

The Marvellous Boy of the Movies

*Some Remarks on the Discovery of Jack Coogan,
and the Picture Built Around Him*

By CHARLIE CHAPLIN



JACK COOGAN

*The extraordinary boy movie actor discovered
by Charlie Chaplin. Mr. Chaplin has been working
with the boy for over a year now on a new film called
"The Kid", —in which they both appear.*

A FRIEND of mine once said that all forms of art are love letters from the artist to the world. The desire has come to these men to express themselves passionately to others through some medium, paint, clay or what not. My own medium is, of course, the film. I must admit that expressing oneself through the moving pictures has very little fun in it for the comedian. Those of my pictures which the public thought funniest have usually been the the most painful in the making.

The art of being funny for fifty-two weeks of the year, six days in the week, starting work at nine-thirty in the morning, becomes a very serious business. There are, fortunately, times when ideas take one unaware. For instance, I go to a concert. Paderewski is about to play. There is the piano, the arranged solemnity, the awful dignity of the psychological moment when he is about to take his seat. Suddenly, in that profound silence before the master has begun his overture, I see—in my imagination, of course—the piano stool collapse and the master come to an ignominious fall. There you have the beginning of an incident in one of my pictures. The work comes later.

I have been asked many times which of my pictures I liked best. Well, perhaps the one I most enjoyed making is my last picture, *The Kid*, written expressly to bring out the qualities of another actor, a five-year-old actor this time, Jack Coogan, who plays in this, my first six-reel picture.

It was by pure accident that I met this remarkable child-actor. He was with his parents in a Los Angeles hotel, sleeping, as a child will, in a chair. He was roused in order to meet me. He rubbed his eyes, jumped up, made his politest bow, and promptly went back to sleep.

However, in that instant, I had seen the rare quality of Jack Coogan, a quality so lovable that I followed him up, induced his parents to let him become a member of my company, and shortly set about a picture which might express something of my feeling—which, I believe, will not prove a purely individual reaction—toward the child. The result is *The Kid*, which has kept us both busy for over a year and is, in many ways, unique among my productions.

Boy

The Making of a Movie Actor

THERE is nothing in Jack Coogan of the boy prodigy, the precocious child mimicking his elders. What first attracted me to the boy was a whimsical, wistful quality, a genuineness of feeling. He is the lovable child, carried to the *nth* power, yet endowed with not a little of the self-consciousness of an artist and with a hundred resources as an actor.

The boy's parents are both in vaudeville, clog dancers, on one of the Western circuits. Perhaps he has inherited his love of an audience from them, for nothing pleases him more than to watch the effect of his performance on others. In the initial stages of his training, however, my chief difficulty was to overcome his inattention, or rather that inability to concentrate the attention, which is, of course, a common characteristic of all children. One quality he has, which is extraordinary in a child: his ability to repeat a scene without losing interest. I have seen him pick up an object after a dozen rehearsals, with a wonder and attention, which would make you believe he was looking at it for the first time in his life.

To come back to *The Kid*. I have for some time wanted to do what is, for me at least, a serious picture, a picture with irony behind the incongruous and comic incidents, inspiring pity under its ludicrous aspects, with a sense of satire underlying the broadest buffoonery. This, I believe, has been accomplished in *The Kid*.

It had as many laughs as any of my comedies, but it has something else. The story, briefly, is this: a woman of poorest London tries to have her illegitimate child brought up in luxury and leaves it in a limousine outside of an opulent house. The car is stolen, the child deposited in an ash barrel, whence he is rescued and adopted by a tramp mender of window panes. A great part of the film is taken up with their ludicrous and sometimes pathetic adventures in the London streets. The boy—Jack Coogan—works on the sly, breaking windows. As the tramp, I follow him, and mend the panes. Finally the boy is lost and is not to be found,—indeed, he and the tramp are only united in a heaven, probably the most extraordinary ever staged, a heaven satirizing the sloppiness of much contemporary altruism, with policemen enforcing brotherly love and second-hand dealers exchanging wings for the kisses of the newly arrived angels.

Now that *The Kid* is about to be released, I suppose another picture made by myself and Jack Coogan is scarcely probable. What the boy will do, I don't know—but then neither do I know what I shall do. I shall probably go on wearing a trick moustache and carrying a cane too small for me, until at last I meet the undertaker.