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An Appreciation of Mary Pickford

By FREDERICK WALLACE

FROM time to time, ever since Motion Pictures began to be an important factor in the world of amusement, the question has come up: "Is Mary Pickford a great actress, or only a very lovely charmer?" From the pages devoted to the topic in various publications, I think that, like the sidewalk scrimmage between two Irishmen, "it isn't a private fight, but any one can butt in," so I am going to put in my oar.

First, she is undeniably the most popular of the screen stars, at least in this vicinity. All the big features draw crowds; but on Mary Pickford nights, we give the baby soothing syrup, put on our best bonnet and sally forth, a whole street at a time. Every one goes; the telephone girls all go to sleep until after the performance; the policeman dozes on his beat, knowing that there will be nothing doing until after the theater empties. Other stars have their following, and deservedly, but Mary Pickford makes her own planetary system.

What is this appeal? Frankly, I do not know. I have been following her since the old Biograph days, and have never been able as yet to define her charm; all I know is that it is there in a superlative degree. I have seen her in all her plays, good and bad, and no matter what the play is, Mary gets by with all kinds of room to spare.

True, she has beauty, but so have other stars; talent, but talent is not so rare a thing upon the screen. It is a something called personality in its highest sense that draws every one to her, and makes them laugh when she laughs, and weep when she sheds tears. She is the most humanly, irresistibly appealing thing I ever saw. Another thing is her sincerity; not the veneer that many of us put on to cloak our deeds, but the real dyed-in-the-wool, honest-to-goodness sincerity that about one person in a thousand has. Mary Pickford's every look, her every gesture shows a sincerity that is one of the many things that endear her to her millions of admirers.

Then, she is so adorably feminine, from her curls to her toes. In Tess, Caprice, the forlorn waif of the desert island in "Hearts Adrift," she is feminine in everything she does. She can storm, but she storms like a warm-hearted, human woman, not a virago; she can coquette, but it is never the cold-blooded type of flirting—Mary Pickford couldn't be cold-blooded if she tried. Men of all ages, women of all types, children of both sexes respond to this wonderful little girl in a manner no other star is able to arouse. They are all good and have done some wonderful work, but Mary is child, sweetheart and friend of the whole world, and no one can ever take her place in our hearts.

I am a cold, calculating man, with a hooked nose and a Yankee twang, and as unemotional as a turnip (naturally), but when Mary Pickford smiles I sit in and grin into the dark like a Hindoo idol (do they grin?), and when she weeps—well, it's all I can do to keep from rolling my sleeves up over my thin and bony arms and wading right into whomever made her cry. I don't care how handsome he is, or how old he is, or how *big* he is; I just want to sit on him, and snarl between my bulldog jaws, "Have ye had enough, or will I give yez another punch?"

As I said before, I have been following her up for years, but I don't know yet whether she can act, nor does any one else with a real heart under their waistcoats. I guess hers must be the highest type of all, the art that conceals art; but whatever it is, may I live to enjoy it for many years.

And may God bless Mary!

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