

# PUTTING PEOPLE IN THEIR PLACES

Women and the Home

## Interview With A Theatre Usher

"I'D never even held a torch in my hand before," she said.

By a process of logical reasoning worthy of Sherlock Holmes I deduced that my theatre usher must have begun her present job before the black-out.

"How do you get jobs like this?" I wanted to know. "Do you apply to the theatre manager?"

"No, I think the best way is to go to the secretary of the Theatre Workers' Union."

"And you don't need any experience?"

"Well, as I said, it was my first experience of even carrying a torch. I think the only requirement is a reasonable standard of intelligence."

And good looks, I thought. My victim certainly had her share of them. She was tall and fair with an imposing carriage and wide grey eyes flanked by two wings of hair.

"I don't know whether I'm a typical theatre usher," she went on. "You see

it isn't a regular job for me, as I work only Wednesday and Saturday nights. From nine to five I'm doing typing in an office, so you can imagine it's quite a change for me. I love the work, but my real reason for taking it on is that I want to save some money so that after the war I can begin my travels. The pay for a casual worker is about five shillings a night, and the ten shillings a week extra makes quite a lot of difference to me."

"How much does a full-time usher get paid?"

"I don't think it's as profitable as having a job and working a night or two a week. I think you get up to three pounds a week. Only the city theatres have full-time ushers, however. At our place, you see, there's only the one matinee on Saturdays."

"And how do theatre ushers feel about pictures? Does their enthusiasm wear off after the first week or do they all become film fans?"

"There again I'm afraid I can't speak as a typical theatre usher. We have a mid-week programme change which means that I see two entirely different programmes, and I'm usually keen

enough to see them both right through. I've even been known to go to the pictures on my nights off."

I asked her if she could tell me any pictures she had enjoyed recently. She thought for a while. "I liked *Philadelphia Story*," she said. "I saw it three times voluntarily and another time when I was ushering. And I enjoyed it even the fourth time."

"But the public wasn't enthusiastic," she went on. "The public doesn't like its humour subtle. It prefers something more straightforward."

### What The Public Likes

"What does the public like?" I asked, as Sam Goldwyn, Alexander Korda, Carl Laemmle and Cecil B. de Mille must have asked before me.

"It likes simple stories with a heart-pull, like *Penny Serenade*. It likes a good cry, provided that everything is cleaned up at the end. And it likes a good laugh, anything from Joe E. Brown and custard pies to Ralph Lynn and cuckoos in nests. But it musn't be subtle humour or it doesn't laugh. And it follows its stars. It likes Deanna Durbin and Spencer Tracy and Irene Dunne and Cary Grant and Ginger Rogers and the Hardy family."

"And did you form your ideas about films before or after you began ushering?"



"Before. When you have to see as many pictures as I do your ideas get terribly confused and you don't get time to sort out your impressions into compartments. Most of the ushers I know have, like me, very muddled ideas about films. Even the ones they like don't rouse them to any degree of enthusiasm. It would be all right if all the good films came to your particular theatre. But usually it works out that the particular ones you want to see are showing somewhere else. If you're a full-time usher at one theatre you have very little chance of being free at a time when you can see a film somewhere else, and in any case you will probably prefer to spend your off-time in some other way."

### Send For The Manager

"Yet you said you liked the job," I reminded her. "Why?"

"Well, it is rather fun and it isn't monotonous. And it's very easy work. The main thing when you begin is to make sure you know how the rows are numbered and on which side of the aisle the various numbers are found."

"Are there any snags?"

"Yes, there are the people who try to be helpful by showing themselves to their own reserved seats. They usually sit in the wrong ones and have to be moved. And sometimes there are drunks who sit in the wrong seats and refuse to be moved. Then you send for the manager."

"But the worst thing that can happen from the usher's point of view is a double booking. Sometimes the girl on Reserves make a mistake and books the same set of seats for two different lots of people. There are loud complaints from both the seated and the seatless parties. So you get out of it again by calling for the manager."

"Working on Saturday night must cut into your social life," I remarked.

"It does," said my usher rather wistfully, but I could see the travel-light quenching the wistfulness in her eye. She went on, "But it makes me anti-social in another sense. People in large numbers are always so much less likeable than people singly. They're all so sheep-like, so impatient, so full of their own importance. It gives me a feeling of power when they're all crowded behind me waiting to sit down, and I know I'm the only one who can tell them where to go and see that they get arranged correctly. I think I must have a tidy mind, because I do like putting people in their right places."

—M.I.

DEDICATED TO SUMMER SMARTNESS

Summer's smartest shoe is this Black Suede Gore Shoe with patent trim. Black Suede and patent bow. Full breasted Spanish heel. Modelled on "Rita" Last.

# Matchless SHOES

FASHIONED IN NEW ZEALAND BY DUCKWORTH TURNER & CO. LTD.