

CURRENT OPINION

June, 1918: p. 382

MARY PICKFORD

—WHOSE REAL NAME
IS GLADYS SMITH

Self-Supporting at Five, at
Twenty-five She Pays an In-
come-Tax on a Million a Year



IT seems incredible that anyone upon whom the spotlight has shone dazzlingly for years could have concealed anything from the public. But there is an item in the meteoric career of Mary Pickford that has been considered either too incredible or too unromantic to be proclaimed. We all know that this Alice in movie wonderlands is five feet high—in her silk-stockinged feet; that her eyes are brown and her hair golden and curly; that she has climbed the theatrical ladder by the rungs of melodramatic and legitimate acting into a region as romantic as that which Jack discovered when he scaled the magic beanstalk; that she is still in her twenties; that she is married to Owen Moore, who played "opposite" her in her first motion-picture success; that she gave Uncle Sam a check of six figures the other day as a tithe of her million-dollar-a-year income, and that her mother is her practical business manager; but it is somewhat surprising to read in the *American Magazine* that she was a breadwinner at the age of five and that her real name is Smith.

It was in Toronto some twenty years ago, we read, that a widow—an actress—with three dependent children was playing in a stock company which decided to produce "Bootle's Baby." It happened that Mrs. Smith, the widowed actress, had come to rehearsal one day with her eldest child, Gladys, aged five, and heard of the frantic search for a child suitable for the part. The future Mary Pickford, in a pair of patched shoes, her legs encased in intricately darned stockings, eyes bright and serious, thereupon took her first stage cue with the decision that was afterward to stand her in good stead.

"I'll do it," she piped up to the astonished stage manager.

"You'll *what?*"

"I'll be Bootle's baby," she explained, eyeing him with the deadly solemnity of five. She got the job and for a year played child rôles in the Valentine Stock Company in Canada. Subsequently, we read, she accompanied her mother on the road, becoming the "che-ild" in many blood-and-thunder melodramas, and gradually her face began to assume that look of "sweet and questioning seriousness" which is one of the chief charms of her acting. By way of various one-night stands, the bright-haired and sunny-tempered little actress at length arrived in a New Jersey town not far from New York and David Belasco. And one memorable Thursday morning Mary Pickford cut rehearsals and the Gordian knot at the same time and hied herself Broadway-ward with her little chin tilted at a determined angle.

"Theatrical history was to be made that morning. To the small, curly-haired figure that gazed broodingly toward the magic spires of Manhattan as the ferryboat brought her closer and closer to the city of her dreams the day seemed fateful with potentialities. . . . David Belasco was conducting the first rehearsal of 'The Warrens of Virginia' at the old Belasco Theater, still ignorant of the fact that a determined little girl on a North River ferryboat was headed his way. But now the ferryboat had landed and an eager figure was hastening through the busy thoroughfares of New York. She was a bit tired, a bit shabby, but determination walked with her. At the stage-door of the Belasco Theater she demanded, with that imperious little way of hers, to see the master of the show. The doorkeeper was a kindly soul—unusually so for a



stage-doorkeeper—and he didn't tell the eager-looking child that the percentage of those who didn't see Belasco was always far larger than those who did. The fates had Mary Pickford in hand, however, and they didn't intend to see her purpose thwarted by a mere doorkeeper. But they *did* decide to try out Mary first, so the doorkeeper informed her politely that what she asked was impossible. The child was unperturbed by his refusal.

"I *must* see him," she said simply. 'I've cut rehearsal just to come. I've got to see him.' And there was something in her manner, that something, no doubt, which has made her loved by old people and children, that prompted the door-

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keeper to make a timid request of Belasco. The request was, of course, refused. Such an interruption was an impertinence. As kindly as possible the doorkeeper broke the news to Mary. Then the fates grinned and the doorkeeper had one of the surprises of his life, for little Mary Pickford gave vent to one of those wind-stormish outbursts of temper for which the great Mary Pickford is now famous, and which cause her millions of admirers throughout the country to chuckle with huge enjoyment. Before the astounded doorkeeper really knew what had happened, a small, tense and tornado-like figure was projected through the stage-door of the old theater and landed upon the stage, breathless and panting. It was Mary Pickford's first and most dramatic entrance upon any New York stage.

"The child regained her self-possession long before the scandalized actors had regained theirs. With that irresistible smile of hers she crossed the stage and confronted Belasco. 'Oh,' she exclaimed delightedly, 'I know you by your picture.' Drama always has appealed to Belasco—and this was drama personified. After that, the rehearsals for 'The Warrens of Virginia' went smoothly, for the child part of Betty Warren was being played with more than adequate skill by Miss Mary Pickford."

In fact, we are told by Belasco himself in the *Photoplay Magazine*, at the *première* of this play Mary Pickford was the most composed member of the entire company. "From the first she gave promise of the ability that has since made her the greatest motion-picture artist in the world." Further:

"Before she left me, Miss Pickford said: 'Mr. Belasco, remember, no matter where I am or what I am doing, when you want me just let me know, and I'll come.' I did not see her again for a number of years, but I watched her grow in popularity. Then came the time when I wanted to produce a child's play, 'A Good Little Devil,' the delightful fairy drama by Rosemonde Gerard and her son, Maurice Rostand. By this time Mary Pickford was famous and had become known throughout the land as the 'Queen of the Movies.' But I sent for her and she came to me that day.

"'Mary, I said to her, 'I have a beautiful part, one that is just suited to you. You will make a great success in it and I need you in it!'

"'Do you really and truly need me?'

"'I certainly do.'

"'Then I'll come back to you,' she said. Her success in the difficult rôle of the little blind girl was phenomenal. Nothing like her remarkable performance of a child's part had ever been seen in New York or elsewhere. And her reward came when she was sought by managers with such eagerness that she commanded the highest salary paid to any moving-picture actress in the world."

It was at the end of her first three seasons with Belasco that the craze for motion pictures was reaching its zenith, and as the bread-and-butter problem was still an issue with the little actress, with no new Belasco part in sight, she applied for work at the old Biograph studios and was engaged as an "extra." For several summer weeks she remained an extra, always "on time, obedient, quiet and unobtrusive." Finally, however, apparently by chance, she was cast for a part—a leading part—in which she played

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opposite a good-looking young leading man — Owen Moore — and the two, “enacting fictitious love scenes in the tawdry glare of the studio lights, found real love, and they were married.”

Mary Pickford is such a modest young person, writes Edwin Carty Ranck in the *American*, that, aside from the necessary publicity attached to her screen career, but little has crept into print regarding her private life and particularly the patriotic war service she is rendering. Last summer she “did her bit” by producing “The Little American,” a poignant protest against the atrocities committed by the Germans in France. Since then she has sent two ambulances to the Red Cross for use “over there” and has “adopted” six hundred members of the Second Battalion, First California Field Artillery. They are known as “Mary Pickford’s Fighting 600,” and she has agreed to keep them supplied with tobacco and other delicacies for the duration of the war. Each of the “boys” carries a gold locket containing the miniature of “one of two or three people in the world who are popular enough to cause a traffic-jam on the streets of any American city at any hour.”

