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Author(s)	William K. Everson
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"THE SOCIAL SECRETARY" (Triangle-Fine Arts, rel: Sept. 10 1916)

Directed by Sidney Franklin; scenario by Anita Loos; 5 reels
With Norma Talmadge, Gladden James, Kate Lester, Erich von Stroheim, Helen
Weir, Herbert French, Vivian Ogden.

"The Social Secretary" was Norma Talmadge's sixth starring vehicle for Fine-Arts, following close on the heels of "The Devil's Needle", and it was the first to be filmed on the East Coast. Some of the NY exteriors, especially upper Riverside Drive, are quite fascinating, and apparently quite a number of non-studio interiors were used, causing the film to have "the most magnificent settings ever seen on the screen" according to Triangle's 1916 publicity booklets, although in the face of earlier Griffith, Brenon and DeMille sets, this claim is a little hard to swallow! Sidney Franklin's name is curiously and conspicuously absent not only from the print itself, but from all the Triangle publicity of the period too. Certainly, directorially, it's inferior to 2-reelers he'd done earlier for Reliance, but even so it's an odd and unexplained omission. It's frankly a rather stodgy little film, like so many of the lesser Inces and Fine Arts, but it's still an interesting period piece, quite fast-moving even if not markedly eventful, and notable for some of the most outrageous scenery-chewing that even Erich von Stroheim ever perpetrated! The original Triangle publicity has this to say: "While all Triangle pictures are clean pictures, the Talmadge pictures are, as a rule exceptionally adapted for promotion as plays which women and children may be especially invited to see. They have what may be called a family appeal, because they deal with conditions in the home. "The Social Secretary" is a healthy, wholesome play". I'm only sorry that we can't reconstruct the detailed musical score outlined in the publicity, since (apart from indicating that telephone bells ring at 55 minutes, and china crashes at 24) it recommends the use of such intriguing-sounding pieces as "Creepy Creeps" and "Dainty Daffodils".

— William K. Everson