

Thoughts on Movie Production in Lone Pine

Sage and Tumbleweed

October 7, 1934.

by *Inyokel



The smell of winter is in the air these mornings and the new brilliancy of the stars finds me half listening to hear them crackle. So when the west wind roared down the canyon the day before yesterday, searching out every chink in my domicile through which to shriek a warning, I needed not the subsequent fleecy mantle on the Inyos opposite to recall the fable of the grasshopper and the ant. The hundreds of denuded pine cones about the squirrels' dens in the hills should have whispered, "Hard winter ahead," but I believe a sluggard's mental processes are in key with the rest of his anatomy. And so, justifying myself by a murmured "Better late than never," I set out with my old rifle at dawn to fill my larder against the gray days to come. A-hunting I would go, and methought I knew where, a mile or two beyond my beloved Alabama hills, there grazed a monarch of the glen. But, so help me, and now, good friends, restrain your smiles, the only game I saw this morning were four hawks, a leopard and an elephant.

Yes, I know that you have seen our label above the words, "some facts... and what lies in between," and you think you have caught me at it. But when you go to your movie palace some day soon to see *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, and you gaze at the Akhound of Swat or some such be-turbaned "potentate" coming right down to meet you, using a pachyderm for a jaunting car, with a snarling leopard gliding along behind, while dusty horsemen in the rear carry flapping hawks at their saddle pommels; then you will be sorry that you classed poor old Inyokel with the Munchausens and the Dr. Cooks. For the Paramount Corporation is on location in my backyard and the Sierras have become, for the nonce, the Himalayas and Mount Whitney right up the company street, if you please, will probably emerge as Khyber Pass. Glad I was able to forget the ant and his troublesome moral as I again emulated the grasshopper and jumped from place to place with the players. Only I did not chirp, for the sound microphones are so sensitive that none but the actors dare whisper in a "shot." The sound of a motor can be picked up a mile away and my friends from town who wished to peek were forced to park their cars two miles away at the stone cabin.

They still tell hereabouts of the close of a trying day in the filming of *The Thundering Herd* in these same hills a year ago. For the last time Noah Beery had stabbed the heroine, or she had stabbed him, I don't recall, when a little onlooker piped up, "Gee, did he kill her?" 'Tis said that then even the director spoke.



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No one who has not seen it can picture what the coming of a movie army does to a small town. The population is practically doubled overnight, beds and cots are dragged out of cellars and barns and rented to the set-dressers, truck drivers and minor actors. Every man not otherwise employed, and even some of those, is pressed into service as a mule-skinner or a rider. I did not know I had a friend in the land of Mahatma Gandhi until half a dozen copper-colored, be-whiskered natives hailed me in good Americanese. They were the town boys, who had ridden horses before they learned to walk. Even unshaven Grevy Fitzgerald looked quite Sikh, or is it Bengalese? The movies have ruined my ethnology.

Gary Cooper and his wife, Franchot Tone, Monte Blue, Sir Guy Standing and his Filipino chauffeur kept the younger generation agog until the elephant arrived by truck from Los Angeles. Most of the children, and as many of their elders, had never seen such a monster before and the town's stock of peanuts soared several points. Don Morgan avers that when Tom Devine, who acted as traffic policeman for the company during its stay, saw the elephant come up the canyon he was willing to take the pledge for I life.

The Padre warns me that seeing Gary Cooper and his wife playing badminton with Director Hathaway and his wife on the church lawn was no sign of his approval of the production. While the local scenes are all he-man stuff, with no females in sight, strange ingredients are often added in Hollywood. And I hope it will not be taken unkindly, but the Padre tells me that returning from retreat he saw this juxtaposition of features above a movie theater on the Alameda in San Jose: *No More Women. Call It Luck.*

Sage and Tumbleweed

February 9, 1935

by *Inyokel



"Inyo, be yourself!" Thus would I apostrophize my desert home when I find her transferred to the flickering screen as India, China, or other lands forlorn. In *Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, the current tremendous hit which *Time* says was filmed within 50 miles of Hollywood, our Sierra becomes the Himalayas. Perhaps our glistening bastions will be "stand-ins" for the Himalayas again in *Oil for the Lamps of China* [starring Pat O'Brien, pictured] filmed this week at the Inyo Marble Company camp. Tar paper slapped over the shingle roofs; whitewashed and mud-spattered canvas sheathing weather-boarded shacks; ratan awnings and false, up-ending gables tacked on the ridgepoles-thus did the set-dressers transform this bleak

desert village into a hamlet in Cathay. All this could have been done more cheaply in Hollywood, but since the mountains will not come to Hollywood, Hollywood comes to the mountains. Few children in the cities have the opportunities for travel in foreign lands afforded the youngsters here. The whole kaleidoscope of the haunts and ways of men revolves, in endless variety, before the little spectators on the movie location. School busses brought scores of wide-mouthed bairns to view the camels, the lumbering wooden-wheeled carts and the plodding bullocks, the rickshaws bobbing before the camera's eye. The little Mexicans were quick to recognize the ships of the desert as the conveyances once used by the Wise Men. It was one of their elders, however, who said the camels had feet like Greta Garbo.

Sage and Tumbleweed

July 24, 1938

by *Inyokel

When you see *The Cowboy and the Lady* at your picture palace you will envy Gary Cooper and Merle Oberon the glory of their mountain home. But neither Gary nor Merle will have seen the actual setting of the picture, unless, indeed, the gentleman recalls those four years back when he fought Indian tribesmen and died against these same rocks in *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer*. This time doubles are taking the parts of the principals in the local shooting, which includes long-range shots at cattle and snowy peaks. The low of the herd and the high of the hills will be ours, the rest will be Hollywood.



Movie companies are no news in Southern Inyo, but the picture deserves mention because it is being filmed simultaneously with a super-colossal, "the biggest R-K-O has ever produced - *Gunga Din*." It was the use of Whitney and the Sierra in *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer* which inspired *The Charge of the Light Brigade* and now *Gunga Din*, and the same background becomes Peshawar or Broken Bar Ranch by a little manipulation of the foreground. A much-traveled gentleman who saw *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer* is responsible for the statement that the portion of the picture which looked least like India was that which actually had been taken overseas. I defy the most hardened native of California to keep in touch with realities when he gazes upon the ruined temple, deliberately battered to show the marks of time, rising from a saddle in the great sepia worm-hills of the Alabamas; or to keep from rubbing his eyes as he surveys the tiny houses scattered among the rocks 100 yards from the main village street, miniature houses so perfectly placed that the perspective suggests intervening miles instead of feet. Even the fake telephone line which begins out of camera range and disappears over a rise, speaks of league on league of silver life-line connecting some lonely outpost with the heart of the Empire. Behind the latticed walls and under the rattan roofs are two-by-fours and celotex, in front you know, even without smelling the braziers and listening to the shouting of the hucksters from the bazaars, that this is India. For up there, are not those the Himalayas?

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The movie company built a complete tent city on the location, four miles from Lone Pine, to house their carpenters, and later the actors. Two hundred and fifty union craftsmen from Hollywood worked three weeks on the erection of the sets thus far completed, a British army outpost, a temple, and an Indian village. More than a quarter of a million feet of lumber were used at first, and, when a third of the village was mysteriously destroyed by fire the night before shooting was to begin, a few hundred thousand feet more of material were rushed up from the lumberyard. Kipling never dreamed that his "limpin' lump o'brick dust, Gunga Din," would thus tap the movie magnates' millions, or that one day an actor would quaff copiously of the melted snows of Lone Pine Creek brought to his tent by special pipe line, and then lie down in front of the camera and feign to empty Din's goatskin waterbag.

'E lifted up my 'ead,
An' he plugged me where I bled,
An' he guv me 'arf-a-pint o' water-green:
It was crawlin' an' it stunk,
But of all the drinks I've drunk,
I'm gratefulest to one from Gunga Din.

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August, 1938

by *Inyokel

Sam Jaffe, who played the Lama in *Lost Horizon*, is cast in the role of *Gunga Din*, now being filmed here. His costume, of course, 'is as Kipling described it, or as Mahatma Gandhi wears it. So, when his wife requested the Padre the other day for permission to take his photograph, the pastor was a little surprised at the reason offered. "You see," said Mrs. Jaffe, "You are the first man of the cloth I have seen in such a costume (she referred to the Padre's khaki and puttees), and I think it is wonderful." 'All right, you may take it on condition that you autograph a print just the way I say and give it to me.' "Why, certainly, what do you wish me to write?" "Just sign it, 'To one man of the cloth from the wife of another, Mrs. Gunga Din.'"

Sage and Tumbleweed

March 19, 1939

by *Inyokel

Did you see *Gunga Din*? Some of the readers of "Sage and Tumbleweed" were quite peeved to discover no pines in the scenery and accused me of misrepresentation. You never can satisfy some people. What would pines be doing in a British Indian outpost? The sets-the village, the cantonment, and the temple have all been torn down and carted away. There are three or four of the plaster elephants still standing on the temple site and many of the visitors pose by them. Spainhower sold the lumber and celotex to Lone Piners and I notice that Claude Van Norman has one of the prison walls up at the house he is remodeling in Independence. Two of the pillars are in front of Spainhower's ranch. We are getting quite handy at building sets ourselves.



Filming on the set of *Gunga Din*

*Inyokel – Fr. Crowley's pen name.