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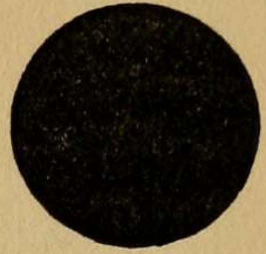
CHARLIE CHAPLIN

CHARLES CHAPLIN
• BY DOUGLAS
FAIRBANKS, JR.

CHARLIE CHAPLIN



HIS LIFE AND ART

BY
W. DODGSON
BOWMAN

WITH
A FOREWORD BY
DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS, JR.

ILLUSTRATED

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INTRODUCTION

He is the easiest man in the world to know but nobody knows him—perhaps because of that fact. He has many eccentricities—a reaction from the days when, as an ambitious artist, he yearned for something he couldn't have and then found, overnight, the world in his grasp. He is a man who has dreamed, and because his dreams came true they embittered him. He is a very vain man and an extremely jealous one. He is selfish beyond all tolerance and yet with all his faults there stands predominantly the frail, majestic figure of a man who might have made history had he not thought too much about doing so.

Even with a knowledge of all of Charlie's frailties, it is impossible, on knowing the man, to dislike him. His ego is entirely impersonal and his attitude at all times is one of ingratiating friendliness and amiability. He is a charming conversationalist and is always interesting. He will sit up all night to discuss a subject about which he knows little or nothing and leaves his listeners convinced of an amazing and vital intellect.

Charlie is intellectual without being intelligent.

He thinks with astounding rapidity. He enjoys being thought "different" and is an inoffensive *poseur*. He has educated himself with a smattering of the best in literature and discusses with authority great writers about whom he has, nevertheless, an imperfect knowledge. He is at heart a rebel to society, yet insists on living within its bounds.

He is an iconoclast and believes in nothing but himself. He likes to have people comment on his physical likeness to Napoleon. He loves flattery and yet is outwardly shy of people. He is undeniably all artist from his head to his toes. He likes everyone to agree with him and because of his winning personality one is inclined to accede rather than offend him. He loves children and is immensely sentimental, but immediately upon showing any emotion of affection he will hurriedly make excuses for himself and joke about it. He analyzes every question from a scientific point of view and refuses to accept the equality of women.

He is the first to laugh at his own deficiencies. He has no sense of financial values. He takes a childish delight in showing off and is an inspired parlor entertainer. His character studies and mimicries are universally known. He would love to be tall and muscular but, even though his phy-

sique is small, he can put up a man-sized battle against the largest.

He has tiny feet and his hands are almost effeminate; he uses them beautifully. He has an inherent grace about everything he does. He loves to monopolize a conversation. He is, at heart, a faithful but an erratic and not always reliable friend. He is an indomitable worker but cannot work under adverse mental conditions. He is highly sensitive and is easily offended. He dreads getting old and looks with terror at the gray hairs that are already plentiful in his early forties. He likes to brood alone. He takes long walks and runs every morning before breakfast. He is an incurable flirt and likes nothing better than to be referred to as a Don Juan. He has a slight English accent but considers himself an American. He is the champion of the oppressed even when he is on the side of the oppressors.

He thinks the theatre an old-fashioned and defunct form of art and believes wholeheartedly in the art of the films. He is very observant of details and is a connoisseur of fine paintings. He is neither a heavy drinker nor smoker. He loves games. Tennis is his favorite outdoor sport. He readily listens to advice but rarely takes it. He has great

will-power in matters of material ambitions. He is an accomplished musician and sits for hours alone, playing the organ in his home.

He loves to have other people take him seriously but seldom does so himself. He is never satisfied with his work and is persevering to a fault. He has a hearty laugh that discloses rather prominent teeth. He is meticulous in his dress. He is primarily a man's man, yet he has many feminine tendencies. He is the perfect companion, constantly entertaining. He talks continuously with his hands which he waves about, gathering momentum until the end of his discourse.

Life, to him, is a great scientific experiment. There has been only one woman he has ever really loved in his life. Charlie Chaplin will live for years in the memories of many millions and be acknowledged one of the greatest men of our day. It may be bromidic to speak of his genius, but it is surely a greater and more profound gift than he himself realizes. Chaplin will always be "Charlie" and "Charlie" will always be "Charlot," and as such will be a great man to many who wish that they knew him, but cannot—because it is so easy to do so.

Douglas Fairbanks, Jr.

CHAPTER I

PARENTS: CHILDHOOD: YOUTH

Charles Spencer Chaplin—to give him the names he received at the font—was born in Kennington, London, on April 16, 1889. There has been much debate as to Chaplin's origin. Some writers assert that he has gipsy blood in his veins. The writer of a book on *Travels in Spain* was greatly struck by the number of men he met in that country who seemed to be counterparts of Charlie, and wondered if his mimic gifts were inherited from dons or grandees.

These are but idle speculations. The surnames *Chaplin* and *Caplin* are occupative and are from the middle English and Old French *Capeline*, meaning a mailed hood. The original owners of these names were probably makers of this kind of defensive armor and descendants of French settlers in England.[1]

What we know definitely is that Charlie's parents were English. His father also bore the name of Charles Chaplin, and in the eighties of the last

[1] See *The Story of Surnames*. Geo. Routledge & Sons, Ltd.

century was a great favorite with the public that took its pleasures in the London music halls. He was also well known on the legitimate stage. His versatility was remarkable. He is said to have played every kind of character known to the English stage. He had also an excellent singing voice and was noted for his knowledge of music. When his son was still a babe-in-arms he crossed to America to fulfil an engagement at a New York theatre, but so far as we know he did not appear at any other theatre. His death while still in his prime was a desolating blow to the Chaplin household, and condemned young Charlie and his brother Sydney to a life of poverty in their early years.

Charlie's mother, Mrs. Hannah Chaplin, also had considerable talent as a musician, and took leading parts in the stock companies that performed Gilbert and Sullivan operas and other popular musical plays. It was while she was headlined to play at a large suburban music hall that Charlie was born; so that the future star made his first entrance and exit on the stage when he was yet a baby in his mother's arms. Mrs. Chaplin had the satisfaction of witnessing her son's meteoric rise to fame and fortune, and like a good mother

her breast swelled with pride at his achievements. When Charlie's position at Hollywood was assured, she broke up her home in Kennington and went out to Filmland to join her sons. She died in August, 1928, at Beverly Hills, California.

The death of her husband, while her boys were yet little children, was the crowning misfortune of Hannah Chaplin's life. The care of her household prevented her taking many professional engagements, and the problem of feeding and clothing her children and paying the weekly rent of the modest little house in Chester Street, Kennington, presented continual difficulties that sometimes defied solution. The shadow of want constantly darkened the Chaplin household, for the poverty they suffered was not that genteel poverty which Augustine Birrell describes as being "a little behind with the quarter's rent," but that grimmer sort which does not know where the next day's dinner is to come from.

The Chaplins knew nothing of those little luxuries and pleasures that bring delight to children and remain in after years as fragrant memories. Ill-fed, ill-clad, and with very little education, Charlie led the raw aimless life of a child of the back streets. The old tub outside the stables where

he used to wash, which Charlie saw again in the days of his success, was not more unsavory than the rest of his surroundings. The neighborhood with its mean streets and alleys, which was all the world he knew, must have numbed the soul of this sensitive child. Like thousands of other boys of his class Charlie was mentally and physically ill-nourished. His life was devoid of color and romance, and books were too expensive a luxury for the Chaplin home. His color-starved senses were rarely, if ever, sated and refreshed by the serene loveliness of the peaceful countryside.

Oddly enough in his book, *My Wonderful Visit*, in which Charlie describes impressions of his journey from Southampton to London, it is not of the landscape he writes. He notes that the grass is not so green as it used to be, but his comments are solely of the new houses being built—the people at the stations waiting to see him—the familiar buildings he passes. Again of Kennington Park he says: "How depressing Kennington Park is! How depressing to me are all parks! The loneliness of them. One never goes to a park unless one is lonesome. And lonesomeness is sad. The symbol of sadness, that's a park."

This insensibility to natural beauty may be due

to lack of early training and opportunity, but it seems more probable that the famous lines in which Wordsworth speaks of a time

> "When meadow, grove and stream,
> The earth, and every common sight,
> To me did seem
> Apparelled in celestial light,
> The glory and the freshness of a dream."

awake no responsive echo in his heart, nor recall dim and almost forgotten memories.

One night, on his last visit to London, he was strolling with a few of his friends on the embankment, when he stopped suddenly and gazed at that mammoth building which is known to everyone as St. Thomas's Hospital. For a time he gazed in silence. Then as a light appeared in one of the windows he turned to his friends, and pointing to the hospital exclaimed: "Do you see that window, the third from the end, with the light in it? That's the window of the room in which my poor father died. I was only a little kid at the time, but I can never forget that night. I was only a child, scarcely old enough to know what this event meant to me. But I stood under that window all night in the cold and the darkness, sobbing my heart out, waiting for the news I dreaded to hear." There were tears

in his voice as he spoke, and his face, as it gleamed under the cold rays of the electric light, was eloquent of despair. "See," he continued, "there's a light burning in that room now. Do you know what that means? It means that there is someone dying in that room now, and we can't help it. With all our power and wealth we can't help it."

Here was a Charlie that his friends did not know. For once they had a glimpse of his soul, and in the mind's eye saw unforgettable pictures of the forlorn child sobbing in the darkness, and the strong man's despair at the futility of wealth and fame.

* * * * *

Charlie was a boy in his early teens when one night at Kennington Cross he heard two street performers, one of whom was playing a harmonica and the other a clarinet, playing what he describes as "a weird, harmonious message." The tune was that of "The Honeysuckle and the Bee," a song that was all the rage thirty years ago. To some who are old enough to remember, that sentimental ditty recalls anything but pleasant recollections. It was dinned into our ears on every possible occasion by street musicians, piano-organs and other

instruments of torture, while office boys drove old gentlemen to the verge of nervous prostration by whistling it, in and out of season, in the shrillest tones they could achieve.

But each soul has its individual experience. To young Charlie Chaplin the tune brought mystery and beauty. "I only knew I loved it," he says, "and I became reverent as the sounds carried themselves through my brain via my heart. . . . It was played with such feeling that I became conscious for the first time of what melody really was."

This was Charlie's first awakening to the power of music. Its beauty has, as he says, gladdened and haunted him since that event.

In after years music became not only a solace but an important influence in his life. He has composed several songs as well as the incidental music for his plays, "The Kid" and "City Lights," while in "The Pawnbroker" he displays his versatility as a performer by playing tunes on fifteen different instruments.

His earliest attempts to give expression to his yearnings were not so fortunate. For, as he says: "When we were a couple of kids, my brother and I organized a band known as the Hammersmith Hornpipers, and we picked up quite a bit of money

from persons anxious to have us leave their premises."

But Charlie has other memories of the days when he wandered about as a toddler. When a child of five, he used to gaze in wonder at an old blind man with ear muffs and clothes green with age, who sat under Westminster Bridge. This man sat with his back against a wall, down which a stream of greasy water used to trickle. He spent his time laboriously reading a dirty and bethumbed embossed Bible. As his fingers moved over the letters, his lips moved, but silently. The child's wonder changed to horror as he looked at the gray-matted beard and the eyes with their stark sightless stare, and invariably it made him feel sick.

But there were pleasanter things to recall. There was the Baxter Hall where children lucky enough to have a penny were regaled with the sight of a magic-lantern show. In these exhibitions, the forerunners of the moving pictures, Charlie took an especial delight, and he patronized them as often as he was in funds.

Kennington Baths was also one of the bright spots of this populous district and provided him with his chiefest joy. For there you could go

swimming, second class for threepence, if you brought your own swimming costume.

Then there were the other children in whose games and excitements he shared, and the streets with their kaleidoscopic changes of life and movement. He loved, and still loves those streets—Lambeth Walk, Chester Street, Kennington Road—for they enshrine unforgettable memories. Hollywood with its glory of perpetual sunshine has been powerless to dim them. Despite the many claims on his time and attention, and the homage he receives from the rich and the great, his first visit when he returns to England is to Kennington, where he finds a pleasure tinged with sadness in pacing its dingy streets and scanning the landmarks that childhood made familiar.

But the days of happy and carefree childhood were soon over. Education—yes, there was need of education, but there were still more pressing needs,—shelter, fuel, clothes and the food for a hungry family. And so the days of schooling were soon sped, and the dreamy-eyed boy was sent out into the world to try to add a few shillings to the weekly income.

For a time he worked at odd jobs. His relatives were too poor to apprentice him to a trade; and

he lacked influential friends to help him to a lucrative situation. Those who befriended him were humble people of his own station in life. He earned stray coppers by opening carriage-doors at the theatre, and by carrying messages; and for a period held the important position of lather-boy in a barber's shop.

But however precarious his income and desperate his position, he was always in the highest spirits, and bubbling over with mirth. One of his friends of those early days, Mr. Deitch, who now has a bootmaker's shop in Islington, says of him: "I remember when Charlie was fourteen. He used to spend hours in this shop, and while I was making boots he would dance about, learning new steps, singing songs, and rolling off endless jokes. When the actors and actresses came in for boots, he would entertain them and make them shriek with laughter. Once I remember there was a hitch in the entertainment at the theatre, and Charlie somehow got on the stage and made the people laugh with his antics until the program could be continued. That was his first appearance on the stage, and we never knew quite how he got there. But after that he was in demand when the program broke down."

So though this callow boy was leading an aimless, nondescript existence, we see clearly enough that Destiny was already pointing the road he should travel. He had inherited actors' blood and shown that he possessed the priceless gift of humor. Uneducated he was, but his mind had been quickened by the turbulent, busy life of the London streets. He had felt the pinch of poverty, reeled before the blows of circumstance.

But as yet fortune stood aloof and watched with enigmatic smile Charlie's pitiful attempts to woo her favor. In her hands she held life's glittering prizes—fame and fortune which she bestows only on the few who can wrest them from her grasp.

How quickly he gained these prizes this narrative will show. But the time was not yet.

CHAPTER II

CHARLIE GROWS UP

As THE years slipped by, it became more and more manifest to Charlie's friends that he had inherited a full share of his father's gifts, and that his future lay in the music hall. It was not a case of choice.

It was the only opening that had presented itself; for Charlie had no business experience and had learned no trade. He came of theatrical stock and had friends in the "profession," and as his bent lay in that direction, it was the most natural thing in the world that he should turn his attention exclusively to the work it offered.

At an early age he became a member of a group of juvenile dancers known as the "Eight Lancashire Lads," and won the commendation of managers, who saw him in this modest performance. Later he had a part that gave him a chance of displaying his sense of humor and gift for clowning which even in those days was well developed. This part was that of the page-boy Billy in "Sherlock Holmes." In this he made a great hit, and

CHAPLIN (SECOND ROW CENTER) IN THE JUVENILE CAST OF A MUSIC HALL SKIT, "CASEY'S CIRCUS," WHICH BROUGHT DOWN THE HOUSE IN LONDON MANY YEARS AGO.

International

his entrances and exits won him rounds of applause and laughter.

He trained himself assiduously for his profession, not so much because he was ambitious, as because his heart and soul were in the work. Like all true artists, Charlie had a highly developed sense of observation. Those wistful eyes of his missed nothing. The street was his academy of dramatic art. Every peculiarity of gesture, movement, or expression that he saw he tried to imitate, and he practised them until the imitations were life-like.

There was an old cabman in Kennington Road who had bad feet, and he wore boots of abnormal size and slithered along the road in a painful but ludicrous fashion. To Charlie this spectacle was a perpetual joy, and he watched and imitated the old man's walk at every opportunity. His mother scolded him for making fun of the poor man's infirmity. But youth takes little heed of the troubles of age; and Charlie saw something so exquisitely delightful in this performance that he gave no heed to his mother's admonitions, and he went on practising the steps that, in years to come, were to convulse the world with laughter.

From the gallery of the local music halls he

studied the turns of the comedians—learned their songs and quickly mastered any new dance steps.

As a boy of fifteen he gave evidence of still greater versatility. His high spirits and abounding humor made him a favorite with the players and music-hall artists who visited Kennington. He used to entertain them in their dressing-rooms with imitations of Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree and other noted English actors. These impersonations became popular and widely known among the acting fraternity, and Charlie's services were much in demand when entertainments were given at their clubs.

A year or two later he had an even more important lesson—a lesson which, when well and truly learned, carried him far beyond the dizziest heights of his ambition. This was the supreme value and importance of the art of pantomime.

While he was still a weedy youth, Charlie was fortunate enough to secure an engagement with a variety company that was about to make a tour of the Channel Islands.

The members of the company had high expectations of impressing the natives of this out-of-the-way corner of the world. But to their surprise and disappointment they found, when they had

given performances at two or three halls in Jersey, that their turns fell flat and that the audiences were utterly unresponsive to their brightest sallies. To Charlie, the most sensitive of souls, this attitude of stolid indifference to jokes and "gags" that had always won laughter and applause elsewhere was particularly galling, and his hopes of "getting his stuff across," as he phrased it, sank to zero.

He and his fellow-players soon found out the reason for this seeming unresponsiveness. Many of the Islanders knew little or no English. Others were bi-lingual, and spoke English and a French dialect peculiar to the Channel Islands. But hardly any knew enough colloquial English to understand the Cockney catch-phrases and slang expressions that made up the stock-in-trade of the average music-hall artist.

What was to be done about it? Charlie and his friends pondered the problem, and adopted the only possible solution. If words were useless, then they must try to make people understand the ideas they wished to convey by gesture and action. The expedient seemed of doubtful value, but they resolved to try it for what it was worth.

The result much more than justified their ex-

pectations. Charlie began to pantomime everything he could. Then he discovered the great secret. For though he had only adopted this acting in dumb show as a substitute for words, he learned to his surprise that pantomime carried the idea over with more telling effect than any language could have done. He was so impressed by this experience that he began to rely on pantomime when acting before English-speaking audiences. In this way Charlie received the best possible training for film work. Years later, when his rôle as a comedian was familiar to millions of people, he said: "Even now I seldom rely for comic effect on witty subtitles. It has always seemed to me a distinct admission that there is something wrong with the presentation of a story, or with the acting, when they have to lean so heavily on a crutch of words. It is possible, of course," he added, "to overestimate the value of pantomime, but it should be remembered that it is the world's oldest art, and at the dawn of civilization people understood each other by signs, before they used sounds to convey thoughts and emotions. People can be moved more intensely by a gesture than by a voice. For an appeal to the emotions give me the silent clown. He is infinitely superior to the speaking actor."

One of Charlie's early friends was Mr. Chester Courtney, who has written his impressions of their association in a series of articles in *The Film Weekly*. Mr. Courtney, who worked with Charlie later in Hollywood, says he first met him in 1910. Mr. Courtney was then with "Park's Eton Boys," and Chaplin was a knockabout with "Mumming Birds." The two young actors became friends and companions. They "shared common amusements—twopenny poker, promiscuous flirtations, Woodbines and 'bus rides." One of his memories is of Charlie pressing a pair of "soiled shiny trousers, in order that he might join me in an evening ramble along Brixton Road in search of feminine adventure." Another is of the young comedian "sitting on an old iron bed in Kennington . . . carefully separating a Woodbine in order that I might not go smokeless."

There is no reason for doubting the substantial accuracy of this vivid sketch of the shabby-genteel music-hall artist, though there is possibly some confusion of dates. It may have been true that Charlie had vague ideas about life with "no concrete visions of either his future or his desires." But this could scarcely have been so in 1910. For it was in this year, after touring the music halls

of Great Britain, that Charlie went to the United States as leading comedian with the Fred Karno Comedy Company. It could scarcely be said that he had no concrete visions of his future then, for he had already made some progress in his profession, and achieved, if only in a small degree, some reputation as a comedian. Moreover, he was at this period in steady employment with the Karno Company and not so impecunious that he could not afford the luxury of a regular supply of cigarettes.

Further confirmation of this view is given in Charlie's book, *My Wonderful Visit*, when, in writing about the haunts of his childhood, he mentions Glenshore Mansions, in Brixton Road, where he lived before he sailed for the United States. He says: "We pass Glenshore Mansions—a more prosperous neighborhood. Glenshore Mansions, which meant a step upward to me, where I had my Turkish carpets and my red lights in the beginning of my prosperity." And this was in 1910. Mr. Courtney must have been recalling a period a little earlier, when Charlie was undoubtedly as poor as his friend describes him.

After leaving London for the United States, Charlie did not see his friend again for six years.

Mr. Courtney tells the story of this remarkable meeting in the series of articles already mentioned. In his narrative the writer displays a vivid sense of its dramatic values. In the interval of six years much had happened. The obscure and friendless boy from Kennington had become world-famous, and had earned an income that princes would have envied.

Fortune had not been so kind to Mr. Courtney. Engagements had been so scarce that he had been driven to singing in the streets. Then, with a determination to succeed, he worked a passage to New York. Here for a time the fates were as unkind as in London, and he was driven to the expedient of selling newspapers on Broadway. In this occupation he not only kept clear of the "bread-line," but saved enough to buy himself, for twenty dollars, a situation as bell-hop at the Los Angeles Athletic Club. Charlie Chaplin was a member of the club and had a bedroom there. Outside the door of this bedroom two big detectives were constantly posted to keep out unauthorized people. The fact that Charlie was a member of the Club was obviously unknown to Mr. Courtney until one day, when dressed in the uniform of his office, he was instructed to take up

a Red Raven Split to Charlie's room. There, to his great surprise, he saw his old friend sitting on the bed, sucking an orange.

The bell-hop yelled "Charlie," and rushed forward. Charlie, as greatly excited as his friend, dropped his orange and seized Mr. Courtney's hand. Then for two hours these long-parted friends sat on the bed together and talked of old times. "He asked me," says Mr. Courtney, "a thousand machine-gun questions about London, particularly Kennington."

Charlie was not dressed to receive visitors. He was in pajamas, and while his friend unfolded his budget of news, sat on the bed sucking innumerable oranges, only interrupting this exercise to ask further questions.

In the adjoining room Charlie's secretary was informing callers, who came on an average of every three minutes, that Mr. Chaplin was "in conference;" while the telephone bell scarcely stopped ringing.

Below-stairs anarchy reigned. The Club servants were excited and bewildered by the strange behavior of their colleague. Well-regulated Club servants did not act in this way! The captain of the bell-hops raged furiously. Three times he

went up to the Chaplin bedroom, but the detectives on guard refused to admit him.

Meanwhile in Charlie's room the discussion on old times continued, and if any strict moralist could have heard it he would have found confirmation for his belief in the vanity of fame and riches. For as Mr. Courtney continued his recital of happenings in those days of poverty and obscurity, Charlie, the renowned and wealthy, listened with kindling eye and from time to time exclaimed: "Happy days! Happy days!"

This meeting was the turning-point in Mr. Courtney's career. Charlie made him take off his uniform and don his private clothes. When this operation was completed, Charlie and his friend left the building together arm in arm. Mr. Courtney recalls with obvious satisfaction that as they crossed the lobby in this brotherly fashion "fourteen bell-boys, an elevator man, the office staff and the bell-captain" looked on in astonishment. When they reached the swinging doors, the bell-captain, not to be cheated of his authority, shouted: "You're fired." A moment later Charlie turned to his friend with a reassuring smile and said: "You're engaged." Mr. Courtney's further history does not concern us here, except to mention

that he fully justified the confidence Charlie showed in his ability.

One episode in Charlie's early life deserves more than passing notice—his first love-affair. For amid the beautiful women who have loved him, Charlie keeps apart in one of the inner recesses of his heart a fragrant memory of that first love-affair with Hetty, the sister of an old stage colleague. It was but a boy-and-girl affair that did not get beyond the flirtation stage, and made no serious demand on the emotions of either Hetty or Charlie. This first visit to the fairyland of love's enchantments thrilled and delighted the young couple, but it was only a short-time excursion and quickly ran its course. But for Charlie it left tender and regretful memories.

When he went to England after the war he made inquiries about Hetty, and learned that she had married and was now dead. The news saddened him so, that when he reached London, his first visit was to Kennington and to the Gate, where as a boy of nineteen he kept his first appointment with the girl who had captured his youthful fancy. "Kennington Gate has its memories," he says in that self-revealing record of his journey. "Sad, sweet, rapidly recurring memories.

'Twas here my first appointment with Hetty. How I was quite dolled up in my little tight-fitting frock-coat, hat and cane! I was quite the dude as I watched every street car until four o'clock waiting for Hetty to step off, smiling as she saw me waiting."

He looks again at the familiar scene, and he sees an excited youth, impatiently awaiting the hour when he and happiness will walk along the road. He sighs as he remembers that the raptures of youth's golden days are beyond recall, and that the lad with the frock-coat and cane, and those who shared his joys and sorrow, have vanished, and found their appointed place in "Time's gray urn."

CHAPTER III

CHARLIE DISCOVERS AMERICA

WHEN in 1910 Charlie Chaplin signed a contract with the Fred Karno Comedy Company under which he engaged himself to play as leading comedian for a long tour of the United States and Canada, he took a step which indirectly had an important bearing on his future.

He had worked, as we have seen, for a considerable time with the Fred Karno organization, and Alf Reeves, the manager of the particular company with which he was associated, was a close personal friend. Reeves was an able organizer and an excellent man of business. He was a public entertainer of great experience, and was a trusted and valued agent of Fred Karno's, whom he had joined after a service of several years with Lord George Sanger, the circus proprietor. Reeves took a great fancy to Charlie, and was his adviser and counselor in every difficulty. Charlie, though he little guessed it at the time, was gaining invaluable experience for the film work he was later to undertake.

The Fred Karno Comedy Company took with them a repertoire of pantomime sets, and in the most notable of these a lively and realistic impression was given of "A Night in a London Music Hall." In this Charlie played the part of a drunken reveller who had various exciting adventures and was always on the verge of toppling out of the stage-box.

The company toured the principal cities of the United States and Canada until the spring of 1912. Then the players left for England to fulfil repeat engagements there, and returned to America in the autumn of the same year to continue their vaudeville tour.

Charlie's acting was greatly to the liking of his American patrons, and it was evident that he was by far the most competent actor in the company.

It was a wearing life—rehearsals, performances before critical strangers, the packing and unpacking of luggage, and the bustle and fatigue of long train journeys, fretted nerves and tempers—and left little time for leisure. Chaplin hated the life, and so did the other players. "When we were playing in New York," he wrote in after years, "we wished ourselves back in London, and when we were playing in England we longed for New

York." But none of the members of the company were willing to give up this employment, arduous as its conditions might be, for it meant food and shelter and occasional luxuries. And none were less inclined to make a change than Charlie himself, as we shall see.

* * * * *

In 1889, the year Chaplin was born, Thomas A. Edison invented the Kinetoscope, the forerunner of the modern motion-picture camera. In the interval that elapsed between that epoch-making event and the year 1913, much happened. The great film industry was built up and organized. The motion picture was first used for recording events of interest. In 1913 it interpreted the tale-teller's art, and showed in pictures the work of the playwright and novelist. Capitalists had visualized its possibilities and invested immense sums in the business. But it was still in its earlier stages of development. Producers had not attempted anything beyond one-reel pictures. The rival firms of screen artists were still fighting for position, and there was intermittent warfare among them. The American magnate likes to have a monopoly of any line he handles. Competition

causes him unnecessary anxieties, and he is generally prepared to go to any lengths to eliminate it. This was the problem he was facing, and as there was a lot of money to be made in the motion-picture game, actions at law concerning infringements of patent and other rights were as plentiful as blackberries in September. For a time the struggle was waged with characteristic vigor and ruthlessness.

But at the end of July, 1913, there came a lull. For a week at least peace had reigned. This unusual state of affairs caused Mr. A. Kessel, the President of the New York Motion Picture Company, to feel extremely bored. He was used to a life of activity and excitement, and as he sat at his desk one sunny afternoon, in the palatial board-room of the company, in the Putnam Building, he suddenly decided that a stroll along Broadway would revive his flagging energies.

When he reached Hammerstein's Music Hall he saw his friend, Mike Sullivan, the manager, standing in the lobby, and stopped to have a chat with him. As they talked, gales of laughter were wafted to their ears from the Music Hall. "Something good going on?" asked Kessel. "I expect it's that young Chaplin that's causing the cackle. He's

pretty good. But the rest are just an ordinary Cockney crowd," replied the manager.

"I think I'll go inside for a bit and see what it's all about," said Kessel.

The Karno Company were playing "A Night in a London Music Hall," and the act was going with a bang.

When the performance was over, Kessel, who was a privileged person, went behind the scenes and asked for Mr. Chaplin.

Kessel quickly found the little man he was seeking in a tiny dressing-room, busily removing his make-up.

Kessel, like most American business men, was direct in his methods and at once stated the object of his visit. He told Charlie he was the President of the company that made the Keystone pictures and that he wanted a comedian to go out to Hollywood and make pictures, and that from what he had seen that afternoon Chaplin was the man for the job. He ended by offering Charlie seventy-five dollars a week.

Chaplin was not to be caught so easily. He was flattered by the offer and rather dazzled by the prospect of earning a larger salary than he had ever had before. But his native caution asserted

CHARLIE CHAPLIN AND JACKIE COOGAN IN THEIR MEMORABLE PERFORMANCE OF "THE KID."

The Albert Davis Collection

itself, and he was not certain that Kessel was in the position to make him this proposal. Kessel regarded him with surprise as he raised objections, for Charlie was using a Cockney accent that he had difficulty in understanding. Charlie told him he was in a good job, that as his company was solidly booked from the Atlantic to the Pacific coasts, he had no cause to worry at present, and that as he had experienced hard times in the past he was not inclined to throw up the substance for the shadow.

But Kessel was not to be rebuffed so easily. When he set his heart on a thing, he worried and worked until he got it.

"I tell you, Mr. Chaplin," he replied, "we can give you seventy-five dollars a week. Is it not a good salary?"

But Charlie shook his head.

Further argument followed. Kessel was persistent, and Chaplin equally obdurate.

Then Kessel with a flourish raised his offer to one hundred dollars a week.

Charlie, however, despite entreaty and advice, was not to be moved. For once Kessel's persuasions had proved ineffective and he went back to his office chagrined at his failure to secure the

little comedian, while Charlie wondered whether he had made a terrible mistake in rejecting the offer.

Events proved the wisdom of his refusal. A month or two later, when the Fred Karno Comedy Company was playing at the Nixon Theatre in Philadelphia, Alfred Reeves, the manager, received a telegram in these terms:

"Is Chaplin with your company? Have him call Saturday our office Putnam Building.

KESSEL."

In his own account of these negotiations Charlie says that he also received a telegram, and that the name on the envelope sounded like a radio signal. It was addressed to Mr. Crzzxs Okkgdlinx, c/o Fred Karno's Pantomime Company, and was from The Keystone Comedy Moving Picture Company, then beginning to make moving pictures on the Pacific Coast. This telegram was to the same effect as the former. Another member of the Karno Company claimed, when its contents became known, that the telegram was meant for him, and that Charlie had cheated. When he finally arrived at Los Angeles, Charlie discovered that the telegram was meant for neither of them! But that is only

his humorous version, and seems too much like an episode from one of his own comedies.

What really happened was more prosaic. Reeves showed Chaplin the telegram and strongly advised him to accept the invitation to New York. Charlie went to the great metropolis, and there was no doubt a hint of triumph in the smile with which Kessel welcomed the little comedy actor when he entered the board-room in the Putnam Building. But the battle was not yet won, for Charlie's caution, bred of hardship and poverty, was still a formidable obstacle. Kessel raised his offer to one hundred and fifty dollars a week, pushed over a contract form, and asked him to sign it. It was a salary Charlie had never dreamt of earning, and brought luxuries within his grasp that he had long sighed for; but he would not sign at once. Kessel used his persuasive eloquence, and pointed out the opportunities motion pictures offered to an actor of ambition, but the little fellow would not sign. He wanted time to think the matter over carefully and consult his manager.

Charlie went back to Philadelphia to discuss the offer with Alfred Reeves, who told him he would be a fool not to accept it. "You had better

take it," he said, "because you can't hope to get much more here than you are getting now."

That settled the matter. Charlie signed the contract, but was punctilious about completing his engagement with the Karno Company, and refused to start on the new job until then. It was arranged that this should end in November, when the company reached Los Angeles.

So at last, towards the close of 1913, which Charlie always spoke of afterwards as his lucky year, he became an accredited film artist.

After the feverish rush and bustle of traveling, interspersed with performances and spasmodic rehearsals, Charlie found life in California restful and enjoyable. Hollywood was quiet and unpretentious. The film trade had not grown to its present mammoth proportions, and such stars as twinkled in its skies shed their radiance in lonely splendor.

He was a little uneasy at first about his fitness for his new duties. But once he was launched on it, and began making his first film, he found the work of acting before the camera surprisingly easy. In all essentials it was precisely the same pantomimic work he had been doing for years with the Karno and other variety companies, the only difference being that he now performed his

stunts before the lens of a camera instead of before an audience. Thus the years he had spent in practising pantomime proved an invaluable training for the screen artist. His first photoplay was "Tillie's Punctured Romance." In this he was associated with Marie Dressler, who helped him over his initial difficulties and explained the technicalities of the new art. In her book, *The Life Story of an Ugly Duckling*, Marie claims to have been the first to recognize Chaplin's genius as a comedian. But this is a claim many dispute, especially Mr. Kessel, who first engaged him as a film actor.

CHAPTER IV

AMERICA DISCOVERS CHARLIE

THERE can be few parallels to Charlie Chaplin's swift rise to fame. Many great men might have rivaled him in this if the moving picture had been invented in their time. But the cinema is a product of the present century, and those who lived before it came into use never enjoyed a tithe of the reputation this amazing publicity agent has the power to confer.

The writer may offer exquisite prose or lofty poetry, yet he remains little more than a name to those who treasure his works. The radio makes the speaker's voice familiar to millions—but it is his voice only. The camera multiplies the vast audience by tens and hundreds, and shows the man himself, not his pose only but the changing expressions of his face, his movements and actions—and if he be a genius, the passions that move him in the character he portrays, and the hopes and fears and thoughts that inspire his actions. Lord Byron became famous in a night—but personally he was known only in certain circles of

London society, while his reputation as a poet did not extend beyond the English-reading public.

Charlie Chaplin in a few months became known to millions of people. And not only was he known to them, but they had learned to regard him with affection. They roared with laughter over his pranks, sympathized with him in his misfortunes, and admired his attempts to retain his battered dignity.

It was the Charlie Chaplin of the screen they loved. But they honored the creator of this lovable character, for they knew that he must have much in common with the film presentation, and it was Mr. Charles Chaplin, the creator, who raked in the *kudos* and the cash.

The question naturally arises—how did Charlie Chaplin win this sudden blaze of popularity? This question has been answered in various ways by critics.

It is true that the early Chaplin films were timely in their appearance. Most of them came out when the world was submerged in the gloom of the Great War. In that time of unexampled violence and bloodshed these comedies shone as a light in the darkness. In watching them on the screen men and women forgot for the moment the

terrible load of anxiety and suffering they carried, and experienced the tonic effect of healthy laughter. The soldiers on leave from the front revelled in the humor of these pictures, and Charlie became the embodiment for them of everything that was delightful and amusing. Special arrangements were made for showing the Keystone pictures to wounded soldiers, and Mr. Kessel and his colleagues in New York received thousands of letters expressing appreciation of the pictures showing this famous figure of fun.

It may be assumed then that war conditions, and the efforts of organizations ministering to the social needs of the fighting forces in various parts of the world, did in some measure quicken popular appreciation of Chaplin films. But it is certain that if there had been no war these films would in time have won an equal popularity, though their progress in winning favor might not have been so rapid.

Some critics tell us that the Chaplin films, infused as they were with the comic spirit, came as a welcome relief after the dreary stuff that was shown on the screen in pre-war days. Sentimental comedies of the penny novelette variety, Buffalo Bill thrillers with cowboys and sheriff's officers

riding endlessly over hill and dale in pursuit of bloodthirsty ruffians, stories of fashionable life in the gilded salons of New York and San Francisco, and the remarkable acrobatic feats of thieves and the policemen who chased them, were all that were offered to moving picture patrons before the Chaplin films were introduced. But Charlie and his antics put an end to this period of dullness.

This explanation is true so far as it goes, but it does not tell the whole truth. The Chaplin films dispelled the air of dullness and solemnity that pervaded the cinema and substituted merriment and laughter. But these films did even more. They presented a character, and the most arresting and appealing character study that the artist's mind has given us since Charles Dickens presented "Sam Weller" to the world in *The Pickwick Papers*. The genius of Dickens made "Sam Weller" immortal. His fame was carried to the ends of the earth. Since Dickens passed away Captain Kettle and Sherlock Holmes have had their select bands of idolaters, but in numbers they fade into insignificance beside the vast host who yield allegiance to Charlie Chaplin. Here then is the explanation of the renown which Chaplin gained.

The change that film work made in Charlie's fortunes seems, even now, little short of miraculous. A single turn in Fortune's wheel made this obscure music-hall artist a world's idol. He received more notice in the Press than a Prime Minister. Society hostesses clamored for his presence at their parties. Admirers loaded him with gifts. Manufacturing firms of all kinds offered him motor cars, clothes and cigars in exchange for letters of appreciation. He was overwhelmed with adulation. Women went crazy and insisted on wanting to marry him. People who in former days would never have given him a moment's thought or attention forced their acquaintance on him and offered him their friendship.

To a young man who had suffered years of neglect it seemed as if everyone had suddenly gone mad. For awhile this new experience dazed him, and the look of bewilderment in his eyes became a fixed expression.

But the popularity pleased him. A lover of his kind, he delighted in the appreciation of his fellowmen. It was a severe testing-time for a young man, but he passed through the ordeal with flying colors. The majority of men under like circumstances would have developed swollen heads

and become unbearably conceited. Charlie remained his simple, unpretentious self. Though he liked the idea of being honored, the process was too trying for one of his sensitive and retiring disposition. Large social gatherings he disliked, and he could never be induced to attend functions held in his honor. He loved a quiet chat and smoke with intimate friends, or a romp with children, but from any other form of association he took refuge in the studio and buried himself in his work.

Charlie's early success appears all the more remarkable when we recall the important fact that the first plays in which he appeared were outlined by others, and that he had to fit in his own part and attune it to the rest of the play. Yet with this limitation he succeeded so completely that all the rest became but a background for the display of his art, and those fifty Keystone comedies are chiefly remembered to-day by the fact that Chaplin played in them. Here was triumph indeed!

At the beginning Charlie, like other actors, was perturbed by uneasy thoughts about the public verdict on his work. Would the audiences like it? Was slapstick humor the right stuff to offer them?

Were they not notoriously fickle and changeable in their tastes?

His early attempts to gauge public taste were only moderately successful. Then he sat down and seriously considered the problem. So far he had not taken into account his own preferences. He had thought only of what his audiences would like. Now he looked at the problem from a new angle. After some thought he came to the conclusion that he himself was an average man—that the average man represents the public, and that if he could satisfy himself that his show was right, the public which he represented would take the same view. How he developed this theory and put it into practice is best described in his own words.

"I began," he says, "to take my eyes off the public, and to aim exclusively at pleasing myself. For when I gave the subject some thought I became convinced that it is the average man that managers and producers want to please. And was I not that average man? I have mixed on social terms with all sorts and conditions of men, and I find their likes and dislikes very similar to my own. The jokes and gags that have really pleased me have also satisfied the audiences I have played to in England and America. I am equally at home

with clergymen and prize-fighters—both have put me to sleep!

"When I put my theory into practice I found that it worked perfectly. In the fifty pictures that I appeared in for the Keystone people I found that those in which I tried to please the public did not do so, whilst those in which I aimed at pleasing myself were always popular."

Not only did Charlie Chaplin try to please the average man in his performances, but he also appeared as his representative on the screen. He himself was the average man who as he says "does not cut a dashing figure as he blunders through a drab and commonplace existence. Heroism with him, except on great occasions, never soars to greater heights than his interviews with his landlord. His fortunes always drag a little behind his expectations, and fulfilment lies always just out of his reach. And as he shambles along with dwindling hopes he is smitten more than ever with a sense of his own unfitness and inadequacy. When he sees on the stage or screen the romantic hero who sweeps through life like a whirlwind, he feels a sense of inferiority and is depressed. Then he sees me shuffling along in my baffled and aimless manner, and a spark of hope rekindles. Here is

a man like himself, only more pathetic and miserable, with ludicrously impossible clothes—in every sense a social misfit and failure. This figure on the screen has a protective air of mock dignity—takes the most outrageous liberties with people—and wears adversity as though it were a bouquet. In emergencies he even triumphs over those imposing characters whom the average man has always visualized with so much awe."

Chaplin himself attributes his success entirely to the fact that in his performances he sets out to please himself, or as we should prefer to put it—that he gives free rein to his own fancy, and adopts methods that appeal to his own judgment. This freedom from restraint gives him more scope for the exercise of his talents and enables him to concentrate his attention on the work, without constantly having his mind's eye on a shadowy and enigmatic public.

But Charlie Chaplin's success is not—as he thinks—entirely due to the fact that he had cast behind him the fear of what the public would think. In taking this modest view he fails to do justice to his marvelous pantomimic art and his fertile creative spirit. Added to this is that sense of humor which from the first enabled him to ex-

ploit any given situation and make it "a source of innocent merriment" with delicious foolery. The humor alone which he imparts to every play in which he appears would have secured its fortunes.

Fear of what the public will think of their work is the besetting weakness of artists, authors and musicians who lack confidence in their own powers. But freedom from this weakness is not sufficient to ensure the artist success. If Chaplin had been a man of mediocre talents his performances, despite the freedom of action he enjoyed, would not have stood out from those of his fellow-players. No, he succeeded because of his supreme gift as an actor, and still more through that creative spirit which made him give shape and embodiment to an amusing and lovable type that mirrored the virtues and weaknesses of every man.

From the first Chaplin's work on the screen showed an artistry that lifted it far above routine clowning. But his humor was more raw and elementary than it was later. In his first films the comic spirit manifested itself in a series of gags and funny business of the knock-about kind. So eager was he to keep his patrons amused that he was ready to do anything that would capture

a moment's laugh or appeal to the most elementary sense of the ridiculous.

But this stage did not last long. He wished to do something more than tickle the ears of the groundlings. Slapstick comedy, compounded mostly of boisterous spirits and manifested in physical violence, might delight bright young people. But he saw that it bore the same relation to humor as tickling the soles of a man's feet with a wisp of straw. He wished to advance and saw that he would not travel very far by falling down manholes, or into barrels of water or whitewash. There are people who delight in seeing sticky and gelatinous substances thrown at unsuspecting victims. They laugh when they see this done, but it is not a sign of fine humorous appreciation. It began to dawn on Charlie that humor is a quality deeply woven into the fabric of life. As he said himself: "I began to look upon humor as a kind of gentle and benevolent custodian of the mind which prevents one from being overwhelmed by the apparent seriousness of life. It finds compensation in misfortune."

Those who studied the earlier Chaplin films noted a change—gradual at first—in the type of humor he presented. It became less boisterous and

CHARLIE CHAPLIN IN THE "GOLD RUSH."

The Albert Davis Collection

more subtle. Sometimes it was wistful, at others charged with pathos. Though less obtrusive it ploughed more deeply into the emotions and turned up feelings of sweeter savor than of old. So it progressed until in the films made under his own direction, "A Dog's Life," "Shoulder Arms," "The Kid," "The Gold Rush," and others, we see it in the flower of its perfection, united with other dramatic gifts that distinguish Chaplin.

There runs in his work a vein of vulgarity which is only slightly manifested, but is apparent in all his photoplays, even in "City Lights." That this blemish, which is common to some of the best writers of drama, has been deliberately adopted cannot be doubted, for to the majority of those who see moving pictures, it is this Rabelaisian touch which gives spice to them and makes them appetizing. Those who frequent places of public entertainment know from experience that any display of vulgarity on stage or screen is always received by the audience with loud applause and bursts of hysterical laughter. This touch of vulgarity "that makes the whole world kin," Chaplin has cleverly exploited, and it has helped him to keep on terms with his tremendous audience.

CHAPTER V

CHARLIE'S WORK IN HOLLYWOOD

CHAPLIN's first influential friend in Hollywood was Mack Sennett, the studio manager and director of the New York Motion Picture Company. Sennett was one of the first to enter the motion-picture business. Originally a chorus man, he joined the Edison Kinema Company and took part in making the earliest screen dramas. Like Kessel in New York he had seen Chaplin's work in pantomime and was delighted to secure so promising a recruit for the screen.

Sennett found Chaplin a young man after his own heart. He was wonderfully vivacious, full of ideas, and anxious to "make good." But he found, further, that Charlie was something more than a comedian desirous of keeping his job. He loved the work for its own sake, and put his best into each of the succession of short pictures which the Keystone people produced.

Then Sennett discovered something else—something that made him regard his new comedian as a potential gold-mine. He found that Keystone

pictures were blazing into popularity, and that picturedromes on all sides were crying out for them, and refusing other "comics," as inferior imitations. Sennett was advised from New York that Chaplin was "the goods" and warned not to let such a promising recruit slip through his fingers. Sennett had no intention of parting with Charlie if he could help it, for they were on the best of terms, and their business relations worked smoothly.

But events proved stronger than the claims of friendship. For Charlie also became aware of his growing popularity. He could scarcely help doing so, as the evidence of it was apparent everywhere. Charlie became the fashion. In the mysterious way that such things happen, "Chaplin" hats and socks and ties were blazoned in the haberdasher's shops; admirers bombarded the little man with letters of appreciation, and begging letter writers singled him out for their attention. He became a popular subject with paragraph writers and the Press, and many stories, more or less veracious, gained currency. In one of these it was gravely stated that the famous boots in which he appeared were put every night in a steel-lined safe that was bedded in concrete, that was guarded by crews of

watchmen heavily armed with shotguns and revolvers.

A striking testimony to the popularity of the Chaplin films in America is furnished by the fact that in a little show situated in a New York arcade, and known as the Crystal Hall, the Chaplin films began to be shown as they were first produced. For ten years thereafter not a single weekday elapsed without the presentation of one or other of the Chaplin films.

Charlie was naturally much elated by his success. He felt that at last he had done with the life of sordid poverty that had been his lot for many years, and would now be able to be of assistance to his relatives. With fame and fortune in the offing, he neither lost his head, as many in his position would have done, nor did he neglect his work.

But, as was natural in the circumstances, he sounded his employer as to an advance of salary. He knew that the Keystone Company was making huge profits through his unique performances, and that others who in no way contributed to the success of the films were receiving salaries as large as his own, and he felt that this was unjust.

For a time Sennett put him off with vague

promises, and enlarged on the experience he was gaining.

Here for a while the matter rested, and Charlie went on steadily with his work, turning out films that at once took the public fancy and scored instant successes.

But at the end of a year's service Charlie again raised the question of an advance of salary. Sennett this time was prepared to talk business. He knew from private reports that his rivals in New York and Chicago were alive to the fact that a genius had arisen in Filmdom, and that the company lucky enough to get the benefit of his services would reap an immense fortune.

Sennett now proposed to raise Chaplin's salary from one hundred and fifty to four hundred dollars a week. But this offer Charlie refused to accept. On the advice of his friends, he demanded seven hundred and fifty dollars. Sennett shook his head. Such a salary was unheard of for a man who had only been a year in the business.

Meanwhile Sennett had been taking every precaution to prevent his star comedian from being tampered with by the agents of other moving-picture companies. The studio was carefully guarded so that no person was admitted to the

"lot" unless he had legitimate business there. Charlie himself was always carefully watched by private detectives.

Such was the position of affairs at the Keystone studio when one day a cowboy film actor rode up and asked to see Mr. Sennett. The manager interviewed him and learned that he was an experienced actor in search of a job. He was invited inside and satisfactorily passed a test.

The application of the supposed cowboy actor for a job was only a ruse. True he was a competent actor, but he was also a trusted agent of the Essanay Company in Chicago, and his real purpose in seeking a job was, as may be guessed, to get in touch with Charlie Chaplin. His conversations with Chaplin were brief, businesslike, and decisive. Two days after he entered the studio he telegraphed his firm in Chicago: "You can secure services of Charlie Chaplin if you offer him one thousand dollars a week." Mr. G. K. Spoor, the President of Essanay, was in conference with his partner and some of the heads of departments of his company when this telegram arrived. After reading it, he asked one of his assistants: "Who is this Charlie Chaplin?" "The man who does the funny business in the Keystone films, and the

cleverest comedian in America," was the prompt reply.

"Wire him an offer of one thousand dollars a week at once," was the President's laconic comment.

This was done, and it was while Sennett and Chaplin were having a rather heated discussion as to whether the comedian's salary was to be four hundred or seven hundred and fifty dollars a week that the Essanay telegram arrived and brought the negotiations to an abrupt close.

By his lack of enterprise and vision Sennett flung away a fortune. A year later, when Charlie's star rose still higher in the firmament, Sennett is said to have wept when he thought of the golden opportunity he had missed.

On January 2, 1915, the Essanay Company published the news that Charlie Chaplin, the newly discovered film genius, had joined their organization. This event was dwarfed into insignificance by the grave crisis through which the world was passing. The fate of empires and nations was being decided on the battlefields of Europe, and men inflamed with blood-lust and fevered by strain and anxiety were eager to snatch at any pleasure that promised them, if only for an hour,

forgetfulness of the life-and-death struggle in which they were engaged.

It may have been, as cynical observers remarked, very good business for themselves, but it must be admitted that throughout the war the Essanay Company did invaluable social work for the fighting forces. As already described, they helped the wounded to forget their sufferings, and made those all-too-short periods of leave for the returned soldier brighter by entertaining them with the Chaplin pictures. Soldiers and sailors in all parts of the world, and the war-weary folk at home, learned to look on Charlie as one who brought a gleam of light amid the general gloom, and raised their spirits by his delicious clowning. In the trenches and on the high seas he was a common theme of discussion. He was regarded as a heaven-sent messenger of gaiety and irresponsible fun. The Charlie Chaplin moustache became the rage everywhere. His clothes, his boots, his postures and gait were all imitated by would-be humorists. "Charlie Chaplin competitions" were held in many music halls, and his admirers were as numerous as the sands of the seashore. He was as much the rage with the French to whom he was known as "Charlot." That affection the little man

still maintains, for in this year of grace (1931), when he visited Paris, he was fêted and decorated as an honoured guest, while the Parisian crowd welcomed him with an enthusiasm that is rarely accorded a national hero.

Those who rise to eminence see more of the darker side of human nature than their fellows. The envious and malicious resent their good fortune and they become targets for abuse and the objects of unwelcome attentions which those in less-exalted positions are free from.

It was so with Charlie Chaplin. The shiftless and the inefficient, the lazy and the vicious, felt that as he was now growing prosperous it was his duty to assist them. Some asked for jobs, others for money, while others resorted to threats if help was not promptly forthcoming. Unscrupulous film artists slavishly copied his make-up and clowning, and some of them even had the impudence to assert that he was imitating them. Companies that were suffering from the competition of the Chaplin films circulated paragraphs in the Press that were models of artistic detraction. Rumor and calumny made common cause in an effort to blast Chaplin's rising reputation. If a tithe of the stories spread about him had been true he would have been spurned by

all decent people. But Hollywood had heard stories of that kind before.

Among the slanders of which Chaplin was the victim was one that some people thought might be true, for it found currency long after the others had been killed by ridicule. It was to the effect that Charlie had ignored his country's call to the Colors, and was skulking in California, where several of his acquaintances had shown their appreciation of his attitude by presenting him with white feathers.

In this story there was not a syllable of truth. When war broke out Charlie Chaplin, with other British subjects in his company, at once volunteered his services, and more than once wrote to the British Ambassador in Washington assuring him of his anxiety to give such help as he was able. Yet, despite the fact that the story again and again was shown to be baseless, his enemies, and especially those who had a financial reason for discrediting him, continued to circulate it. Rival film companies "dressed up" the story for British consumption and had it published in several London and provincial newspapers.

Happily, Charlie was not called up. In his Hollywood studio he did work of infinitely greater

value to the Allied cause than he could have done in the front-line trenches. Had he gone to the front the British Army would have gained a recruit of indifferent physique and doubtful value; but it would have lost one of the few cheering influences that relieved the misery and wretchedness of those nightmare days.

It was at this period that Chaplin received a visit from another famous comedian—but of another type—Harry Lauder. To those who witnessed it, the meeting between the bluff, self-confident Scottish singer, and the shy and timid Cockney pantomime artist, must have been of more than common interest.

This meeting had an interesting sequel. The two artists faced the camera together and appeared in a short film of Charlie's own devising. This film, when released, became immensely popular, and the proceeds from it went to swell a fund for wounded soldiers which Harry Lauder had promoted.

Meanwhile, as figures showed, Chaplin had become the Essanay Company's most profitable investment. In Chicago, the President of that organization, Mr. G. K. Spoor, was rubbing his hands with glee as he thought of the immense

sums of money they were earning. He was also speculating as to the amount of salary Charlie would expect at the termination of his year's contract. The little comedian was a gold-mine, but gold-mines when profitable are expensive, and Charlie, who had shown that he knew his value, could not be put off without a very substantial increase to his already princely salary. This was a ticklish point to decide.

As yet Charlie made no sign as to his future and busied himself in his work. Success followed success, and films like "Charlie's New Job," "A Night Out," and "The Champion," demonstrated his ability to gauge the public taste with accuracy.

When in November, 1915, he completed a year's service with Essanay, Chaplin had become, in the words of an eminent American critic, "the biggest single fact in the motion-picture industry," though he had been on the screen only two years.

G. K. Spoor showed his appreciation of this fact by offering Charlie a new agreement with a salary of five thousand dollars a week.

Charlie was almost delirious with joy when he received the news, and rushed off immediately to tell his brother Sydney. Sydney was not at all impressed, and received the tidings as though the

offer of five thousand dollars per week was an everyday affair. Charlie thought his brother had not really grasped the significance of the offer, and read it out loud again. But Sydney's attitude did not change. "Turn it down," he said. Charlie gazed at him in astonishment. "Turn it down?" he asked. "Yes," replied his brother. "It is not enough. You are worth ten thousand dollars a week."

Charlie was afraid again that if he snatched at the shadow the substance might elude him, and was all for closing with so generous an offer. His brother thought he would be mad to accept it. For days they wrangled continually on the subject. On more than one occasion, it is said, actual force was used to prevent Charlie from telegraphing an acceptance. Sydney asked Edna Purviance—Charlie's leading lady—and other friends to keep a watch on his brother and see that he did not sign an acceptance of the Essanay offer. This they promised to do. He then went to New York to find out what other companies were prepared to offer for his brother's services.

Then Charlie received a telegram calling him to New York. Prolonged negotiations followed. Charlie was courted, flattered, and fêted by the

managers of various film companies concerned. Finally an agreement was reached with the Mutual Motion Picture Company. Under the terms of this contract Charlie was to receive ten thousand dollars a week with a bonus of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, which was to be paid over as soon as the contract was signed.

Sydney's estimate of his brother's commercial value had proved correct. For his services in this matter he received a commission of seventy-five thousand dollars.

Charlie was still a young man, on the sunny side of thirty, and he was now to receive a salary of more than five hundred thousand dollars a year —a greater sum than had ever been paid up to that time to an individual actor in American films.

The new star could scarcely realize his good fortune. He wondered vaguely where such a stupendous salary was to come from. When he left the Mutual office where the contract had been signed, he took the check for one hundred and fifty thousand dollars from his wallet, and as he fingered it nervously he remarked to his brother Sydney: "Well, I've got this much if they never give me another cent. Guess I'll go and buy a whole dozen neckties."

In those far-off days of 1913 when Charlie Chaplin first sought his fortune in California, Hollywood was little more than a geographical term, and was scarcely known to the outside world. Its rise to eminence was as swift and certain as that of Charlie, and in a year or two it became to millions of people the Mecca from which emanated glamour and entertainment. Hollywood, the gay, feverish, and irresponsible! Where Fortune assumes her most fickle moods, and men and women grow crazy with the fame and wealth she scatters in their path. Where stars flame suddenly into radiance, and then as unaccountably fade into the blue!

Yes, things have changed. In 1914 a dark, nervous little man sat in Levy's Restaurant in Los Angeles every evening after a tiring day's work. In those days the little man was hardly noticed, for there were other and greater attractions. For Mary Pickford, or Queen Mary as her admirers called her, dined there regularly, while in other parts of the big room were Owen Moore and Mabel Normand, Charlie Murray and D. W. Griffith, Bessie Barriscale and Ruth Roland, Dustin Farnum and Charles Ray. But Mack Sennett was also there, and as he was the first and

most enthusiastic of the Chaplin fans, he was fond of pointing out the comedian to his cronies, and assuring them that "the little fellow there is going to be good."

The film world gasped in astonishment when it was announced in 1915 that Charlie Chaplin was to receive a salary of ten thousand dollars a week. But much has happened since then. At the present day when stars like Will Rogers are receiving as much as twenty thousand dollars such a sum excites little more than passing notice. In any other calling a firm making such a contract with an employee would be regarded as guilty of reckless extravagance; but the Mutual Company knew their business and the money-making power of screen pictures. Paying Chaplin twenty times the salary of a British Prime Minister turned out to be one of the most profitable deals they had ever made.

Under the terms of his contract with the Mutual, Chaplin had to make twelve films yearly, at the rate of one a month.

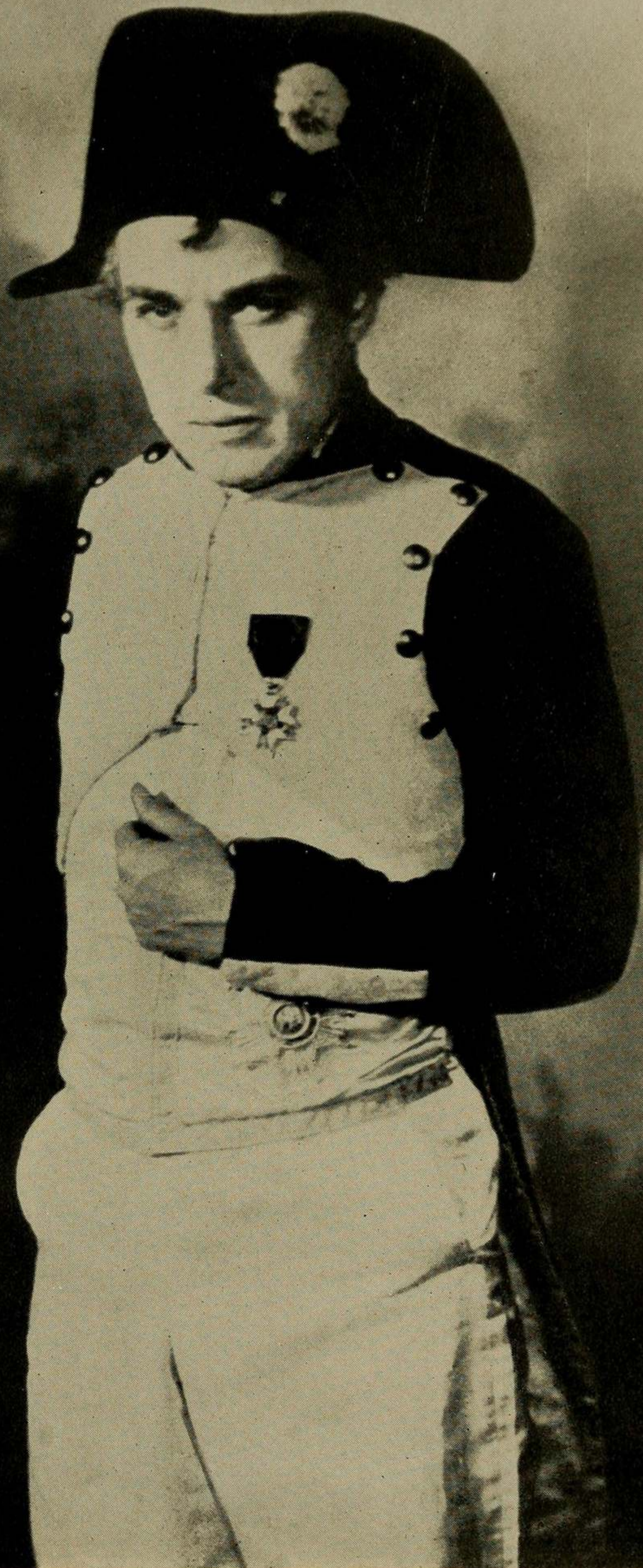
Charlie's methods were thorough, though to those who carried out his instructions they probably seemed erratic and lacking in system.

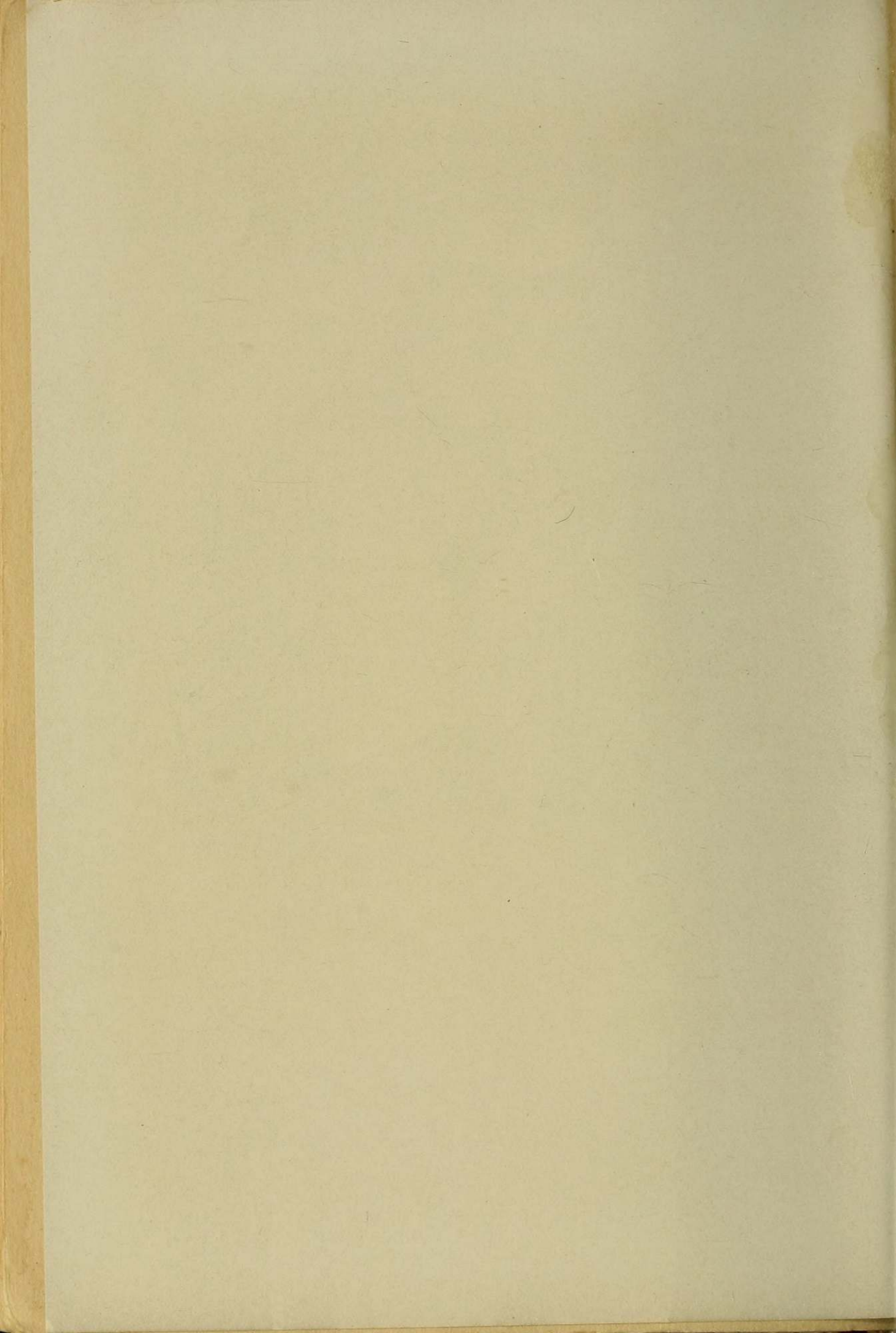
Sometimes he spent days thinking out plots

"HE LIKES TO HAVE PEOPLE COMMENT ON HIS PHYSICAL LIKENESS TO NAPOLEON." — DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS, JR.

CHAPLIN IN THE TITLE ROLE OF "NAPOLEON," A PROJECTED FILM IN WHICH RAQUEL MELLER WAS TO PLAY OPPOSITE HIM.

International





and new situations. When Charlie was "in conference with himself" all work in the studio was at a standstill, and the company and camera men amused themselves as best they could. At times he would work day and night for a week on end almost without cessation. At others he would lounge all day and then at 1 A. M. rouse his company to action.

Charlie's first week with the Mutual Company must have been one of the unhappiest of his life. The Mutual director in Hollywood must also have been the prey of uneasy feelings. For Chaplin came to the studio on that first morning without an idea for his initial picture. Executive, company, and camera staff were all ready to carry out his instructions, but he had none to give. He was uneasily conscious that he must justify the confidence his new employers had shown in him, but try as he would he could not hit on the idea he wanted. For awhile he became oblivious of the waiting company, and passed in review every possible plot he could think of, but rejected them all. Some of his friends offered suggestions, and these he listened to eagerly. But when he had heard them he shook his head sadly and murmured: "Not big enough. I want something strik-

ing and original." As day followed day and nothing happened, matters began to look serious. Charlie became a figure of gloom. The company began to worry about their jobs, and the face of the Mutual director lengthened as he watched Charlie pacing the studio floor.

At the end of a week the little comedian was almost in despair. His mind was a blank. He felt he was a failure, and was ready to throw up his job.

It was in this frame of mind that a week after he started with the Mutual he walked into a big department store in Los Angeles to make a trifling purchase. As he stood by the counter waiting for his parcel he idly watched the moving staircase carrying customers to the second floor. As he watched something stirred in his mind. His mental vision cleared, and he visualized himself as a floorwalker in a department store, trying to run down the stairs that were steadily moving upwards.

The central idea for his picture comedy had come. He rushed to the telephone and rang up the studio. To the operator at the other end he said: "Build me a moving stairway and set up a department store around it."

The studio woke to life. The moving stairs and

department store were set up, and soon company and camera men were feverishly employed. From this activity emerged "The Floorwalker," one of the finest and most humorous of the Chaplin pictures.

We have mentioned Charlie's thoroughness. Many instances of his painstaking care could be given, but one or two will suffice. Those who have seen his picture, "The Count," may recall the diverting dance he performed at the fancy dress ball. In that play he was a tailor's assistant. His employer went to the fancy dress ball made up as a Count. Charlie greatly disliked his master because of the many slights and punishments to which he was subjected. He decided to take his revenge, and accomplished this by attending the ball uninvited. He had no need for fancy dress. The clothes we all know so well were a sufficient disguise. Ascending to the ballroom by the service elevator, he singled out the prettiest girl in the room and danced with her. His employer, furious at seeing his bungling assistant there, tried to kick him as the couples passed each other in the dance. In this Charlie proved more adept than his master.

A comparatively trivial effect to get, one

would imagine, and by no means so amusing as some of the tricks he played on the same occasion. Yet for this dance Charlie engaged a band to play a dance-tune throughout each working day for three weeks, while Charlie, with the aid of Miss Edna Purviance, learned to dance to it.

For the scene in "The Pawnbroker," where Charlie receives a clock from a customer and proceeds with a screw-driver to take it to pieces, and then when this process is completed and the parts of the clock are scattered over the counter, hands the dismembered clock back to the customer, Charlie experimented on many timepieces and obtained a sound working knowledge of the mechanism of a clock.

For the scene where he mounts a stepladder to clean a window, and performs many remarkable acrobatic feats, Charlie practised assiduously for weeks.

His method of composition was and is his own. The general plans of his plays are prepared in outline. For details he depends on the inspiration of the moment. He modifies, deletes, or adds as fancy dictates. If a scene does not please him he scraps it without hesitation and substitutes another. Every detail, however insignificant, is sub-

jected to the closest scrutiny. Nothing is omitted that will add point to the story or heighten the general effect. Charlie is author and producer in one, and for him a written scenario would be worse than useless.

From his earliest days in screenland Charlie displayed in the studio a puckish humor which in some measure recalled the Charlie of the screen. Sometimes work in the studio would be suspended while he played some boys' game with marbles. When "The Pawnbroker" was being filmed the company stood idle for a fortnight while he learned to play a tune on each of the fifteen different musical instruments which were stock properties in the play. Afterwards the staff were regaled with a concert, and listened to selections on these various instruments.

He was always ready for a romp with children, and more than once when youngsters were brought to the studio by their parents to see the great little man, work was at a standstill until Charlie had finished his game with them. Yet with all these interruptions to his work, Charlie did not neglect his duties. If at times he stopped the routine of the studio to draw or play, he more than made up for it by intense application afterwards, and the

Mutual Company never had any reason to complain of slackness. For, oddly enough, it was when he was drawing caricatures or playing boys' games that he was wrestling with some mental problem or thinking out some new feature.

With his company and staff he was on terms of easy companionship. They were his assistants, not his servants, and he was always ready to help in any difficulty.

Charlie Chaplin has had several leading ladies, the most important of whom were Merna Kennedy, Mildred Harris, Edna Purviance, Georgia Hale, and Lita Grey.

Why he should have changed them so often is known only to himself. Some who know him well attribute this "to the strong strain of the artist in him." As Mr. Courtney says: "He abhors the humdrum, the familiar, the monotonous. He must fashion his works from fresh material each time, if his inspirations are to function to his liking."

There may be a measure of truth in this suggestion, but it is impossible to write on such a matter with any certainty. Chaplin himself is so temperamental that it is doubtful if he himself knows why he adopts this course.

What we do know is that in changing his lead-

ing lady in every important play he shouldered a great load of responsibility and anxiety. For each of these girls had little or no experience of film acting, and they had to be carefully trained. The leading lady's part in any play is, needless to say, of great importance. On the manner in which it is acted success or failure may depend. In a picture play where the critics number tens and hundreds of millions, good acting in each of the leading parts is essential. To put an inexperienced actress whose dramatic talents are unknown, and may therefore be non-existent, into a position where her performance may make or mar a piece, is a highly dangerous experiment.

Chaplin took this risk, but he knew what he was doing, and was confident of his ability to train these girls to play the parts he had mapped out for them. There is much more in stage technique than the general public imagines, and the task Chaplin had set himself was burdensome to the point of weariness. But he did not shrink from the task. The fact that the actresses were without experience rather helped than hindered, for they had less to unlearn. To each of these girls, whom he had chosen as types suitable for his various comedies, he imparted the rudiments of dramatic art.

In this he displayed infinite patience and painstaking zeal. With the exception of Edna Purviance, none of these girls had much latent dramatic talent, but such as they had he made the most of and took care to develop. For weeks, and in some cases months, he watched them carefully as they practised the particular postures and movements he wanted them to learn. With a clear understanding of the beginner's difficulties he gently pointed out to the novice where she had gone wrong, and made her practise the particular movement until at last the work was pronounced to be satisfactory. All acquitted themselves with credit when it came to the final test, but Edna Purviance was the only one who achieved celebrity as a film star. With two of them, Mildred Harris and Lita Grey, he tried brief experiments in matrimony. The rest enjoyed their short hours of triumph in Chaplin comedy, and then slowly faded into obscurity.

To thousands of imaginative people Hollywood is a city of myriad enchantments, the capital city of fairyland, where riches and renown may be had for the asking, and a favored few bask in the sunshine of prosperity.

Unhappily for those who nourish these golden

dreams there is no open sesame to the select circle of Hollywood's favorites. The Film City has prizes to offer—rich and glittering prizes—but they are only for those who have grit, ability, and the unconquerable determination to succeed.

This Edna Purviance discovered when she threw up her typewriting job in a small California town and went to Hollywood to seek her fortune. Edna was young, and she had the buoyancy and sanguine spirits of youth. She was also beautiful—undeniably beautiful. But these assets, though they had their value in the eyes of a casting director, were not sufficient to secure a position in a film studio. Miss Purviance soon knew that she had tackled the most heart-breaking task of her short career. As she wandered from office to office she discovered, to her dismay, that for every situation that was vacant there was a host of clamorous aspirants. She also found out that Hollywood took no interest in the ignorant and inexperienced. At one or two studios where she was questioned about her qualifications she had to confess that she had never worked in a studio and that she knew nothing about acting.

As a last resort she joined the crowd round the casting-office window of the Chaplin studio. After

a long wait she succeeded in getting a word with Charlie himself. He was impressed by her looks, and decided to give her a photographic test. This proved satisfactory and she was engaged.

For a time Miss Purviance seemed but a screen possibility, and a dim possibility at that. She revealed no sense of dramatic values, lacked charm and dignity, and was clumsy and self-conscious in her acting. So little ability did she show for her work, that Chaplin felt he was wasting time in trying to teach her. But he persevered till at last her mind became attuned to the work she was doing and revealed to an astonished company those remarkable dramatic gifts that have won her so high a reputation as a comedy actress.

Darwin once defined a fool as a man who never made an experiment. Charlie Chaplin would pass the scientist's test with flying colors, for he is never tired of experimenting. Once he decided to produce a short picture in which he appeared as himself, without the comical hat, boots, and moustache of the familiar screen Charlie. Moreover, it was to be a picture in which he appeared without the support of other characters. It was the most risky experiment he ever tried. The piece was "One A. M." and told pictorially the story of

the adventures of a young man in evening-dress, returning home in the small hours after an evening's revelry.

When the picture was shown for the first time in Los Angeles, the audience received it with tumultuous cheering, and Chaplin was overwhelmed with compliments on its success. But he was neither influenced nor impressed by this reception. When the show was over and he was asked for his own opinion he said: "One more film like that, and it will be good-by Charlie."

This verdict was the right one. Before many months had elapsed thousands of letters reached him in which the writers demanded the funny, whimsical Charlie that they loved. They implored him to give them again the baggy trousers and the big boots and that inimitable moustache with which they were familiar.

Charlie took the hint.

Of his gifts as an actor of comedy, his fellow-players in the studio speak in terms of unqualified eulogy. Mr. Chester Courtney declares in the *Film Weekly* that he saw the scene in "The Vagabond" being shot in which Charlie parted from the rich man's daughter. "As he took his last farewell," says Mr. Courtney, "lifted his narrow,

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pathetic shoulders in a wistful gesture of resignation, and slooped away towards the evening light, there was not a tearless eye among the twenty persons who watched spellbound."

CHAPTER VI

CHARLIE CHAPLIN AND WOMEN

WHEN it was announced that Charlie Chaplin was going to England to witness the first performance there of "City Lights," a journalist said to the writer: "I want to interview Chaplin, but not in the ordinary way. The public would like to see him eating his dinner, chatting with his intimate friends, watch him at his amusements and recreations. I should like to photograph him at all this, and give our readers glimpses into his private life."

This intrusion on their private lives is the price public idols have to pay for popularity. As soon as Charlie Chaplin's face and figure became familiar to picture-goers a thousand searchlights were focussed on him. His person, habits, social relations, pastimes, and antecedents were freely discussed in the Press. Journalists knew that their readers were deeply interested in the little comedian, and did their best to satisfy public curiosity. What they did not know they invented. He became the hero of a score of highly spiced

legends. His size in collars, his favorite shade in neckties, his preferences in clothes, and his choice of breakfast foods and cigarettes became matters of international interest, and subscribers to the mammoth American Sunday journals thrilled with joy when their curiosity on these important points was satisfied. People from far-distant lands made pious pilgrimages to Hollywood to see and talk with the man who made the world laugh.

Meanwhile the victim submitted tamely to these attentions, and did his best to adjust himself to the situation. He romped with the children who were brought to see him, talked with becoming modesty to the insistent reporters, and shrugged his shoulders over the fantastic stories that were published about him in the newspapers. For a time he submitted graciously to this rigid public scrutiny. Publicity was useful, and people who patronized his pictures must be satisfied. But its fierce glare was unpleasant, and he began to feel as though he were a museum exhibit in a glass case.

Even a public entertainer has some rights. Why should strangers interfere in his private concerns? The answer to this question was soon given, and Charlie acted promptly.

The studio was closed to intruders; he refused to be interviewed except on business; and he avoided public gatherings.

He achieved a little privacy, but the spate of publicity matter was still in flood. Balked in one direction the reporters sought information in others. His personal friends were bombarded with questions till they in turn became exasperated and refused to say anything. Then for some months Chaplin enjoyed a respite, for other film artists were coming into prominence. But he was too tempting a quarry to be left alone, and when it was rumored that he was in love with one of his film stars and was paying her marked attentions, the hounds were again in full cry.

Reams of sensational nonsense have been published about Chaplin's love-affairs. The known facts will not make an excessive demand on the reader's attention.

Charles Chaplin has been twice married, first to Mildred Harris in September, 1917, and secondly to Lita Grey in 1924. Both were unhappy unions and ended in divorce.

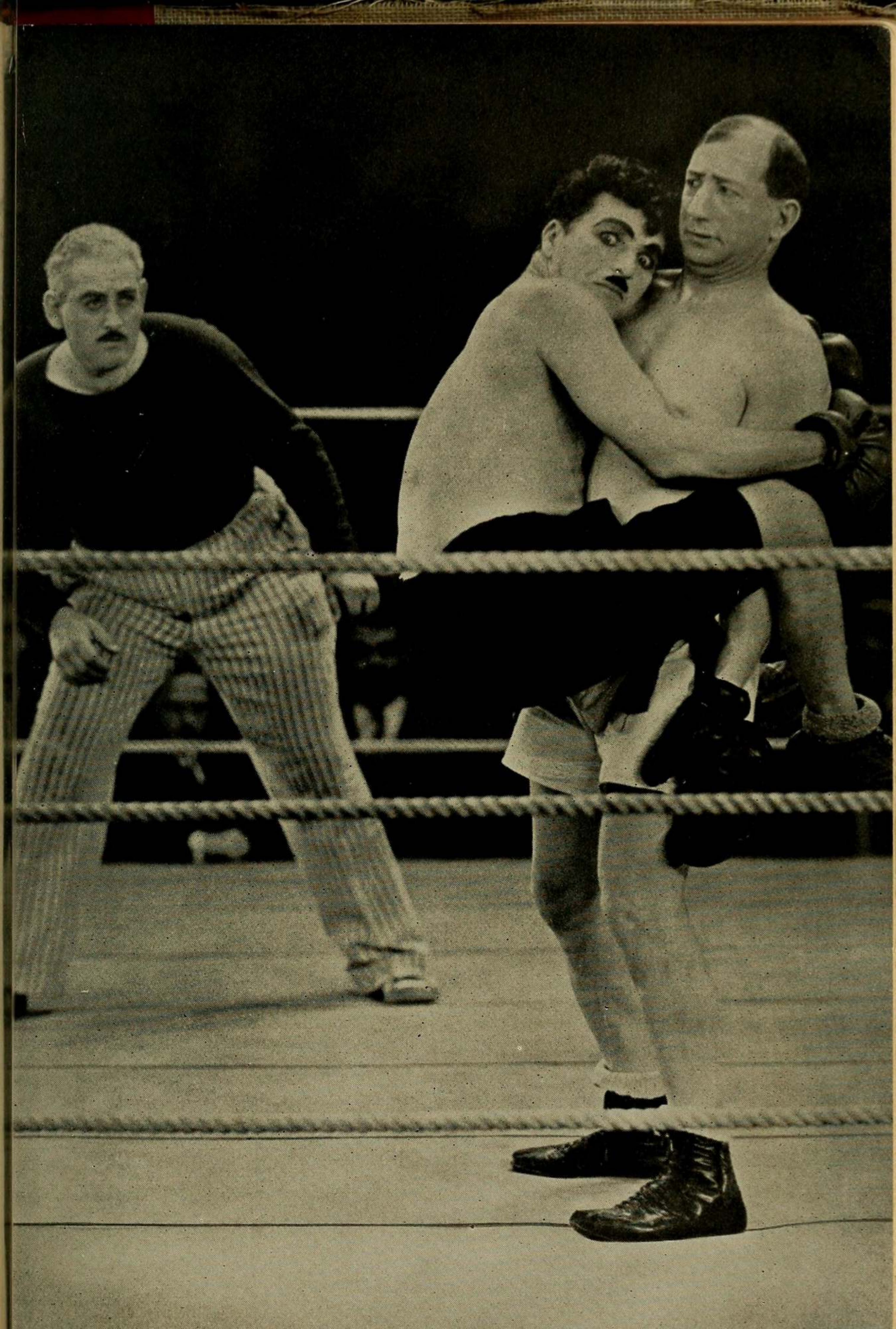
Many women have worshipped Chaplin. But the feeling he inspired was different from that which Valentino and other film heroes kindled in

the breasts of their admirers. Here there was no all-compelling charm, but a tragic forlorn little figure that aroused the desire to mother him and restore his battered dignity. It was the Charlie of the screen they loved, not the actual Charlie. But even under the comedian's disguise they sensed the fact that he was lonely and voyaged "through strange seas of thought alone," and this conviction awoke in them a compassion that made them long to offer him the solace of companionship.

Of those who were acquainted with the real Chaplin none understood him so well as Miss Purviance. For a long period they were thrown much together and were the best of chums. She ministered to him in his varying moods—laughed and romped with him when he was disposed to be merry, cheered him when he was depressed, and was his friend and counselor at all times. What Miss Purviance's views were, we do not know—for this brilliant actress does not wear her heart on her sleeve. But all Charlie's friends were agreed that if he had married this leading lady the union would have been a happy one. But nothing happened. If Charlie was in love with Miss Purviance, as many suppose, he never went to the length of making a proposal.

THE HILARIOUS RING SCENE FROM "CITY LIGHTS."

United Artists



Then Mildred Harris came along, and he found a new interest in life. He was greatly impressed with the fresh young beauty of this girl. Her golden hair and blue eyes haunted and enraptured him. He invited her to dinner, sent her flowers daily, and seized every opportunity of basking in the sunshine of her presence. At this period Mildred held a subordinate position in a Hollywood studio. Charlie exhibited all the ardor of the average lover. He had gone far past the stage where considerations of age and position hold sway with the hesitant lover, and felt that the world had gone into eclipse when she vanished from his sight. He would sit in his car, we are told, for hours on a cold rainy day in front of the studio where Mildred was engaged, waiting with what patience he could command for her appearance.

Charlie's courtship did not progress smoothly. Mrs. Harris, Mildred's mother, thought that her daughter was much too young to marry, as she was not yet sixteen. To this Charlie had to agree. But at last in the autumn of 1917—two years later—the long-deferred ceremony took place.

This venture, as we have said, was not a success. At the end of two years Mrs. Chaplin was

tired of the matrimonial state and instituted proceedings for divorce. She obtained her decree, and her husband made generous financial provision for her future support. Naturally this matrimonial experiment brought the Chaplins into the full glare of the limelight.

Journalists scented a scandal, and the gossips and mischief-makers of four continents greedily devoured every item of information that was published about the divorce.

These lovers of the sensational were disappointed. There were no disclosures of the gay and hectic life that wealthy film stars are supposed to live in Hollywood. It was only a tale of the tragedy of two ill-assorted lives, and the misunderstandings that arose through lack of sympathy and perception.

Chaplin was averse to doing his laundry work in public, and said nothing about the divorce. Mrs. Chaplin was not so reticent. In Press interviews she told reporters and the world that her late husband was a man of strange moods, who would go down to the beach for hours and hours, leaving her alone at home with no one to speak to except the servants. When he was engrossed in some particular problem he even remained at the

seashore for a whole week. Sometimes he would be bitten by the mania for music, and either the piano, 'cello, or violin would occupy his attention for ten hours at a stretch. He was most kind and attentive when she was ailing or suffering physical pain, but was indifferent to the mental affliction his strange moods caused her. His lonely tramps in the California hills, and his long fits of silent thinking depressed and unnerved her. As a young girl of seventeen she craved companionship and amusement, but with Chaplin these were denied her.

For Mildred Harris, marriage with a man so rich and famous as Charlie Chaplin had offered the most dazzling prospects. Until he came into her life she had nothing more to look forward to than an existence of genteel poverty. Once she had married him, she had every incentive that self-interest could supply to maintain harmonious relations with her husband, and probably would not have attempted to dissolve the marriage without reasons that seemed to her good and sufficient. We may assume, then, that the account she gave of her life with Chaplin is in its main lines substantially true. We may assume also that it is somewhat overcolored, as she would naturally wish

to justify the action she had taken in suing for divorce.

We see, then, that the urge for self-communion which marked Charlie's creative spirit, and which drove him into lonely places and made him oblivious of his surroundings, was really the cause of this domestic disaster. After the ardor and rapture of courtship days, these fits of moody silence bewildered and offended his wife. An older and more experienced woman might have understood them and sympathized. To this young girl they betokened coldness and indifference.

His wife's recital also shows that, at this period at least, Chaplin was too self-absorbed to make an ideal husband. He was so much engrossed with his own work that he lost sight of the fact that his wife also had desires and ambitions. Youth demands gaiety and lighthearted pleasures, and these the young wife too seldom experienced. The atmosphere of the Chaplin home was too cold and rarified for a vivacious, high-spirited girl, and Mildred pined and sickened in it. What followed is now ancient history.

* * * * *

It was in the Palais Hemroth, the most exclu-

sive and expensive of Berlin's night clubs, that Charlie Chaplin first met Pola Negri. In 1921, when he visited Germany for the first time, his pictures were hardly known in that country, and as he himself confesses in *My Wonderful Visit,* he was slightly piqued at the little interest the natives took in him.

At Hemroth's Charlie's appearance, as he mournfully remarks, caused no excitement. Everyone in the brilliantly lighted dining room was in evening-dress. Charlie and his party were not, and when they asked the manager for a table, he looked them over doubtfully and shrugged his shoulders. Then he pointed to a table in an obscure part of the room. Charlie was nettled, but he accepted the back seats with becoming humility. Just as he and his friends were going to this isolated table, Charlie was startled by a shriek and a slap on the back. Al Kaufman, of the Lasky Corporation and manager of the Famous Players studio in Berlin, had recognized him, and shouted: "Come over to our table. Pola Negri wants to meet you." Once more Charlie was reassured of his position and he was happy. The Germans present watched the little ceremony that followed with interest and amazement. An American jazz band

was stationed in the room. As soon as their members realized who the little man was they stopped playing and shouted: "Hooray for Charlie Chaplin!"

Again the manager shrugged his shoulders, but not so disdainfully.

Of Pola Negri as she appeared at that first meeting Charlie speaks with genuine enthusiasm. Listen!

"Pola Negri is really beautiful. She is Polish and really true to the type. Beautiful jet-black hair, white even teeth and wonderful coloring. I think it such a pity that such coloring does not register on the screen. She is the centre of attraction here. I am introduced. What a voice she has! Her mouth speaks so prettily the German language. Her voice has a soft mellow quality, with charming inflexions. Offered a drink, she clinks my glass and offers her only English words, 'Jazz boy Charlie'."

But Charlie is stumped and can make no reply, for he is innocent of any knowledge of German. His host whispered: "Charlie, you've made a hit. She has just told me that she thinks you are charming."

Charlie then asked Kaufman to reply in his

name and tell her "that she's the loveliest thing I've seen in Europe."

More compliments were exchanged in this way. Then Charlie, wishing to address the famous actress without using a third party as intermediary, begged Kaufman to tell him the German for "I think you are divine." Kaufman whispered some German words. Then Charlie turned to the lady, and with a smile repeated them. Pola was startled. She slapped his hand and said, "Naughty boy," while everyone at the table roared with laughter. What Charlie had said was, "I think you are terrible."

The little man decided to go home and learn German. As he was leaving the Club the manager approached him and said: "I beg pardon, sir. I understand that you are a great man in the United States. Accept my apologies for not knowing, and the gates here are always open to you."

The next evening Chaplin met Pola Negri at dinner at the house of an eminent German lawyer.

When he returned to America and learned that she was taking up film work in Hollywood he secured her a vast amount of advance publicity for which she was effusively grateful.

Later when she came to Hollywood, after the

dissolution of her former marriage, her friendship with Charlie ripened into love, and they became engaged. Soon it was announced that they were shortly to be married, and popular excitement knew no bounds. The little comedian was a little embarrassed by all this fuss, but his fiancée revelled in the limelight. In articles published under her signature in American journals, Charlie's praises were sung with lyrical fervor, and reporters listened with eager attention as she recited the catalogue of his virtues and spoke of his marvelous intuition and sympathetic nature. He was, she declared, as chivalrous as a medieval knight and as courteous. The only people he hated, she added, were those who always expected him to be funny.

Then, as often happens in these affairs, there was rumor of disagreement; and rumor for once proved true, for close on its heels came the news that the engagement was cancelled.

* * * * *

Of Charlie's marriage with Lita Grey little need be said, as its features are similar to those of his earlier union with Mildred Harris. Lita Grey was only sixteen when she became Mrs. Chaplin, and

she knew little of the responsibilities and duties of the position she was accepting. Both she and Charlie at first tried to make the marriage a success, but they had neither tastes nor mentalities in common, and their efforts proved abortive. Disputes and quarrels made life intolerable for both, and the matrimonial yoke became a galling chain. Then followed divorce and litigation that cost Chaplin an immense sum of money.

In consequence of these matrimonial disasters, it has been assumed by those who are ever anxious to believe the worst, that Chaplin is a reckless libertine and in his dealings with women faithless and selfish. Nothing could be farther from the truth. He has suffered much from malicious gossip. Rumor has connected his name with those of Thelma Morgan Converse, Mae Collins, Georgia Hale, Merna Kennedy and Peggy Joyce. But this is nonsense. Every prominent film star is a target for such shafts of idle gossip. Living as he has done in an exposed position, in which special significance is attached to every word and act, Chaplin has presented an easy mark to the slanderer and moral assassin. The legends that have gathered round his name would, if printed, fill a large-sized volume, but these stories have not even an

air of verisimilitude that would commend them to any but the most foolish and credulous.

Charlie has keen esthetic perceptions and is enraptured when he sees a lovely child or a beautiful woman, and he delights in their society, but that is far from being a vulgar philanderer. Few men will admit that they have made mistakes in their intercourse with the fair sex. Charlie is not like this. To him woman is an enigma, and he is naïve and childlike in confessing his romantic errors. He does not adopt the martyr's pose. He asks no sympathy. He has made mistakes and paid the exacted penalty. Like his screen presentment after a rebuff, he throws back his shoulders, twirls his cane, and marches on gaily to further adventure.

CHAPTER VII

THE CHAPLIN FILMS

In 1917 Charlie decided to become an independent producer and to run a studio of his own. When at the end of the year his contract with the Mutual Film Company came to an end, he acquired for his studio a picturesque piece of property in the heart of Hollywood. This property, which he altered to suit the purposes of his new enterprise, has been steadily rising in value since he bought it and is now said to be worth one million dollars.

Charlie was the first star to acquire his own personal studio, and some of the mammoth film concerns became apprehensive when they heard of this new form of competition. Later he united forces with Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, and D. W. Griffith in forming a new company which became known as the United Artists' Corporation. This Corporation included several of the foremost stars and producers, and was an organization established primarily for securing to

its members independence in the motion-picture industry.

This independence Charlie has always sturdily maintained.

From the first his new enterprise was a success. Freed from the restraints of supervision his motion-picture work took on a more individual note, and the plays he produced in 1918 and the succeeding years were not, as at first, go-as-you-please entertainments crowded with pantomimic stunts, but finished artistic comedies. In the longer pictures especially, like "The Circus," "The Kid," and "The Gold Rush," Chaplin gave his public amusing but penetrating studies of life in various aspects. Humor predominated; the humor that meets hardship and suffering with a smile, and accepts Fate's buffetings with cheerful courage. Tenderness and pathos were blended with the comedy, and the characters were delineated with sympathetic understanding.

Despite their burlesque and extravagance there is in these photoplays, for those who have eyes to see, a sounder philosophy of life than in all the outpourings of the pessimist.

Just after the Great War a regiment of British soldiers landed at a South Coast holiday resort.

The veterans found the town in an uproar. A local strike was in progress, and the soldiers who sympathized with the strikers got out of hand and refused to carry out the instructions of their officers. Then the Mayor, a kindly and generous man, talked to the war-weary men. He offered them refreshments, and invited them to be his guests at the local cinema. The soldiers eagerly responded to these advances, and a quarter of an hour later were laughing uproariously over Charlie Chaplin's delicious comedy in "Shoulder Arms." Here was the little man going through some of the gruelling experiences they had been suffering, but doing it in a way that made them rock with mirth. For the first time many of them realized that, even amid the mud and blood of the trenches of Flanders, life had its humorous aspects. "Shoulder Arms" had done this.

"A true picture of a soldier's experiences in France" was the verdict of one of the returned men, and his comrades emphatically endorsed it. When the show was over, thoughts of mutiny were forgotten and the soldiers went quietly back to barracks.

Among the early successes that came from the Chaplin studios were "A Dog's Life," "Shoulder

Arms," "Pay Day," "The Immigrant" and "The Pilgrim."

In each of these we find an advance on the pictures made in earlier years. They are richer in humor, there is less slapstick comedy, and the subsidiary character stands out in clearer outline. In these various plays the Charlie of the screen remains the Charlie we have known of old, full of a thousand tricks and oddities, but gentler and less boisterous, a Charlie revealing new and unexpected qualities.

One of the best examples of this more matured style is "The Pilgrim." In this comedy, which was first produced in 1922, Charlie introduces himself to the public as a convict who has just escaped from prison, and is wearing prison garb. This he is anxious to exchange for something less revealing and conspicuous. He steals the clothes of a clergyman who is enjoying a swim, and hastily dresses himself in them. Then as he is hurrying along the road he encounters an elderly couple, who take him for a clergyman and wish him to marry them.

This is very awkward, but worse troubles follow. The people of a neighboring town are expecting the visit of an eminent minister who is to

CHAPLIN WAS GIVEN A DELIRIOUS AND UNPRECEDENTED RECEPTION UPON HIS ARRIVAL IN LONDON FOR THE OPENING OF "CITY LIGHTS."

International

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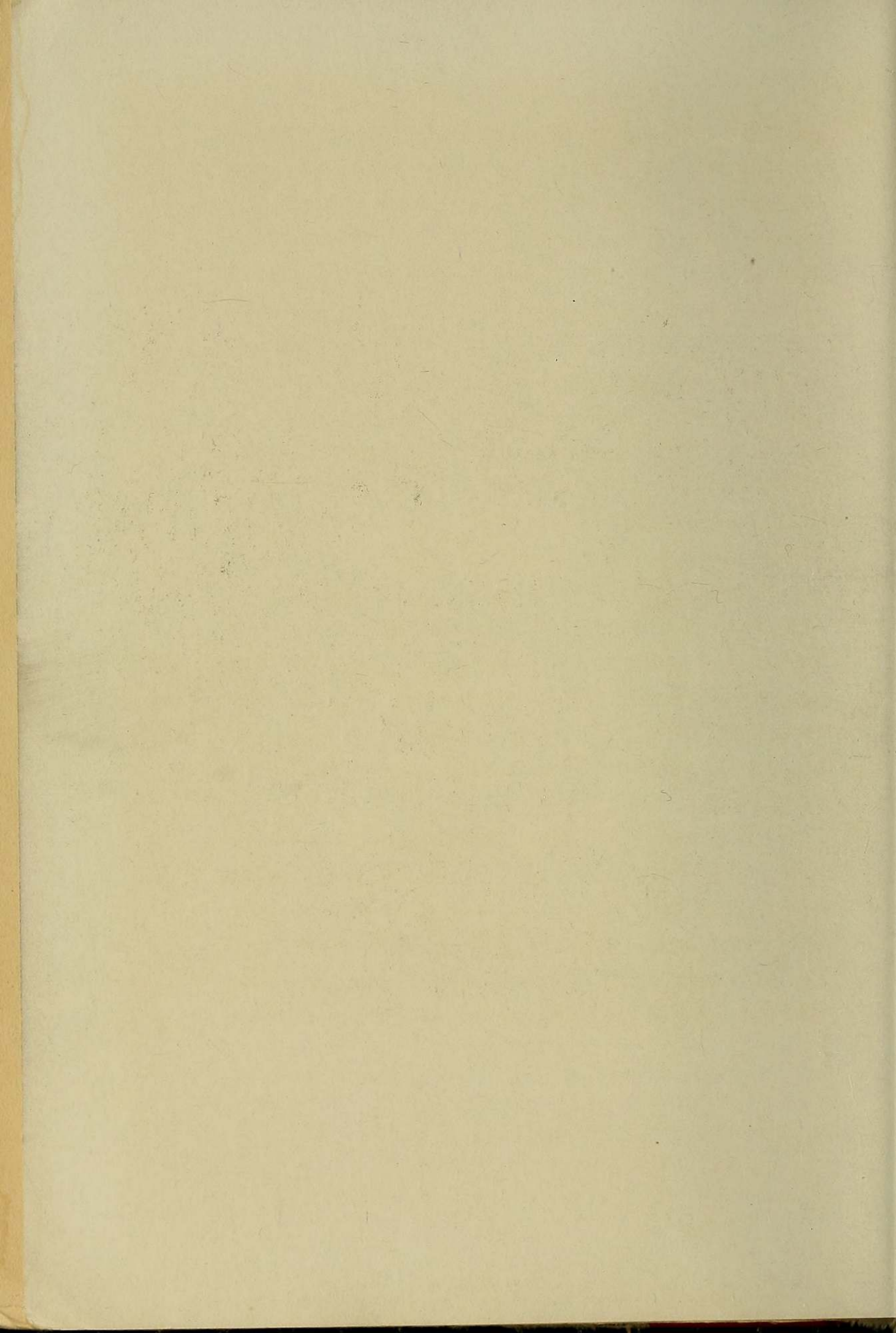


preach a special sermon in their church. When Charlie arrives there, the inhabitants at once assume that he is the preacher they expect. He tries in vain to shuffle out of the predicament. At last he finds himself in the pulpit facing a large congregation, waiting to hear a sermon.

Charlie preaches. It must have been an extraordinary sermon, judging by its effect on the congregation. Some look horrified, others surprised, while the young people present are obviously amused. In the picture we see Charlie telling the Biblical story of the combat between David and Goliath. This is one of the most marvelous pieces of pantomimic acting Charlie ever achieved. So expressive are his movements and gestures that we can follow every incident of the narrative without the use of words.

This is the culminating triumph of the play, and a fine example of Chaplin's genius in pantomimic art.

As the story is unfolded we yield ourselves willing victims to its charm. Its audacities leave us breathless. We sympathize and pity as the hero passes through a sea of tribulations, and we thrill at his hairbreadth escapes. Often our emotions hover between laughter and tears. But laughter

prevails; for who could help being amused by the air of dignified gravity with which he performs the most absurd tricks?

In 1921, a year earlier than "The Pilgrim," Charlie Chaplin produced "The Kid." This was a much longer and more ambitious picture than any he had yet attempted. It also marked an advance in its author's dramatic talent. Everywhere it was acclaimed as his greatest effort, and is still regarded as one of the best he ever produced.

This film is notable for the simple and unaffected playing of Jackie Coogan in the part of the Kid. Charlie Chaplin showed penetration and sound judgment in selecting Jackie for this responsible part, but the child justified the selection. Jackie is now ten years older, and after this long interval is again facing the motion-picture camera. His acting in Mark Twain's story, *Tom Sawyer*, has much of the natural grace and charm of former days. He commands a stupendous salary and is rated among Hollywood's brightest attractions.

When he had completed "The Idle Class," and was about to start on another picture, Charlie received a cable from London calling attention to the fact that "The Kid" was about to make its

first appearance in London, and that as it had been acclaimed as his best film, this would be a suitable occasion for revisiting his native land.

It was a timely and attractive proposal. Charlie, as he says, was feeling weak and depressed, and had just recovered from an attack of influenza. For seven years he had been profitably employed trading laughter and pathos for gold, but the process had grown monotonous and the atmosphere of the film studio oppressive. He needed rest.

But a further inducement to take a trip to England acted more powerfully on his mind. He had never witnessed the visible tokens of his vast popularity. He had made great sums of money; the Press had enshrined him as an idol; thousands of people had written to him; and the great ones of the earth had done him homage. Yet he had never been present at the first showing of one of his pictures in New York, London or Paris. Their debut for him had been in Los Angeles projection rooms. Would it not be wonderful to see how the people of London received his new picture? He had often wondered if the people among whom he had spent his early years would welcome him. He had been assured by enthusiastic admirers that

he could turn London upside down. This he doubted, for, he reflected, the gray old town was deeply immersed in its myriad concerns and had little time to spare for an unknown man who left it years before. He wanted to be patted on the back, and if he really was to have the pats—well, it would be all the nicer to have them from England.

Moreover, he wished to see Europe, which was new to him. Charlie's decision was quickly taken and as promptly acted on. He stopped preparations on the picture he was making and on the following night left for Europe.

In Chicago and New York he had a foretaste of the welcome that awaited him in England. Reporters were in wait for him wherever he turned and bombarded him with stereotyped questions. Everyone delighted to do him honor. He was fêted and banqueted and cheered wherever he went, and spent anxious hours dodging the thousand and one people who wished to meet him.

To a man longing for change and rest this feverish rush of entertainment was very trying, but he would have been bitterly disappointed if these signs of popularity had been wanting.

It was just the same when he arrived in Eng-

land. The reporters fired off the usual string of questions, and when this ritual was completed it was the turn of the Mayor of Southampton, who presented an address of welcome. The flustered little man murmured an incoherent reply. Then there were handshakes from old friends of early days, children gathered round, and autograph books were produced from all sides. Charlie was flustered but delighted, but somehow the crowds were not so large as he had anticipated. This brought a little disappointment, but when he reached Waterloo he was more than reassured. He got a wonderful reception that far surpassed his expectations. He revelled in the thrill of it. In *My Wonderful Visit* he graphically described the struggle to reach his motor-car:

> "The barriers are broken. They are coming on all sides. Policemen are elbowing and pushing. Girls are shrieking. 'Charlie! Charlie! There he is! Good luck to you, Charlie. God bless you!' Old men, old women, girls, boys, all in one excited thrill. My friends are missing. We are fighting our way through the crowd. I do not mind at all. I am being carried on the crest of a wave. Everybody is working but me. There seems to be no effort. I am enjoying it—lovely."

Every hour of every day of that memorable

stay in England afforded fresh evidence of Charlie's remarkable popularity. Society ladies in search of a new celebrity for their parties invited him to their dinners and dances. Theatrical critics who would have felt themselves degraded if they entered a Picture House were pleased to meet him and decided that there was something in "that fellow Chaplin after all"; while the populace received him with genuine affection.

The interest excited by his visit was shown by the fact that during his first three days in London 73,000 letters or cards were addressed to him. Of these, 28,000 were begging letters.

Then "The Kid" was produced in London and turned out a riot of success. Great men complimented him on its artistry and construction. Audiences applauded rapturously. England was delighted, and Charlie got his enthusiastic pats on the back.

He took boat and train to Paris, and there the crowds that greeted him were almost as large as those of London. "Charlot," had an exciting time. The reporters, like nearly everyone else, knew no English, but that did not prevent them asking the usual questions; and as Chaplin knew no French he had recourse to pantomime and dis-

covered its inadequacy for satisfying journalistic curiosity.

After a visit to Germany, he returned to Paris to attend the *première* of "The Kid." Charlie was amazed at the interest taken in this event. Paris had declared a holiday for the occasion, and the proceeds of the entertainment were given to the funds for devastated France. The élite of the country were present at the Trocadero Theatre. The people who could not gain admission crowded the streets round the theatre, and Charlie Chaplin had the greatest difficulty in effecting an entrance by the back way. As soon as he arrived he was introduced to the American Ambassador in Paris, and was then conducted to his box where he was received by the Ministers of the French Cabinet. His box was draped with the American and British flags. A long procession of distinguished people, French, American, and English, were presented to him, but he had no time for more than perfunctory greetings, as officials were crowding round him asking him to autograph programs. This kept him busy, for as fast as the signatures were written the programs were sold at one hundred francs each. Then many photographs were taken, and the little comedian sat

flushed and dazed as a thousand attentions were pressed on him. He felt very happy and grateful as this popularity was offered him, but, as he says, saw very little of the picture shown on the screen. When the show came to an end his complacency was rudely disturbed. A message came from the Minister: "Would Mr. Chaplin come to his box and be decorated?" Charlie grew sick at the thought of such a ceremony. He was unable to think clearly, and went to the box with the feelings of a man approaching the guillotine. After presentation, the Minister delivered an oration. This was translated for Charlie's benefit. He could think of nothing to say in reply, though he tried to coin some neat and appropriate phrases. When he realized that the speech had ended he merely said "*Merci,*" and, as he remarks, the word was appropriate in both its English and French meanings. The Minister's speech to the audience followed, after which there was a tremendous popular demonstration, and many bearded men kissed Chaplin before he escaped from the theatre.

At last Charlie had seen the visible tokens of his popularity.

Among the most sincere compliments on the success of "The Kid" in Paris, was that contained

in a note from a Russian girl, which was as follows:

"I saw picture. You are a grand man. My heart is joy. You must be happy. I laugh—I cry.

SKAYA."

* * * * *

"A Woman in Paris," which Chaplin produced in 1923, is notable as being the only picture that has come from his studio in which he himself did not appear. Edna Purviance acted in the title rôle, and the other principal actor was Adolphe Menjou, who made his first appearance in films in this play, and was recommended for the part by Charlie's old friend, Peggy Joyce. This dramatic photoplay, which he wrote and directed himself, shows the more serious side of Chaplin's genius and marks a radical change in film production. It is founded on the stories of "La Bohème" and "The Lady of the Camelias." In this masterpiece, suggestion and subtle conveyance of dramatic situations are stressed through symbolism.

Once "A Woman of Paris" had been launched, Charlie began to form plans for the greatest picture he had yet attempted. The story of the rush

to Alaska and the ice-bound Klondike by thousands of gold-hunters in the early nineties and the hardships they endured seized on his imagination. When the idea took concrete shape he found himself faced with stupendous difficulties. It was impossible to take the picture in Alaska. After careful investigation, he decided to transport his company, staff, and apparatus to the high Sierras of the California Rocky Mountains. The risk and cost of such an undertaking would have deterred most men of enterprise and courage; but the obstacles he encountered only steeled Chaplin's determination to carry it through, whatever the result. He was out for something big, and meant to achieve it.

The photographs in the Rocky Mountains were made at a cost of sixty thousand dollars. But before this could be achieved much preliminary work had to be done. To make a pass similar to the Chilkoot Pass in the Klondike, a pathway 2,300 feet was cut through the snow, rising to an ascent of 1,000 feet. This pathway was cut at an altitude of 9,850 feet. To reach this, a trail had to be made through deep snow and dense woods, nine miles from the railway. Altogether one million dollars was spent on the production, which

included the building of two hundred tons of plaster sierras.

When the picture was at last completed, those who saw it were satisfied that it was well worth the money and labor it had cost; and Chaplin himself, the most exacting critic of his own work, was this time completely satisfied. When asked his opinion he said, "This is the picture I want to be remembered by."

The leading critics enthusiastically confirmed his opinion. One American authority described it as "Chaplin's hour of sovereign triumph in the picture reels." Another wrote of it as "the biggest *tour de force* of Chaplin." A third hailed the Prologue as "a thing of matchless beauty." In other journals, verbal bouquets like "His longest and greatest" and "The sublime in panto" were commonplaces of appreciation.

For once the experts and the people were fully agreed. Audiences the world over were thrilled by this picture which depicted with realism the drama of the sufferings of the deadbeats and their incredible adventures, and followed with painful interest their journey through the Chilkoot Pass, along a path cut through the snows over a precipitous mountain-side.

Even this story of intolerable hardships, that wrings the heart with pity and sympathy, has its interludes of comic relief, as in the scene in the snow-bound shack where the starving men cast lots as to whose boots shall be eaten. The lot falls on Charlie's, and his famous boots are served up for dinner. The sight of famished men trying to find sustenance in cooked leather would, under almost any circumstances, be more likely to excite tears than laughter. But Charlie is not as others. Had he lived in ancient days he would have bravely faced adverse fate, and the *risus sardonicus* would have played round his lips as he listened to the death-sentence pronounced on him by his fellows.

In this scene, his portion is the sole of one of the boots. The sight of him gravely munching this and separating the tacks from the leather is pathetically humorous and relieves the tension of an almost unbearable situation.

The play is poles apart from the early Chaplin pictures. Here slapstick clowning has no place.

There is a love interest, but this is subordinate to the main theme. It is a story of the feverish lust for gold, of frustrated hopes, and human sufferings. At its culminating point it reaches the

level of great drama, and reveals the sublimity and grandeur of man's strivings with Fate.

Whatever claim Charlie Chaplin may have on the regard of future generations, this photoplay, "The Gold Rush," will be one of the strongest items in his plea, for it contains scenes of surpassing beauty that haunt the memory and quicken the emotions.

"The Gold Rush" took fourteen months to produce and was completed in April, 1925.

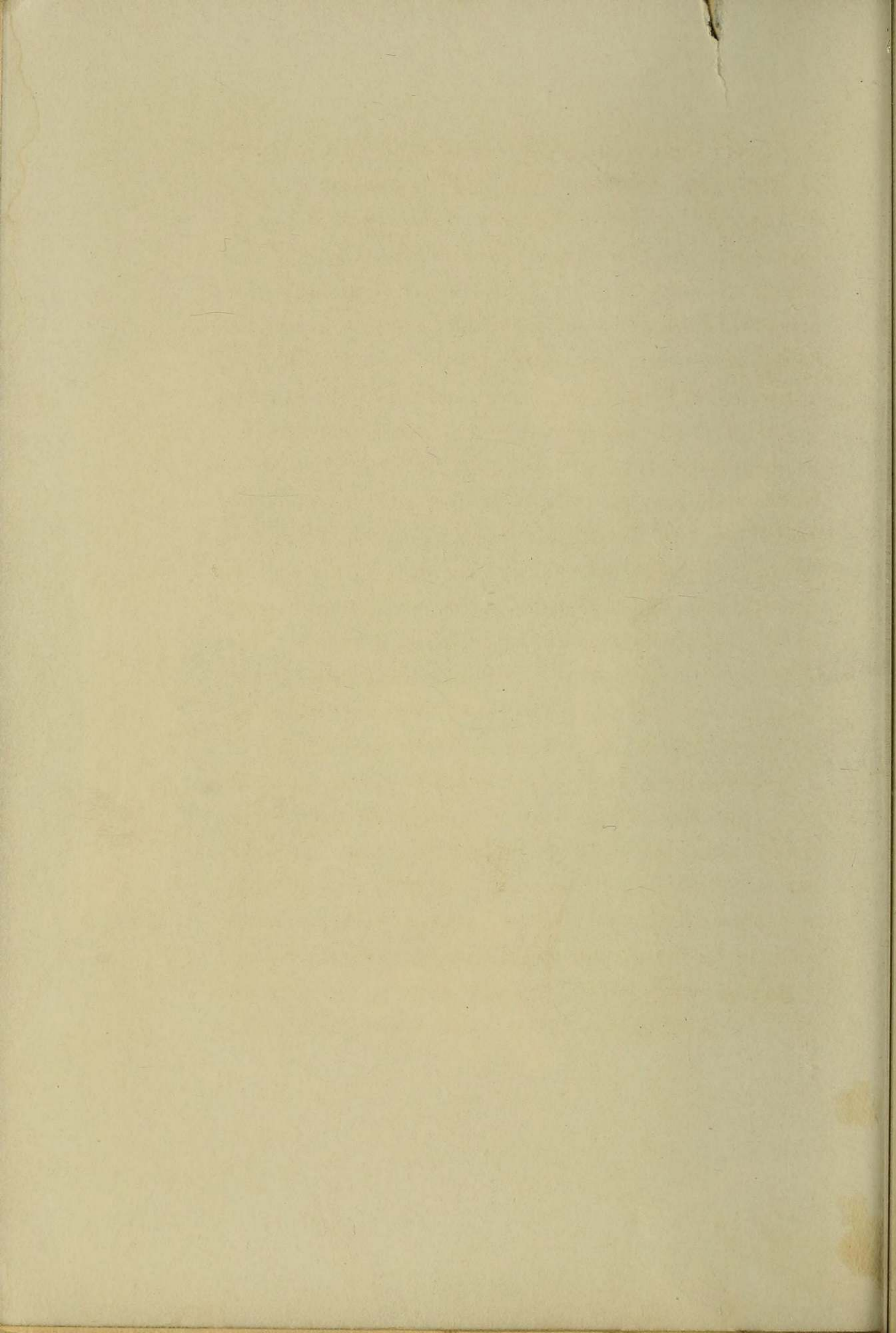
"The Circus," the successor to "The Gold Rush," was copyrighted in 1927. It presents the old-time combination of comedy and drama. Charlie Chaplin took immense pains to make this picture a success. To make it as realistic as possible, a circus, complete with performing animals, including lions, tigers, and elephants, were kept on the "location" for more than a year, together with performers, trainers and grooms. So that, in addition to the animals, more than two thousand people were maintained while the picture was being made, and the food bill alone amounted to three hundred thousand dollars. Special derricks were built to enable the camera men to "shoot down" on the circus, and Merna Kennedy, the leading lady, went through three months' inten-

sive training in learning to ride bareback on the circus horses. Chaplin applied himself for the same period to tight-rope walking.

When the picture was nearly completed a disastrous fire broke out in the studio and destroyed all the properties, scenes, and film, and the work had to be done all over again. This caused serious delay.

In "The Circus" Charlie appears first as a man out of work and in search of a job. Unwittingly he becomes the accomplice of a pickpocket, and in consequence of his suspicious behavior is wanted by the police. An officer catches sight of him and pursues him. Charlie, nimble of foot as ever, takes refuge in a circus which happens to be in the neighborhood. The proprietor regards him with suspicion, but after questioning engages him as a handy man. But he is amazingly clumsy, and his awkwardness, instead of diverting the circus man, enrages him, and Charlie is discharged. But luck does not altogether desert him, for the workmen about the circus go on strike, and Charlie, who promptly asks to be reinstated, is taken on again. Then, to complicate matters, he falls in love with the circus-owner's daughter, but is too timid to declare his affection.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW CONGRATULATING CHARLIE CHAPLIN AT THE PREMIERE OF "CITY LIGHTS" IN LONDON



A handsome young man is enrolled as a member of the circus company. The girl, knowing nothing of Charlie's affection for her, falls desperately in love with the new hand. Meanwhile, Charlie has shown himself to be a very useful man and does jobs of all kinds so satisfactorily that he is always called for when any emergency arises. Thus it happens that when the wire-walker fails to appear for a performance Charlie is pressed into service to do this man's turn. Charlie becomes the star-turn of the circus, though he does not realize how useful he has become to his employer. The girl, however, tells him how indispensable he is, and in consequence he demands higher wages and gets them. But there still are troubles in store for him. The circus owner attacks and abuses his daughter. Charlie becomes her champion and protects her. This the father resents and discharges him.

Charlie goes away and makes another start in life. One day when taking a walk he meets the circus-owner's daughter, who tells him that she has escaped from the circus as she cannot bear her father's abuse. Charlie, acting as her friend, returns to the circus grounds and appeals to the handsome young performer to marry the girl at once. This he agrees to do. After the wedding the

three return to the circus, and the father, who wishes to be reconciled to the young couple, induces them to rejoin his staff. His daughter demands that Charlie be reinstated also, to which her father agrees, but as the circus moves on to another town Charlie remains behind and thinks sadly of what might have been.

Here, as in the rest of the Chaplin pictures, there is no rounding-off with a happy-ever-after ending. In this picture, as in those that have gone before, it is the same Charlie we meet—a little kinder and less boisterous and mellowed a little by age, but the Charlie with those odd and amusing pranks, who picks himself up and dusts his hands with a careless gesture, and at all costs tries to preserve his self-respect.

On this picture, also, Charlie Chaplin spent an immense sum of money. He gave the public a new story and spared no trouble to show them life in new and varied aspects. He displayed for their edification a remarkable circus performance. As in "The Gold Rush," he thrilled them with amazing spectacles. But the comedian himself was the chief attraction, for without the old Charlie, of the big feet and little moustache, the entertainment for millions of people would have lost its savor.

"The Circus" was from every point of view a great success. It delighted and entertained every audience that saw it, and its special feature was an endless source of amusement. Charlie Chaplin himself is the chief feature of every Chaplin picture, however intriguing the subject.

"City Lights," Charlie's latest picture, has taken three years to produce, and in March, 1931, was shown for the first time in Los Angeles, New York, and London.

To the public the production of this picture is the most important event that has happened in film history for three years. When it was produced in Los Angeles the California city went mad with excitement. Women were crushed, heads were broken, a solid mass of people crowded the roadway as far as four hundred yards from the theatre; and at midnight when the show was over, twenty-five thousand still surrounded the theatre, cheering and shouting.

In London similar, if not such riotous scenes, took place when Charlie Chaplin attended the first showing of "City Lights" at the Dominion Theatre. Hundreds of people crowded the vestibule anxious to get a glimpse of Charlie, while outside thousands stood patiently waiting in the pouring

rain. No warrior returning to England ever received a more fervent and enthusiastic ovation than did Charlie when he entered the theatre.

The Los Angeles, New York and London audiences rapturously applauded the picture. It may be, as the critics say, that "City Lights" is not as good as "The Gold Rush" and "The Circus." It may not be uniformly funny, and it possibly is dull in patches. But this matters little, if at all, to the public. For Charlie is something more to the people than a popular comedian. He is a public institution. They recognize him as one of themselves, as a man of broad human sympathies for whom they have affection and admiration. It may be objected with truth that it is the Charlie of the screen they love. But a sure instinct tells them that the two Charlies have very much in common, and that one is but a burlesque of the other. On this account they have a kindly feeling for him that is deeper and more sincere than mere popularity.

In "City Lights" Charlie meets a blind flower girl in whom he takes more than a sympathetic interest. The same evening he meets a wealthy drunkard whose particular hobby is attempting suicide. The millionaire drunkard asks Charlie to

have a festive time with him. Charlie spends a convivial evening with this eccentric. But in the morning, when sober, Charlie's new acquaintance becomes anything but friendly. After a further meeting with this fickle friend, which ends disastrously, Charlie realizes that this eccentric soak will not be of the slightest use to him. So he resolves to earn an honest living. He takes a job as a street-cleaner. But he neglects his work to court the flower girl, and his foreman discharges him. The girl of his heart is very poor, and Charlie, on the lookout to help her, comes to terms with a boxing manager and agrees to enter the prize ring. The boxing match is an amusing affair. Charlie's style in the ring amazes the spectators, but his boxing career comes to an abrupt close with a knock-out.

Then he again meets the eccentric millionaire, who when drunk gives him money to pay for an attempt to cure the flower girl's blindness. Afterwards, when he is sober again, the millionaire accuses Charlie of theft. Charlie succeeds in transferring the money to the girl before he is arrested. He serves a sentence and leaves the prison a battered and broken man. While he has been in prison the girl has recovered her sight and become pros-

perous and happy. But she longs to see again the devoted lover who had done her so great a service. Then Charlie appears. Little thinking that this is her benefactor, the girl laughs merrily at the sight of the down-at-heel tramp who is looking at her with a woebegone expression. Then comes the climax. The girl learns the truth, and for a long minute they gaze at each other in silence.

The experts have shaken their heads a little over this picture-play. They complain that it has dull patches; that it is less uproariously funny than some of Chaplin's former efforts; that it is more matter of fact and less idealistic; and that at times it descends to the level of the ordinary comedy picture. But these faults—if they really exist—are but as dust in the balance when compared with the sterling qualities which these critics freely admit the play possesses. They admit that its sentiment rings true, and that pathos never degenerates into bathos; that it is rich in humor, and that Charlie as the principal is excruciatingly funny. Furthermore, there is a concensus of opinion that though "City Lights" occasionally falls short of the heights attained in "The Gold Rush," it has a finish which motion pictures rarely attain, and is without doubt the finest picture pro-

duced in the past year. For most of us it is enough that this play has the sparkle and irresistible appeal of former Chaplin comedies, and that the inimitable mannerisms of its hero are as quaint and lovable as ever.

In comparing "City Lights" with "The Gold Rush" and "The Circus," the critics subject Chaplin to a test before which even the greatest dramatists occasionally fail. Genius recognizes no uniform standard of excellence. Sometimes it burns with fiery glow; at other times it flickers and spurts. Cheered and stimulated by its warmth, why should we grumble if now and then it does not burn with steady flame?

CHAPTER VIII

CHAPLIN AND HIS FRIENDS

One of the most agreeable traits in Charlie's character is his loyalty to old friends. There are few among his acquaintances of boyhood days who have sought his help in vain. Some he has found work for in his own studios. Among these is his old friend Alf Reeves, formerly the manager of the Karno "Mumming Birds" Company, of which Charlie was a member. As soon as he started a studio of his own, Charlie cabled to Reeves and invited him to come out to California and become his business manager. This position Reeves has held for several years and is still Charlie's trusted lieutenant.

Of his first meeting with Chaplin, Douglas Fairbanks tells an amusing story. Fairbanks' first film was being shown at a theatre in Los Angeles. One morning an actor was standing outside the theatre, looking at the posters advertising the show, when a young man came up and also began to inspect them.

"Is this a good picture?" asked the young man.

"One of the best," answered the other promptly.

"Is it funny?" persisted the unknown.

"Very funny," the actor answered in a tone of conviction.

"Funnier than Chaplin's?" the questioner asked.

"Far funnier," the other answered him.

The young man drew himself up with an offended air and declared, "I'm Chaplin."

"I know you are," said the other, with a smile, "and my name's Douglas Fairbanks. Let's shake hands."

Charlie responded with a delighted smile. The two stars have since been the closest of friends.

"Good old Doug," writes Chaplin, in *My Wonderful Visit,* six years later. "It's great to have friends like Doug and Mary. They understood me perfectly. They knew what the seven years' grind had meant to my nerves. . . . Doug had thought it all out and had planned that while I was in New York my vacation should be perfect. He would see that things were kept pleasant for me."

Though Charlie Chaplin, as a rule, avoids dinner-parties, dances and other social engagements, he has hosts of personal friends, for he is one of the kindliest and most agreeable of men. He is on the best of terms with his fellow-artists in Hollywood, and among them are some of his

staunchest admirers. Poets, artists, authors, dramatists and musicians, as well as doctors of medicine and lawyers, are also proud to claim his friendship. Occasionally during the early years at the studio celebrities drifted in from Europe, but the majority of his acquaintances were Americans whom he had known since he settled in the country. Once a fashionable lady novelist from England called upon him in Hollywood. After some conversation the lady remarked in a disappointed tone:

"You don't look so funny as I thought you would."

"Neither do you," was the curt reply of the offended comedian.

Charlie intensely dislikes those who always expect him to be amusing.

Except the friends of boyhood days, Charlie knew very few English people until he took his memorable journey to Europe in 1921. Then he made a circle of new friends, some of them people of international reputation.

When he arrived he discovered from his letters that there were 671 relatives of his in England that he knew nothing about. "The greater part of these," he says, "were cousins, and they gave very

detailed family tree tracings in support of their claims. All of them wished to be set up in business or to get into the movies." Nine claimed to be his mother and told wondrous adventure stories according to which he had been stolen by gipsies when a baby. But on this point he did not worry much as he had left a perfectly good mother behind him in California.

Having wrestled with these problems of family relationship Charlie told Mr. Knoblock, the dramatist, who had been acting as his cicerone, that he had to meet other people besides his Hollywood friends in London. And then the obliging dramatist introduced him to Mr. E. V. Lucas, with whom he lunched. The same evening he attended a dinner at the Garrick Club. The company included several distinguished people and among them were Sir James Barrie, in whom Chaplin was chiefly interested.

Charlie felt uncomfortable among these strangers and wondered what he should say to Barrie. Why hadn't he given it a thought—aware that Squire Bancroft was seated at his other side—feeling as though he were in a vise with its jaws closing as the clock ticks—why had he come?

He was afraid of Sir Squire Bancroft, for he

had been told that the veteran refused to go to a movie on principle.

Then Sir Squire broke the ice by telling him that he had been to a picture house that day, and added that "Shoulder Arms" was the high spot of the show.

Charlie was aglow with delight, and according to his own report murmured inanities in reply.

Then Barrie bowled him over by suggesting that he should play Peter Pan. But Charlie in his modesty was afraid to discuss the matter with Barrie, who might decide that Charlie knew nothing about it, and change his mind.

Then Barrie talked about moving pictures and criticized "The Kid." He was severe, but Charlie felt that the dramatist was trying to flatter him, and was grateful. He lost his self-consciousness and gave his side of the argument without hesitation, and the discussion went on easily and pleasantly.

The conversation was continued at Barrie's flat until three in the morning, and Charlie found himself giving Barrie ideas for plays, while Barrie suggested ideas for movies. Charlie left Barrie's flat feeling that he had made a friend.

Then he met Mr. H. G. Wells with whom he

talked of Russia. Charlie aired his views with confidence but soon found himself merely a questioner. Wells, to Charlie, seemed full of pep. He was a dreamer, but a practical dreamer. Wells told him that organization was needed, and was just as important as disarmament; that education was the only salvation not only of Russia, but of the rest of the world.

Charlie had had a pleasant evening, but as he walked to his hotel he felt that he had not met Wells yet!

He spent a week-end at H. G.'s country house where he met Mr. St. John Ervine. Ervine discussed the possibility of synchronizing the voice with motion pictures. (This discussion took place ten years ago!) Ervine was interested in the idea. Charlie explained that he did not think the voice was necessary, and that it spoiled the art as much as painting statuary. Pictures in his view are pantomimic art, and if the voice were added, nothing would be left to the imagination.

Charlie had a glorious time with Wells and his family, and sensed the charm of English home life. As he traveled back to town he recalled the crowded hours of his visit, and analysed his impressions. "I am wondering," he writes, "if Wells

wants to know me or whether he wants me to know him. I am certain that now I have met Wells, really met him, more than I've met anyone in Europe. It's so worth while."

Then Charlie met Thomas Burke, the author of *Limehouse Nights.* He had been more desirous of meeting him than any other Englishman, as he is the one man who sees London through the same kind of glasses as Chaplin himself. He found Burke different from his expectation, and met a little man with thin peaked face and sensitive features, who did not seem to be noticing anything that went on around him.

Yet Thomas Burke saw more than Chaplin imagined, and afterwards, when he noted his impressions, described his new acquaintance as being "a frail figure, small footed, and with hands as exquisite as those of Madame la Marquise—in conversation." Burke adds, "the pale hands flash and flutter and the eyes twinkle; the body sways and swings, and the head darts birdlike back and forth in time with the soft chanting voice."

Burke had agreed to show Chaplin the districts in the East End of London where the scenes of his famous book are laid, and the pair set out late at night for Limehouse. So they strolled along in a

CHARLIE CHAPLIN TODAY.

United Artists

labyrinth of streets and alleyways through Stepney. Burke was silent. He had told the story of these streets in the printed page. Now he told it over in actual sights. Now and then he merely lifted his stick and pointed. But he had made clear to this companion the only objects he could possibly mean; and to Charlie the very shadows took on life and romance, and everything he saw was invested with interest.

For Charlie, it was a moving picture specially acted for his benefit. He looked at the skulking forms that came and vanished into the darkness, and wondered what tragedies have darkened their lives, what passions stirred in their breasts.

Outside the Old Britannia, Hoxton, Charlie was recognized by the people of the neighborhood, and Burke was deeply impressed by the note of genuine affection in the voices of these rough people who cheered and shouted words of encouragement to the little comedian.

And so they passed on through Bethnal Green, Spitalfields, and Ratcliffe, and the darker parts of London, whose stones were once so cold to Charlie in those early days of squalor and mean things.

CHAPTER IX

CHARLIE AND THE TALKIES

CHARLIE CHAPLIN may or may not hold revolutionary views on politics. Some newspaper men believe that he is a Bolshevik, but beyond the fact that he has made a fortune out of the sale of his pictures in Russia, there is not the slightest warrant for the suggestion.

But whatever his opinions on social or political affairs, in matters of art he is a die-hard Conservative. The revolution that has taken place in the cinema world during the last three years, leaves him unchanged, and he believes as fervently as ever in the efficacy of the art of pantomime. When Hollywood was stirred to its depths by the advent of the talkies, Charlie took the matter very quietly. Many people assured him that silent pictures were out of date, and that unless he adopted the new invention to "City Lights," the picture would be a failure.

Charlie was not convinced. All around him the film producers were cutting out silent pictures and installing talkies. A considerable section of the

public demanded silent pictures, but no attention was paid to them.

Some picture makers stood out for a time and gave the best of reasons for not making the change. But one by one they fell away, till at last Charlie Chaplin was left as the sole champion of the old order. As he himself said, "he began to feel like the boy on the burning deck whence all but he had fled." He was lonely, and felt worried. How could it be that all the others were wrong, and he alone right? At this stage Charlie took the usual course he adopted when worried or in doubt—he went into conference with himself.

After this there was neither doubt nor indecision. He is convinced that for him, at least, the "babble-machine" would serve no useful purpose. All his previous experience confirms this view. He is also convinced that millions of Chaplin film lovers want no change, and strangely enough the more talkies that come out the more requests he gets by letters from admirers to keep silent.

Chaplin admits that much good work is being done with the talkies, but some of it, he thinks, is most distressing. Much is being said in the sound pictures, he thinks, that would be better left unsaid, and those strong silent men whose appear-

ances bring thrills to the hearts of impressionable girls, are no longer so strong now that they are not silent. Many of the pretty young ladies of the screen should have been seen and not heard. Good artists, most of them, but now they are neither seen nor heard. Some complain that the microphone fails to do justice to their voices, though they know that it is not justice but mercy they want.

One of the strongest reasons that Charlie adduces for not talking is that pantomime is the universal language. People of strange and distant countries like China, Japan, and India all understand him. The whole world is still his market so long as he does not talk.

On this point the facts confirm Chaplin's judgment. The talkie invasion has caused much confusion and discord. In Prague a German dialogue film was shouted down simply because it was German. The people of Budapest have threatened similar action. Audiences in Paris have in one case refused to listen to the American dialogue of a Hollywood film, and in another to the German accent of a player in a French talkie. Picturegoers in some parts of South America obstinately object to talkies in Castilian Spanish.

Chaplin is not impressed by the fact that Bernard Shaw believes in the talkies, and does not believe he is a true prophet when he predicts the death of the theatre.

"Shaw," he says, "is a great actor himself," and his make-up is to Chaplin one of the most interesting things about the Irish dramatist. "He is more attached to his make-up than I am to mine. At least I don't take my moustache to bed with me," he remarks.

Many millions know the Charlie Chaplin of the movies, that gallant little figure who faces life and its mishaps with undaunted courage, who greets misfortune with a smile, and in all circumstances strives to uphold his self-respect. They admire, pity and love him.

Only a very few—and these are a chosen band of brothers—know anything of the real Chaplin. Those who know him best are conscious that their knowledge is superficial. His nature is many-sided, and he often surprises his intimates by the revelation of some new aspect of his character.

He is shy, sensitive, and inarticulate. He hates crowds. He spends hours and sometimes days in self-communion. To his chosen friends he talks freely, but there are depths that lie unrevealed,

thoughts and feelings that are hidden in the innermost chamber of his soul. Thomas Burke describes him as "the loneliest, saddest man he ever knew." But this we cannot accept. He is no fatuous optimist, for he has shed many illusions. He knows the futility of wealth. He craves real companionship but knows not where to seek it. But he is no craven, and the pessimist's despairing creed he leaves to weaker natures. And he has those moral reserves of determination, patience and serenity of temper that may yet lead him to his heart's desire. In the meantime he remains an enigma.

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