

68

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
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PREMIERE OF THE LAND TO BE HELD AT MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The first and greatest documentary film director, Robert J. Flaherty, has turned to his own country for the subject of his latest motion picture: The Land, a five-reel film which he has just completed for the AAA, United States Department of Agriculture. The Land will have its premiere Thursday night, April 9, at the Museum of Modern Art before a distinguished audience of film critics and invited guests. It will then be distributed non-theatrically throughout the country in 16 mm. and 35 mm. prints by the Motion Picture Section of the Department of Agriculture. Both 16 and 35 mm. prints will be available for booking from the Museum of Modern Art Film Library.

The Land does not gloss over our agricultural situation. It is the story of erosion which in a century has destroyed one-seventh of our land, which annually washes or blows away enough top soil to fill a train of freight cars stretching 18 times around the earth, which every year removes from the fields and the pastures of this country 126,000,000,000 pounds of plant food material--more than 60 times as much as we put back in commercial fertilizer. And against this moving background Flaherty, as narrator, tells us that "we have wasted our soil, squandered it at such a rate, that in less than a century more, if we go on as we have in the past, the days of this Nation's strength will be numbered."

When Flaherty's Nanook of the North had its Broadway premiere in the summer of 1922 a new type of motion picture, later to be called the documentary film, came into being. Since then Flaherty has brought back from the far places Moana (1926), Tabu (1931), Man of Aran (1934) and Elephant Boy (1937), the latest of his masterful presentations of strange folk in faraway lands.

More than a year ago Flaherty brought his camera from London to Des Moines. Starting from that geographical center of the United States and traveling in a single camera car and with a very small crew, he crisscrossed the country from Pennsylvania to California, from the

Canadian border in Minnesota to the southern tip of Texas on the Rio Grande.

Wherever he found the significant and revealing he recorded it on celluloid: farm-factories of the fields, monster machines uprooting trees, tractors turning under prairies with incredible speed, gigantic wheat combines threshing endless fields of grain, rural workers standing in dreary relief lines, land made useless by erosion, hopeless faces and undernourished bodies of migrants. Flaherty used crossroad stores as his operating bases, getting off the highways onto our neglected byways, at times even flying over farm lands in an autogyro plane.

This forty-five-minute documentary film presents in terms of human life the agricultural problems of erosion, migration, income disparity, and particularly mechanization. It is the fifth vital documentary produced under the sponsorship of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. The first two, the famed Plow That Broke the Plains and The River, were directed by Pare Lorentz, who, having gone on to other activities, welcomed Mr. Flaherty as the director of The Land.

This latest documentary by the U. S. Department of Agriculture does not solve the farm problem, but puts it squarely up to the American people. It poses the question of how we can bend the marvels of a mechanized system to the advantage of all the people--farm relievers and homeless migrants, as well as those for whom the machines have already opened a better life and greater opportunities. Its central theme is the struggle of men to live with machines and master them for the common good.

Director Flaherty has this to say about the problem which his film presents:

"With our marvelous, miraculous machines we are actually one step from paradise. They bring undreamed of abundance within our reach. With modern machines it would be possible to clear and develop a whole new country out of tangled jungle or waste land in an incredibly short time; or to produce enough food in one country to feed all the rest of the world.

"Machines are like prehistoric monsters, terrifying in their possibilities. But they are also miracles of efficiency in producing the food and goods that sustain the

human race. Our problem is to master the machines that man's genius has created, and it's just a lot of talk unless we do it."

In the direction of The Land Mr. Flaherty has had the collaboration of his wife, Frances H. Flaherty, who has worked with him on most of his films. The editorial supervision has been by Helen Van Dongen, and the commentary by Russell Lord, with Mr. Flaherty himself as narrator. Richard Arnell has composed the musical background of the film which is played by the National Youth Administration Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Fritz Mahler.

The Land will be distributed only non-theatrically. A limited number of 16 mm. prints will be available for loan upon request for agricultural groups and other non-theatrical users, at the forty educational film depositories cooperating in the distribution of Department of Agriculture films. A limited number of 16 mm. and 35 mm. prints will also be available for loan on request at the Motion Picture Section, Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., for users in states not having depositories. A list of the depositories is available from the Motion Picture Section.