Mabel Normand's history has been—being ready—as it will ever be.

Would You Ever Suspect It?

All the while she was making slapstick, Mabel Normand was reading Strindberg, Ibsen, and Shaw

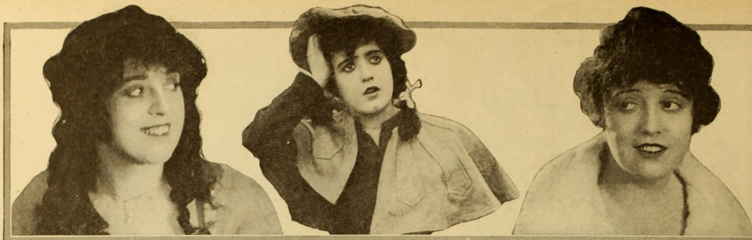
By Randolph Bartlett

"DO you rent this apartment furnished?"

This was the only important thing I asked Mabel Normand. And this is why I asked it:

When I called, Miss Normand was quite obviously a very busy young person. A parcel had just arrived and she hurriedly tore off the wrappings and brought to light a collection of men's pocket articles bound in pigskin, including a memorandum book, a photograph case, and such odds and ends. She explained that they were for Father Kelly, the chaplain of a contingent of the American Army, just sailing for France. Miss Normand had received word from her brother, at Spartanburg, that Father Kelly had been very kind to him when he was in the hospital, and would be in New York a day or two before sailing. So Miss Normand was preparing to show her appreciation. This was something that could not wait, so while she went on with her work of doing the things up for Father Kelly, I nosed around the living room.

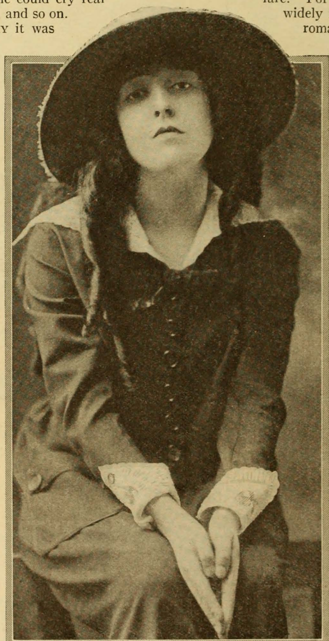
A big book case in one corner invited inspection. The array of authors was as unusual as it was fascinating. There were Gautier, Strindberg, Turgeneff, Stevenson, Walter Pater, Kipling, Oscar Wilde, Shaw, Ibsen, John Evelyn, J. M. Barrie, Francois Coppée, Bret Harte. Of the superficial best sellers there was not a single sample. Nor was



there to be found in the room a copy of any of the cheap, current fiction magazines. On the piano was a heap of music in which was to be found Rubenstein but not Irving Berlin, Chaminade but not Jerome Kern, Rimsky-Korsakoff but not Von Tilzer, Kohler etudes but no ragtime.

So when she told me that everything in the apartment belonged to her, I knew that we were going to have more important things to talk about than whether she considered the moving picture still in its infancy, and what her favorite role was, and whether she could cry real tears when the director asked her, and so on. In a recent article in PHOTOPLAY it was observed that the sole secret of enduring success in moving pictures is intelligence. Miss Normand's collection of books has, probably, done little toward making her successful, but they are an index to the possession of that intelligence without which there can be no success. Of course the mere ownership of books may mean nothing except that the owner is an easy prey to salesmen, but when, as with Miss Normand, there is a thorough knowledge of what is contained between the handsome covers, it means a great deal.

Let there be no mistake about this, however—Mabel Normand is no highbrow. To a person whose mind is not virile and active, association with the masters of literature is fraught with peril. But Miss Normand has that active mind. She does not take her reading like a sponge, but like an electric motor. While she was bumping and splashing her pretty self all over the landscape of Southern California and its well known coast line, in the Fatty and Mabel series of comedies, her mind was developing toward something more important. She was not satisfied to go on forever decorating the slapstick classic. The opportunity came, and Miss Normand was ready to be starred in big features. Still she is not satisfied. From farce she has ascended to comedy, but she knows there are higher rungs of the ladder still unclimbed, and when the next opportunity comes again she will be ready.



This girl reads Gautier, Turgeneff, Pater, Coppee, Wilde—but she is no highbrow. She does not take her reading like a sponge, but like an electric motor.

That has been her history—being ready. Not so many years ago, as the calendar counts time, she was living in Staten Island, just down the bay from New York. She wanted to earn her own living, and it was not long before she found a place as a model for artists. Charles Dana Gibson, James Montgomery Flagg, and other noted illustrators, were among her employers. It is not a highly paid profession, and there were times when she walked all the way from Thirty-first Street to Sixty-seventh to save car fare. For the life of the artist's model is widely misrepresented. There isn't much romance in it.

Among Miss Normand's intimate friends of those days were Alice Joyce and Florence La-Badie, also artists' models.

The fact became known to them that it was possible to earn five dollars a day working in moving picture studios. As the income of the model averaged three dollars a day when she was so fortunate as to have engagements both morning and afternoon, this sounded like good news. So one day Miss Normand ventured into the Biograph studio on Fourteenth Street, the very cradle of the modern moving picture.

"I'll never forget it," she says of this adventure. "I had been told to be sure to see Mr. Griffith, and somehow or other I found my way up to the floor where they were working. The lights and the confusion bewildered me. The blotchy appearance of everybody's face, caused by the rays from the light batteries, frightened me. I sneaked off into a corner and tried not to be noticed.

"While I was standing there the most beautiful creature I had ever seen came upon the scene. She was a gorgeous blonde—I have no idea who it was—and her golden hair hung clear to the floor like one of the Seven Sutherland Sisters. I knew nothing about makeup and wigs, and I supposed this was all her natural appearance. If that was what they wanted in the movies I knew there was no chance for me. I wanted to get away before anyone saw me and laughed at me.

"As I was going out of the door a man stopped me and asked me if I was looking for anyone. It was Del Henderson. I stammered that I wanted to see Mr. Griffith, though the fact is, that was the last thing I did want. He told me to wait a few minutes. I tried to get away again and Edwin August stopped me. I evaded him and then Frank Powell came along. Somehow or other, in spite of all my efforts, Mr. Griffith saw me and immediately ordered someone to take me down to the wardrobe room and put me in a page's costume. I suppose it's about the only time any person trying to get into the movies actually made an effort not to see Mr. Griffith.

"Well, they had a terrific time finding a pair of tights small enough for me. They had to twist them into knots to make them fit. And I was horribly embarrassed. Yes—I know it doesn't sound like the ordinary idea of an artist's model, but I never had posed with so little clothes. They told me to stand still in a certain part of the scene, and I felt my knees wobbling. My legs felt like sticks of well-cooked spaghetti. At last they started work, and it never seemed to end. I don't remember the name of the picture—all I recall is that the wonderful creature I had seen was a blind sculptress.

"It came six o'clock and I could hear that dear Staten Island ferry calling me, but they wouldn't let me go. I never had been late to dinner, and I knew my mother would be worrying. But they kept us there until nearly ten o'clock. I think they gave me ten dollars for the session, but that was no lure. I never went back. They had told us to come back the next day, but I had no idea that the picture was unfinished, and I didn't want any more."

It was quite a while after this that Miss Normand summoned up courage to try again. The second time she became a member of that company from which came Bobby Harron, Henry Walthall, Mae Marsh, the Gish sisters, Florence Lawrence, Arthur Johnson, and all that long list of screen stars who had their start with D. W. Griffith.

Mabel Normand with Roscoe Arbuckle in an old Fatty-Mabel comedy. When she was making these farce comedies Miss Normand became known as the most fearless girl in pictures.

When she was making farce comedies with Roscoe Arbuckle, Miss Normand became known among the players as the most fearless girl in pictures, when there were dangerous stunts to be performed. Nobody ever "doubled" for her. With all her slenderness and petite grace, she had the will power to go through with anything she attempted. She couldn't bear to be called a quitter. A typical incident occurred just when she recovered from a long illness that kept her away from work all summer, two years ago.

Just before she was laid up, she had been working on the comedy "Fatty and Mabel Adrift," and it had to remain unfinished until her recovery. At last she felt able to go back to the studio, and started out in her car. As she neared Edendale her nerve began to ooze away.

"I can't do it—I can't," she groaned, and ordered the chauffeur to turn back.

Before she had driven back many blocks, she began to call herself a coward.

"You've got to do it," she kept repeating to herself. "You've *got* to do it."

So the chauffeur was ordered to turn again toward the studio. Three times she ordered him to drive back home, and as many times her Irish blood rose at the thought of submitting to her fear, until at last she fairly whipped herself to her dressing room—and finished the picture.

Miss Normand's latest presentations, those that draw her away from the slapstick stuff, are "Joan of Plattsburg," in which she plays a modern and American Jeanne d'Arc, and "The Venus Model," in which she essays the title role recalling the good old days when she was so well known as the diving girl. Her first picture in her new affiliation gave her the luscious part of "Arabella Flynn," an errand girl, in "Dodging a Million." In "The Floor Below," a newspaper story, she was a copy girl, acting as no copy girl ever acted now or then. But no matter what she does—romping through a picture and lifting it out of the commonplace, or reading Strindberg, Shaw, or Ibsen after a hard day's work at the studio, Mabel Normand stands all by herself.