

The reward of the long, long struggle. "The Miracle Man" was Lon's life miracle turning him from failure to fame

LON Chaney was the second of four children born to deaf and dumb parents. The year was 1883, the town, Colorado Springs, Colo., and Lon's father was a barber.

By the time the boy had reached the fourth grade, his mother had become an invalid, her speaking hands locked powerless by rheumatism. Lon stayed home to do the housework. He got no more schooling, but through the necessity of talking to and understanding his mother he unconsciously learned the art of pantomime.

When the younger children had grown strong, he started working. He was a guide up Pike's Peak, a carpet layer, a decorator's apprentice, a mine worker, a prop boy, a nineteen-year-old barnstormer.

Manhood found him touring the kerosene circuit of shabby honky-tonks, getting stranded in God-forgotten villages, being broke in Chicago and while hunting engagements, he and his young wife were often close to starving. Nine struggling years later he was still a ham comedian in a five-a-day musical comedy house on Los Angeles' Main Street and by every law of reasoning and common sense he had no right to expect anything at all from the movie profession on which he took a gamble in the late days of 1912.

A MAN, drab and weary after thirty years' struggle, stood outside the casting office of the young Universal Film Company. Never handsome, his clothes far from flattering, the daily battle for existence was written large upon him.

He was hunting a day's work. He hadn't even the satisfaction of being unknown. He had worked on the Universal lot for more than a year. But he still had to beg for every bit he got.

The picture that morning—they made a new one every third day—was "The

The True

Few men work as hard or wait as long for success as Lon Chaney. Read this triumphant chapter in the career of the movies' mystery man

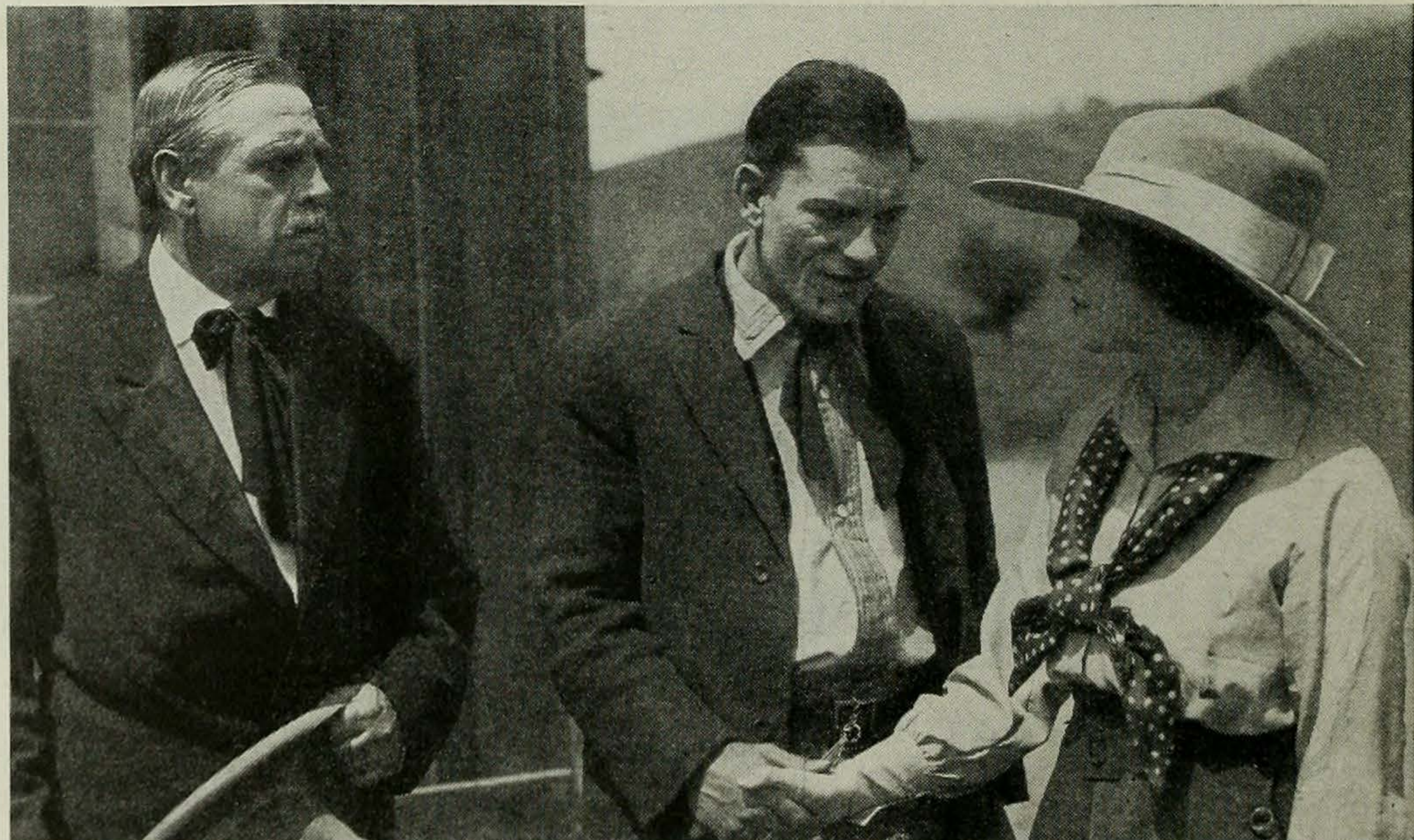
By Ruth Waterbury

Bloodhound of the North" and they finally handed Lon Chaney a scarlet coat and let him be a Northwest Mounted Policeman in the distant background.

"Even among all those other terrible actors I couldn't be important," Lon explained. "The only person who was aware of my existence was myself."

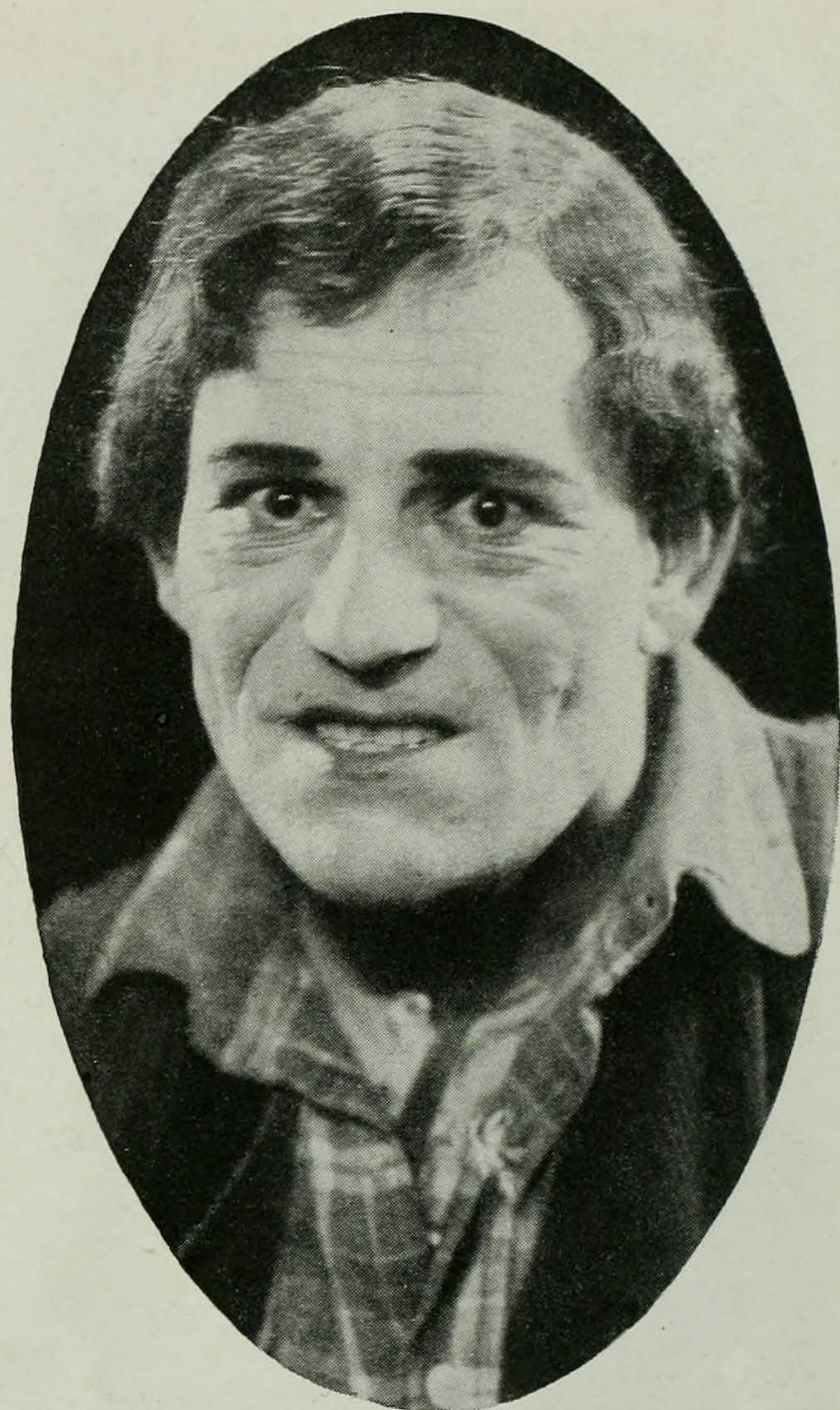
The sole movie pioneer who today ranks among the first ten at the box office, and that entirely on program pictures, sat with me under an arbor on the back lot of the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studios. "The Hypnotist" had been finished that morning, completed as nearly all Chaney pictures are, a week ahead of schedule. It was the final talk we were to have together, but in contrast to my sense of disappointment Lon was voluble and gay.

"Tonight I start out for the high Sierras," Lon crowed. "No shaving, no make-up, no interviewers for four long lazy weeks. We take a stove along and the wife cooks the fish I catch. We sleep under the pines and I try to climb high enough to reach the snows. Camping's the biggest kick in life for me."



After months of idleness Lon was rescued by Bill Hart who cast him as the heavy in "Riddle Gwan." The girl was Mary MacLaren

Life Story of LON CHANNEY



Contrast today's quietly self-possessed Chaney with this Chaney playing "The Trap" in 1921

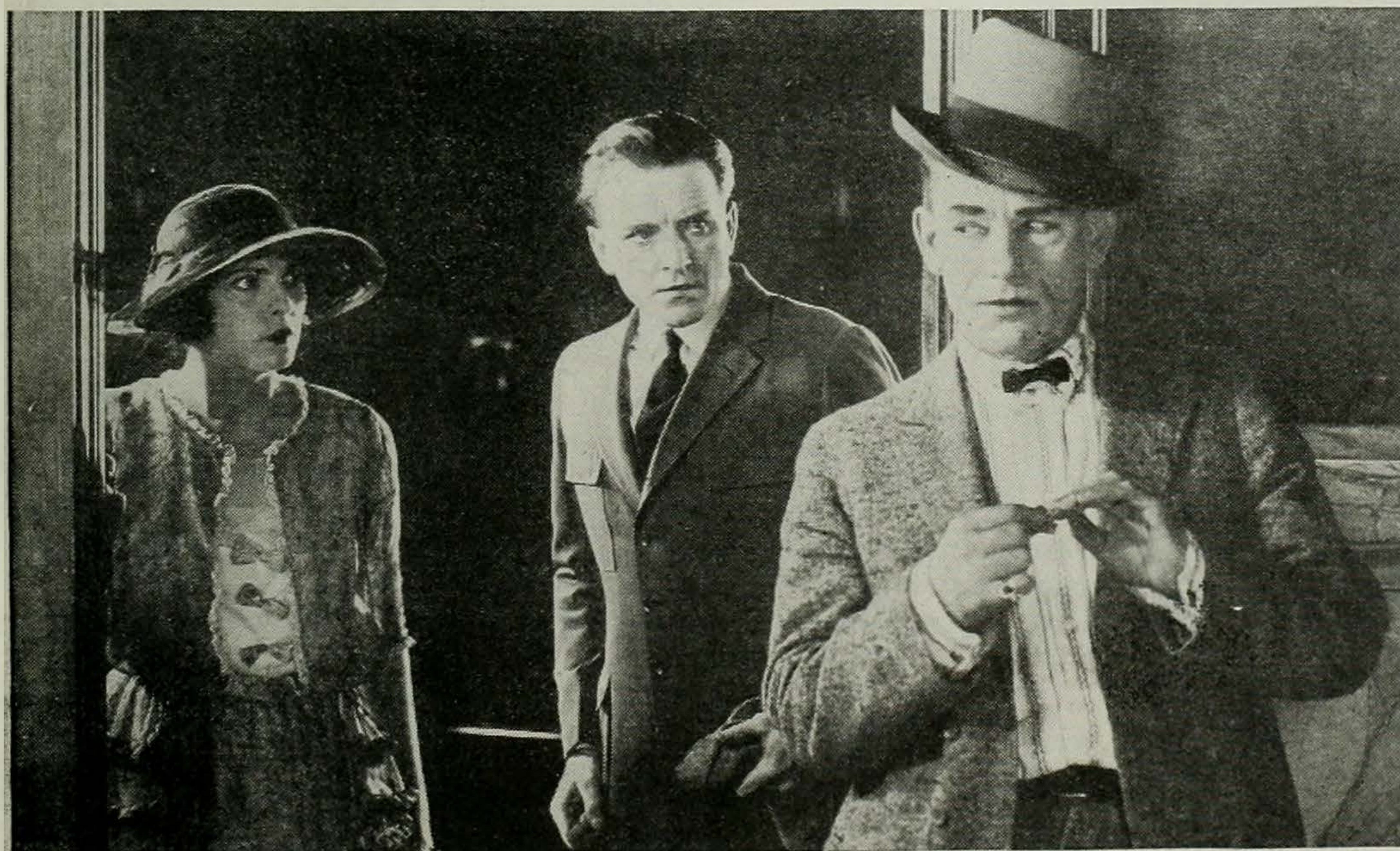
Most creative artists have dual personalities, but in few men are they so sharply marked as in Lon. I was seeing this afternoon the quiet, successful man of property. His very clothes expressed his relaxation. His grey sack suit was carelessly worn. His hands, which are so rarely still, worked around the edge of a grey cap. Earlier that day I had sat on "The Hypnotist" set watching Lon enact a monster creeping through a fearful room. Then he had worn a black frock coat and a high black hat. He had a wig that matted greyly about his shoulders and from his slobbering mouth pointed teeth gleamed and tears of agony flowed from his awful, distended eyes.

For nearly an hour it seemed impossible for a human body to suffer severer torture than that to which Lon subjected himself in order to gain that effect with his eyes. I promised him not to reveal the make-up trick, yet it would make little difference to the profession if I did, for few men could have endured it. Yet in this visible suffering Lon was plainly an artist in the ex-

quisite travail of creation. To endure pain for his work brought him strange joy. Now, with the character creation ended, he was just a good business man who had done his job and was off for a rest. It even made reminiscing almost agreeable to him.

"I alternated between comedies and one-reel Westerns at Universal," Lon recalled. "We slapped pictures together in two days to a week. I must have been in at least a hundred. Only a few names stick. I remember a Joker comedy called, 'Back to Life,' another titled 'Red Margaret.' I was a moonshiner hidden among the rocks in that one. The chief thing for me was that I got three dollar checks daily and that occasionally they were worth that.

"The movies had their forces at work but none of us quite sensed the gigantic thing we were mixed up with. Some of the troupe were getting somewhere, but I wasn't in that class. The big stars on our lot were J. Warren Kerrigan and Jeanie [CONTINUED ON PAGE 94]



The story of Lon's career reveals how many other stars have faded. Priscilla Dean was his co-star in "Outside the Law"

The True Life Story of Lon Chaney

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 57]

Macpherson, but I was really happy. For years out on the road I'd battered through awful boarding houses and cheap restaurants. Now I was in a miracle land where the sun shone all the time and I had a home. No touring and I had a sure twelve to fifteen dollars a week. I hoped, hoped constantly for something better, but that much was good. Hollywood was a village of shadowy lanes, orange groves and carnations. I loved it then. I love it yet."

THERE is no sight in life more thrilling than that of a human being who has found his true destiny. Lon was now being as nearly urbane as his lonely temperament would let him. He leaned back against the white birch tree trunks that formed the arbor, peacefully content.

"Tell me about the opportunity Jeanie Macpherson gave you," I prompted.

"Gee, we were in awe of her," Lon said. "First, she was a lady. Then she had a foreign education, had played Broadway, had worked under D. W. Griffith in New York, and finally she had the ability to write as well as act her own pictures.

"She wrote and acted a feature a week. I've forgotten the name of the one in which she first cast me but I do remember that if she had been anyone else I would have refused to play the scene. It was straight character drama and I was convinced I was a comedian.

"I had to be an outraged husband who discovered his wife in another man's arms. Desperately I walked into the scene and started calling my wife names. I had done a lot of listening in my life and I discovered I had quite a store of names to call an erring wife. I raved on until Miss Macpherson's laughter stopped me. I thought that finished me but she was only laughing at my vehemence. She then directed me through the scene, ordering me to keep my mouth shut."

Shortly after that Jeanie Macpherson had a nervous breakdown from overwork. With her health restored, she forgot Universal and joined the growing Lasky Feature Company as assistant to Cecil B. De Mille, for whom her most recent work was the scenario for "The King of Kings."

SHE would probably have helped Lon Chaney more, had she stayed. As it was, that one picture lifted him from the ranks. The studio began giving him regular bits and he jumped from comedy to characterizations, from Italian dramas to cow operas, never being more than one week on any picture and working constantly.

A man of less morose, less idealistic temperament might not have builded for fame from that novitiate. But Lon plodded along, solemnly, hopefully, driven by a soul desire which he himself but dimly understood.

He took a whirl at directing J. Warren Kerrigan for six months. He made good

on the assignment but the grease paint urge was too strong for him. He went back to acting, learning make-up, learning technique.

Nevertheless it took six years for his salary to advance to one hundred dollars a week.

It was 1918 and the big stars were William Farnum, Douglas Fairbanks, Harold Lockwood, Fatty Arbuckle, Fran-



Tetotum, Va.

Three blankets deep—and shivering. Gosh, East winds are nippy, especially when one's been ordered to bed on a porch for six months and it's only the second week! Nothing but fighting the old "temp" and cough on and on, hopelessly. Everybody buying spiffy new clothes, and no togs for me but pajamas and a bathrobe!

I closed "Romola" with a shudder. Not a smile in all its dark pages; not once that glorious, swept-off-one's-feet feeling.

I felt bleak as the East wind; I had lost faith in everything. Thinking over the past, I didn't wonder. But unlocking old memory chests is dangerous. Could I fight on?

Over in a corner, I spied a collection of old magazines. I'd go exploring. Wriggling into my slippers, I scuttled across. PHOTOPLAYS—goody! Gathering them up, I slid back. And, after two hours, I was thinking.

These people of the screen—against what towering difficulties they fight! But they didn't stop when the winds blew East; they kept on till they got there. And because of them, and all they give their great, watching world of followers, lost ideals live again and romance brings back the gleam into drab lives. Love, reaching out, touches hardened hearts, and the fires of Faith and Hope are relit, to guide doubting souls—like mine.

While Mary Pickford brings us youth, Betty Bronson makes us believe in fairies and Thomas Meighan strengthens our trust in men. Why have a grouch with the world?

I looked out. The sun shone across the garden and there was Cinthy with my supper.

"Eyes mighty bright," quoth she.

"I've found something I'd lost, Cinthy,—Faith."

"Praise de Lawd! Child got religion out cher by herself."

"Through PHOTOPLAY," I thought, and smiled as I stirred my tea.

F. G. B.

cis X. Bushman, Mary Pickford, Nazimova, Marguerite Clark. High salaries were the mode and Lon Chaney felt he was worth a little more than he was earning. He sought out William Siström, then studio manager of Universal, and asked for \$125 a week on a five year contract. Mr. Siström, revealing that he was just a typical wise supervisor, stated that he knew a good actor when he saw one but that looking directly at Lon Chaney he only saw a washout. He added that Lon would never be worth \$125 a week to any company. Lon walked off the lot. He was thirty-five years old and success was still invisible.

THE curly-haired boys and girls were then holding forth," Lon said. "Character work meant nothing. I went from one studio to the other but I soon discovered I was totally unknown except at Universal. At first I wasn't frightened. I had saved my money in those six years. I had a little home and my boy was going to school. But as the weeks became months I began to believe Siström wasn't such an idiot. Then Bill Hart saved my life."

Lon's whole face softened as he recalled that friendly act of Bill Hart's. Bill cast Lon for the rôle of heavy in "Riddle Gwan," overriding his manager's objections that Chaney was too short, fighting the officials who wanted to cut Lon from the finished picture. Bill Hart was a power in 1918 and he could get away with anything.

"Riddle Gwan" was Lon's first release on an important program. From it he got two other engagements and then George Loane Tucker sent for him.

"Tucker didn't really want me for the rôle of the cripple in 'The Miracle Man,'" Lon confessed. "He wanted a professional contortionist, but the five he had already tried out in the part couldn't act it. When Tucker described the part to me I knew my whole future rested on my getting it.

TUCKER explained that the first scene he would shoot would be the one where the fake cripple unwound himself before his pals. If I could do that, I got the job.

"I went home to try to think it out. I'm not a contortionist, of course. It would have been easier lots of times in my subsequent work if I had been. While I was sitting, pondering over that part I unconsciously did a trick I've done since childhood. I crossed my legs, then double crossed them, wrapping my left foot around my right ankle. I caught sight of myself in the mirror and jumped up to try walking that way.

"I found I could do it with a little practice. Then I rushed out to buy the right clothes.

"When I came to the studio on the test day Tucker was already behind the camera. He gave me one glance and called 'Camera.' I flopped down, drag-

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 112]



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what the stars are worth at the box office, regardless of what charming statistics may be presented at his office.

Bankers used to be bulwarked in their working hours by austere offices and vast formalities. Giannini does a great deal of his banking over the luncheon table. He is always to be reached and in times when motion picture affairs have been at a crisis he has been found at his office in Broadway at 3 o'clock in the morning.

This banker extraordinary makes the screen cause his cause. Not so long ago when Charles Chaplin was in a domestic litigation an injunction was served on every bank and banker known to hold Chaplin funds to prevent payment to the unhappy comedian of any moneys on deposit. The injunction covered Chaplin's personal funds in proper legal form. A footnote on the Giannini copy of the injunction requested that it should be interpreted as applying to any Chaplin funds whatsoever. That, decided Dr. Giannini, was not a part of the court order proper. Thereupon he delivered to Chaplin the major fraction of a million dollars, which stood in another account.

By way of further identifying the institution with the screen world, Will Rogers and Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford have been made members of the advisory board of the Hollywood branch of the Bank of Italy. Also Nicholas Schenck, president of Metro-Goldwyn-

Mayer Company, and Joseph Schenck, president of United Artists Corporation, are members of the board of directors of the Bowery and East River National Bank.

Dr. Giannini's home, despite the fact he wants to live in California, is on Riverside Drive overlooking the Hudson, which is probably all that he has overlooked in a long time. Mrs. Giannini was Leontine Denker, daughter of one of the owners of the vast Hammel-Denker lima bean ranch which occupied the present site of Beverly Hills, now the home of those screen star-bankers, who so assuredly know their beans. The Gianninis have a son Bernard, now 16 years old. He does not see as much of the movies as his father.

In a room just outside Giannini's private office stands a most elaborately professional barber's chair. In this chair each morning Giannini is shaved, while as he dictates, blowing bubbles through the lather. The chair carries a story, short and with a happy ending.

A few years ago one A. DeSio, a barber down at West Houston and Lafayette street in New York, plunged his all in Bank of Italy stock. One day he counted up and quit. He sent his chair as a present to Dr. Giannini whom he had never seen.

"I send you my chair because I shall not need it again—now I have \$300,000."

The True Life Story of Lon Chaney

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 94]

ging myself forward along the floor, my eyes rolling, my face twitching and my legs wrapping tighter and tighter around each other. Tucker didn't speak and the sweat rolled off me. Finally I heard a single whispered word from him. "God," Tucker said. I wanted to say that, too, but not for the same reason."

The success of "The Miracle Man" was instantaneous. It made stars of Betty Compson, Thomas Meighan and Lon. The first two are practically through today.

Lon has drawn as close to few men as he did to George Loane Tucker. They became pals and planned many adventures together, one of which was to be Lon's direction of one of Tucker's productions. Tucker's sudden death shadowed Lon's happiness for years.

But with "The Miracle Man" the struggle was over. He had played the part for the salary Universal had said he would never get, \$125 a week, and the offers flew fast. He had established a new type. In his work there was a blend of the unusual, the ideal, and the tragic. Lon knew what it was to be in demand but he did not yet know his own worth.

A conversation that he happened to overhear taught him that. Goldwyn Pictures wanted him as the legless lead of "The Penalty." He was the only possible man for the part and he held out for \$500 a week. Then he happened to hear Abe Lehr, production head of the studio, talking to the casting director.

"I wouldn't have believed we could get Chaney for \$500," Lehr said. "I was prepared to pay him \$1,500."

"The Penalty" gave Lon the idea he has used ever since. He makes his appearance news value. For "The Penalty" he designed a harness to wear, which apparently cut off his legs. The public wondered what on earth he would do next. The public, after each of his pictures, still wonders and Lon still outwits it.

Lon played four pictures for Goldwyn, two for Metro, and then went back to Universal as star of their most ambitious production, "The Hunchback of Notre Dame."

He outdid himself on make-up for *The Hunchback*. He wore a harness to stunt his body, he used false teeth so that it was impossible for him to speak while on the set, he placed putty over one eye, so that when he removed it at the end of the day's work he was quite blind for a few moments. It was this trick that still forces him to wear glasses. "The Hunchback" made back its million-dollar cost many times and Lon Chaney was a star of the first magnitude.

One of his best loved parts came next, the clown in "He Who Gets Slapped." He played that at the Metro studios, returned to the Universal for "The Phantom of the Opera" and "Faust," then back to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer under his present contract.

"As for the real Lon Chaney," said

that gentleman, "he was in 'Tell It to the Marines.' I never had a bit of make-up on during the entire shooting of that picture and I played it straight."

Lon lighted a cigarette. "The story's over," he said.

"Have you gotten a philosophy of life out of it all?" I asked finally.

The amazing Chaney eyes observed me carefully.

"It's in my pictures," Lon said. "I've tried to show that the lowliest people frequently have the highest ideals. In the lower depths when life hasn't been too pleasant for me I've always that gentleness of feeling, that compassion of an under dog for a fellow sufferer. 'The Hunchback' was an example of it. So was 'The Unknown' and, in a different class of society, 'Mr. Wu.'

"I TRY to bring that emotion to the screen. Beyond that I don't fuss. People seem to have the impression I study scripts all the time. I don't. I don't even try to find stories for myself like some stars. I wouldn't know where to look for them and I probably would not recognize them if I found them. I trust my producers to look out for my good. All I want to know is what the character is like and what emotions rule him. It takes me two to four weeks to work out a make-up for a new picture. That set, I don't worry.

"I've had good directors. Tod Browning and I have worked so much together he's called the Chaney director. I like his work. I think Victor Seastrom and Benjamin Christonson are great directors. Their values are finer. But I really don't worry over who they hand me. The chief thing for any actor to remember is that it wasn't his brains that got him to stardom. It was only his acting. He isn't paid to think about production plans and when he starts he usually sinks his whole career."

We walked together across the studio lawns, and out the gate. Lon sent for his car.

"You've found success and wealth," I said. "Why didn't you let your boy become an actor?"

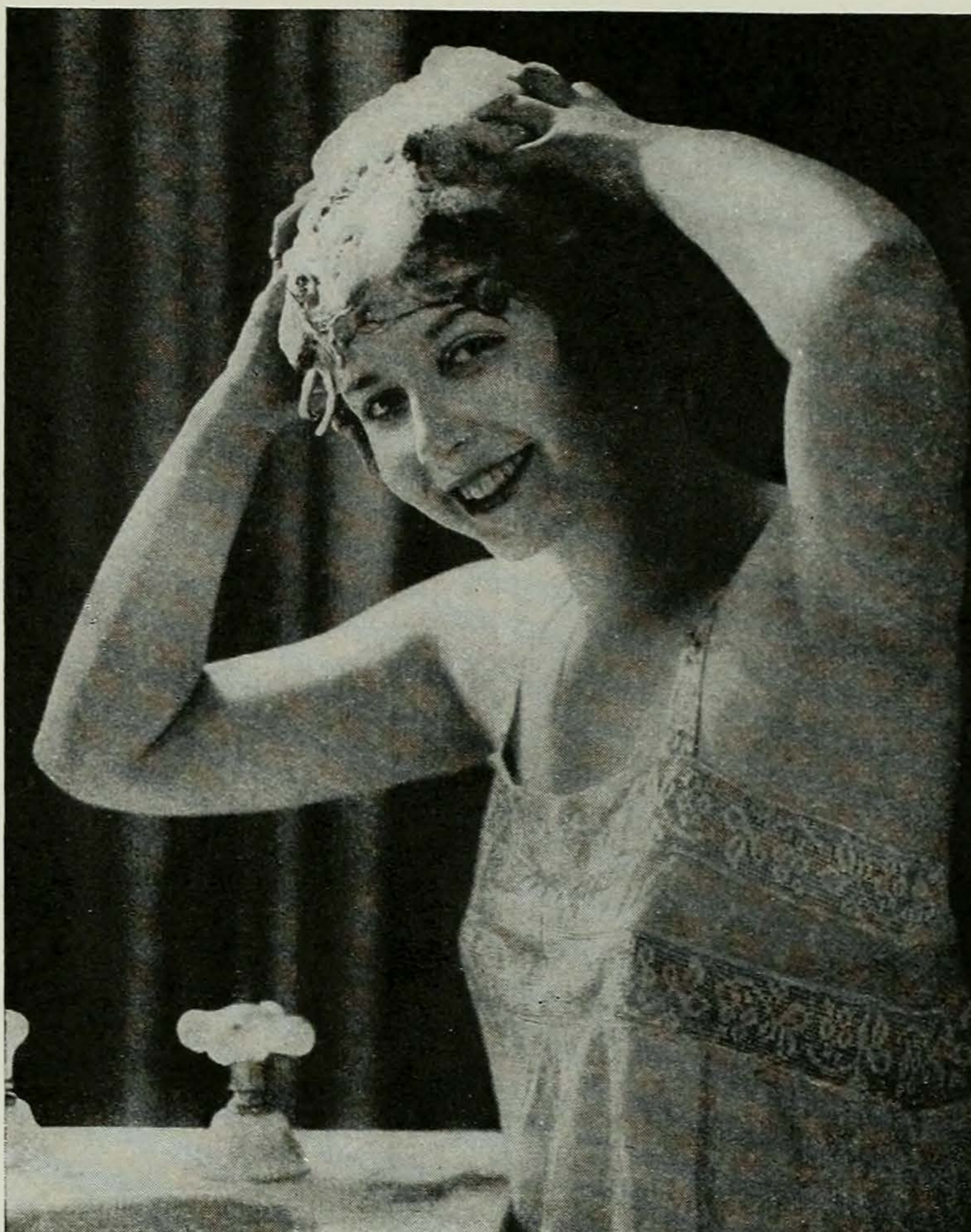
"HE'S six-feet-two," said his father. "That's too tall. He would always have had to have parts built around him. He couldn't build himself for the part. Besides, he's happy in business and he's got a great wife. They're grand kids."

The garage man parked Lon's very expensive roadster at the curb and gave the wheel over to Mr. Chaney.

"Good-luck at your camp," I said. "Where is it, by the way?"

Lon grinned. "No you don't," he said. "I've answered more questions than I ever dreamed could be asked. Nobody but my wife and the boy and his wife and our chauffeur knows where that camp is. And nobody else will ever find out. They've gone up there ahead of me. But I'm starting right out there this moment. Good-bye and good luck to you."

So the car door slammed and he drove away, up through the golden hills, out toward the sunset, all alone, going heaven knows where, Lon Chaney, the mystery man of the movies, being just as mysterious as ever.



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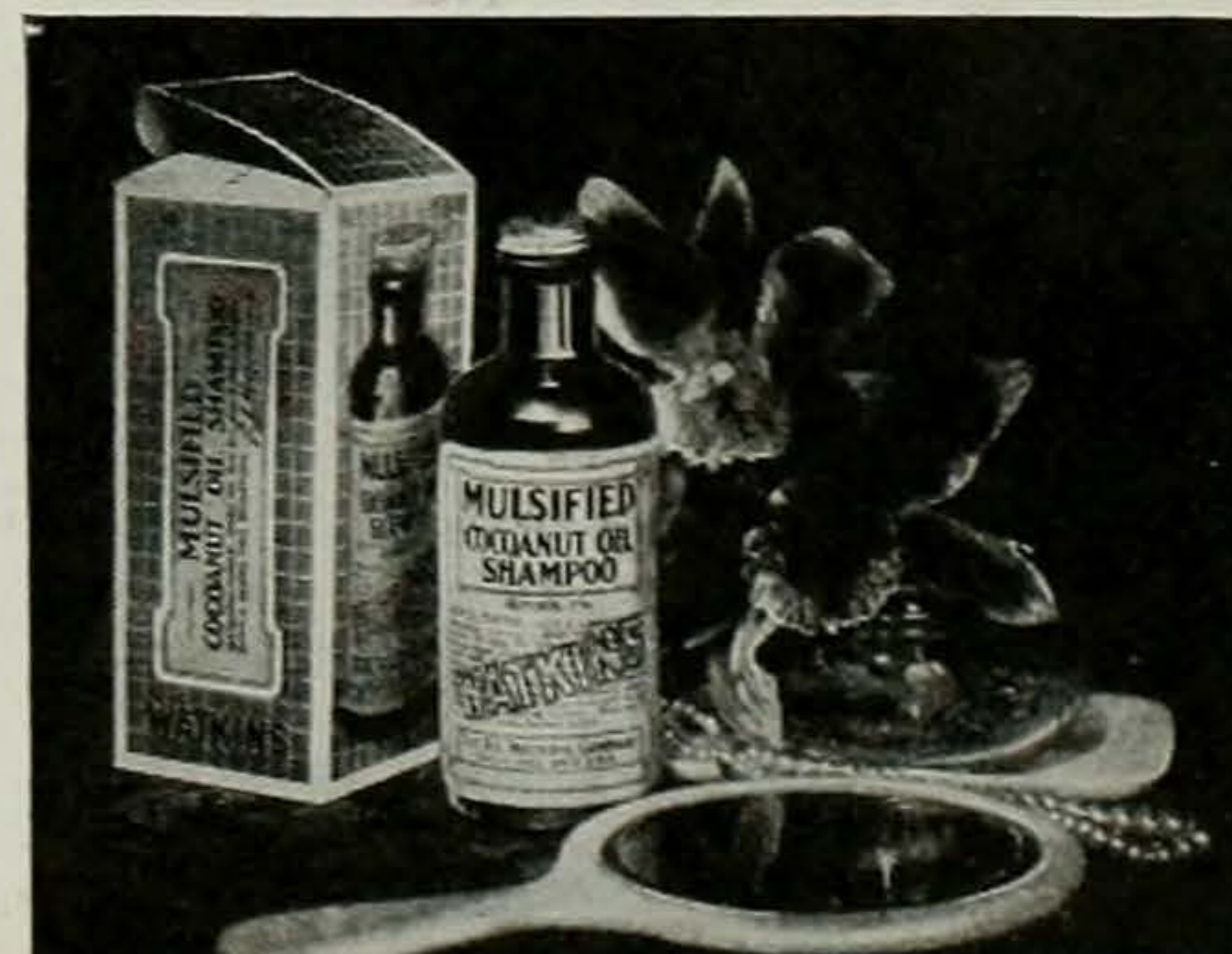
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