

PHOTOPLAY

JANUARY, 1940



VIVIEN LEIGH, RHETT BUTLER AND I

BY CLARK GABLE

AS TOLD TO

RUTH WATERBURY

Everyone else has had his say about what went on behind the scenes of "Gone with the Wind." Now the hero himself, in a startlingly frank story, tells the truth about the year's most exciting cinematic event

TO begin with I'd like to state that despite what a lot of papers said there was never any feud between Vivien Leigh and me during the filming of "Gone with the Wind" or at any time thereafter.

Hollywood goes just as much to extremes when it comes to male and female stars cast together as it does on any other subject. Get a man and a woman in a picture together and you are immediately reported as either fighting or romancing. The fact that in eighty per cent of your pictures you have no emotion about the beautiful creature opposite you, other than an interest in her acting ability, is never printed. Yet that's the truth more often than not.

As for any possibility of Vivien Leigh's falling in love with me I knew that was out from our first glance. For never have I seen any girl more completely in love than that one is—with Laurence Olivier. It's as visible as a Neon sign that she can't think or talk of or dream about anything or anyone else on earth—except when she's on the set. When she's on the set, she's what a good actress should be. She's all business.

As for my falling in love with her, I'm sure that could have been plenty pleasant except that, added to her lack of interest in me, I didn't have any heart to give away, either. Mine was staked out to that Lombard girl who is mighty beautiful and brainy. Carole and I weren't married when Vivien and I first met, but we did marry while I was working on the picture and there's a story about our wedding that has never been told and which I'll get to presently.

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"That reaction certainly shows I'm no casting director!"

I'll be truthful about it, however; I'll confess that the first time I saw her I doubted that Vivien could really play *Scarlett*. That reaction certainly shows I'm no casting director. But, accustomed to the more abandoned and superficial personalities of Hollywood girls, Vivien seemed too demure to me, at that first meeting, for the vivid, relentless *Scarlett*.

David Selznick introduced us to each other at a dinner party at his home. Vivien was wearing a very plain, tailored dress. She's much tinier in real life than she appears on the screen, and since she uses little make-up she has a very young, unsophisticated air. Besides, she had all the fires banked that evening and that Olivier guy was her escort.

Now I know I should have stopped to consider all that. But having seen Vivien only in "A Yank at Oxford," in which she didn't have a lot to do, I just looked at her that first evening at David's and wondered if that keen-minded producer had gone haywire when he signed her.

I knew he hadn't the first day Vivien and I got on a set together. (David doesn't go haywire, anyway, which is another thing I should have thought about—but as a profound thinker I'm a good duck-hunter.) The best alibi I can offer for my thickheadedness is that my mind was preoccupied with *Rhett Butler*. He had me plenty worried, so worried that I didn't want to play him.

Don't think that was because I didn't realize what a fat part he was. *Rhett* is one of the greatest male characters ever created. I knew that. I'd read the entire book through six times, trying to get his moods. I've still got a copy in my dressing room and I still read it once in a while, because I know I'll probably never get such a terrific role again. But what was worrying me, and still is, was that from the moment I was cast as *Rhett Butler* I started out with five million critics.

About all the handicap an actor ordinarily has is two or three professional critics to a city which adds up for the whole world to about one large theater's matinee business. Those birds may rap you and while you'd prefer their praise, still you can take those raps, if need be, hoping that the public which makes up all the millions of other movie-goers will like you regardless. But five million people have read "Gone with the Wind" and each must have his or her own idea of how *Rhett* should be played.

There was not only that, but I had an accent to think of, long hair to wear, and twenty-six costume changes—more than Carole has ever had in any one of her pictures (which brought

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me in for lots of ribbing from that one, too).

Photoplay, in publishing some two years ago, a sketch of me as *Rhett* had given me a guide on the make-up which was an enormous help, and I followed that. The hair was a mere matter of growth and getting used to going without a haircut. All those things were headaches enough, but I talked with Alicia Rhett, a Southern deb (she's from Charleston, where *Rhett* was supposed to have been born), before every scene and she was a marvelous accent coach. (Watch for her in one of the smaller roles. The girl's good and that "Rhett" stuff is her own name.) But *Scarlett*, being in every foot of the picture, needed plenty of watching.

WE started the picture early last March. I discovered *Rhett* had been pruned of most of his cuss words and much of his force, but apparently that had to be for the censors. Still, he had every scene he actually had in the book. I was signed for six months (and be it said here that it was a honey of a contract. Selznick had offered me a flat rate for the picture. M-G-M played very fair with me and let me make my own deal. I put it on a week-to-week basis. Six months at that rate was mighty sweet sugar and I ate it up, for I know I'll never get such a chance again, and the ranch needed a lot of landscape gardening.)

Actually in production, however, I discovered that *Rhett* was even harder to play than I had anticipated. With so much of *Scarlett* preceding his entrance, *Rhett's* scenes were all climaxes. There was a chance to build up to *Scarlett*, but *Rhett* represented drama and action every time he appeared. He didn't figure in any of the battle scenes, being a guy who hated war, and he wasn't in the toughest of the siege of Atlanta shots. What I was fighting for was to hold my own in the first half of the picture—which is all *Vivien's*—because I felt that after the scene with the baby, *Bonnie*, *Rhett* could control the end of the film. That scene where *Bonnie* dies, and the scene where I strike *Scarlett* and she accidentally tumbles down stairs, thus losing her unborn child, were the two that worried me most.

The problem of *Rhett*, to me, was that although he reads like a tough guy and by his actions is frequently not admirable, actually he is a man who is practically broken by love. His scenes away from *Scarlett* make him a heavy and his scenes with her make him almost a weakling. My problem was to make him, despite that, a man people would respect. In that scene where *Rhett* has knocked *Scarlett* down stairs and learns later that the baby is dead, while *Scarlett* hovers between life and death, *Rhett* has to show remorse and suffering.

The scenario, in fact, has him hanging to *Melanie's* skirts and crying. So there was *Moose Gable*, clutching the skirt of that dainty de *Havilland* and trying to sob.

I thought of the stuffed doves *Carole* had sent to my dressing room on the day "Gone with the Wind" started. They are an omen between us. The first night we ever really talked to each other, the night of the White Mayfair three years ago, we quarreled. Next morning when I waked up, a little the worse for wear, I heard the weirdest noise in my room. I was living in the Beverly-Wilshire Hotel at the time but

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GABLE AS RHETT



PHOTOPLAY THROWS ITS HAT IN THE RING

Here we enter the great casting battle of 'Gone with the Wind' because to our mind there is but one Rhett—Clark Gable. So sure were we of our choice that we had Vincentini paint this portrait of Clark as we see him in the role: Cool, impertinent, utterly charming. We like all the other handsome actors mentioned as Rhett—only we don't want them as Rhett. We want Gable and we're going to stick to that regardless.

Our prophecy came true! For here is the Photoplay portrait Clark mentions which we ran in the October, 1937, issue with this caption: "Here-with we enter the great casting battle of 'Gone with the Wind,' because to our mind there is but one Rhett—Clark Gable. So sure were we of our choice that we had Vincentini paint this portrait of Clark as we see him in the role: Cool, impertinent, utterly charming. We like all the other handsome actors mentioned as Rhett—only we don't want them as Rhett. We want Gable and we're going to stick to that regardless"

then whenever we have an argument about anything one or the other of us sends a dove. Result is that we've got some ten original doves on the ranch today and about fifty of their progeny. Squab from squabbles one could say, though it might be wiser if one didn't.

Anyhow, I thought of the stuffed doves for luck and I blessed Vic Fleming, the director, who has guided me through some tough ones before this, and as for the rest, I honestly prayed the scene would be good. Vic was kind and didn't keep the camera too much on my face. He let me try to do most of it on the sound track, act it with my voice, rather than with my expressions, I mean. I only hope you'll feel I've gotten away with it.

In the scenes with Bonnie, I tried to show a mature man's transfer of love away from a woman he knows doesn't love him to their child whom he adores. I've played only a few scenes with kids so these were a new experience to me, too. A new type of love scene. They were exciting but the scene in the whole picture that I enjoyed playing the most was the scene where I come in late at night, drunk, and Scarlett comes down and joins me, getting a little drunk herself. That's the scene where I knew what an actress Vivien is because while I intended nothing of the sort, she took the whole shot neatly away from me.

THE greatest day on the picture to me was March 31, 1939. That was two days after my wedding to Carole.

It has been written since then that Carole and I had that wedding day planned out for months in advance, but that's not true. It happened this way. On the afternoon of March 28, I was finished with my scenes about three in the afternoon. While I was taking off my make-up, the assistant director came over and said I didn't need to work the next day. I called Carole at once and with the aid of a close friend, we headed out that night to Kingman, Arizona. We took Otto along, not only

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to untangle any difficulties we might get into, but because he had a new car without license plates which meant we wouldn't be spotted.

We were married at three-thirty that afternoon and left at five-thirty, getting home the next morning at three. Carole's mother was there, all excited, which kept us up till five. Finally we got to sleep, only to be awakened at nine to discover forty cameramen, three newsreel men and twenty reporters waiting out in the front yard to interview us. Under the circumstances, David gave me another day off.

But the next morning when I reported at the studio, ready for the prison sequence, I discovered Vic had switched things on me and was prepared to do the wedding scene, only this day my bride was Vivien. David had engaged a full orchestra which was gurgling through the wedding march and while I knew it was all a rib on me, I blew up in the first take. The stage hands all groaned, Vivien asked solicitously what was the matter with me, and Vic said, "It's just that Clark has always been shy of girls."

Despite the kidding I got that day, however, we did precious little fooling on "Gone with the Wind." I, for one, was a stranger in a strange studio. Somehow, I'd never met Olivia de Havilland or Leslie Howard before. The crew, who are the ones who put over the gags in any studio, were all new to me. And Technicolor is too expensive to play tricks with. Besides David, having three million dollars invested, was down on that set all the time fixing us with his eagle eye. So we worked, day after day and hour after hour, for those six exciting months. It took all the stamina I've got, which is enough, but I can't imagine what it must have taken out of Vivien, who worked twice as much as I did. I only know that never once did I hear her complain.

As for me, when I finally was released, and they let me cut my hair again, the M-G-M gang sent me a turkey. They named it *Rhett Butler* and it was a male bird. The card said, "This is just to assure you that even if a turkey, *Rhett* can't lay an egg."

That leaves me nothing to do now but wait until after the picture is released, to read the critics and to see if I have to go out to the chicken house and tell that gobbler to move over.



"I doubted Vivien could really play Scarlett--"