

IMAGE

Journal of Photography of the George Eastman House

Vol. III, No. 2

FEBRUARY, 1954



L. Corrin Strong

ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT
GREED
THE BIG PARADE
THE GOLD RUSH
INTOLERANCE
THE FOUR HORSEMEN
CITY LIGHTS
WINGS
BLOOD AND SAND
ROBIN HOOD
THE BIRTH OF A NATION
IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT
THE THIEF OF BAGDAD
THE KID
THE MARK OF ZORRO
CHANG
WAY DOWN EAST
NANOOK OF THE NORTH
THE IRON HORSE
42nd STREET
PETER IBBETSON

MUST WE LOSE THESE FAMOUS MOTION PICTURES?

DOOMED: A HALF CENTURY FILM RECORD OF AMERICA'S PAST

ONE MAN HAS COME FORWARD to rescue from certain extinction, irreplaceable moving picture records of the history of the United States of America: L. Corrin Strong, United States Ambassador to Norway. He is the first American philanthropist to make a personal gift of \$100,000 to serve as a life-preserver for priceless films of the past—films otherwise fated to complete loss through deterioration.

Perhaps you would be willing to help save some of these great films.

Perhaps by granting Eastman House permission to duplicate nitrate films now in your company's possession, you will participate in this rescue work.

Or you may wish to join Mr. Corrin Strong in furnishing funds, however large or small, to aid in our preservation program.

It costs approximately \$800 per feature to preserve a film of average length.

Time has run out on the millions of feet of motion picture film produced from 1894 to about 1928. The whole achievement of the silent film, basis of the art of motion pictures, and the filmed actualities of world events through decades of our most momentous times are all on their way to chemical disaster.

The condemned nitrate negatives and prints of the past have all too few champions; the timely action of an individual in the person of L. Corrin Strong is an event that will enable future generations of scholars to see and study some of the great films of our day that were already under the tragic sentence of following countless others into the total oblivion of decomposed nitrate.

Perhaps Mr. Strong is aware that the early movies are important as vital documents of the past because he himself took an active part in the history making during the period in which movies became an American art and a world industry.

At five, he and his widowed mother were roughing it in the Klondike through gold rush days after a shipwreck on the stormy arctic coast in the wildest movie tradition. He saw World War I with the French Ambulance Corps and later served in the French Foreign Legion. His record in World War II brought him many decorations along with the rank of Colonel. A secret mission to Chungking during

the war began with a plane crash in Brazil and an eventful, pursued flight over the "Hump" in the Himalayas.

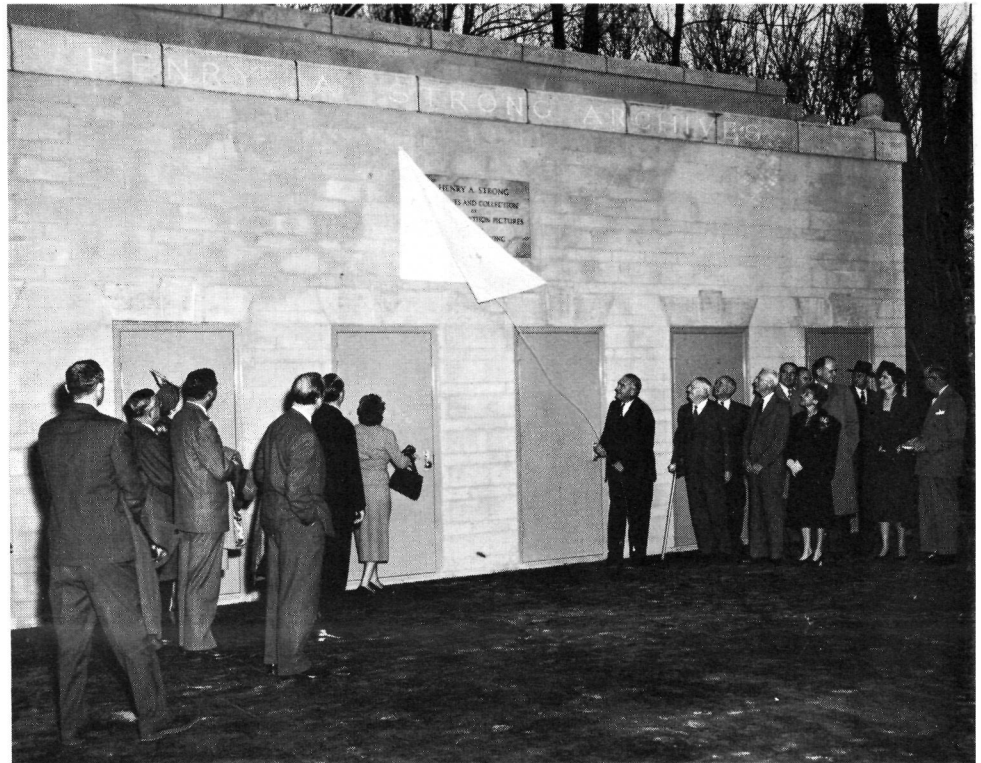
Less hectic years were spent by Mr. Strong as a youth in Rochester where his mother came to live with her husband, Henry Alvah Strong, the first president of the Eastman Kodak Company. Then followed Yale University and his start in banking. In Rochester, Mr. Strong married Alice Throwbridge; with three sons they lived in Washington where Mr. Strong made a study of educational foundations. He planned and wrote the charter for the Strong Educational Foundation of which his mother, Mrs. Hattie Strong, was the founder and he its president. This Foundation was one of the first of this successful type that finances a deserving student's college education after the second year, on the honor system, with no legal obligation or interest payment. He is a member of the board of trustees of three colleges and many Washington civic groups. As a sportsman, he is devoted to sailing, an interest shared by his family; his boy Peter, with a crew of youngsters, last year sailed Mr. Strong's 47-foot schooner across the Atlantic to Norway in twenty-four days. The father followed his son to Norway as the new United States Ambassador, appointed by President Eisenhower.

Mr. Strong's generous gift to the George Eastman House for film preservation, has been made especially effective



DOCKS OF NEW YORK, one of the films that has been saved from certain destruction by the combined efforts of Mr. L. Corrin Strong and the producers.

MR. AND MRS. L. CORRIN STRONG unveil the Henry A. Strong Archives on November 15, 1952 on the George Eastman House grounds. This modern vault is designed for the maximum preservation of nitrate film and is the gift of Mr. Strong in memory of his father who was the first president of the Eastman Kodak Company.



through the understanding cooperation of the motion picture industry. Loew's Incorporated, Paramount Pictures, Warner Brothers, Universal and RKO have all lent negatives of outstanding films for duplication and preservation on long-lasting acetate film stock. An air-conditioned vault has been built with Mr. Strong's gift, where nitrate films may be kept safely while awaiting their eventual transfer to acetate, an operation that delivers them from the doom awaiting all nitrate-base film materials.

Some of the memorable American productions that have been already saved thanks to the combined generosity of L. Corrin Strong and the producers who permitted their duplication are: *Ben Hur* (MGM), *The Copperhead* (Paramount), *Don Juan* (Warners), *The Informer* (RKO), *The Phantom of the Opera* (Universal), *Grand Hotel* (MGM), *The Torrent* (MGM), *It* (Paramount), *The Crowd* (MGM), *Docks of New York* (Paramount), *Jezebel* (Warners), *Our Dancing Daughters* (MGM).

The list of films still in peril however is long and the responsibility of saving them rests on our own generation. The George Eastman House is working with the Museum of Modern Art Film Library and the motion picture industry to save both a great art and an enduring record of our times. The munificent assistance of Mr. L. Corrin Strong merits more than gratitude; he has rescued for the future, a dynamic portion of the heritage of our past.

MOVIES: THE MIRROR OF THE SPIRIT OF OUR TIMES

SOCIOLOGISTS are beginning to suspect that from 1915 to 1929, Americans were not educated in the schools at all, but at the movies. Educators will not like to think the film has beat them at their own game, but the sobering fact is that in 1929, 85 million Americans went to movies every week in the year. That figure exceeds by 62 millions the total of all those who are even now attending schools, colleges and universities in this country. Historians are now finding it rewarding to study these films that so many of our fellow citizens were watching in their impressionable years.

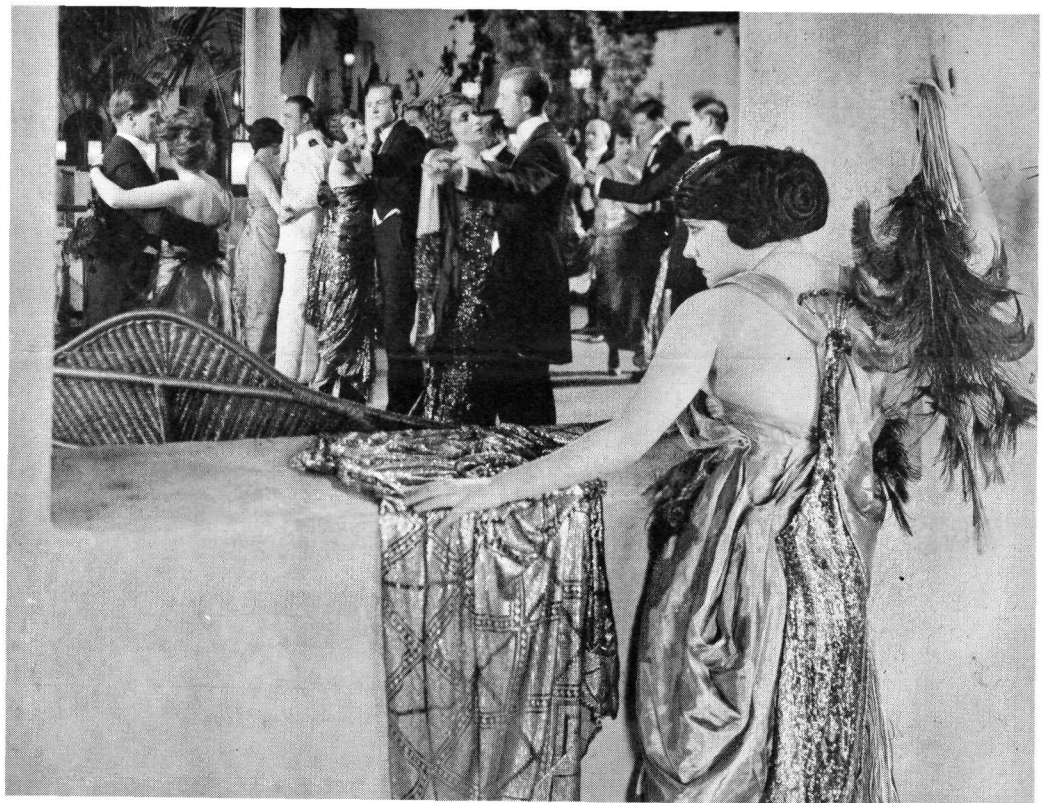
From a cheap, peep show novelty, the motion picture grew like Jack's beanstalk to the cloudland inhabited only by the mightiest giants of American industry. That upstart, overnight invasion is one of the economic legends of our time. In past years there was a tendency to shrug off this marvel as a strange freak of business. Now one begins to see in that fantastic growth, a clue to the enduring position of the film as the most facile means of mass influence and information that civilization has yet developed.

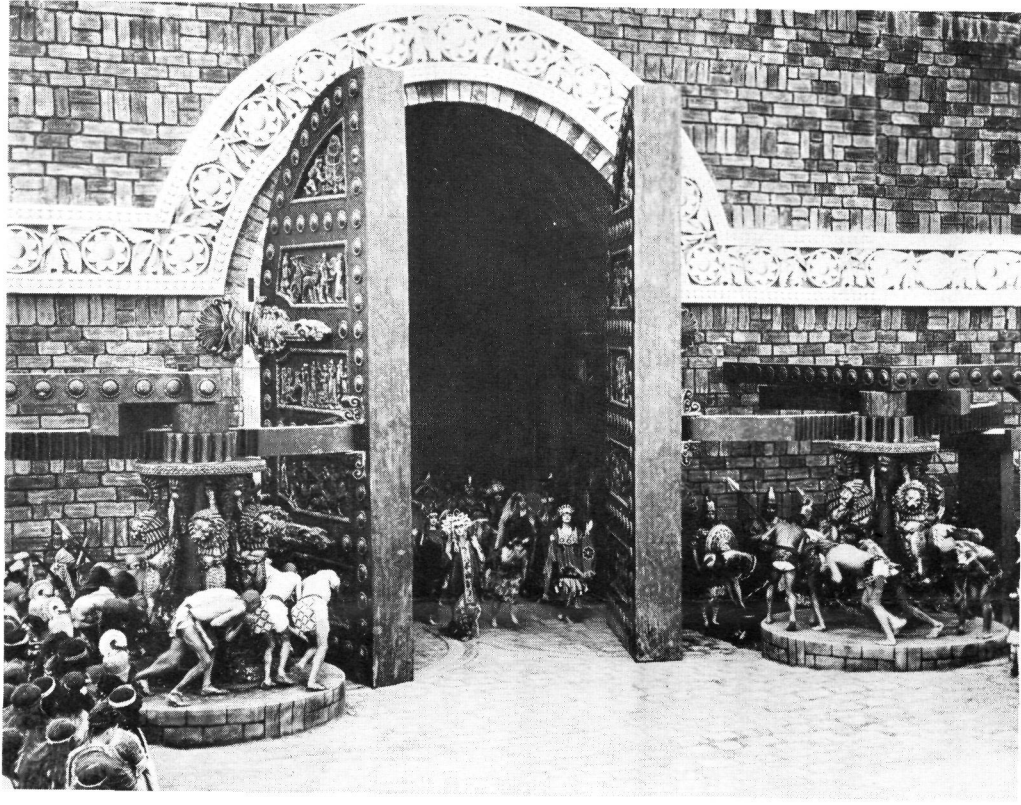
The historic value of films of fact and newsreels has always been acknowledged. From the time of the coronation of Czar Nicholas II in 1896, the wandering news

THE GRETA GARBO BOB
"Grand Hotel"



GLORIA SWANSON
GOWNS
"Why Change Your Wife"





HOLLYWOOD
HISTORICAL
RECONSTRUCTIONS
"Intolerance"



VALENTINO
ROMANCE
"The Sheik"

cameramen have captured every scheduled event of importance along with an exciting share of unanticipated happenings too—like the murder of a monarch and the nightmare blasting of a sky-queen. The courageous combat cameraman has looked straight in the ugly face of every war from the battles with Spain in Cuba to tragic Korea.

The entertainment films of the past, however, for historians and scholars, are the truly revealing, inadvertent documents of their time. In these films there survives the very spirit and essence of the eras that produced them. For the American film industry made a gigantic business out of guessing, with a high degree of accuracy, just what people at any given time most ardently wish life to be like. Whether or not these fictions as they have been pictured on the screen are to our intellectual liking, it remains demonstrable that the Hollywood fabrication soon becomes reality through emotional acceptance, speedily followed by real-life imitation.

In films reconstructing the historical past, vast and painstaking research was encouraged by such perfectionist producers as Cecil B. De Mille. Often the creditable accuracy of the background material was negated by over poetic license in the story line with the result that Americans have somewhat vague and very definitely movie-conditioned concepts of ancient and modern history. In some cases the faces of Paul Muni, Don Ameche and Spencer Tracy have

supplanted the features of great men and educators in the memories of movie-educated youngsters.

The Clara Bow pout, Gloria Swanson's gowns, the Garbo bob, Cedric Gibbons' "movie-modern" interiors, the De Mille bathrooms—all have demonstrated that film fiction and film manners and styles become life reality in a matter of months.

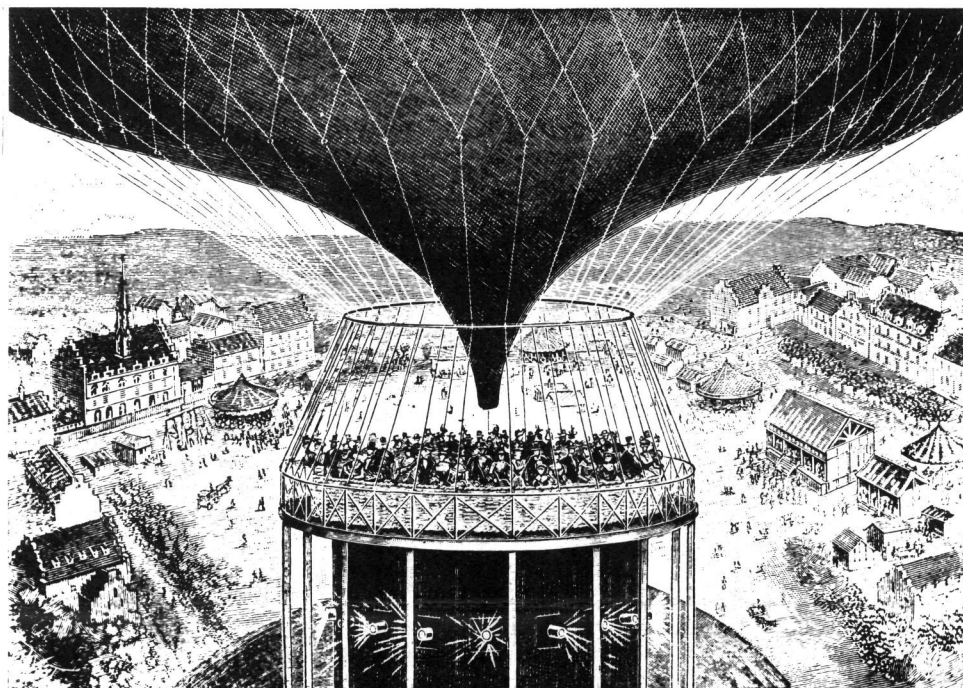
Before the coming of radio comedians, it was the silent movie titles that set the patterns for America's wisecracks and colloquialisms. Eight million Americans each week read movie titles by such experts as Anita Loos. No wonder that Douglas Fairbanks' "Gee Whiz" could become part of the American language. Rudolph Valentino's first appearance in *The Sheik* was responsible for the complete transformation of an innocent Arabic title. The noun "sheik" had its regional connotation transplanted all the way from the Sahara desert to the American drug store by a single movie. The history of the film mingled with the history of speech when the most colorless word in the English language, that neuter and neutral pronoun, "it," was introduced by Elinor Glyn to Clara Bow.

The content of motion pictures has served both to mirror and to create the behavior patterns of our times. For that reason, serious students will always find close to the surface of the movies, eloquent clues to the special hopes and dreams of the people for whom they were made.



CEDRIC GIBBONS
INTERIORS
"Our Dancing Daughters"

THE CINEORAMA of Raoul Grimoin-Sanson was featured at the Paris Exposition of 1900. Ten synchronized projectors gave a 360 degree picture. The spectators stood in the middle of this huge moving picture. From a woodcut in the Scientific American Supplement for 1 September 1900.



FROM MUYBRIDGE TO CINEMASCOPE

AN EPOCH STARTED on May 4, 1880. Edward Muybridge projected on a screen his moving picture studies of animal locomotion. Spectators were members of the San Francisco Art Association and gentlemen of the press. One reviewer reporting his show the next day in the *San Francisco Alta* wrote: "Mr. Muybridge has laid the foundation of a new method of entertaining the people."

From that 1880 date until the end of the century, motion picture inventions crowded the files of patent offices around the world. The activity reached a peak in 1896. In 1895 the first film fans in France, Germany, Switzerland, Great Britain and the United States were responding to their earliest chance to buy entertainment furnished by motion pictures.

In five years' time there was already too much from which showmen could choose. By 1900 there were available sound films, trick films with stop-motion effects and multiple exposures, news features, story films and movies in color. Fifty-four years ago, they even had Cineorama and the wide-screen (69 feet wide, by the way).

All this was displayed in dazzling profusion at the great Paris Exposition celebrating the advent of the Twentieth Century. It was there that the voices of Sarah Bernhardt and Coquelin spoke from motion picture screens. It was there that Cineorama, the patented invention of Raoul Grimoin-Sanson, made its debut. Today's version, the Cineorama is less than half of what the 1900 spectacle was. Instead of just three synchronized cameras and projectors,

Sanson used ten. Instead of a screen 25 feet high, the French inventor used a screen 30 feet in height that completely surrounded the spectators. In 1900 the watchers stood right in the middle of a gigantic moving picture, projected in color from ten synchronized movie machines, merging ten separate films into a single vast, encompassing scene.

At the same exposition there was a wide-screen presentation that would have impressed today's most ardent champions of Cinemascope: the brothers Lumière showed their films in color, on a gigantic screen 48 by 69 feet and seated 25,000 viewers at a single session.

Invention had come too fast. The movies were too rich in ideas. The flood of brilliant devices given to the world by 1900 could not be absorbed commercially in a field so new. In a few years, for practical purposes, the movies were stripped to the essential novelty: images in movement.

The bones of nearly everything basic to the medium today were then stored away in the closets of the movies' past—skeletons of the wondrous systems destined to delight beholders in the new century.

Sound—dialogue—color—and 3D—each remained for the most part hidden in the past, each awaiting its cue for the proper time to be brought out and appended once again to the moving image that is the heart of the cinema.

Each time, it was to meet a crisis that one of these old treasures was brought out of the shadows of the nineteenth century and dramatically presented anew to the jaded public eye.

Back in 1926, radio provided the crisis. From the time of Edison's first film experiments, there had been attempts at talking pictures. By 1912, Gaumont was producing elaborate dialogue films with sound effects and musical accompaniment. Sound-on-film had been developed as early as 1908. But the time was not at hand to catch the public ear. From 1912 to 1926 the film held its tongue. The movies kept their silence until the radio forced them to speak up.

The silent film was threatened by the new device. Thousands of head-phoned Americans were staying home to carefully guide cat's-whiskers to the highest spot on the crystals of bed-side radio sets. Then came the loud speakers and the whole family seemed in danger of preferring the static from KDKA to the mute allure of Hollywood's most sparkling shadow stars.

The movies met this audio challenge in 1926 with Vitaphone and Movietone.

Now a new challenge has been hurled at the cinema. This time the attack came from television in an area where the movies seemed most secure—in the field of sight rather than sound. The film men have countered with visual displays of stereo effects and larger screen sizes, all devices a half-century old.

The movies still have all manner of surprising devices stored undeveloped in their past that await only contemporary vision and energy to adapt them to present usefulness. We are still living in the age of vision.

But vision is needed too, like that of L. Corrin Strong, to see that the images of the past must be preserved for the enlightenment of the future.

JAMES CARD

Curator of Motion Pictures, George Eastman House

BOOK REVIEW

The Columbia Historical Portrait of New York, by John A. Kouwenhoven. New York, Doubleday & Company, 1953. 550 pp. Illustrated (a few in color). \$21.00.

To produce a new portrait of New York City, historical or otherwise, is a distinguished feat. Few cities have been more prolifically portrayed, meticulously recorded, or better preserved in archival materials. Yet Professor Kouwenhoven has managed to produce a fresh study and to combine a popular touch with superb scholarship, aesthetic sensitivity, and an insight into what might be termed the

"semantics" of graphic materials.

"The choice of pictures, and the organization of the book," states the preface, "both grew out of the conviction that in our contemporary enthusiasm for picture history and pictorial journalism we too often lose sight of a simple but important truth: that a picture of something is not the thing itself, but somebody's way of looking at it."

Short italicized phrases leap from the top of one page to the top of the next to form a running interpretive commentary which may be read independently of the detailed captions. If you are in a factual historical frame of mind, the captions themselves will give you a sequence of period portraits of the city, and the commentary can be ignored.

The photographic portion of the illustrations ranges from the John W. Draper daguerreotype portrait of his sister, taken in New York in 1840—one of the earliest portraits known—to an aerial color photograph of Manhattan. Between the two are both conscious and casual documentaries: the first women medical students at Bellevue Hospital about 1888; the "Flashes from the Slums" of police reporter Jacob Riis; "Old Mother Hubbard," the pickpocket and satchel worker; and "Kid Glove Rosey" the shoplifter, from the 1886 rogue's gallery; the city's first "Auto Street Cleaner" built in 1912—these photographs all emphasize the timelessness as well as the period aspects of their subjects. The harsh realism of sociologist Lewis Hine's photographs of immigrants becomes a commentary on the artistry of Alfred Stieglitz' masterpiece, "The Steerage," so forceful a picture that it is difficult to believe that it was taken on an Eastward journey, and portrays emigrants.

The final section of the book, 1910-1953, is predominantly architectural, and consequently the human aspects of the city are relegated to unimportance. Here the superb layout is at its best when the "intersecting planes of light and shadow" of the color reproduction of Charles Sheeler's painting "Church Street El" are in apposition to the "city's austere geometry" in Berenice Abbott's photograph of the townhouses at Nos. 4, 6, and 8 Fifth Avenue.

Not only does this book bulk large in the procession of graphic histories, but it bulks large physically, weighing even more than the Sunday edition of the *New York Times*. It is much more than a footnote on "Man's Right to Knowledge and the Free Use Thereof," the theme of Columbia's 200th anniversary. It is an interpretation of two great monuments to that *Right*, the city, and the university.

DEAN FREIDAY

IMAGE, Journal of Photography of the George Eastman House, 900 East Avenue, Rochester 7, New York. Editors: Oscar N. Solbert, Beaumont Newhall, James G. Card, Minor White. Associate Editor: Marion N. Gleason. Editorial Assistants: Dean Freiday, George Pratt, Warren C. Stevens, Howard Keith Stott, Erwin J. Ward. Printed in U. S. A.