

THE LITERARY DIGEST

for June 10, 1922 • P. 42

HORRIBLE HOLLYWOOD, HOME OF HOKUM



TYPICAL HOLLYWOOD INHABITANTS "ON THE JOB."

The chief excitement they may find in the famous celluloid city, says a careful investigator, is getting calluses on their waists by carrying trays in the local cafeterias. The "Horrors of Hollywood," in his candid opinion, are those of any "forlorn suburb" where there is "never anything doing."

HOLLYWOOD IS A HORRIBLE HOLE, and Karl K. Kitchen, who has been investigating the place for several months, says he can prove it. It is such a horrible place that, conjectures Mr. Kitchen, the late William Desmond Taylor, reported to have been murdered there, really committed suicide rather than remain in Hollywood another fortnight. It is a "forlorn suburb," there is "nothing doing" either in the daytime or after dark, the "café life" consists of lunching in cafeterias. You can determine how long any one has lived in Hollywood, declares Mr. Kitchen, by the calluses on his or her waist-line caused by carrying trays in the local "carry-away-your-own" eating-joints. Mr. Kitchen speaks of his stay in the suburb as the length of his "interment," and insists that, because a few of the inmates of the Hollywood film colony have married "from time to time," they are less to be censured as Mormons than pitied as morons. The correspondent spent a week-end in the home of Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks, which he found much like any thoroughly domestic suburban home—except for a complete moving picture projection room where Mary and Doug and their guests spend much of every evening looking at "the pictures." Altogether, Mr. Kitchen's investigations seem to have convinced him that Hollywood is anything but a sink of iniquity. "Right at the outset," he writes in the introduction of his series of articles in the *New York World*—

Let me state that my old friend, Dr. Straton, would not only approve of Hollywood but give it his blessing. For just as an oil-well may be described as a hole in the ground owned by a liar, Hollywood may be described as a collection of bungalows and motion-picture studios written about by liars.

It is an actual fact that more lies have been written about this dreary, desolate suburb of Los Angeles than any other part of California. Only the climate of this alleged "sun-kissed" State has been more misrepresented, to put it mildly, in the public prints. And while I am on the subject of "sun-kissed" California, I want to explain why it is so called. To put it crudely but correctly, it is because the sun long ago kissed it "good-by."

Yes, dear simple-minded readers, to any one who really knows Hollywood and its inmates, the stories that have been printed about its gay life are a joke. The tragedy of it is that they are taken seriously.

There is no more necessity for you to put on asbestos mittens or sprinkle this page with chlorid of lime because this story is about Hollywood than there is for Eastern visitors in this wretched suburb to wear signs reading: "Not in the Movies—Don't Shoot."

In the first place, no one but an inmate can take this bungalow Greenwich Village seriously. However, that is no reason why it should be maligned in the public prints. Hollywood is

Hokum, California

simply that part of Los Angeles in which the majority of its motion-picture studios are located. Consequently a third of its population—between fifteen and twenty thousand souls—are in some way connected with the motion-picture industry. At the present time most of them are only connected with the studios by telephone—but we'll come to that later. Hollywood is in no sense a city. It has no local government, no art galleries, no museums, no institutions of learning aside from primary schools and kindergartens—nothing that makes the slightest pretense to culture—civic or otherwise.

Its only restaurants are cafeterias—self-serve tooth and jaw gymnasiums where it is as fashionable to use a toothpick in public as it is to leave the spoon in one's cup. It doesn't boast of a single theater except the cheapest movie playhouses.

There are no evidences of any life—wicked or of the night variety—anywhere within its precincts. If in the daytime more than two people walk abreast on Hollywood or Sunset Boulevards

—broad avenues that lead nowhere—the inhabitants mistake them for a parade. And at night—it is too dark to see anything. In fact, no inmate of this quiet suburb leaves his home after sundown except, perhaps, to buy an evening paper.

Consequently its gay life—its naughty, wicked gay life—is confined to its bungalows. But despite the fact that the attics and basements of these bungalows are on the same floor, this naughty, wicked night life in Hollywood is not on the level.

How did Hollywood get a bad name? you ask.

Principally because one movie actor—an overpaid, overfed comedian who didn't live in Hollywood—was connected with the accidental death of a film actress in San Francisco, and an unsolved murder mystery within its borders focused the attention of the entire country on its gelatin set.

Similar untoward happenings have taken place in other environments, but rarely has an entire community been held up as a horrible example because of them. Hollywood and its movie set are no more to be condemned because Fatty Arbuckle was tried for manslaughter and William Desmond Taylor was mysteriously murdered than the inhabitants of any other city in which sensational crimes have been committed.

The Taylor murder mystery remains an unusually interesting murder mystery. But William Desmond Taylor was not a particularly important member of the local film colony, and there has never been anything to show that his murderer was connected with the movies. My own theory is that he committed suicide rather than remain in Hollywood another fortnight.

Mr. Kitchen here digresses to insist that he holds no brief for Hollywood or its film colony, but having lived in its gelatin set for a month—as well as having made an even longer sojourn three years ago—he feels it is his solemn duty to set forth the real facts about "this home of hokum." He proceeds with the duty as follows:

Because many of its male gelatin set wear little black mustaches and golf pants, there is no occasion to refer to them as "The Horrors of Hollywood."

I have seen movie actors dress as Bishops and Cardinals eating ham sandwiches on Fridays. I have visited movie queens who spent weeks trying to locate their maternal parents in order to be photographed with them to "show the world" that their home life was above suspicion. I even attended a church wedding at which "Come Back to Erin" was played by the organist instead of the march from "Lohengrin."

But these happenings, individually or collectively, should not cause the public prints to refer to the inmates of Hollywood as murderers, hop fiends or libertines.

The truth is that Hollywood is as dull as the proverbial ditch water. Most of the studios are closed or running on part-time. Salaries have been cut in fractions. Extras—even men with



Hokum, California

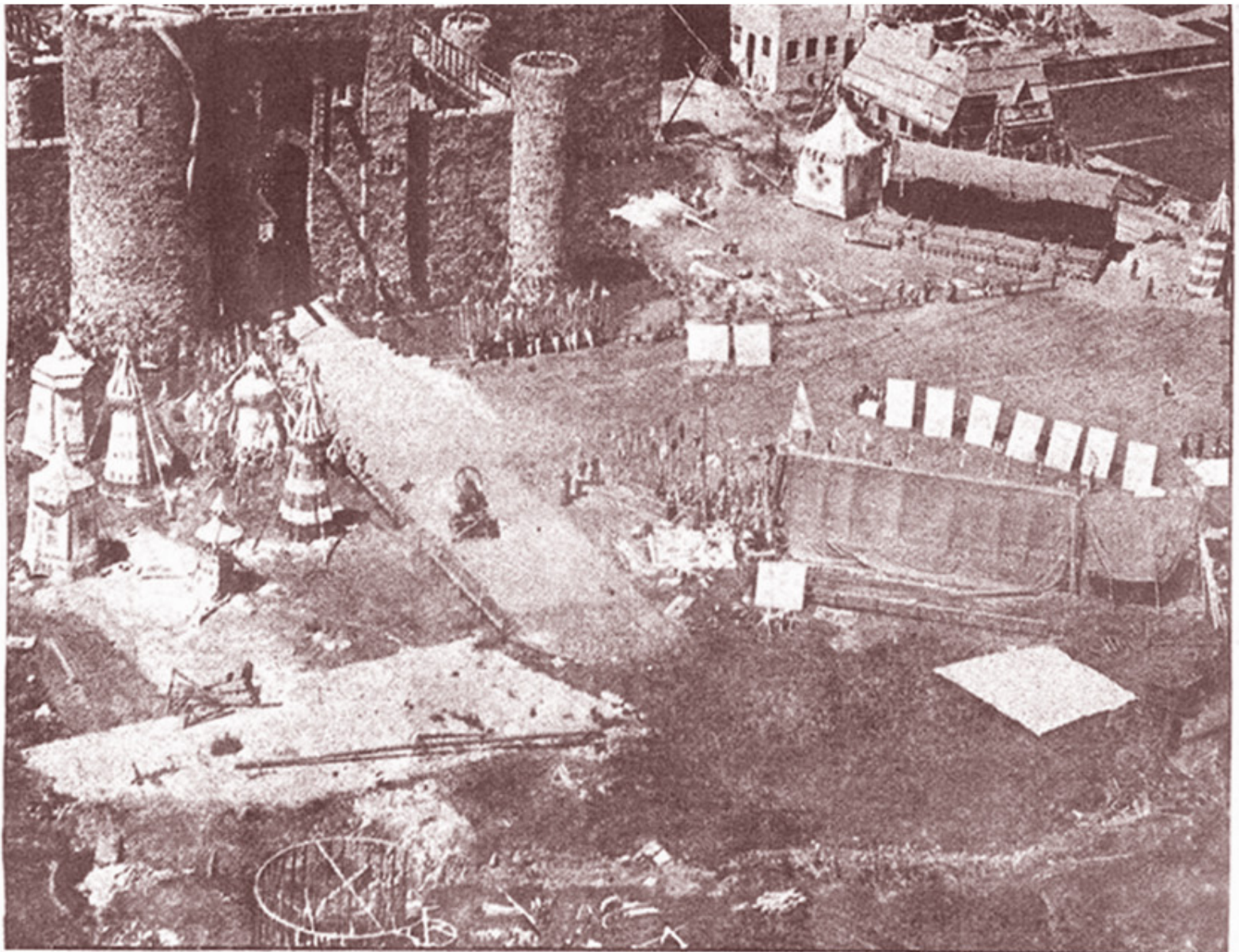


Photo from the United Artists

POSITIVELY THE LARGEST "SET" EVER MADE IN THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD.

This phrase has been used often before, but this time, it is authoritatively announced, there is no doubt of its truth. The picture shows part of the Norman castle sets under construction at the Fairbanks-Pickford studios, where "Doug" is making a multi-reel celluloid of "Robin Hood."

beards who could play millionaires and professors—who used to receive \$10 and \$12 a day are now glad to get \$3.50 and \$4—less, in fact, than a day laborer's wage. Actors are engaged only for each separate picture and at salaries they would have spurned a year ago, with the result that the majority of the members of the film colony are "between pictures," "at liberty" as it is called out here.

The film colony out here hasn't any money to spend in riotous living, even if there were any place to spend it.

As Charlie Chaplin told me, if there was any vice in Hollywood, he'd have a piece of it. He has to go to bed at ten or eleven o'clock every night, like everybody else out here, because there is no place else to go.

"I played a game of dominoes last night and I feel terrible guilty," Charlie confessed to me one morning. "Do you suppose Dr. Straton will roast me to his congregation next Sunday?"

It must be admitted that one can motor to Santa Monica, some fifteen miles away, and dance at Sunset Inn—the alleged center of the alleged gay life in that windswept community. And the white-front restaurants in Los Angeles are open until midnight. But in Hollywood there is nothing but darkness and gloom. That is why the stories about the "gay doings" in this forlorn suburb are too absurd for words.

Not to visit Armstrong & Carlton's is to miss the best that Hollywood has to offer. For part of its cafeteria is equipped with tables to which waitresses will actually bring your luncheon!

Here the elite of the gelatin set lunch daily if not exactly gaily. The ameba of the gelatin drama must be in the hash served here, for scenario writers are as much addicted to it as screen screams or ingénues with phony mothers. The only drawback to it is the fact that so many tourists are visiting it that even the highest priced film stars are often unable to find seats.

The sightseeing automobile companies of Los Angeles have capitalized the alleged scandals of Hollywood to the limit. They run huge motor buses to the graveyard where Taylor is buried and "luncheon at Armstrong & Carlton's" is one of the features of the trip. The yaps who make the excursion naturally expect to see gun-play. One of the sightseers told me he wanted his money back because there wasn't a single murder committed during the entire trip.

I lunched at Armstrong & Carlton's twice without seeing anything more devilish than an assistant director order a second cup of coffee. The third time I went there it was so crowded with tourists and sightseers that I had to join my movie friends at "Frank's"—a cheap restaurant across the street.

"I'm going back on the stage next season. They wanted to cut my salary \$500 a week and I wouldn't stand for it."



One of the many Spanish-Colonial style courtyard apartments being built in Los Angeles at the time.

Hokum, California



If I heard this once I heard it a hundred times during my enforced sojourn among the movie makers. It is the "set" speech of nearly every actor and actress "between pictures" — even if their last picture was "The Birth of a Nation."

But when you read that Miss Maybelle Meringue or Handsome Harry Huckleberry has decided to give up the deaf and dumb drama and return to their first love—the stage—you may be pretty sure that their contracts have expired and that neither Abie Wogglebaum nor Leo Pratheimer wants to renew them. All the theaters on Broadway, if they functioned 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, could not provide standing-room, let alone employment, for the actors and actresses of Hollywood who are returning to the stage next season.

And the reason is very simple—Hollywood as a motion-picture community has seen its best days. This doesn't mean that its studios will be abandoned and the industry transferred to the East, but it does mean that the days of big salaries, wholesale productions and reckless expenditures are over.

Little by little the industry in Hollywood is being put on a safe if not exactly a sane basis. Authors are no longer paid fabulous prices for the screen rights to their books and plays. Actors are no longer put under long-time contracts and paid whether they work or loaf. In fact, economy is the watchword all along the gelatin line.

There is still much to be accomplished. Too many "relatives" are on the payrolls, and directors are still more expert in thinking up new ways to waste time than in devising new business. There are still too many people in the picture business in Hollywood who ought to be in the garment trades. But there is a noticeable improvement over conditions as the writer found them three years ago.

The fact that less than one-third of the studios are functioning at the present time is not the least improvement. Not only have too many pictures been made of late, but most of them have been decidedly mediocre—to speak mildly. The few intelligent actors and directors out here realize this. It is the real reason for the slump in attendance at movie playhouses all over the country. The worth-while pictures have invariably played to good business, and that is why the "best minds" in Hollywood are endeavoring to make "fewer and better pictures."

So the shutdown has been a good thing for the industry despite the hardship it has worked on many untalented stars



WHERE "DOUG" AND "MARY" LEAD THEIR PLACID LIVES.

One room in their suburban Hollywood residence is equipped as a cozy and complete movie theater, and there the two screen stars, we are assured, enjoy a complete picture program every evening when they are at home—where they are said to be about seven evenings of every week. Their lives are described as models of suburban domesticity.

and loud-mouthed directors. The picture business must be deflated—it still needs many drastic economies—a good house-cleaning at the top as well as at the bottom. There are too many illiterate aliens in control of the big companies. When they are weeded out by bad business and replaced by intelligent, well-trained men, there will be still fewer and much better pictures.

Hokum, California

Will Hollywood remain on the map?

As long as Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks and Charlie Chaplin live and work there, it will. Up to the present time there are no indications that they will desert California. But the facts that interior lighting is being more and more used in making pictures, that the "locations," around Los Angeles have been used so many times that they are stale, and that the changed climate is making outdoor work in the winter time impossible, must be taken into consideration.

Hollywood is not yet threatened with the sack, but it wouldn't surprize me to wake up some fine morning in the not too dim and distant future and read that nearly all the big companies would make their pictures in and about New York.

Three years ago, when the motion-picture industry was at the height of its prosperity, Hollywood was dull enough. There was nothing to spend money on, even when the film colony had money. To-day, with the studios turning out one-third as many pictures and with salaries one-third of what they were, it is the dreariest, most desolate place imaginable.

In short, the Hollywood of fiction does not exist. Its gaiety and wickedness are about as spontaneous as the winter sunshine in Southern California.

So, suffice it to say that Hollywood is simply a state of mind. I know its faults and its virtues and I sympathize with both.

It was with the virtues of Hollywood, presumably, that Mr. Kitchen went to sympathize when he spent a week-end at the home of "Mary" and "Doug." Both of them, of course, have been divorced and remarried, but Mr. Kitchen is far from including either in his Mormonical or moronical categories. He writes, in a chatty way:

We sat down, six at the table—Mary at the head of the festive board, with Douglas on her left; Mr. and Mrs. Frank Case, "the gentleman with the typewriter" and his accompanist.

It was Saturday night at the Beverly Hills home of Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Fairbanks, where we had arrived to spend the week-end with the famous film stars. But it was in no sense a festive occasion. In fact, it was after seven o'clock before all of us left the studio, and no one was drest. We didn't even begin the meal with a cocktail, for while the Fairbanks-Pickford ménage is perfectly appointed in every respect, cocktails are rarely served. Doug insists that even the rarest champagne tastes like citrate of magnesia—so, what's the use?

There was a printed menu of the dinner in front of Mary's plate and the meal was perfectly served by a French butler and a second man; but its formality ended there. Before the first course was served Doug got up to start the phonograph, and he left the table again when the dessert arrived to find a box of vintago cigars.

Despite the spaciousness of the dining-room, with its beamed ceiling, rich rugs and massive furniture, the atmosphere of the dinner was decidedly intimate and homelike. Shop talk was dropt when we left the studio, and the conversation, which was general, never once turned to the gelatine side of their existence. Mary, in a simple semi-evening frock which she had hastily donned on our arrival, discust her shopping expedition to Los Angeles which she had made that morning, while Douglas argued with Frank Case, a New York hotel proprietor and brother Lamb, on merits of the plan for making the Grand Canyon a national receptacle for safety-razor blades that have outlived their usefulness. In short, the meal was like any one of a thousand others served in well-appointed American homes. No one ventured any particularly witty remark, but that did not prevent every one from laughing at the banalities that were uttered. And as every one had an appetite, the dinner was an unquestioned success.

As the guest of honor I was seated at Mary's right, and we had quite a little heart-to-heart talk on the subject of marriage — strictly between ourselves. She confided to me that in the two years or more that she had been married to Douglas Fairbanks, she had dined only three times without him.

"And on two of those occasions Douglas joined me shortly after dinner," she added proudly.

From the admiring glance she gave her actor-husband as she made



Beverly Hills, 1918

Hokum, California



Douglas Fairbanks
and Mary Pickford

this confession, it was obvious that their two years of married life have not spoiled their romance. If Mary Pickford is not head over heels in love with Douglas Fairbanks, then she is a far greater actress off the screen than she is on it. I have observed many young married couples, but I have never seen such unmistakable devotion as this famous married pair lavish on each other. They literally hang on each other's words—even the most trivial matters are referred to each other's opinions. In fact, they still act as tho they were on their honeymoon.

When Douglas, as Mary always calls him, returned to the table with the cigars, which he had the butler pass around with all the dignity due a 1908 Havana, the movies were mentioned for the first time.

"There were only two boxes of these cigars in the humidor of a big New York importing house," explained Fairbanks. "And it was only because 'The Three Musketeers' was the favorite book of the proprietor that he consented to part with one of them. Knowing my love for the character of d'Artagnan, he made me a present of the entire box."

"I don't see how any one can smoke them—they're so long and black," said Mary. And I believe Doug would have endeavored to justify his fondness for the rare weeds if the butler had not asked our hostess whether he should serve coffee in the drawing-room or at the table.

"We'll have coffee in the other room and see the pictures," said Mary simply. And, suiting the action to the word, we moved into the huge living-room, which had been transformed into a private picture theater for the occasion. A full-size screen covered the middle of the wall at one end of the room, while the couches and easy chairs were arranged in two rows at the other end. On the steps leading to this improvised play-house were other chairs, and what I had supposed to be a blank wall covered with tapestry was a full-size projection box. In short, here was a complete motion-picture theater, and while the coffee was served Mary explained that every evening after dinner they had a show.

"What's the program to-night, Chevalier?" Doug asked the operator, who handed him a printed slip on which were the names of a feature film, a comedy picture, together with the latest news reels and educational pictures.

"Let's have the news reels first," said Mary, and a moment later—we had hardly taken our seats—the big room was plunged into darkness and pictures of various events from all over the world were thrown on the screen. Doug, Frank Case and I smoked in silence—out of respect to the 1908 Havanas—while the ladies kept a tray of luscious chocolates in circulation.

Certainly it was an ideal way to see motion pictures—sunk deep in a huge easy-chair, after a perfect dinner (minus the cocktail) and with a long black Havana of a vintage year.

When the reel was finished and the lights were turned on, half a dozen other people had appeared in chairs on the steps behind the small, select audience. Mr. Kitchen relates:

"They're our servants," Mary informed me. "We always have them come in after dinner to watch the pictures."

"And you mean to say that every night you have a picture show?" I asked, for the idea of witnessing a movie performance every night in the week seemed too much of a good thing.

"Every night," answered Doug, who had made himself comfortable on the couch beside his wife. "You see we hardly ever go into Los Angeles. It's no pleasure going to the theaters there because of the crowds and, besides, we have all the new pictures sent up here where we can enjoy them in comfort. Would you believe it?" he went on, "that I've never been to any of the places in Hollywood and Los Angeles that the newspapers write about? Why, Mary and I have only been to the Ambassador Hotel once since it was built. We spend practically all our evenings at home. And we're usually in bed at 11 o'clock."

The darkening of the room for the next picture—a travel film—put an end to the conversation for a moment.

"Travel pictures are the best part of a movie show as far as I am concerned," I said, forgetting for the moment that I was the guest of the two most famous stars of the feature films.

"That's what I enjoy most, too," agreed Mary, adding, "but Douglas likes comedy pictures."

Hokum, California

Following another brief interval, during which more bouillons were passed around, a comedy picture was shown. But it was the unfunniest of alleged funny pictures and we all breathed a sigh of relief when the star feature of the evening, a new Goldwyn picture, was begun. However, it turned out to be even stupider and duller than the alleged comedy, and in the midst of one of its most tragic scenes Mary nudged me to look at her husband. He was sound asleep on the couch, snoring rhythmically, if not exactly musically.

"I think we've had enough, Chevalier," Mary called to the operator, and when the lights were switched on Doug awoke with a start.

"Pardon me," he said. "I must have been dreaming."

"Snoring, you mean," corrected Mary. "But I don't blame you, Douglas. It was an awful picture."

"That's why the picture business has been so bad of late—the pictures have been too awful for words," interrupted Frank Case. "Isn't it past bedtime?" he added, changing the conversation without warning.

"It's after eleven," replied Doug. "We keep early hours here," he explained for my benefit, passing me an apple.

"How'd you like a glass of fresh laid milk?" he asked as we said the usual "good-nights." "I'm sorry I haven't any Scotch to offer you."

It was not surprising that every one slept late. Mary and Doug had put in a strenuous week on their new pictures. And I had long since resigned myself to the fact that for a New Yorker there is nothing else to do in Southern California but sleep. So it was nearly ten o'clock when I emerged into the bright sunshine—the one sunshiny day in a month's stay—to explore the grounds of their Beverly Hills estate.

As I walked over to the swimming-pool, a few hundred feet from the house, I heard a whistle from an upstairs window, and a few moments later, redolent of tooth paste and freshly talcumed, Doug joined me on the lawn.

"Isn't it wonderful out here in the hills?" he asked. "Look over there, you can see the Pacific Ocean. This is the only place to really live," he went on, taking deep breaths and apostrophizing the sun. And for a moment I shared his enthusiasm, but the announcement that breakfast was ready turned my attention to more important things.

Doug and I began our meal alone in the sunny breakfast-room, but before we had two helpings of oaks, Frank Case joined us and when we were ready to eat a third breakfast, Mary looked in on us.

It was a jolly breakfast party—that is, if any morning meal can be described as jolly. We talked of everything from seedless oranges to the horrors of Hollywood, and after discussing what would be the most amusing way to spend the day, we decided to omit luncheon and motor over to the studio.

"Charlie'll be over to-night and we'll have some laughs," Doug announced, as he called for the car. "Do you want to go over to the studio with me?" he asked Mary, who merely answered that she would be ready in a minute.

And so we all bundled off for the Fairbanks-Pickford studio



Hollywood Hotel

in Hollywood to see if everything was as we had left it the night before.

When it is explained that Mary is building a bungalow on the "lot" and Doug is having a Turkish bath constructed on his athletic field—in addition to their respective "sets"—their anxiety to visit their studio on Sunday may be understood. And it was surprising how much activity we encountered there.

Hokum, California

When a studio is in the throes of picture-making—especially a big picture like the next Fairbanks superb movie—Sunday is almost like any other day. In fact, it was almost seven o'clock before we were back at Beverly Hills for dinner. Charlie Chaplin had joined us at the studio and he returned with us to spend a quiet evening with Mary and Doug.

Our dinner Sunday evening was a little livelier than the night before, for Charlie loves to talk and he monopolized most of the conversation. Doug and Mary didn't agree with him on anything, but that only made it more interesting.

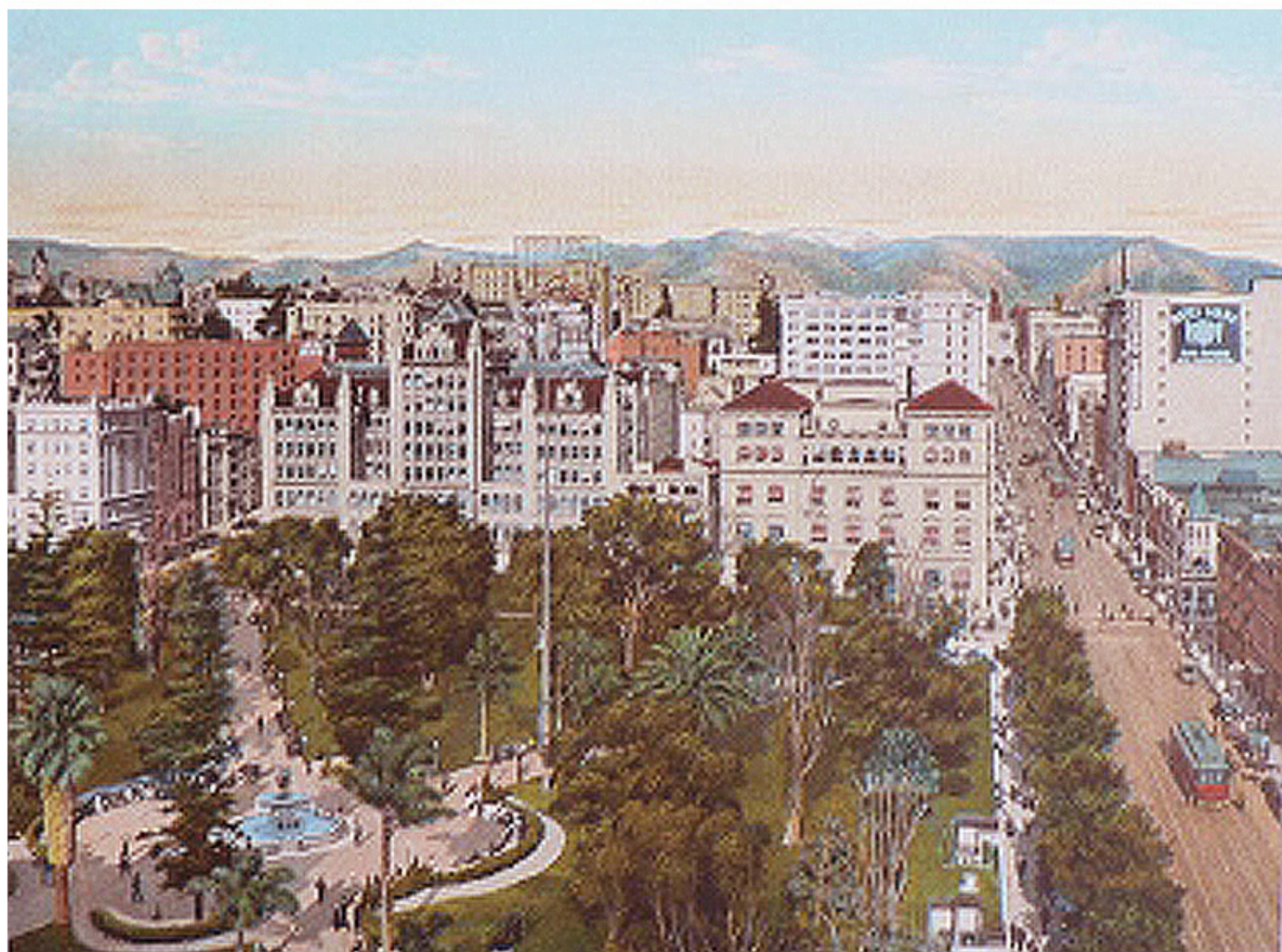
"Charlie, you're a 'nut,'" Mary repeated after each oratorical outburst on the part of the famous comedian. At which Charlie would make a funny face that would set us all in roars of laughter.

Before the inevitable picture show Charlie suggested that we have five-minute speeches on subjects selected at random from a hat—the favorite indoor sport of this famous film trio. We all wrote subjects on slips of paper which we dropt in one of Doug's derbies and which we drew out later after they had been thoroughly mixt up. As luck would have it Charlie drew the slip on which I had written the word "warts," and he stood up and for five minutes made a brilliant after-dinner speech on that important subject.

"Charlie can talk on any subject." Mary explained to me, for I was again on her right. "The other evening he made a speech on Socialism to our five dogs and he kept right on talking for three hours, altho three of the animals walked out on him."

It would have been more enjoyable to have remained at the dinner-table, but the picture show was announced and before we finished our coffee it was under way.

I am unable to describe it very fully, as I went to sleep, and shortly before eleven o'clock when Charlie took his departure, he admitted that he had slept through most of the program.



1920s downtown Los Angeles