MAURICE CHEVALIER'S OWN STORY

MAURICE CHEVALIER IN "THE LOVE PARADE"

(By Courtesy of Paramount Pictures.)

MAURICE CHEVALIER'S OWN STORY

As told to

PERCY CUDLIPP

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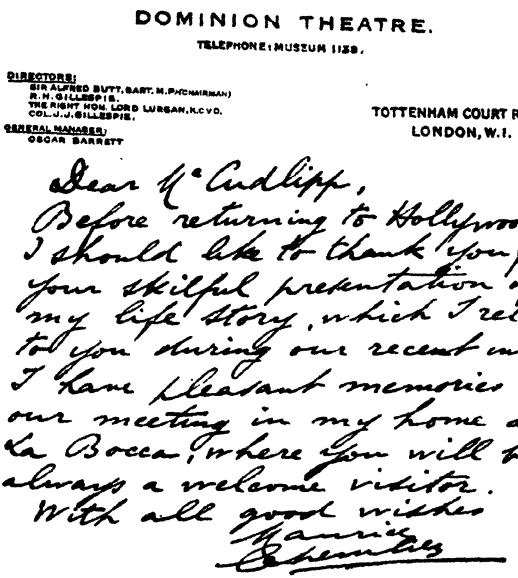

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Dear Mr Cudlipp,
Before returning to Hollywood
I should like to thank you for
your skilful presentation of
my life story, which I related
to you during our recent interviews.
I have pleasant memories of
our meeting in my home at
La Bocca, where you will be
always a welcome visitor.
With all good wishes
Yours sincerely
Gabrielle

MAURICE CHEVALIER'S OWN STORY

CHAPTER I

EARLY DAYS AND ODD JOBS

To a taxi-driver in Cannes I said:
"I wish to go to the home of M. Maurice Chevalier at La Bocca. Do you know it?"

At first he did not answer. Instead, he turned to a friend who was lounging near by and remarked in tones of gentle satire: "Ecoutez-le donc! Monsieur is asking whether one knows the home of Maurice Chevalier!"

They both laughed sympathetically.

Then, as he held wide the door of his vehicle for me to climb in, the taxi-driver explained: "Pardon—but it is as though one approached Monsieur in the streets of London to inquire the address of the King of England!"

So we drive along a winding, palm-fringed road to the drowsy village of La Bocca and beyond. A narrow turning off the main road brought us to a sand-coloured villa with sky-blue shutters, and that was the home of M. Maurice Chevalier.

Five minutes later, when my visiting-card and I had been grimly inspected by a middle-aged French servant, Chevalier himself was telling me about the first home he ever knew, in the grey Paris suburb of Menilmontant.

"Have you ever been in Menilmontant?" Maurice began. "I suppose not. Well, it is just a plain working-class district of Paris, and ours was a working-class home. We lived, in fact, in two rooms.

"Father was a house painter. I was the ninth of his ten children. To-day but three of us remain.

"Life was hard enough in Menilmontant, but it had compensations. One of these was the Palais de Travail, a workpeople's music-hall, to which my mother took me regularly.

"Now, there were many splendid artists appearing in the programmes at that music

MAURICE CHEVALIER AND HIS MOTHER

hall, and they sang some splendid old songs. The audiences, always high-spirited, were lavish with their applause, and nobody shouted more frantically for an encore than I.

"Automatically, I memorised one or two of the most popular songs. And, with a boy's natural desire to imitate—I was six years old when mother first took me to the Palais—I soon began to imagine myself singing them. . . ."

It was not long before Maurice sang his first song in public. Alas ! the time and place were ill-chosen. At school, during the arithmetic lesson, he scrambled on to a desk and piped out the beginning of a favourite comic chorus. His teacher, who was not a music-hall habitué, expelled him from the class.

"A terrible blow fell upon our family when I was eleven years old," said Maurice, "for then my father died. I had to find work, to earn what little I could. My first job was that of an apprentice carpenter."

His first job—for he had many jobs in quick succession. Maurice was full of mischief and

humour, a playboy of Paris. Employers found him—well, over-exuberant.

Take, for example, the respectable proprietor of the paint shop to which Maurice became attached after failing in turn as carpenter, electrician, and printer's devil.

One day, when approaching his premises, the tradesman heard a shrill young voice raised in a sentimental ditty. The singer was Maurice. Smiling and gesticulating as he sang, he stood among the paint-pots facing a blushing blonde aged ten, named Georgette. It was Chevalier's first love-song.

Sacked on the spot, he left beaming, his arm linked with Georgette's.

A doll factory engaged him. He was supposed to paint schoolgirl complexions on the faces of dolls. "Just a delicate touch of colour," advised the foreman. "Don't overdo it."

At first Maurice worked well, decorating each pale porcelain cheek with the authentic bloom.

Then, in an experimental moment, he

MAURICE CHEVALIER OUTSIDE HIS VILLA

(*By Courtesy of Paramount Pictures.*)

painted a doll to resemble a theatrical puppet, with glaring dabs of crimson.

The foreman saw it, and disapproved. He remembered that in more ways than one this young Chevalier had not been an ideal employee : for example, he had a habit of turning up in the mornings with a black eye, sometimes two. Maurice was interested in boxing.

"You are dismissed," said the foreman.

I wondered what the foreman of the doll factory, the owner of the paint shop, the teacher of arithmetic and others of the luckless line who tried to make a humdrum citizen out of Maurice Chevalier would have thought if they had been with us during this talk in the drawing-room of his Mediterranean villa.

It was a big, lofty room, beautifully furnished.

Facing me was a vast open fireplace, at either side of which a bright blue woollen monkey was poised as if scrambling towards the mantelpiece.

Two photographs, both signed with an inscription to Maurice, caught my eye.

One was of the King of Spain. The other

seemed at once strange and familiar. A boyish, sensitive face looked out wistfully from the frame. It was Charles Chaplin's face, minus the "property" moustache.

Maurice, comfortable in an armchair, wore a blue sweater and flannels. I had liked him instantly. Stars of the screen and stage are not always easy to like. Neither, as a rule, is their conversation interesting. But Chevalier, as he talked modestly and frankly of the days when nobody, least of all himself, dreamed that he would become the best-loved living Frenchman, gripped me more than a dozen novels.

Outside, beyond the fields, the Mediterranean sparkled in warm sunlight, yet our thoughts were in the little home at Menilmontant, where a poor widow battled to feed and clothe her children.

"Do not think that I enjoyed losing jobs as a boy," Maurice went on. "I wanted more than anything to settle down, but I had ideas of my own about the kind of work to which I was suited.

"A desire to go on the stage had steadily grown in me. At that time my ambition was to be an acrobat, and I put in a lot of practice in the back-yard.

"Mother was sympathetic when I mentioned, as I often did, the subject of the stage. She was always wonderful to me: she could never say 'No' to any wish of mine.

"But the elder of my two brothers, who was in a banking house, thought differently. Stage work, he used to say, was a job for lazy men. Why couldn't I be sensible and go into business as he had done?

"I knew I was not meant for business, that I could never do the same thing for eight hours every day."

Still, Maurice tried very hard. He obtained employment in a nail factory. For a while it seemed as if all would now be well. The big brother nodded his head wisely. Maurice had found his metier at last. He was a born nail-maker.

Maurice knew himself better than that. In odd moments he continued to sing, with appropriate expression and gesture, the songs

of his idols, the artists at the Palais de Travail.

And when each day's nail-making was done he accompanied his brother Paul to a gymnasium, where he devoted himself very earnestly to the higher acrobatics, performing miracles on the trapeze and the flying rings.

He meant to be the most daring acrobat in all France, and every evening spent at the gymnasium seemed to bring realisation of his ambition nearer. By day he seemed to hear, instead of the prosaic noises of the nail factory, that menacing roll of kettledrums—which rises when an acrobat, perched high over the stage, prepares to leap from one trapeze to another. The romance of taking risks possessed his mind.

But he never became an acrobat.

One evening, while practising on the flying rings, Maurice fell. He was carried home with a broken ankle and a badly damaged face. For once his mother spoke severely. "No more acrobatics for you, my son," she announced.

Maurice obeyed. He deserted the gym-

nasium. He was far from beaten, though. Acrobats do not monopolise the music-halls. Why not be a singer? So Chevalier, still a child of thirteen years, devoted himself rigorously to learning comic songs and the art of "putting them over."

CHAPTER II

MISTINGUETT'S PROPHECY

"Never in my life," declared Maurice Chevalier, his blue eyes twinkling, "have I felt so full of confidence as on the occasion of my début as a public entertainer—aged thirteen."

Maurice and I were lounging on the veranda of his Mediterranean villa. Striking, indeed, was the contrast between the scene before our eyes—sunlight, smooth meadows and shimmering waves—and the one which he began to describe to me.

For the setting of Chevalier's boyhood bid for fame was the Café des Trois Lions in a humble quarter of his native Paris. It was noisy, crowded, and dim with the smoke of cheap cigarettes.

"Every Saturday night," said Maurice, "working men and their wives went along to the Trois Lions. They sat at little tables, ordered refreshments, and settled down to

listen to a programme of songs by amateur vocalists. There was no lack of artists, for free drinks were supplied to those who contributed in this way to the gaiety of the evening.

"As you know, after my mishap at the local gymnasium I devoted myself more seriously than ever to learning songs. My mother had forbidden me to continue my efforts to become an acrobat, so I resolved to be a comedian.

"At the age of thirteen excessive modesty was certainly not one of my failings. I soon felt fully equipped to volunteer my services to the manager of the Trois Lions.

"He laughed at me. When I told him I was an experienced singer, he laughed even louder. But his wife was present, and she had a generous heart. 'Let him have a chance,' she said. Her husband agreed at last, and on the following Saturday I turned up, bursting with pride and optimism.

"Since that night there have been many occasions when I have felt nervous at facing an audience. But as I took my place beside

the piano at the Trois Lions I had not the slightest qualm.

"I smiled, stuck out my chest, and began. Alas! I had never sung with a piano before. Throughout the song I was about three keys above the instrument."

He kept on, undeterred by the grinning faces around him. The audience cheered ironically. He finished his song amid roars of mirth. Maurice's début became a hilarious debâcle. But he was not discouraged.

"Failure can happen to anyone," he told himself as, with head held high, he left the little café. "Next time I will be a success. Now I can really claim to be a singer of experience."

And so, at the first opportunity, Maurice sought an interview with the manager of a full-blown music hall, the Casino des Tourelles.

"I am not interested in novices," said the manager.

Maurice looked hurt.

"I," he answered stiffly, "am no novice.

MAURICE CHEVALIER AND YVONNE VALLÉE AT HOME

(By Courtesy of Paramount Pictures.)

Why, I have appeared at the Café des Trois Lions."

"Really! And were you well received?"

"But yes, Monsieur. In fact, I brought the house down."

"H'm. Very well, I will engage you for four evenings a week."

"And the salary, monsieur?"

"Three francs a night."

Twelve francs a week! Maurice was overjoyed. He was a professional at last!

"I rushed home," he told me, "and revealed my great surprise to the family. To my dismay, the elder of my brothers was not at all pleased. He said candidly that he disliked the idea of my singing in public. I pleaded. This, I said, was my great chance of earning a living in my own way.

"At last mother smiled and said, 'It is settled, Maurice. You shall become an actor.'

"Over and over again I rehearsed the entertainment I had designed for the patrons of the Casino des Tourelles. It was by no means an aristocratic audience that fre-

quented the Casino, but few could be more critical.

"My safest line, I decided, would be to give impressions of famous stars singing their own most popular songs. This went down well. I felt I was marching to success. But when the engagement ended, and with it the twelve francs a week, my difficulties began again."

At an age when most boys nowadays are still at school Maurice Chevalier started to tramp the round of the theatrical agents' offices. He secured a number of provincial engagements.

One day, in Paris, a friend told Maurice: "You ought to meet Mistinguett. If you like, I can introduce you."

Soon afterwards they met—the glittering star of the Folies Bergère and the obscure young man to whom fame was still a dream. He told her about his stage struggles. I suppose he talked with the easy candour which, to-day, makes him instantly likeable. Probably that gay smile of his was there, too—the smile which is now as familiar to millions of film-goers as their own faces.

THE FOLIES BERGÈRE, THE FAMOUS PARIS MUSIC HALL, WHERE MAURICE CHEVALIER MADE HIS FIRST APPEARANCE

At all events, Mistinguett was very favourably impressed.

"Have no anxiety about your fortunes on the stage," she said. "One can read your future in your face. You will succeed."

Success was sure—Mistinguett had prophesied it ! All that remained now was to get more and more experience. Maurice went away, and with redoubled confidence invaded the agents' offices. Many provincial engagements were offered to him. He accepted them all.

His popularity grew, though in those days he employed a stage technique very different from that which he has since adopted.

Chevalier was then a low comedian. He wore a top hat and a coat much too small for him, and he shuffled before the footlights carrying an absurd walking-stick.

"Eventually I returned to Paris," he said, "and then I had a great stroke of fortune. I was engaged at the Folies Bergère—and given a dance opposite Mistinguett.

"The Folies audiences were wonderfully kind. I changed my style now, and forsook

the make-up of a red-nosed comic for neat clothes. I tried to gain my effects by subtler methods."

The experiment was justified. Paris took the new Chevalier to its heart, and he became the partner of Mistinguett.

He was a star !

When Maurice had told me the story of his early life on the stage we strolled through the garden. This lovely retreat in southern France, where he was now resting preparatory to his personal appearance in London, was another dream of the old struggling days which has come true.

He chose the site himself, mid-way between bustling Cannes and the peaceful slopes of the Esterel range, a countryside where oranges and lemons, palms and pomegranates grow. The villa, built to his own requirement, has been in his possession for about two years. It is an attractive home, with its sand-hued walls, its blue shutters and its little tower at one corner, but he says he is not yet completely satisfied with it. Maurice,

in the arrangement of his home, as in his work, is a tireless seeker after improvement.

Among the simple folk who live near by Maurice is admired—and adored. His generosity to the poor is proverbial. Though he can command huge sums for his appearances, he has worked for nothing so that the proceeds may be given to the needy families of the district.

He lives simply and naturally, and does not believe in a rigid programme of physical exercises. "I am very interested in boxing, though," he said. "I used to be a good boxer, very safe on my feet and pretty fast. Once I boxed with Carpentier, but he, of course, was much too good for me."

I noticed that Maurice was wearing three rings, and asked him about them.

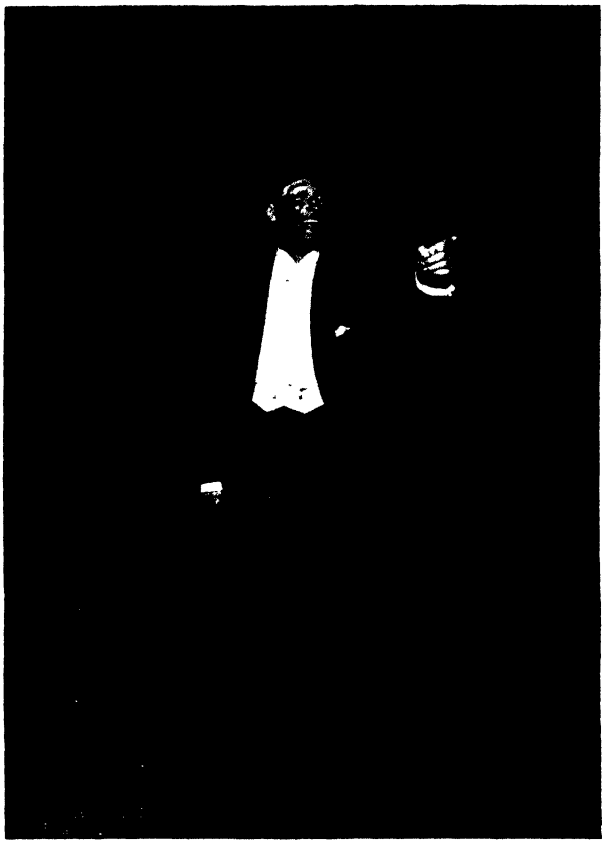
"This," he pointed out, "is my wedding-ring. This one was given me by some film people in Hollywood. And this third ring—well, it has a little story of its own."

It was a slender ring, set with tiny diamonds.

"When I first began on the music-halls," Maurice continued, "one of my greatest ambi-

tions was to save enough to buy a piece of jewellery for my mother. I have never forgotten how wonderful was her faith in me, to let me go on the stage despite my brother's opposition. This ring was a token of gratitude—the best I could give her then.

"Last year mother died when I was away in America. And I have worn the little ring ever since."



MAURICE CHEVALIER ON THE STAGE AT THE CASINO DE PARIS

CHAPTER III

SOLDIER AND PRISONER OF WAR

Two young men named Maurice arrived at Belfort in 1913, for the period of military training which is compulsory to all sons of France.

Maurice Yvain was a composer, and wanted to write operas. Maurice Chevalier had already won popularity as the partner of Mistinguett at the Folies Bergère in Paris.

Friendship sprang up between the pair. As a result Yvain was persuaded to postpone his operatic inclinations and write some syncopated songs for Chevalier. Thus he acquired a new ambition, which led to his becoming one of the finest French musical comedy composers.

"Yes, I enjoyed my military training," said Maurice Chevalier to me as we sat, one morning, beneath a crimson and green sun-umbrella in his garden at La Bocca. "The life was a happy one, but you will under-

stand me when I say that I looked forward eagerly to resuming stage work in Paris.

"Then, when I had one more year of training to serve, the war broke out.

"That meant putting aside my stage ambitions for a while—for how long, who could guess?

"As a soldier—I was a private in the infantry—I managed to keep in practice at first by trying to amuse my comrades in our leisure hours. But when we went into the trenches there was no more singing or dancing.

"Our losses were severe. One by one my friends were killed or wounded, and I was beginning to think myself a very lucky fellow to remain unscathed. But one day, during continuous heavy shell-fire, a shrapnel shell exploded right in the trench. Then it was that, as the English Tommies used to say, I got my packet."

Maurice had been hit in the chest, and a piece of shrapnel had entered his right lung.

For some time he lay senseless, then be-

MAURICE CHEVALIER ON THE STAGE AT THE FOLIES BERGÈRE

came conscious of raging pain, and of blood oozing from his mouth.

"Two of our fellows picked me up," Maurice told me. "They carried me to a village behind the lines. Next day there was a swift German advance—so swift that those of us who were too badly wounded to move had to be left.

"The Germans took possession of the village and of us ; we were prisoners."

A long spell followed in hospital at Magdeburg, and when Maurice had recovered he was transferred to a prison camp.

"That was a bitter experience," he told me, "for discipline was strict in the prison camp at Alten-Grabow. Still, it was at least a relief to know that my wound had not done as much damage as I had feared it might.

"You see, I was afraid it would interfere with my singing, and that would have been a very serious thing for me. However, when I had settled down to the routine of the camp I was able to join in entertainments with my fellow-prisoners just as I had done some months before, when we were all free men.

"Now I want to tell you about one of the

finest men I have ever met in my life. He is an Englishman, and I owe him a deep debt of gratitude, because he taught me your language.

"His name is Ronald Kennedy, and he, too, was a prisoner at Alten-Grabow. His regiment, I learned, was the Durham Light Infantry, his profession a schoolmaster.

"I suppose that, just as I welcomed any opportunity to sing or dance, Kennedy longed for some work in which he could apply his teaching gifts. He found it, too—by starting a class at which French prisoners could learn English.

"Every other day we met, a little group of us, for our studies, and we made great strides. Kennedy was a wonderful teacher, and a very real friend."

To-day Maurice's English is, as millions of film-goers know, very good indeed. He retains a French accent, of course, and that is no drawback. When Maurice appeared in "Whitebirds" in London, Ronald Kennedy came to see him, and he is hoping that his present stay in England will afford another opportunity for a reunion.

In spite of such diversions and the Sunday night concerts, at which he sang regularly, Maurice found prison-camp life painfully irksome, and at last he determined at all costs to get away.

"I had often discussed the possibility of escape with a Parisian friend who was also an actor," he continued. "No suitable chance occurred, and as the months crawled by I determined to get away by a trick. It was a risky trick, but it worked.

"Through the instrumentality of the King of Spain it had been arranged that the French and the Germans should exchange those of their prisoners who were ambulance workers.

"So I became an ambulance worker. That is to say, I altered my identification papers, then claimed that a mistake had been made in regard to me—that I should have been sent back to France long before. Had the deception been discovered, my punishment would have been severe. But I got away with it, as you say."

When Maurice left Alten-Grabow for France and freedom he had been a prisoner of war for two years and four months.

So ended another trying period in the life of the man who is now a great star ; a period which must have seemed very far away to him as we chatted and smoked in his quiet garden.

A faint breeze stirred among the olive trees, and the sea was like blue glass. Servants were laying a table for luncheon on the verandah. A gardener, beneath an immense and shady hat, moved about his work. From somewhere in the villa came the busy noise of a typewriter, for even when he escapes to the South of France Maurice is pursued by an immense correspondence.

One must simply imagine Chevalier's emotions when he returned to France and to the work he loved, for he did not describe them to me. Unlike very many of the people in his profession, Maurice does not parade his sentiments. He confines his acting to the studio and the stage.

He was feeling the effects of life in the prison camp too badly to appear on the stage when he reached Paris from Germany. Those twenty-six months at Alten-Grabow, after being so severely wounded, had had a weaken-

ing effect from which he recovered very slowly.

At the end of the leave period which had been granted him he presented himself for further war service, but the authorities decided that he was now physically unfit. He was discharged and awarded the Croix de Guerre.

After some months of resting, the call of the theatre became too strong to resist, and Maurice took up again his partnership with Mistinguett.

They appeared triumphantly at the Folies Bergère and the Casino de Paris. Peace came at last—and it was in the first months after the war, when delirious joy succeeded sorrow and suspense, that Maurice caught the imagination of Paris as he had never done before.

At this point it is fitting that I should give you Maurice's own story of the straw hat he so often wears on the stage and in his pictures —the only straw hat, I suppose, that ever made a reputation for itself all over the world. For the straw hat is closely linked with the immense popularity its wearer won in the early days of the peace.

"I first thought of wearing a straw hat with evening dress as my chief stage make-up when, before the war, I saw one on the head of a young man at Deauville," Maurice explained.

"It looked, in my opinion, very smart. When I came back from Germany nothing seemed more natural than to resume the straw hat ; it gave me a feeling of taking life up just where I had left it off when I first went to the army.

"Since then the hat has become part of me. I look upon it, if you understand, as representing me. Now my attitude towards it is almost superstitious. If I am appearing on the stage, I must wear a straw hat at least once during the evening ; otherwise I do not feel that I am being myself."

To the young men of Paris, eager for gaiety now that the war cloud had lifted, that hat of Chevalier's became a symbol of France's newly-won happiness. They cheered it whenever it appeared at the Folies Bergère or the Casino de Paris.

Besides, Maurice had at that time a song which lifted the spirits of his audiences to

wild enthusiasm. It was called "Madelon de la Victoire," and it expressed magnificently the mood of his countrymen.

Outside the Folies Bergère the twinkling electric lights announced his name, and his reputation spread among foreign visitors to the capital. Chevalier, son of working-class parents, born in a humble suburb, was marching to still greater success.

CHAPTER IV

MARY PICKFORD'S OFFER

MAURICE CHEVALIER objects to the term "matinee idol." He objects to it very strongly.

I happened to use it, quite casually, when we were sitting in the garden at La Bocca near the edge of an ornamental fish pond, discussing his stage career in Paris after the war. He frowned at a passing goldfish.

"I do not like those words 'matinee idol,' " he said. "A matinee idol is the kind of artist I have never tried to be. I am not a ladies' man. And I am happiest when, in dancing or singing or acting, I can use my sense of humour."

During his appearances in partnership with Mistinguett after the war, Maurice earned a reputation which, though not to be compared with his present fame, many a star might envy. For he was becoming known internationally.

MADEMOISELLE MISTINGUETT

Mistinguett—slender, starry-eyed, vivacious, the embodiment of *chic*—was already a world figure.

Even in British homes where nobody had ever been to Paris, illustrated papers had made her face familiar. Comfortable New York housewives who were not quite certain how "Mistinguett" was pronounced repeated to one another with complete assurance the reports that she had insured her legs for goodness knows how much.

It was through the medium of English and American visitors to Paris that Maurice Chevalier's reputation was carried to countries in which he had, so far, made no professional appearance. They went home full of the praises of the young Frenchman who could dance, sing and mime so well, and who infused his work with a bubbling sense of fun.

This much is plain history. I heard little about it from Chevalier himself. His disinclination to talk about his achievements as an artist was matched only by the utter candour with which he discussed his first appearance on the London stage, which was not a complete success.

The show was a revue at the Palace in which Miss Elsie Janis appeared. It was called "Hullo America!" Sir Alfred Butt had brought Maurice across to play a part vacated by Mr. Owen Nares, who was going into another production.

"Of course, I was very pleased to have this opportunity of taking up an important part in London," said Maurice. "But during the rehearsal which preceded my appearance I began to wonder whether it was really my kind of part.

"It had been admirably suited to the style of Owen Nares, whom I consider an extremely fine actor, because it was a 'straight' part. But I must have a freedom of gesture and action, if I am to be at my best, which is quite unsuited to 'straight' work.

"As the rehearsals proceeded this feeling grew on me. However, everybody was so kind that I decided it must merely be nervousness that was affecting me. All the same, I went to Sir Alfred Butt and assured him that, if I did not do well enough, I should be quite ready to leave the cast.

"I remember saying to him, 'I shall have

one foot on the stage and one on the boat.'

"So it came about that I had my first experience of the kindness of British audiences. They received me splendidly, but all the same I realised once for all, inside myself, that 'straight' parts were not my line.

"No ; I was not satisfied with my appearance in 'Hullo, America !' I was not sure of myself, that was the trouble."

Maurice was next seen on the London stage in 1927, in "White Birds."

Who does not remember "White Birds" ? It was said to have cost £30,000 to put on. The scenery was magnificent. The cast was awe-inspiring. Yet it failed—dismally.

I was at the first night. Chevalier, though nervous at first, did wonderfully well. It was in "White Birds" that London first heard his song "Valentine," which has since become familiar all over the world.

Wearing the symbolic straw hat, Maurice gave us "Valentine" in three or four different styles, showing how it would be sung by various types of people.

He was, to me, the one bright spot in a dismal evening. Things went wrong on the stage. The show lacked wit. It lasted so far beyond the expected time that many people got up and went home. But nobody forgot Chevalier, with his bright face, his eloquent wink, his air of being on good terms with the whole wide world.

Later I was invited to see a revised edition of "White Birds," and went again—to see Chevalier. Again his singing, his mimicry, and a charming burlesque of some old-fashioned acrobats in which both he and his wife appeared were the best things in the show. But "White Birds" did not last.

Maurice, gazing thoughtfully seawards, summed up the situation with his usual frankness.

" 'White Birds' was a tragedy," he said. "I felt that the audiences liked me, and I was very grateful. But the show was a failure, and nobody can hope to appear to the best advantage in a show that fails. So that was that."

Maurice told me next of a memorable event that occurred in between his "Hullo,

America !" and "White Birds" appearances—his first meeting with Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford, who have remained close friends of his ever since.

"And I warn you, my friend," he remarked, "that once I begin to talk about those two I am liable to go on for a long, long time. So sit back and make yourself comfortable.

"It was while I was appearing with Mistinguett in Paris. Douglas and Mary were then on their first visit to Europe, and somebody had been good enough to suggest that they should see my performance.

"One evening, as I sat in my dressing-room waiting to go on, I was told that they were in the house. Can you imagine how excited I was ? For years I had admired them on the screen. I thought, as I still think, that Fairbanks was one of the greatest personalities in the world ; to me he was like a king.

"I sent my card around to them, with a message scribbled on it.

"The message ran : 'I admire you so much and I would greatly like to have the honour of shaking hands with you after the show.'

"You will see that I wrote to Douglas and

Mary as one of their 'fans.' But when, after the curtain had fallen, they came round to the back, they behaved like friends immediately.

"When we had talked for a while Douglas said, 'Let us go out somewhere to supper. Won't you take us to some favourite restaurant of your own ?'

"So we set out, the three of us—and that is how I met two of the best friends I have ever had."

After that, whenever they visited Paris, Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford went to see Maurice's show on the night of their arrival.

About this time the spreading fame of Chevalier led to his receiving several offers to make films.

Resolutely he declined them all.

"Already I had had one experience of making pictures in France," he explained, "and as far as I was concerned it was not a happy one. I felt that the silent screen cramped me, for how could I hope to be completely myself if I did not speak one word or sing one note ?

"One evening, when she was in Paris, Mary

Pickford suggested that I should go to Hollywood and make some films as her leading man.

"It was a difficult decision for me. In the end, though I need not tell you how greatly honoured I felt at the invitation, I did not accept it. I was happy in Paris, because there I could work, so to speak, at full power, without the handicap of silence. Little did I think, at that time, that within a few years the 'talkies' would arrive and overcome all my objections to screen work !"

During this phase of his career, while he was a star in Paris, Maurice was on two occasions summoned to the Spanish Embassy to sing before the King of Spain.

Each time he received a present from the King as a token of appreciation—on the first occasion a gold cigarette case, inscribed with the Royal signature, and on the second a signed photograph.

CHAPTER V

MARRIAGE AND FIRST VISIT TO HOLLYWOOD

ON the bare stage at the Bouffe Parisienne an audition was in progress.

Performers were being picked for a forthcoming revue in which Maurice Chevalier was to be the star.

One by one applicants detached themselves from a waiting group in the wings and danced or sang so that Chevalier and his producers could make their choice.

There was one girl whose dancing particularly impressed the onlookers. She was petite, dark and shy. She danced as if she did so for enjoyment rather than for a living.

As the sharp tinkle of the piano died away one of the produced announced, "Madamoiselle is engaged," and shortly afterwards the girl—whose name was Yvonne Vallée—heard that she was to have a dance in the revue as partner to Chevalier himself.

MAURICE CHEVALIER, DAVID DURAND AND SYLVIA BEECHER
IN "INNOCENTS OF PARIS"

(By Courtesy of Paramount Pictures)

So began the love story in real life of Maurice Chevalier.

"The dance in which Mlle. Vallée and I appeared together proved to be a very popular item in the show," he told me. We became good friends.

"A special bond between us was the fact that we had each felt drawn towards the theatre at a very early age. Mlle. Vallée began to learn dancing when she was only eight years old, and I myself, as you know, made my first appearance at a music hall at the age of thirteen.

"In the next season Mlle. Vallée joined me as my regular dancing partner. Meanwhile, we had become something more than good comrades. We found that we had fallen in love."

Maurice told me this part of his story with a reticence uncommon among the members of his profession. He is exceptional in the fact that he does not enjoy discussing his private life. Chevalier the actor and Chevalier the man are two separate persons whom he likes to keep apart.

It was in 1923 that Maurice met Mlle Vallée. Their stage partnership continued until 1926, when he proposed to her and she accepted. "We will have a very quiet wedding," they decided. Maurice hated fuss. He hates it still—genuinely.

"At that time," said Chevalier, "I was living at a little village outside Paris. We arranged that the wedding should take place there, and invited only ten people, all relatives and very close friends."

Maurice's mother was there, a white-haired, frail old figure in black clothes and a black bonnet, walking proudly to the church with her son.

"Alas! all our hopes of a quiet ceremony were doomed," Maurice gold me. "Somebody had given away our secret. And so, at the church, we were faced by a crowd of photographers and cinema men, and there had to be a fuss after all."

While we talked Mme. Chevalier herself came into the room to join us. She wore a dark blue jersey embroidered with her initial, "Y," and baggy sailor trousers. She is still

shy and very, very French ; takes the duties of house-keeping with great seriousness ; and is an excellent business woman.

Yet another unusual characteristic of Maurice Chevalier is his capacity to appreciate the work of rival performers.

I do not mean that he praises everyone effusively and indiscriminately in order to create an impression of generosity. If Chevalier says he admires a fellow-artist he means it. He takes an intensely serious interest in the style and methods of other actors, and his opinions are often highly illuminating.

"While I was appearing in Paris I paid regular visits to London to see the current West End shows," he said. "I used to call on my friend and fellow-countryman, André Charlot, for an exchange of ideas."

One year he took a holiday in America. He had arranged to appear on the New York stage at a future date, and this preliminary visit was in the nature of a "look round."

He thought the American artists wonderful —so wonderful that he decided to postpone

indefinitely his New York début and persuaded the manager concerned to let him off the contract. But a time was fast approaching when Maurice was to become more famous than any of the artists whose abilities had made him so unnecessarily self-deprecating.

One evening a young American called on him in Paris accompanied by a very beautiful girl with blue-grey eyes. The young man was Mr. Irving Thalberg, the girl was his wife—Miss Norma Shearer, the film star.

They had come in the hope of persuading him to enlist under the banner of a Hollywood producing organisation to which Mr. Thalberg belonged.

His reputation in Paris was so great, they argued, that he could gain nothing by staying there any longer since he could climb no higher. But in Hollywood the possibilities were limitless. This, incidentally, they had learned by experience—for had not Mr. Thalberg been a typist, then a clerk at £3 a week, before a chance meeting with an important film executive while on holiday set him on the road to fortune? And had

not Norma Shearer, now a reigning queen in the studios, once tramped round New York carrying her photographs under her arm, trying to get an engagement ?

Maurice listened to the arguments of the two young people with a growing realisation that the time had come to take his chance on the films. As it turned out he did not accept Mr. Thalberg's offer—they could not agree as to terms—but when, soon afterwards, an invitation came from another source he was still in the frame of mind to give it consideration. And this time he was persuaded.

"I had known Mr. Jesse Lasky for a number of years," Maurice said, "but although he had spoken very kindly about my stage work he had never suggested that I should make pictures for his company.

"However, during one of his visits to Europe he happened to look in at the Casino de Paris on an evening when I was singing some songs in English.

"This gave him a new idea of me, I suppose. At all events, he came round to me after the show and said, 'Maurice, the talking film is

going to be the film of the future—and your future is going to be on the talking film. Let us meet to-morrow and discuss terms.'

"That night I thought it over—and it did not take me long to make up my mind. For the arrival of the talking picture had entirely changed my attitude towards film work.

"When, some years before, I had done a little filming in France, I had been dissatisfied with the result because the silent screen imposed heavy limitations on me. Unable to speak and sing, I was only half myself!

"But now the situation was altogether different. So when Mr. Lasky offered me terms which were satisfactory I hesitated no longer, and made rapid preparations for my transfer to Hollywood."

Jesse Lasky, always a penetrating student of the trend of the entertainment industry, had chosen wisely. In the very early stages of the "talkie" revolution he realised that a new type of star would now be needed—so many of the old gang would speedily lose their popularity once they became articulate on the screen.

Chevalier had polish, a sense of humour,

an attractive personality and a good voice—and he could speak and sing in excellent English. Yes, Mr. Lasky felt he had done the right thing.

Maurice, on the other hand, continued to take a modest view of his chances. And something that happened in New York on the way to Hollywood made him feel more modest than ever.

"I went to see Al Jolson in 'The Singing Fool,' partly because Jolson was the pioneer artist in this new medium of the talking film and partly because I had always been interested in his career and his personality.

"He started with few advantages to help him in his stage career. He was the son of a poor Jewish family that emigrated to America. Like myself, he made his first stage appearance as a boy. And what an artist he became!

"I tell you, when I saw Jolson's performance in 'The Singing Fool' my heart was in my boots. On the journey to Hollywood I continually asked myself—Have I done the right thing? Shall I succeed? Would it not have been wiser to remain in Paris,

enjoying such popularity as I had gained there ?"

He arrived in Hollywood feeling still more apprehensive, and most of Hollywood received him in the way that it receives most apprehensive strangers—it threw him a careless nod and went on working.

But in his pocket he carried a telegram which he had received from Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford while he was in New York. It said: "Come and see us as soon as you arrive." He went, and his old friends welcomed and encouraged him. "You are going to be a very great star," they prophesied.

Within a few weeks Maurice was hard at work in the Paramount studios, and Hollywood was speculating busily about the future of the smiling young Frenchman whom Jesse Lasky had brought from Paris.

MAURICE CHEVALIER IN "THE INNOCENTS OF PARIS"

(By Courtesy of Paramount Pictures)

CHAPTER VI

FACING THE CAMERAS

CAN you imagine a more interesting dinner party than this one, which Maurice Chevalier described to me when we were discussing his experiences as a newcomer to Hollywood ?

Only four persons are present.

The host is an Englishman, slightly built, with a pale, serious face.

Once he belonged to a dancing team called the Eight Lancashire Lads. Then he toured, for £3 a week, in a revue.

After that he went through America for £15 a week—until the film magnates found him.

To-day the mention of his name in any corner of the civilised world calls up a vision of baggy trousers, wistful features and a little black moustache . . . for the name is Charles Chaplin.

On Chaplin's right sits a blue-eyed, golden-haired woman who has played, in her

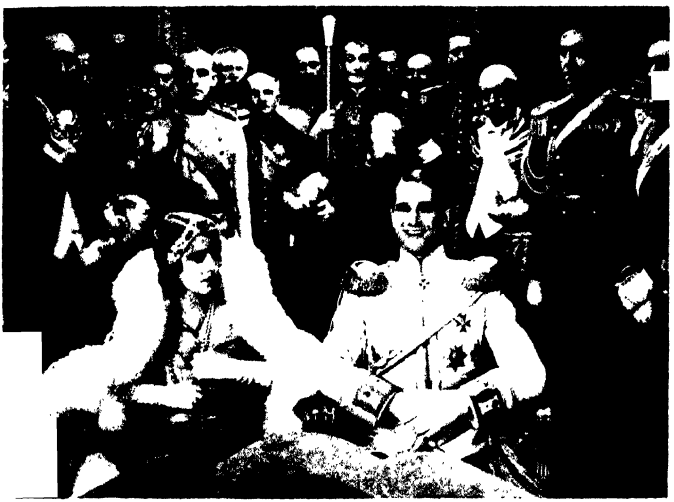
time, child parts in crude melodramas. She was an actress before she could read or write. A film company's commissionaire, touched by her earnestness, allowed her to see D. W. Griffith, the great producer. So Gladys Smith became Mary Pickford, "the world's sweetheart."

But her legal name is Mrs. Fairbanks, and her husband, Douglas, who once arrived in Liverpool with only £10 in the world and walked to London, where he made just enough money to pay his passage back to New York, is the third member of this dinner party.

The fourth, sitting on Chaplin's left, is Maurice Chevalier himself—once a music hall performer at 12s. a week, later the idol of Paris, now an unknown quantity in Hollywook, washed up by the "talkie" tide.

"You see," said Maurice to me, "at that time I had only just begun work at the Paramount studios, and nobody knew whether I was going to turn out a success or the biggest failure in the world.

"Yet my friends, Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford, gave me an immediate wel-



MAURICE CHEVALIER AND JEANETTE MACDONALD IN "THE LOVE PARADE"

(By Courtesy of Paramount Pictures.)

come, and when they told Charles Chaplin that I had arrived he at once arranged that the four of us should meet at a dinner in his house.

"You are English, and you should be very proud of Chaplin. He is a genius. Such men occur only once in a generation.

"I have met him many times since that first dinner party when I was new to Hollywood, and when he was so kind and encouraging. Sometimes he is moody; but if anybody has earned the right to possess an artistic temperament, Chaplin is the man. His friends understand his moods. They know also that he is one of the most generous-minded people in the world.

"As far as his film work is concerned, it is my considered opinion that even if Charles Chaplin never did another thing he would stand out as absolutely unique.

"As for Douglas and Mary, they are the king and queen of Hollywood—not only because of their achievements as artists, which all the world knows about, but because they have made friends in every rank of the film industry. They are equally popular

among those who are prosperous and those who are poor and struggling.

"Douglas and Mary are a marvellously well-matched couple. They have equal fame and equal intelligence.

"You will realise that the friendship of two such people was worth everything to me when I began in Hollywood."

Hollywood to Maurice was full of surprises. It was much bigger than he had expected. Instead of a sort of overgrown workshop, he found a place of wide avenues and green boulevards, with studios situated at a considerable distance from one another. Private cars filled the roadways; men and women of many races crowded the pavements; film actors wearing their yellow make-up and their studio costumes passed along the streets with absolute unconcern.

Hard work at the Paramount studios dispelled Chevalier's first pangs of loneliness.

"In Hollywood they keep one at it," he said. "I seemed to be working all the time, and everybody was very businesslike.

"Did you see my first picture, 'Innocents of Paris'? To a certain extent it told the story of my own life; that is to say, it was about a poor young man who managed to make a success on the stage."

I had another glimpse of Chevalier's remarkable candour—his gift of viewing his own achievements in a manner utterly detached and unbiassed—as he went on:

"About two-thirds of my part in 'Innocents of Paris' suited me down to the ground. I had to be an optimistic, carefree, unsentimental person. But at the end came me odrama, and I do not like melodrama in the least. I had to sing a song and cry at the same time.

"There is something in my nature which turns me against playing sentimental parts or singing sentimental songs. If I must be a little bit soulful at one moment I like to laugh it off immediately afterwards.

"But the climax of 'Innocents of Paris' was its sentimental part, and that made me feel uncomfortable."

That was Maurice's private reaction. Hollywood—and the rest of the world—liked

"Innocents of Paris," sentiment and all. When the film was first shown in Los Angeles Chevalier went alone to the theatre and avoided his acquaintances among the audience. He was afraid of a failure. Yet within a few minutes of the start hardened film stars were laughing at the breezy humour of this new rival whom Jesse Lasky had brought into their midst, and at the end they cheered enthusiastically. The critics did the rest.

Among the audience at the preview of "Innocents of Paris" sat a man who, like so many in Hollywood, had made a great name after beginning life very obscurely.

He was a film director, Ernst Lubitsch.

In 1913 Lubitsch was touring in Germany as a red-nosed comedian. Five years later he earned international fame as the director of a picture called "Gipsy Blood," in which Pola Negri was the star. His reputation swiftly increased, until he found himself about to make a picture called "The Love Parade," a picture which, provided it were properly cast, would delight the whole world.

MAURICE CHEVALIER AND YVONNE VALLÉE WITH DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS, WHO SAW THEM OFF FROM PARIS TO LOS ANGELES

After seeing Chevalier in "Innocents of Paris," Lubitsch knew he had found the star he wanted, and persuaded him to take the part of the prince in "The Love Parade."

At first Maurice was not quite sure—he had his doubts about playing a princely part. But when he saw that there would be ample scope for humour and that sentimentalism was reduced to a minimum in this film, he gladly agreed.

"By this time," he told me, "I was as closely interested in film work as I had ever been in the stage. I found myself taking pains over the slightest detail.

"Lubitsch and I worked in close co-operation. Before playing a scene I went through the script with him, and we discussed it carefully together.

"By the time I began to play the scene I had every intonation and gesture worked out in my mind.

"I had managed, too, by this time to get over the strangeness of not playing to an audience. It is a great trial to a performer who has appeared for years to be deprived of contact with an audience and the sound of

their applause, but the device I adopted was to *imagine* an audience—and it worked."

"The Love Parade" was, of course, a tremendous success. Maurice was said to have "smiled his way into the hearts of millions of women" with his performance as the prince. Looking back on that picture, nevertheless, he has still found room for self-criticism. I doubt whether he will ever be completely satisfied with himself, which is a very good sign indeed.

"Those elegant uniforms limited one's style," he explained. "It was a sophisticated part, too, and I am not really a sophisticated fellow.

"But I am not grumbling. Everybody was very kind indeed about the film, and I found that I was no longer a lonely man in Hollywood; I began to make many more friends."

There was at least one star in Hollywood besides Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford to whom Chevalier's sudden success was not a surprise.

MAURICE CHEVALIER AND CLAUDETTE COLBERT IN "THE BIG POND"

(By Courtesy of Paramount Pictures.)

She was an English actress from Hull—Miss Dorothy Mackaill.

Years previously Miss Mackaill had appeared in a French show on the Paris stage. In the same company was a young actor whose personality stood out from the rest, though he had a comparatively minor part. There was an attractive "naturalness" about his speech, his gait, his smile.

Miss Mackaill decided that there was a particularly bright future in front of that young Frenchman.

In course of time she went to Hollywood, became a star of the silent film and remained a star when the "talkies" began. Then she heard again of the young Frenchman who had attracted her notice at the theatre in Paris—for Maurice Chevalier had become a star as well.

CHAPTER VII

IMPRESSIONS OF FAMOUS FILM STARS

MAURICE CHEVALIER was beginning to feel very much at home in Hollywood.

His second picture, "The Love Parade," had been a triumph. His third, "The Big Pond," promised to be another.

Even those one-time stars of the silent screen whose voices had not survived the onslaught of the "talkies"—men and women whose popularity had depended solely upon their being seen and not heard—now admitted, albeit a trifle sourly, that the radiant young man from the Casino de Paris had justified Jesse Lasky's faith in him.

Among his fellow stars of the talking screen Maurice rapidly made friends. For, as he pointed out to me, a genuine comradeship naturally exists among people who have had to work hard for their success; and most of Hollywood's successes began, as he did, in obscurity.

Maurice talked to me about Adolph Menjou, one of the first friends he made—Menjou, who worked in his father's hotel business, then on a farm, then in a New York vaudeville theatre, before he determined to try his luck as a film actor and secured a part in "The Three Musketeers."

"Adolph is not only a very fine actor, but a charming fellow as well," said Chevalier. "However, there is a tragic memory associated with our friendship; it concerns Francie, my pet turtle. Would you like to hear about it?

"Before I left Paris a French actress gave me the turtle as a token of good luck. Francie was a very elegant turtle, for her shell was studded with artificial gems.

"I took Francie to Hollywood, and installed her in my home. She was treated with great deference, for she certainly seemed to bring me good luck.

"Then I met Adolph, and he made me a present of a beautiful little dog, a Sealyham.

"Alas! for Francie and the Sealyham quarrelled—and the Sealyham won. We found Francie had been killed in the encounter,

and soon after that the Sealyham died, too. A mournful episode, was it not?"

Maurice told this story with the same mock-serious air which he employs for his famous song about the love story of the two elephants.

I mentioned Greta Garbo, once a poor student at the Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Art, now one of the most talked-of women in the world because, though she is a very famous star, she remains aloof in Hollywood and goes to no parties.

"Greta Garbo is magnificent," Maurice declared. "She has succeeded because, instead of adopting any traditional style of acting, she uses her own unique personality."

One of Chevalier's friends is Ronald Colman, the Englishman who, ten years ago, took a second-class passage to New York and haunted the agents' offices until he was given a walking-on part in a stage show. It was while he was touring in the play "East is West" that he met, in Hollywood, a producer who wanted a leading man for Miss Lillian Gish—and thus his chance turned up.

"Colman is just another example of Eng-

lish grit and ability getting to the top," said Maurice. "And now I should like to mention a young Englishman who will go very far indeed, though already he is immensely popular. I mean Jack Buchanan.

"Jack and I have been friends for many years. In my Paris days, when I paid frequent visits to London to see André Charlot and exchange ideas with him, Jack Buchanan was working for André.

"I was an admirer of his work from the beginning. He began on the stage, as you know, in a very obscure capacity, and worked his way into prominence by sheer cleverness and energy.

"He is not content merely to dance or sing; he takes care that everything he does on the stage shall express his own personality.

"Jack is not only a fine artist with a fine style; he is a fine fellow as well."

Mr. Buchanan, who once danced in the chorus, has won high praise in Hollywood for his work as a "talkie" artist. He has been called, in fact, the English Chevalier, so that Maurice and he may yet become friendly rivals.

"I am very glad that Jack is making talking pictures," Maurice told me, "because his talents deserve a world-wide audience."

You would be surprised to find how extensive is Chevalier's knowledge of English artists, both in the legitimate theatre and the music hall. Comedians and tragedians, singers and dancers, he seems to know about them all. From the time when, many years ago, he travelled third class to London in order to do a round of the theatres, learning what there was to be learned, he has never lost interest in the English stage.

"When I was in Paris," said Maurice, "English people sometimes asked me whether I was in any way related to an English music hall star who bore the same name as myself—Albert Chevalier.

"I heard of him so often that I decided, next time I was in London, to go and see this other Chevalier. I did so, and his genius made me proud of the coincidence that gave us the same surname.

"He was wonderful! His songs were gems, and his gestures were perfect. More than any other artist I have ever seen Albert

Chevalier had the gift of changing the mood of an audience from laughter to tears in the space of a few seconds."

There is another English comedian whose name Maurice will never forget—Gerald Kirby. For it was while watching Gerald Kirby that Maurice, then a broad comedian, decided to adopt a smarter make-up on the stage, and so became the debonair figure that the world knows to-day.

"The show was called 'Hullo, Ragtime!' and one of the costumes that Kirby wore consisted of a white suit and a white bowler hat," Maurice explained. "At that time my own stage costume included tight trousers, a coat that was far too small for me, very big boots and an ancient top hat. I decided to take a leaf out of Kirby's book, and after that I forsook my comic clothes and wore well-fitting suits on the stage. Naturally, I changed my style with my clothes, and audiences approved of the idea."

During my talks with Maurice at La Bocca we were occasionally joined by a slightly-built, spectacled Englishman. This was Mr. T. Elder Hearn, who is Chevalier's manager.

Mr. Hearn himself has been well-known on the music-hall stage as "The Lazy Juggler."

"Tom and I are very good friends as well as associates in business," Maurice told me. "We met first before the war, when I was appearing at the Folies Bergere. Tom's act was in the same programme.

"Though for many years we travelled along different paths our friendship remained, and when I was a prisoner of war at Alten-Grabow I used to look forward to receiving his cheerful letters."

One of Maurice's treasures is a photograph of Sir Harry Lauder, with whom he has been friendly for several years.

A film actor's popularity can be guaged to some extent by the size of his "fan mail"—the letters he receives from admirers in various parts of the world. "Innocents of Paris" brought Maurice a flood of inquiries for signed photographs and messages of affection and goodwill, and after "The Love Parade" his morning mail reached gargantuan proportions.

MAURICE CHEVALIER AND FRANK LYON IN "THE BIG POND"
(By Courtesy of Paramount Pictures)

But Chevalier speaks of his "fan" letters with characteristic modesty.

"It is gratifying that people should take the trouble to write and say that they have enjoyed a picture," he said. "Letters of that sort are always good to read. As for the other kind of letters which actors sometimes receive —messages from women who say they have fallen in love with them—I simply do not think I appeal to women in that way.

"I am not a fascinating fellow. My job in life is to make people smile.

"One of the most pleasant things I have heard for a long time was the news that two of my pictures, 'The Love Parade' and 'The Big Pond,' were being shown on opposite sides of the same street in a town in China, and were very much liked by the audiences who went to see them.

"Most of the people attending were Chinese men and women who could not have had any idea what I was talking about, but I am told that they roared with laughter at my actions."

In January of this year Maurice was invited to appear for a week at the San Francisco motor show, giving short concerts.

He received for this a fee of £5,000.

When he was about to leave Hollywood for his present visit to Europe, some of his friends arranged a "Bon Voyage Night," described on the invitation as "Hollywood's 'au revoir' to the beloved star."

Dozens of world-famous actors and actresses attended to show their goodwill to the man who, not much more than a year previously, had walked through the doorway of the Paramount studio with his heart in his mouth—half expecting to be a failure.

Maurice Chevalier has been called the Valentino of the "talkies." I mentioned this fact—tactlessly, perhaps—as we sat in the garden of his villa on the last day of my visit to La Bocca.

"That is so," Maurice replied, "and the idea is absurd. I will tell you why.

"In the first place, please understand that I think Rudolph Valentino was a very great actor. More than that, he worked tremendously hard to make his way on the films. He had known what it was to go hungry, and to tramp many miles looking for a job.

"But between Valentino and myself, as screen actors, there is not the slightest resemblance.

"He was a very good-looking man. Am I? Why, I should think not!"

Maurice made a comic face beneath his sun-helmet.

"Rudolph Valentino," he continued, "was known as the great lover of the screen. I do not think I am at my best when I am acting a love scene. I am not a sheik.

"So, when I am told, or when I read, that I have sex appeal, I am not at all pleased. If people think of me in that way they misunderstand me.

"I hear a great deal about the quality called 'It' which some artists are said to possess. But do you think it is a compliment to an actor to suggest that he succeeds, not by his ability to entertain, but because his personal appearance is attractive to women?

"You know, I think there are very few women nowadays who like the sort of man who is full of insincere gallantry and exquisite compliments. They like a man whose behaviour is natural, just as nearly all men

prefer women who have an absolutely feminine personality and outlook.

"At all events, I am perfectly certain that if I tried to be a 'great lover' on the screen I should merely look ridiculous. But I shall never try—my own sense of humour would not let me."

CHAPTER VIII

TRIUMPH

AFTER Maurice had become world-famous as a film actor he began to be besieged by offers to sing at private parties.

At one such function, in New York, he appeared before some of the "Four Hundred" —the rigidly exclusive inner circle of American society—and was paid a fee of £1,600.

So the son of a Paris house-painter found himself being applauded by an audience of millionaires!

All the same, Maurice did not feel completely at home during these private entertainments. He missed the familiar atmosphere of the stage or the studio.

He decided, as offers from private sources in America became more and more numerous, to ask a minimum fee of £1,000 for a one-night appearance.

Now there were some people who, while covetous of the prestige which they would gain by being able to invite their friends to hear Chevalier sing, were anxious to strike a bargain. They tried to persuade him to take a smaller sum. He was adamant.

"I would not haggle," Maurice told me. "I said that my charge was a fixed one, and if people were not prepared to pay it there could be no argument.

"Once I had accepted an offer I did the very best I could to give my hosts the entertainment for which they had paid, and I naturally took it as a compliment that they should desire to have my services. But my real home is on the stage and on the studio set, where I am an actor among actors, and so, since it is no ambition of mine to become a private entertainer, I ask for such appearances a fee which is high enough to limit their number."

In other words, by refusing to accept fees lower than his set rate for private appearances Maurice turned away thousands of pounds!

We talked, afterwards, of money, and Chevalier was as frank as ever.

At first glance, a man who can ask—and get—£1,000 for singing at a party, and whose salary for a fortnight's appearances in London is £8,000, is well on the way to being rich.

But there is another side to the question.

The necessary outlay of a film star of Chevalier's magnitude is very high.

For example, he has to travel constantly to and fro in America, and between America and Europe. Hotel bills are heavy. A popular actor incurs expenses in many directions which are not realised by the layman. And, if he is wise, he must also save.

"I dislike all this publicity about the money I earn," said Maurice, "because it gives people a false impression. And, you know, as film actors go I am by no means rich as yet. For people are apt to forget sometimes that I have only just begun to earn big money.

"You hear it said, 'Chevalier is the highest paid artist in the world.' But remember, that applies only to my stage appearances.

"I am still more or less a newcomer to Hollywood, and there are artists there who get much more money than I do for their film work. If some of those same artists made personal appearances on the stage they would probably get much less than I, because, not having been trained in the theatre, they would naturally find it a little difficult to entertain an audience face to face.

"My engagement in Hollywood is on the basis of a long-term contract which has still nearly a year to run, and until then I shall continue to earn a salary for my film work which, comparatively speaking, is not so stupendous as some people might imagine."

As one who has been accustomed to hearing, from stage and screen performers, accounts of their salaries which I know to be romantically exaggerated, I found this latest example of Chevalier's candour singularly refreshing.

Somebody once began a story to the effect that Maurice is so fond of good living that he takes his own French chef with him wherever he goes. He laughed when I mentioned it.

MAURICE CHEVALIER WITH HIS WIFE, ACKNOWLEDGING THE CHEERS OF THE ENORMOUS CROWD THAT GATHERED TO SEE HIM AT VICTORIA, NOVEMBER 28TH, 1930

"It is true that I still love the cooking of my own country best of all," he said, "and that whenever I have a chance to eat a real French meal I do so. But as for travelling with a chef—it is just one of those picturesque little stories that grow up automatically.

"To take one's wife, one's business manager and a servant wherever one goes is in itself an expensive business. I have had to harbour my resources; so far I have not had the money to make a big splash."

In Paris there is an institution which bears Maurice's name—the Chevalier Dispensary for members of the theatrical profession.

At the Dispensary actors and actresses who are in poor circumstances can receive the best medical attention. Maurice has given largely of his own money to help the institution, and he has also forwarded contributions by some of the wealthy people he has met. He intends to give a gala performance for the benefit of the Dispensary in Paris before his present European visit ends.

"It is my ambition," he told me, "to get

together contributions which will make it possible to enlarge the Dispensary to a big hospital. Such an institution is badly needed in Paris.

"Sometimes, as many actors do, I meet rich people who speak in flattering terms of my work on the films. I often say to them 'It is very kind of you to say such nice things. Now, if you really want to do something that will please me, why not contribute something to my Dispensary?' And they respond, as a rule, very readily."

We talked about the future.

"Of course, I shall stick to the films," said Maurice. "You can hardly imagine how fascinating film work becomes once it has got, as you say, into your system. You cannot help taking the closest interest in every detail of film production.

"I find myself becoming as interested in the part which the electricians, the carpenters, and the scene painters play as I am in my own.

"And there is a great thrill in building up a new characterisation. First I read the script—a little anxiously, hoping that I am

not asked to be too sentimental—and then, having got the 'feel' of the part, I talk it over with my closest friends, tell them how I propose to play it, and listen to their opinions.

"Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford had been wonderfully helpful to me in this way. I try my new songs on them first, before singing them at the studio. They come to dine with me, or I go to dine with them, and we talk over every detail, so that I can get the expressions and gestures right.

"Although I have finished with the stage as a regular occupation, I intend to go on making stage appearances at intervals. It would be too much to deprive oneself for ever of the joy of acting before an audience! What I should like most to do would be to travel, after each film, to a different part of the world, so that by appearing on the stage I can meet personally the people who have given my screen self such a generous reception."

* * *

After that we smoked a final cigarette, and Maurice, profoundly relieved to find that he was no longer required to talk about himself,

pointed out to me the loveliness of the view from his terraced garden—the bold curve of the coast and the spiky contours of the Esterel range.

Then his manager came up and said that two visitors had arrived from Paris on business, and my host went indoors to shoulder once again the responsibility of being Maurice Chevalier.

CHAPTER IX

LONDON'S REMARKABLE WELCOME

On November 29, 1930, Maurice Chevalier stepped from the Golden Arrow at Victoria Station into a circle of Press photographers.

He looked a little self-conscious.

Perhaps he was remembering the day when, many years before, he had descended in the same station from a third-class carriage with a cheap suitcase in his hand—a young French actor who had come to London on a sight-seeing visit, eager to learn what English theatres and English actors were like.

Nobody knew him then. Now, ten thousand Londoners were waiting to welcome him.

"Click, click," went the camera shutters. As Chevalier turned to walk up the platform the crowd beyond the barriers caught sight of him and roared his name. "Good boy, Maurice!" shouted the men. Women waved

handkerchiefs and small boys cheered shrilly.

When, standing by a microphone, Maurice told them that he was delighted to be in London again, his broken English was rapturously applauded.

He meant what he said, too. For he was making his third professional appearance in London not as Chevalier of the Casino de Paris but Chevalier of the Talkies.

Probably there were very few in the cheering crowd who remembered his London debut in a Palace Theatre revue—at £30 a week. Probably, too, only a small proportion of those present saw him in "White Birds," the spectacular show at His Majesty's which failed so thoroughly as a whole that not even Chevalier's brilliance—and he was scarcely less brilliant in those days—could pull it through.

The talkies had made Chevalier, and it was a talkie crowd that came to Victoria to greet him.

Outside the station they surged around the car which was to take Maurice to his hotel. Men and women struggled to shake hands with him. He was breathless, over-

whelmed by the spontaneity of this reception. All he could do was wave his hat, smile, and gasp, "Thank you so much! Thank you so much!"

It was not, of course, the first time that a famous film star had been uproariously welcomed to London. But as a rule the stars who visit this country have appeared in dozens of films. Up to the time of Chevalier's arrival only three of his pictures—"Innocents of Paris," "The Love Parade" and "The Big Pond"—had been shown in England; yet ten thousand people had turned out in drizzling rain merely to catch a glimpse of him!

Burly police constables stood close together to form a lane through which the car could pass; others rode on the running board; and so Chevalier and his smile passed slowly from view.

"It was a wonderful thrill for me," he said afterwards, "to see in that crowd people of all classes. There were elderly men and women, and small boys, and men who wore mufflers round their necks. That was the finest thing of all—to be welcomed by

poor people. It was all I could do to keep from crying when I saw that crowd."

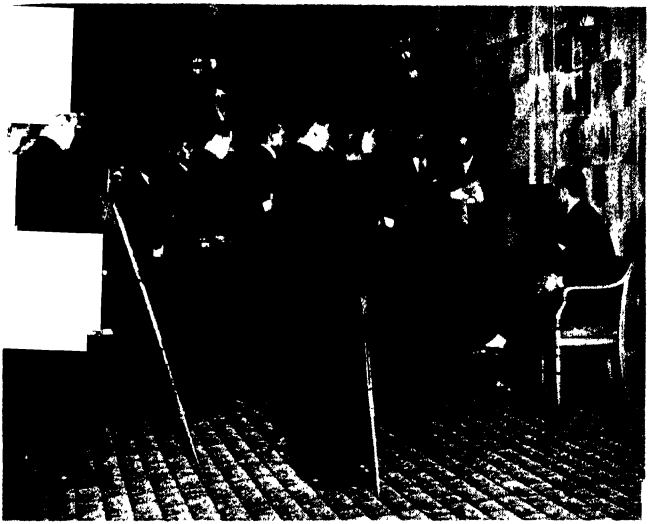
Towards midnight on the evening of Chevalier's arrival I sat in the Kit-Cat Restaurant. It had been announced that he would appear for supper, because his friend Miss Sophie Tucker was in the cabaret programme.

The dance floor was crowded when Maurice came in. Dancing stopped immediately, there was a burst of excited applause—and the band struck up one of the songs from "The Love Parade."

Famous English actors and actresses went up to greet Maurice as he sat at supper, presiding over a table with Miss Tucker at his right. Autograph collectors formed an eager queue behind him.

Afterwards Maurice made a little speech—a characteristic one. He promised to do his best during his appearances at the Dominion Theatre, and hoped that those who came to see him would not expect too much.

Next morning there was a Press reception



MAURICE CHEVALIER. PRESS DAY AT THE HOTEL

at Maurice's hotel. He was photographed a dozen times—listening to gramophone records, drinking coffee, shaking a cocktail. Questions were fired at him; he answered them good-humouredly and frankly. Then came a rehearsal at the Dominion.

On Sunday Maurice drove into the country, but early in the evening he returned to London for a dinner in his honour given by members of the French colony and attended by the French Ambassador, M. de Fleuriau, and Mme. de Fleuriau.

The applause went on for a full minute when Maurice walked on to the stage on Monday evening.

He began with a speech of thanks, telling the audience that he would "give of his blood" to please them.

His first song was one they all knew—"My Love Parade"—and he prefaced with a quaint little talk, rich in humorous gestures.

There were French songs in his programme, and before singing each one he explained its

meaning in English. The explanations were as funny as the songs. He gave them "Mon P'tit Tom," the one about the two elephants, preceded by some brilliant miming. He talked amusingly about the apaches of Paris, then sang "Ma Regulière." After each number he dived into the wings and returned with only the tiniest change of make-up—a different hat, perhaps—but Maurice can work miracles with a hat.

During his season at the Dominion, Chevalier proved his own contention that he is not an artist of the "matinee idol" type.

It was his sense of humour that triumphed. His smile, his wink, his comic gestures and inflections roused the audiences to greater enthusiasm than mere characterless good looks could ever have done. Good looks alone have little power to attract audiences to-day. Personality and charm are far more valuable commodities, and Maurice possesses them both to an amazing degree. He expresses, on the stage and the screen, the spirit of buoyant youth and optimism.

"The true Prince Charming of the entertainment world" was the phrase in which

one critic summed up Chevalier's qualities after the first night at the Dominion.

Outside the Dominion Theatre, when Maurice entered and left, there were repetitions in miniature of the welcome which had greeted him at Victoria on the day of his arrival.

Six policemen were required, on the second night, to clear a path from his car to the stage door, so big was the crowd which had gathered to cheer him.

When he appeared on a Sunday evening at the Albert Hall it became clear that unless the crowd dispersed he would never be able to reach the hall in time for his performance, and so he had to take temporary refuge in a block of mansion flats close by.

Chevalier's style is essentially "intimate" —yet he lost none of his attraction in the vast Albert Hall. "I am deeply happy," he said as he walked on to the platform, "that the English public likes me all the while." After his first song he smiled confidentially and said that he was even happier now,

because "at first I was afraid that your Albert Hall would be too beeg."

Each night at the theatre Mme. Chevalier watched her husband's triumph, happy and proud.

She, too, was besieged by interviewers, and answered their questions in her shy, hesitating English. They wanted her to tell them what it felt like to be married to one of the most popular men in the world, and whether she cooked Maurice's dinners herself, and whether she played golf and tennis, and how she liked Hollywood, and so on, endlessly. . .

There was another person for whom Maurice's success in England had more than ordinary interest.

This was Mr. Ronald Kennedy, the Durham man who had taught him English when they were both prisoners of war at Alten Grabow. Mr. Kennedy has travelled to London on each occasion when Chevalier has appeared professionally in England, and on the last occasion he found, as he had

expected, that world-wide success has left his friend completely unspoiled.

That was my own impression of Chevalier each time I met him. Popularity has not turned his head. Off the stage and outside the studio he discusses his profession with a penetrating sanity.

His pleasure at having won the affection of English people is genuine and unbounded. Long before he learned to speak our language he formed an ambition to appear on the English stage, talking and singing in English.

"I have never been so happy in my life," he said to me the day after he reached London. "I am hoping that I shall be a very great success. But even if I am a failure, when I recall how I was welcomed in this country I shall be content."

THE END