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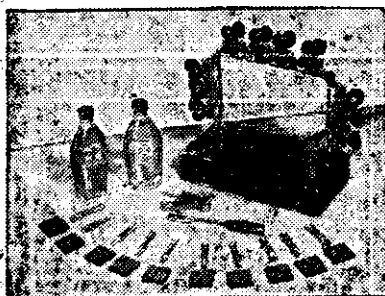
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TWENTY YEARS BEHIND A-MOVIE CAMERA

By **RUDALL HAYWARD**

(Based on the script of a radio talk.)

IF ever I come to write an autobiography—not that it's very likely—it will be called "Twenty Years Behind a Movie Camera." It is a story which really begins more than 20 years ago, when I was a schoolboy in Wanganui, and read, by chance, James Cowan's "Life and Adventures of Kimball Bent."

Kimball Bent fought through the Taranaki Wars on the Maori side, and I still think his is one of the most thrilling biographies ever written. In New Zealand, it suddenly occurred to me, was material for film plays just as exciting and dramatic and colourful as any Hollywood western. Certainly Australia had nothing to compare with it.

And so I decided to capture some of the wild history of our beginnings on a strip of celluloid film, and immediately, while there were still people alive who remembered the period accurately.

When I left school I set about translating the dream into fact, and went to Australia to study film production seriously. There I gained experience under Raymond Longford, Beaumont Smith (who has made several well-known silent and talking films), and John K. Wells, an American producer. Unfortunately my apprenticeship was cut short by my father's death, and I had to return to New Zealand.

"Bloke From Freeman's Bay"

It is just 20 years this month since I started work on my first story film. There was nothing historic about it; my funds would not run to spectacle. It was a two-reel comedy revolving around the monkey gland theory, which was in the news at the time. The whole production unit consisted of myself and three or four friends, and our location was the back streets of Auckland. The title—"The Bloke from Freeman's Bay."

Finally it was finished, and optimistically I set out to secure a first release for

it in a city theatre. The birth of such an important production, I felt, just had to take place in Queen Street. So round all the theatres I hawked "The Bloke from Freeman's Bay." The theatres took one brief look at it and pronounced it the worst ever.

It showed how little they knew about films, I decided, and took it along to my uncle, Henry Hayward. He had a look at it in one of his smaller Queen Street theatres, myself sitting beside him and enthusing him. When the lights went up I turned to him confidently.

"Unless New Zealand learns to make her own talkies she will lose her soul."

—Bernard Shaw.

"How much did it cost, Rudall?" he asked.

"Well over £70," I said impressively.

"I'll give you £50 to burn it and save the family name."

For One Night Only

Scornfully I turned the offer down, and took "The Bloke from Freeman's Bay" up to the West End, a little theatre in Ponsonby run by a good-natured old aunt of mine. After much persuasion she agreed to screen it for one night only, so off I set to advertise and exploit it.

Well, the unexpected happened, as it often does in the picture business. The crowds were so big the first night that we packed the theatre an hour before the performance, and at starting time there was a queue outside so enthusiastic that it tore down the canvas screens at the entrance and started a near-riot. We 'phoned the police and the fire brigade, and next day we were on the cable page of the morning paper. I still have the clipping. "Riot at Picture Theatre. Hundreds Unable to Get In," it says.

That did the trick. We ran the film for four nights at the West End, then took it down into Queen Street, where it ran ten days in a first release house.

It was soon after this that I made my first feature drama. It was based on a New Zealand story by H. T. Gibson, "My Lady of the Cave," and we filmed it on Mayor Island, just off the Bay of Plenty coast.

Tale of a Canoe

For one scene a small Maori canoe was wanted, but though I advertised widely for one in Tauranga, there was nothing doing. Plenty of big canoes, but not little ones. I was sitting despondently on the deck of the scow on which we were to sail from Tauranga next morning when up came a member of my cast, Mohi, one of the biggest Maoris I have ever seen. For a fiver he would get me just the sort of canoe I wanted. I gave him the money and he disappeared. Next morning he returned, paddling a beautiful little canoe, and



STAN KNIGHT as "Old Ben" in
"Rewi's Last Stand"

overjoyed we set sail for Mayor Island. Coming back a month later, as we neared the wharf we noticed there was a larger crowd than usual waiting for us, and that they were mostly Maoris. We waved to them, but they were strangely silent, and soon we learned why.

The Maoris were from up the river, and it seemed that Mohi had borrowed their tribal canoe, and now they were looking for *utu*. I gathered that it was a far more serious crime to steal a canoe than to steal a man's wife. After all, wives are plentiful. To make matters worse, Mohi did not even belong to their tribe. Well, it cost us quite a lot of *utu* to settle the matter. I forget whether the payment was made in cases or barrels, but at any rate we did our best to "liquidate" the debt.

"Rewi's Last Stand"

Next production I tackled was the original silent version of "Rewi's Last Stand," which was made 15 years ago at Rotorua, on a much smaller scale than the talking version I have just completed, and from a different story. In its day it was most successful, running for five weeks in Auckland at two city theatres.

I produced two more pictures before the talkies arrived. The first was "The Te Kooti Trail," and the second "The Bush Cinderella," a light wayback story featuring Dale Austen, that year's Miss New Zealand. Financially, "The Bush Cinderella" was the most successful film I ever made, production costs being delightfully low.

Advent of the Talkies

Very soon afterwards came the talkies and I realised that my cameras and equipment, accumulated slowly over many years, were practically useless. I would have to start all over again, first learning an entirely new technique. The chief difficulty was the fact that extortionate prices were being asked for good American talkie cameras.

The only thing to do was to make our own cameras. It was two years before we achieved satisfactory results, results which cost us many hours of heart-breaking work and some 90,000 feet of film. As the quality of our work improved we began making newsreel items for Cinesound Review, and most New Zealand picturegoers will remember my newsreel interviews with celebrities such as Charles Ulm, Bernard Shaw, Major Douglas, Jean Batten, Von Luckner, and others.

(Continued on next page)



RAMAI TE MIHA, heroine of Rudall
Hayward's latest talkie "Rewi's Last
Stand"