

Looking at Hollywood with Ed Sullivan

How Gable Stays at Top

By ED SULLIVAN

Hollywood.

CLARK GABLE starts now on his tenth year as a matinee idol, which indicates that the so-called fickle public is not so fickle as you would believe. It was back in 1930 that Gable's career as a matinee idol started and almost finished during the filming of "The Painted Desert." They were on location in Arizona, and there was to be a dynamite explosion of a hill. The performers retreated to a spot some hundreds of yards distant from the explosion when the danger was sounded, Gable with the rest. The man who prepared the blast was incautious; he failed to block up the rear of the concussion tunnel, and when the fuse was applied the dynamite backfired. A huge piece of rock came within inches of creasing Gable's hair. "I've never been so close to sudden death," says Gable. The international picture colony was never so close to losing its No. 1 matinee idol.

The rock, however, missed, and Gable starts 1939 under most favorable auspices. He has completed "Idiot's Delight," with Norma Shearer, and it looks like a real good picture. He has started to work in "Gone with the Wind," and the character of Rhett Butler appears made to order for his talents.

Gable's long tenure of popularity can be explained best in a simile: The big fellow from Cadiz, O., has all the ingratiating charm and tact of Jack Dempsey. I've never met two persons so alike in their ability to handle applause as these two, and their continued popularity testifies to that ability. Gable, like Dempsey, never says the wrong thing to his fans. Instinctively he knows what to say and when to say it. You might continue the parallel by drawing a comparison between Gene Tunney and Rudy Vallee. These two are as much alike in reactions and expressions as any other pair—a trifle uneasy with crowds, just as Gable and Dempsey are at ease with them.

Gable got his start in pictures (and I am using him as author-



Clark Gable as the hooper in his co-starring picture with Norma Shearer, "Idiot's Delight."



Gable meets Lombard, in "No Man of Her Own."

ity) as a piano-playing Al Capone. The people who figured in Gable's start were Hunt Stromberg, the late Lew Cody, Edmund Lowe, and Joan Crawford. To clarify that muddled statement: Stromberg, M-G-M producer and former St. Louis sports writer, figured vitally in it because he called Gable up and proposed the part in "Dance, Fools, Dance." Lew Cody figured in it because previously Stromberg had called him up to take the part and Cody rejected it on the grounds that the gangster rôle would alienate the affections of his fans. Ditto Edmund Lowe, who at the time was the leading "heavy" or menace of cinema. Joan Crawford figured in it because "Dance, Fools, Dance" was her picture.

"Cody and Lowe turned down the part," says Gable, "because they thought the fans wouldn't like the Al Capone characterization. They objected particularly to one scene in which the gangster, after sending his mob out to knock off a rival bootleg king, is pictured seated at the piano playing a strain from Beethoven. It seemed to me that this scene would carry terrific contrast value in shaping the characterization of the gangster. I told Stromberg I'd love to play it. That was the picture that took me out of the precarious ranks of bit players. Another bit player at the time was Janet Gaynor. I used to drive her home every night from F. B. O., now RKO, and she never thought I'd be a matinee idol, and I never thought she'd be an Academy winner.

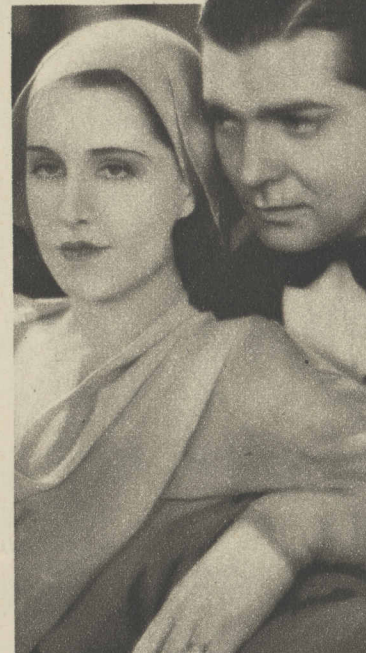
If Gable's career really was

launched in the Crawford picture, Norma Shearer and Director Clarence Brown will certify that it received its first great momentum in "A Free Soul." Gable was so good in this that the M-G-M biggies, after viewing the first rushes (the first scene shot), decided to make Gable repugnant to the audience for fear that he'd steal the picture from the stars. To accomplish this renegade purpose they wrote in a scene in which Gable was to give Norma Shearer a violent shove, figuring that the audience would turn from cheers to hisses. Instead, so compelling was Gable's charm and so furious were audiences at Norma Shearer's screen rôle of a philanderer, that when the scene was shown at the preview the customers started applauding Gable for shoving her around. That spontaneous outburst of

applause convinced Irving Thalberg that in Gable he had a great star. From then on he was accorded the de luxe treatment of a star, and for nine years he has held his position in the Hollywood parade as the No. 1 heart-throb generator.

Where did Gable win this personal charm that has marked all of his screen characterizations? The answer is that he always had it, from the time that he worked on his dad's farm at Ravenna, O. He says that he thinks he got his yen for the theater from his mother. She had studied painting in Paris and leaned toward that and the allied arts. His father was more matter-of-fact, a Pennsylvania Dutchman who was practical, God-fearing, and a hard worker.

It was at Akron, O., that Gable launched his theatrical career. Ed Lilly, later associated with



With Norma Shearer in the picture that made him a star, "A Free Soul."

Earl Carroll on Broadway, had arrived in Akron with a stock company, and Gable, who was working as a tire molder in the rubber factories, served his apprenticeship as a call boy for the stock company. "It was out of that that I got my first real stage job," recalls Gable, "with a tent show that was routed to Montana. The tent show folded, so Phil Phillips, the pianist, and I decided to strike out for Bend, Ore., where he had an uncle. He went to work in a department store at Butte, Mont., and earned \$17 clear. To match his bank roll I pawned the leather suitcase my family had given me, hocked one suit, and grossed \$15. After we got the money, \$32 in all, we were so afraid to spend it that we

hopped a freight train to Bend, Ore., and learned there that his uncle had moved away a year earlier."

Gable then joined a stock company headed by Earl Larrimore, but when that folded at Portland, Ore., he joined the newspaper ranks—he became an advertising solicitor for the Portland Oregonian. He was assigned to the want ad department, and one day an attractive ad came in from the Pacific Telephone company, so Gable answered it himself and got the job. He worked there for a year and with that money headed for Hollywood.

On the Los Angeles stage the young Ohioan played bit parts with Jane Cowl and Lionel Barrymore. That graduated him to the Broadway stage with George M. Cohan, Arthur Hopkins, and Al H. Woods. Los Angeles summoned him for the part of Killer Mears in "The Last Mile," and it was while he was emoting in that that Pathé scouts signed him. From Pathé he went to Warners, from Warners to free-lancing, from free-lancing to "Dance, Fools, Dance" at M-G-M.

Along the route, between hopping freight trains and hitchhiking, between the Portland Oregonian and the Pacific Telephone company, between the Los Angeles stage and Broadway, Gable's natural gift of tactfulness was confirmed. In addition he acquired a certain "savvy" that experience bestows on its harder pupils. The cumulative effects of his background and hop-scotch existence are very evident today.

Personally he is a very likeable, genuine person. He lives simply, avoids all but rare Hollywood parties, spends most of his leisure hunting and shooting and fishing, and salts away his dough in the bank. Professionally he is known to Hollywood directors as a skilled, competent workman. He is what the professionals call a "quick study," meaning that he learns his lines quickly and doesn't blow up when the cameras are trained on him. In comporting himself with crowds of fans he is so like Jack Dempsey that sometimes it is difficult to dissociate them in your mind. I often call him "Champ," so strong is the impression that Gable is Dempsey.

This year undoubtedly will find him married to Carole Lombard. The groundwork for his divorce has been established already, entailing a property settlement of some \$350,000, which is more than his year's salary of \$300,000. He and Carole are great pals. She likes the things that appeal to him, and her light-heartedness is a foil for his natural seriousness.

Carole Lombard and Gable met in 1931, when he wooed her on the screen in "No Man of Her Own." It has worked out to a very charming romance, because Miss Lombard now has a man of her own—a man who is the No. 1 heartbreaker of the world, judging by the hysterical outbursts of those girls who swell the fan mail at Metro.

Stars in Color

Full-color pictures of these two movie stars appear today on page one of the Picture Section.

LORETTA YOUNG

● Loretta Young was born Gretchen Young in Salt Lake City, Utah, on Jan. 6, 1913. She changed her name to Loretta when she embarked on a motion picture career. For many years she studied dancing and hoped to follow it as her career. Her plans were changed, however, quite by accident, when she volunteered to take her sister Polly Ann's part in a picture because Polly Ann happened to be out of town at the time. The director was so impressed with her that he presented her to Colleen Moore and she played her first rôle with Miss Moore in "Naughty but Nice." Another opportunity came when she was chosen to play opposite Lon Chaney in "Laugh, Clown, Laugh." After the completion of this production she was given a contract. Miss Young's current picture is "Kentucky," in which Richard Greene is her leading man.

ROBERT TAYLOR

● Hollywood's gain was the medical profession's loss, for Robert Taylor had planned to become a doctor ever since he was a boy in knee pants. His father was a physician in Nebraska and wanted Robert to follow in his footsteps. While at Pomona college, a short distance from Hollywood, he became interested in dramatics and appeared in most of the college plays. A talent scout from Hollywood spotted him in a presentation of "Journey's End" and immediately placed him under contract with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. He appeared in several "shorts" for this company. Before long he had climbed the ladder to success and is now one of the most popular leading men in filmdom. He was born in Filley, Neb., on Aug. 5, 1911. His latest film production is "Stand Up and Fight," in which Wallace Beery plays an important rôle.

Voice of the Movie Fan

Letters published in this department should be written on one side of the paper. If you wish a personal reply please inclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Dear Miss Tinée: This is the first letter I've written to you, and I hope it passes, because I'd like to see a picture of Jeffery Lynn, who played the part of Felix (the gate swinger) in "Four Daughters." I'd like a little news about him, too, if there's room.

I thought Priscilla Lane was darling in that picture. Along with Hedy Lamarr, I think she is one of the most promising actresses on the screen today, and I agree with Pat, who wrote in recently about the Lane sisters appearing in "bigger and better pictures."

I'd also like to know who played the part of Will Scarlet in "The Adventures of Robin Hood."

Thanks a lot for everything. Sincerely, CHESTNUT.

Editor's note: I guess there's a bit of room. Jeffery Lynn was born in Auburn, Mass. Educated at Bates college in Lewiston, Me. Before entering motion pictures

he was an instructor in English and dramatics at Lisbon High school in Lisbon, Me. Played in stock for several years and also with Walter Hampden in "Cyrano de Bergerac." Patrick Knowles played the rôle of Will Scarlet in "The Adventures of Robin Hood." You are most welcome.

Dear Mae Tinée: "Moonlight Sonata" is too good to be buried among the snobs on Michigan boulevard. The whole city should have a chance to listen to immortal Paderewski. Yours truly, PETER GULDEN.

Editor's note: There are no more snobs on Michigan avenue than any place else, and the picture isn't buried, but there for all to see who care to see it.

Dear Miss Tinée: I read the letter of Jack P. W. I agree with him. For the first time last night I saw Richard Greene. I think we should see more of him. He is better than those that are marked as the best. Will you please print me a little of his life history? Thanks loads, RUTH L.

Editor's note: Okeh. Richard Greene was born at Plymouth, Devonshire, England. His father, the late Richard Greene Sr., was an outstanding favorite among playgoers in his day, and his mother, Kathleen Gerrard, is still appearing in character rôles in London. He's 6 feet

tall, weighs 170 pounds, and has dark brown hair and blue-gray eyes. Favorite sports are golf, riding, swimming, and tennis.

Dear Miss Tinée: I saw "Boy Meets Girl" recently, and I thought it was the silliest picture I've seen for some time. Two of us went together, and we both had the same opinion. I like James Cagney very much, but I disliked him in that particular rôle. I'm hoping I don't see Cagney in rôle like that again. Do you agree?

Could you please tell me the height of Merle Oberon? I hope this isn't too much for you, yours, JAMES NORMAN.

Editor's note: "What's one man's meat is another man's poison, you know. No, it's not a bit too much for me. Miss Oberon is 5 feet 4 inches tall.

Dear Miss Tinée: My family and I just saw "Boys' Town," and the children claim Mickey Rooney to be one of their favorite actors. Will you please tell us something of his earlier life, where he attended school and his birthplace? Thank you, MRS. G. H. E.

Editor's note: We printed news of Mickey Rooney recently in this column, but since you apparently didn't see it, we repeat for your benefit. Mickey's real name is Joe Yule Jr. He was born in Brooklyn, N. Y. Educated Dayton Heights and Vine Street Grammar school and Pacific Military academy in Hollywood and by private tutors. As a baby he appeared in a vaudeville act with his parents.

Dear Miss Tinée: Perhaps I have been misinformed, but if I have been informed correctly I am led to believe that I can obtain free of charge any amount of movie stars' pictures I wish.

If the above statement is correct, please send me pictures of the following stars: Alice Faye, Tyrone Power, Jack Benny, the Lane sisters, Dick Powell, Dorothy Lamour, Jack Haley, Madeleine Carroll, Loretta Young, Anita Louise, the Mauch twins, Joe Penner, Ginger Rogers, Don Ameche, Tony Martin, Harriet Hilliard, Sonja Henie, and Richard Greene. Sincerely yours, H. CECH.

Editor's note: Statement is not correct. Sorry.



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