WOMEN *at* THE HELM

By Grace Wilcox

WHEN Dr. William Moulton Marston predicts that women will rule the nation in another thousand years, he starts me off on a career-hunting expedition. But the Doctor has taken all the wind out of my fluttering sails, for I thought women had been ruling the world for the last thousand.

Research should begin at home, so I am exploring the Hollywood jungles to discover exactly how important women are in the making of moving pictures. Although I have had time to scratch only the surface, I present my findings with pleasure and a snapped finger in the face of the good Dr. Marston. A thousand years indeed! Scientists must think women pretty slow on the up-take. Look how far they've gone in the past 60 years! Let's chop off 999 years from the thousand and consider where they stand today.

Dr. Marston says: "Women have twice the emotional development, the ability for love, that man has. Today, realizing that their love motive has no sustained force, nothing to feed upon, women are diverting their energies into other channels. And as they develop as much ability for worldly success as they already have ability for love, they will clearly come to rule business and the nation and the world."

Love is a wonderful thing, but success and financial independence, power and authority go to the head like wine. Besides, it is possible to have a baby and a career at the same time in these days of modern methods and intellectual equality.

From the earliest days of the flickering films, women have had an important place in the industry. In this article actresses will be omitted; their importance is so well realized.

When Hollywood was merely a dot on the map, before they had cut down the trees to build the first studios, Lois Weber was taking an interest in the growing business. For more than 25 years she held a commanding position in the industry, producing such early pictures as "For Husbands Only," in 1911, and directing "White Gold" as late as 1934. Her "Shoes" is still an outstanding film in my memory.

Dorothy Arzner entered pictures in 1920 as a stenographer, became a cutter, scenario writer, script clerk and is now our most famous woman director. Fanchon, who with her brother, Marco, produced movie theater revues, is a producer at Paramount. Another woman producer and writer, Marian Fairfax, performed one of the great feats in film history with her picture, "The Lost World," in which great monsters wandered about a weird landscape.

CECIL B. DE MILLE has consistently realized the importance of women in positions of responsibility and trust. He has always had several working side by side with him.

He first met Jeanie Macpherson when she went on location in the San Fernando Valley, where she was writing, directing and starring in a picture for which she alone was responsible. Having picked out her location the night before, she was pretty peeved when she discovered a building had been erected on it during her absence. De Mille was shooting a scene for "The Squaw Man." She sent a man over to tell the honorable Cecil he'd have to get off, as it was her location. He sent word back to the rival director that "he" could go he knew—where. Then he found out he was dealing with a woman. Immediately he went over and apologized.

Some time afterward she came to see him at his office—a barn at the corner of Selma and Vine Streets. "Did you want to see me?" he asked. "Not if you don't want to see me," she answered, smartly, walking out with scrapbooks under her arm. De Mille called her back and when she said she wanted to be an actress or a director, he hired her as a writer at $25 a week.

That was about 25 years ago. For him she has penned such successes as "The Ten Commandments," Gloria Swanson's "Male and Female," "Why Change Your Wife," "Don't Change Your Husband." Lately she has been adapting Lyle Saxon's book, "Lafitte, the Pirate," for "The Buccaneer," and now she has begun on the basic work for "Hudson's Bay Company," which De Mille will do next.

Another De Mille assistant who has been with him for 25 years is Ann Bauchens, the first feminine film cutter. She was William De Mille's secretary and came West with him when he first came out to enter the picture business. C. B. persuaded her to stay and help him cut his pictures. She has been his chief cutter on his 64 films, including "The Buccaneer."

On De Mille's right hand is another important personality, his secretary. Her name is Gladys Rosson and she has been with the Chief for 24 years. Her first typewriter was borrowed by De Mille. She and Stella Stray (Paramount's first employee, still employed by the studio) shared the gaunt contrivance, which resembled a cement mixer. Miss Rosson is now head of a staff of secretaries on the De Mille unit, but it is to her memory, skill and unflagging loyalty that he turns on matters of diplomacy or private business.

GWEN WAKELING, of Twentieth Century-Fox, woman designer, is famous for her sketches of costumes that are neither so outre or elaborate that women outside of pictures cannot wear them.

Over at RKO-Radio I called on the first woman to originate a research department in a studio. When Elizabeth McGaffey started, in 1915, she had an atlas and a world almanac. Later she brought in her own encyclopedia and other reference books. Today she has a complete library in the studio and can turn out information with the celerity of a magician taking rabbits out of his hat. Frances Richardson is head of research at Twentieth Century-Fox and Nathalie Bucknall is at M-G-M. Miss Richardson has just finished research into the period of 1852-1873 for "In Old Chicago," while Mrs. Bucknell is deep in "Marie Antoinette" for Norma Shearer.

Barbara McLean (above) is the smallest film editor at Twentieth Century-Fox and cut its biggest picture, "In Old Chicago." Helen Hunt (right) is a movie wig expert.

Dorothy Hechtlinger is the lady behind Darryl F. Zanuck's scenarios. Not that she writes them. No. She is the co-ordinator, who jots down the ideas of writers in conference, sifts them out, writes the first draft of the scenario.

Studio stock schools are generally in the hands of women, although Oliver Hinsdale is an outstanding director of drama for Paramount. One of the most successful is Florence Enright, at Twentieth Century-Fox, who has 25 years of stage experience behind her. She was director of the Washington Square Players from which came Katharine Cornell and Eugene O'Neill. Her recent graduates into top spots on the screen include June Lang, Shirley Deane, Dixie Dunbar, Marjorie Weaver, June Storey.

Out at Twentieth Century are three film cutters, Barbara McLean and Irene and Eleanor Morra.

When Executive Louis B. Mayer finds himself in a political or diplomatic quandary, he doesn't rely on his own judgment exclusively. He immediately goes into a consultation with Mrs. Ida R. Koverman, who has served as executive secretary in four presidential campaigns and who has more information about economic conditions, politics and general current events than a radio news commentator.

A CASTING job is one of the most difficult in the moving picture industry, yet Marcella Napp has become one of the most efficient casting directors in the business. Ten years ago she went into the casting offices of M-G-M as a telephone girl; today she is assistant to Louis K. Sidney, executive in charge of radio activities. She has helped to cast scores of pictures and is said to know every important and most of the non-important players by sight, at least.

Jane Loring is production assistant to Pandro S. Berman, of RKO-Radio. She is the only woman in Hollywood with such a title. She is a fascinating person who cut herself adrift from her family at the age of 13; has played a violin in an orchestra, addressed envelopes at $1 a day and finally came to Hollywood as secretary to Al Kaufman, then manager of Paramount. She is gentle, soft spoken, wears slacks and blouses most of the time, is very popular with her fellow-workers.

"If I ever win an Academy Award, I shall share half the honors with my hairdresser," Barbara Stanwyck was heard to declare recently. That person is Helen Hunt, hairdresser and wig expert at Columbia studios. She began her career as a stenographer back in her home town, Omaha, Neb. Then she drifted to Hollywood.

And at the end of a perfect day I still haven't seen Frances Marion or Anita Loos, two of Hollywood's most prolific scenario writers. Nor have I met up with Jane Murfin, another ace scenarist, or the stand-ins for the feminine stars.

In Hollywood we all acknowledge the supremacy of Mary Pickford in business and in knowledge of the making of motion pictures. In this veteran of the screen there is combined financial genius with artistry—Hollywood's outstanding personality through the years.