



FUNDAMENTALS OF FILMING

IN the article on *Filming in Africa* in the July number of "Colonial Cinema", we said that films for exhibition to Africans should have an African atmosphere. That means, of course, that they should mainly be made in Africa. During the war, however, it is practically impossible for the Colonial Film Unit to do any filming in Africa, and until conditions are normal again, we shall have to depend almost entirely on the resident enthusiast for the provision of background material. Some of that which has been received is excellent; but some is of much less value not because it is intrinsically less interesting, but because the scenes have been incompletely covered and editing is, in consequence, very difficult or quite impossible.

The letters which we receive from Africa often show that writers are themselves doubtful whether the films they send will be found to show all that was intended to show, and we feel, in consequence, that some guidance on the essentials of film technique will be welcome by our helpers in the field.

The enthusiastic camera-director will find his work much more satisfying if he will adhere rigidly to the fundamental principles that govern all good filming. They are few and simple; obedience to them will reduce wasted effort to a minimum. All those who work with a camera know too well how their pleasure is marred and their enthusiasm damped if poor results recur. If with each effort some little improvement is effected, one is spurred on to greater efforts. We believe that a careful study of articles that will appear from time to time will bring about that improvement and maintain enthusiasm.

Every time the camera is used, three essentials must be borne in mind. They are the *matter*, the *method* and *continuity*. The director must be absolutely sure of what his camera is to record, how it is to be established and in what way the scene will join its predecessor and successor. It is in clear appreciation of these three fundamentals that the whole secret of good direction lies. If they are always made to govern filming, the result should be good; if not, it will certainly be bad.

Let us take a typical case to illustrate simply the point at issue. The shooting script may read: "The man washes his hands in a bowl of water". This simple everyday action has been included in the script because it is significant. We may wish to emphasise the necessity of clean hands for a doctor about to examine a patient or perhaps for some one about to milk a cow. Whatever the reason, it was of sufficient importance to be included in the shooting script. Therefore we must make sure of the real *matter* of this scene. It is the removal of dirt from dirty hands. What is the best *method* of making this clear through the camera? The obvious way is by means of a close shot. Finally, we must consider in what way it is possible to join the shot to the one that precedes it and to the one that follows it; in other words, how are we to make certain of *continuity* through this scene?

The whole scene may be detailed as follows:

SHOT A.—The man walks to the bench (let us say from a shot showing him leaving his hut door). This could be a medium long shot showing the bench in full and the man in full. He picks up the soap from the bench.

SHOT B.—This will be a medium shot closer, to include the bench top, the bowl in the rear foreground with the man behind with the bench top and the man's head clearly established. He repeats the action of picking up the soap—this ensures continuity between shots A and B. He commences to wash his hands in the water.

SHOT C.—This will be a close shot of the bowl and the hands. The washing of the hands proceeds. This is the vital action of the whole scene, hence the close shot. The camera operates until the man removes the soap from the bowl and puts it on the table.

SHOT D.—This will be a similar shot to the one in Shot B, that is, the bench top and the man's head are clearly seen. The final moments of the hand washing are repeated—this ensures continuity between shots C and D. The man then walks out of the scene towards the towel, which is probably hanging near by. Similar continuity is preserved to the next scene of hand drying.

It will be observed that the shot has a beginning, a most important middle, and an end—all good work should conform to this general arrangement. The vital middle not only establishes the real message, but also provides for a reduction in the length of the scene if deemed desirable, once the message has been made clear. Note, too, the perfect continuity that is possible when the scene is being edited. Actions can be run smoothly one into another because of the overlap of the various actions during the scene.

The more experienced amateur will have observed the possibly more practical and expeditious way of dealing with the scene described. He would combine shots B and D when the camera is in its "medium shot closer" position, later introducing the close-up described in shot C with the appropriate overlapping of the actions for editing purposes. The shots are described seriatim for the benefit of those less experienced.

Not every scene can be established in a medium long shot, a medium shot, a close up and a return to a medium shot in that specific order. The example given cannot be taken as a fixed pattern for every scene, but it does provide a pattern for any scene of similar content.

All this may appear to be very elementary but it is the strict attention to these elementary matters that makes for good camera work. Summed up, good screen work is nothing more than knowing:

- (i) WHAT one wishes to *show* clearly.
- (ii) HOW one can show this clearly.
- (iii) HOW one can make a shot join smoothly with the shots that precede and follow it.