "movies."

Even when Miss Fuller was a very young girl her consuming ambition was to be an actress. She never had been in a theater, probably she didn't know there was such a thing, but she lived in a land of make-believe romances that she evolved in her childish brain. As soon as a child begins to think it begins to "pretend." Some children never outgrow this. All their lives they move in a realm of fancy where the real things are those they imagine and the practical things are the dreams. Such children, in some cases, become eminent in art or literature, or the stage. Most of them, however, fail utterly.

Those that succeed have the spur of a restless, relentless ambition to drive them forward. Miss Fuller is one of these.

An Imaginative Child

"When I was a very little girl," she says, "I used to make dolls out of handkerchiefs, put them in grape baskets and drag them about. In my eyes these rather grimy, shapeless doll people were real beings. I loved fairy tales. I never tired of listening to stories. When I could find no one to tell me stories, I made them up myself. Therefore, my handkerchief dolls were princesses, giants, dwarfs, kings, queens, anything and everything. Almost from moment to moment they changed in character. They played more new parts than I ever expect to. The grape baskets in which they scraped over the ground were royal coaches, railway trains and I don't know what else.

"In those mud-pie days I began acting. I got the other little girls, and boys with whom I played to 'pretend' also. Those who didn't have what I considered adequate ability I placed in the audience and charged them two pins each. I made up each 'play' on the spur of the moment. I have seen some motion-picture plays that were scarcely less improbable than those productions of my childish imagination.

"After I grew up and finished school, I came to New York to carry out my ambitions. I didn't know even the name of a single manager. It was hard, discouraging work getting a start, but I made good. I toiled early and late. I studied. I wrote a lot of plays, most of which I rejected before anyone else had a chance to. I wrote for the newspapers. It was all a process of education. I never was a star in the regular drama, but I did play a number of leading parts in several productions. Then three years ago, I decided that I should perfect myself in the art of expression and went into motion pictures. Later on I am going back on the stage. I shall be ready to play big parts then, and to realize some of my pet ambitions."

The Stage and the Movies

Many persons who have had experience on the stage and in the silent drama have tried to define the differences between the requirements of the two. Each person takes a little different view. Miss Fuller believes that any actor can learn much from motion-picture work. The picture, she says, brings to the surface the best that there is in a person in sentiment or emotion. On the stage the distance from the audience is bridged by gestures that must be more or less exaggerated and by the voice. In the pictures the motions must be real. The more natural and expressive they are the better they "get across."

Motion-picture acting and the art of the pantomimist are two separate things. Pantomime is grace and poetry of movement – something that can be learned by anyone who is adaptable. But the acting for the camera, to impress the audience, has "to come from the depths," as Miss Fuller puts it. It has to combine the art of the pantomimist and the humanity of everyday life. The mind plays as great a part as the body in making clear the sentiments that have to be expressed.

Making a picture before the camera is not a silent affair. All the actors talk. They try to live the parts for the moment as they themselves see them. They "make up" the dialogue as they go along. With Miss Fuller this is the case more than with most stars of the screen. To her, the make-believe surroundings that are within the scope of the camera's eye are all quite real. When she played "Mary Stuart" she wept real ears. When she spoke it was in the stately language of those days. For the time being she was the ill-fated queen of Scotland, portrayed in Schiller's somber tragedy.

Likes to Impersonate Queens

The parts that Miss Fuller has created for the films have covered a wide range. She likes best those that might be termed classical; for example, "Mary Stuart" is one of her favorite roles. She wrote the

scenario herself. The queens of history have a fascination for her. She is going to portray a series of them. In each case she will study the history of the time and write the scenario. One of these queens will be Mary Tudor; another, Isabella of Spain. The queen of Sheba will be a third. One of these days, when she goes back to the legitimate stage, she is going to play a king – Richard III.

An idea of Miss Fuller's versatility as a motion-picture actress may be gathered from a list of a few of many parts she has played. With the Vitagraph Company, with whom she began her career as a star of the "movie," her first par was "Mario's Wife," in An Eye for an Eye. Later she had the principal parts in Elektra, a Greek tragedy; The Peacemaker, a modern comedy; The Love of Chrysanthemum, a Japanese romance; The Sepoy's Wife, an East Indian tale, and Her Adopted Parents. In this she was a woman 80 years old.

With the Edison Company, where she has been the last two years, she has played Aida in the film drama adapted from the opera of that name; the title roles in Kathleen Mavourneen and Mary Stuart, the "Countess Morowsky" in The Prophecy; the "Indian Lali" in The Translation of a Savage, "Pette San" in An Almond-Eyed Maid, the "Wall Street Girl" in When the Right Man Comes Along, the imperious stenographer in When Greek Meets Greek, "Amelia" in the Robbers, "Joyce" in Joyce of the North Woods, "Eve" in a Woodland Paradise, "Annette" in the Daughter of the Wilderness, and scores of others, the names of which she herself has forgotten.

She is best known, however, as the heroine in the What Happened to Mary series and its sequel, Who Will Mary Marry? The latter was published in an American and an English magazine concurrently with its film appearance.

Miss Fuller says she likes the motion-picture work for two principal reasons. One is the almost daily opportunity for creating some new character which is a constant stimulant to her originative faculties: the other is that in motion-work she doesn't have to travel.

Acrobatic Stunts

Miss Fuller's plays, as a rule, do not call for her to do the acrobatic "stunts," which are a feature of so many motion pictures. But when she has anything of that sort to go through with, she does it with the same intense enthusiasm as everything else. She has the higher type of courage – the ability to master fear. It takes nerve, for instance, to drive a high-powered, over-engined motor boat at the top of its speed as she did in The Girl and the Motor Boat, to snatch a child from in front of an onrushing locomotive. She did this in The Switchman's Tower. He engine was less than 10 feet away when she made the thrilling rescue. In another picture play, A Letter from the Princess, she drove a big automobile at high speed down crowded Picadilly, in London. In Five Seconds from Death, she rode a bucking broncho; in A Way to the Underworld, she came down a rope, hand over hand, from the seventh story of a building. This she recalls as one of her most difficult feats.

"In that play," said Miss Fuller, "I was abducted by one of the villains – there were a host of very bad men in that melodrama. The rope hurt my hands so that I couldn't think of anything else except when I would get down to the bottom – if ever I would get there alive. At the foot of the rope were some cobblestones that looked far from soft. They were real. But there was the merciless camera buzzing away and I had to get through with it. I didn't lose myself in that part. I was just Mary Fuller sliding down a rope. The sage director's torrent of verbal suggestions and instructions while I was coming down got on my nerves, too. Usually the stage director doesn't worry me much, but this time everything seemed to go wrong. It all took more muscle and nerve than I thought I possessed. When I got to the bottom, my hands were raw and bleeding."

The only other time that Miss Fuller has been really upset in her moving-picture experiences was when she was about to play her first part before the camera. It was what is technically known as an "emotional lead" – an Italian woman. The first rehearsal had to be postponed twice on account of the

scenes not being set. When they were ready, she was so weak with anticipation she could hardly stand. But when the picture was finished it was pronounced a great success and she was very happy.

Most of the actors and actresses in films say that it seems strange, almost uncanny, to see themselves on the screen. This is not so with Miss Fuller, and never has been. To her it seems all very natural, like the reflection in a mirror. She studies each real of films in which she appears to see where she could have done better. Although she has played queens and waifs, saints and sinners, women of all ages and all nationalities, the pictures that show her in tragic roles are the ones that interest her most.

The Day's Work

Miss Fuller's day at the Edison studio, away up in the northern part of New York City, begins when the light is strong enough for the taking of pictures to begin. When the weather is sunny, every moment is utilized for photographing the scenes that are laid out of doors. The actors in these various scenes have only a general idea of what the story is about. In a single reel there may be thirty different scenes. These are not taken consecutively. They follow one another in the making, according to the practicability of the light, the readiness of the small stage, and a hundred other things. But before each scene is rehearsed the stage director tells the actors briefly what they must try to "get across." When the picture play is completed the film is like the negative that is made in ordinary photography. This is developed and is printed upon other films, called "positives." These are run through a projecting camera and thrown on a screen. He stage director and some of the principal characters are the sole audience in this first view. They then see as a whole what they have been doing piecemeal. Practically every film is changed in one way or another before the public sees it. It is either condensed or expanded. If a part of the action is not vivid enough, it is done over.

Therefore, the work of the star in the "movies" practically never ends. Many interior scenes are made in the studio late at night. Miss Fuller's principal place of abode while she is not at work is her dressing room. It is about the size of a New York hall bedroom, which is some 8 by 12 feet. It is not richly furnished. Quite the contrary. There are two kitchen chairs in Miss Fuller's room, a mirror rests on a broad shelf. There is a wardrobe made of unpainted boards and curtained with calico, where her costumes in use are hung. Two trunks complete the furniture. Space has to be economized as much as in a steamer's cabin.

Writes Plays Herself

When Miss Fuller is not "in a picture" she goes to her dressing room and takes up whatever work she was engaged in while waiting for her parts in the scenes. Usually this work is writing scenarios for plays in which she is to appear. She has a big pad of paper and a pencil on the low shelf that is her dressing table. In a moment she is absorbed in spinning the threads that make up the story which later will be visualized on the screen.

Miss Fuller's only diversion is going to the theater. She sees the players of Shakespeare as often as she has an opportunity. Her mother and sisters live in Washington, D.C. Miss Fuller says she herself has practically no home life. She lives in a New York hotel. She doesn't care for housekeeping. She says she knows nothing about it and has no taste for it. She is as little concerned about dressmaking or millinery. Like all girls, she likes nice clothes, but dress with her is so little of a passion that she leaves what she wears when off the stage to the judgment of her modiste. Miss Fuller takes a keen interest in her stage costumes, because that is part of her business, and cannot be slighted any more than her acting.

She is an omnivorous reader. Going up or down town in the subway or elevated, she buries herself in a book or magazine until she reaches the end of her journey. She is fond of society in the sense that she is ever eager to learn something from every person that she can. She is a brilliant conversationalist. She is a keen student of human nature. But all her energies are concentrated toward one end. She

hopes someday to become and to prove herself the greatest tragic actress that this country has ever produced – the Bernhardt of America.

The Evening Star, June 18, 1920

Movie Star Wins In Rental Case

Mary Fuller Awarded Occupancy of Home and Tenant Must Move

Mary Fuller, motion picture actress, was allowed the occupancy of her home, 1933 Conduit road, by the District of Columbia rent commission today. The commission notified Guy H. Gerald that he must vacate immediately. Miss Fuller gave Gerald the legal thirty days' notice, but the tenant failed to make preparations for departure. When asked by the rent commission to make a sworn statement of his reasons for not vacating, Gerald refused. In the meantime, Miss Fuller was forced to seek lodgings at a hotel.

Photoplay Magazine:
Vol. 8-1:, p. 99, June 1915
Vol. 10-6: p. 41, Nov. 1916
Vol. 26-3: p. 58, Aug. 1924

Vitagraph (1906-1909)
1907: The Ugly Duckling
19xx: Leah the Forsaken
19xx: The Stage Struck Daughter
19xx: The Foundling
19xx: The Flower Girl of Paris
19xx: Jessie the Stolen Child
19xx: King Lear
19xx: Elektra

Edison (1910-1914)
1910: Electra
1911: Aida
1912: Martin Chuzzlewit
1912: Harbinger of Peace
1912: The Convict's Parole
1912: What Happened to Mary (serial)
1913: Merry Merrick
1913: It's Never Too Late to Mend
1913: With the Eyes of the Blind
1913: Mary Stuart
1913: Who Will Marry Mary? (serial)
1914: Dolly of the Dailies (serial)
Fuss and Feathers
Hansel and Gretel
The House of Cards
The Engineer's Romance
Frankenstein

The House of Seven Gables
Michael Strogoff
A Modern Cinderella
A Stage Romance
The Three Musketeers
The Professor and the New Hat
The Little Wooden Shoe
Treasurer Island
The Cub Reporter
More Precious Than Gold
A Daughter of the Wilderness
Kathleen Mavourneen
Mary Stuart
The Pied Piper of Hamelin
A Woodland Paradise
An Affair of the Dress
The Chinese Fan
Comedy and Tragedy
Frederick the Great
A Lonely Road
The Necklace of Rameses
The Princess of the Desert

Universal (1914-1917)
A Girl of the People
Health of the Hills
The Witch Girl
The Bribe
A Daughter of the Nile
Jeanne of the Woods
The Laugh That Died
The Taming of Mary
A Witch of Salem Town
My Lady High and Mighty
1915: Under Southern Skies
1915: The Woman Who Lied
1916: A Huntress of Men
1916: The Strength of the Weak
1916: Thrown to the Lions
1916: The Little Fraud
1916: The Limousine Mystery
1916: Love's Masquerade
1916: Three Wishes
1917: The Public Be Damned
1917: The Long Trail