

some of the bills before her horrified eyes and suggested that she use the rest for wallpaper. I said goodbye to Aussenberg and advised him to find a doctor. Then I told Miguel to park the truck in front of the Paso del Norte and caught the night train to Los Angeles.

Griffith and Frank Woods congratulated me on the Mexican coverage, but I was a bit uncertain about the picture. Had I directed Villa or had he directed me? "Some of the shots are good and bloody," Griffith commented. "The censors may faint. But that's Mutual's headache." For once he sat down while he talked. "They're pushing us for the complete feature. You'll finish it by playing young Villa. Cabanne will direct."

In those early days, because money was always short and transportation difficult, motion-picture crews never traveled far to location. San Fernando Valley for Mexican scenes to Portuguese Bend and San Pedro for sea shots, and San Bernardino for desert pictures, was the usual range. We made the *Life of Villa* studio sequences at Fine Arts and filmed most of the exteriors, including the "Villa house at Parral," around the old San Fernando mission. When we finished and the cutting room was through, we had a feature-length five-reeler. Typically Mutual never told us how much the picture grossed, but it ran for a long time at the all-Mexican theater on Spring Street and for some years was a regular part of the Cinco de Mayo fiesta.

One day when I was taking it easy between studio shots, Buck Friedman came looking for me. "Two guys at the gate asking to see you. One says his name is London."

"What's his first name?"

"I didn't ask."

"If it's Jack, bring them in."

That was how I met Jack London and Wyatt Earp. London was getting on in years, but his seamed face was still as rugged as his stories, which had thrilled me when I was growing up. His books had been published in most countries of the world. The legend-

ary Earp was tall and a little stooped, but I could still see him as the marshal of Tombstone.

"So you're the man who rode with Villa?" London shook hands and my fingers tingled. For a man who had only a year more to live, he appeared to be in vigorous health. "How was it? Wyatt and I would like to hear about him." Earp nodded and looked interested.

I gave them a short rundown on what had happened between Juárez and Mexico City. When I had finished, London looked at Earp. "How do you like that? Here we've been trying to live up to our reputations and this guy comes out of nowhere and rides with the man who thumbed his nose at President Wilson." He turned back to me. "Great stuff. I envy you."

Jack mentioned that he was thinking about writing a Villa book. "The man's fabulous."

I advised him to wait. "Right now, Mexico is just one big shooting gallery. You probably wouldn't have much trouble getting in but the odds are against you getting out."

"You did," he pointed out.

"Yes, but I was under the protection of the strongest army in Mexico. I had twenty thousand soldiers to back me up."

I asked them to dinner that night before I was called back to the set. We went to Levy's, and London started in almost at once reviling his publishers. "They're worse than your censors," he complained. "They won't hear of me sleeping with a woman, no matter how I try to clean it up. They're a bunch of goddamned eunuchs."

I told him I had the same trouble with the movie moralists, then tried to draw both men out about their own doings. Neither wanted to talk about himself, but I did manage to get a few good details from Earp about the Clanton family and the famous shootout at the OK Corral. London reminisced about Klondike days and the circumstances that spurred him to write *The Call of the Wild*.

I was listening with both ears when Charlie Chaplin, sitting

with friends at another table, got up and went into his waiter act. I called him over and he bowed to us with a napkin over one arm and produced an order pad. "Cut it out," I cautioned him, "or I'll tell Sennett you're breaking your contract."

He quirked up one side of his mustache in a typical leer. When I introduced my guests, he viewed Earp with evident awe. "You're the bloke from Arizona, aren't you? Tamed the baddies, huh?" He looked at London and nodded. "I know you, too. You almost made me go to Alaska and dig for gold." He sat down and related some of his experiences "when I was a snot-nosed brat in Cheapside." I had a fine time just listening to them and later wished I had some way of recording their conversation. For the record, Jack went back to his home in the Valley of the Moon and died there without writing his Villa story. Earp followed him some years later. I did not see Chaplin again for ten years.

When the Villa sequences were finished, Frank Woods told me to take a week off. He seemed to take an almost paternal interest in me and was worried because I had lost weight in Mexico. "Get some honest-to-God American food under your belt. That beans and chili diet will kill you." By this time I liked beans and chili, but I let it go.

I mooned around, at loose ends until Tommy O'Brien, my assistant, hauled me down to Venice to see the Al G. Barnes circus. O'Brien, a circus buff, knew all the performers and introduced me after the show. I met Olga Petrovich, a Russian animal-tamer, whose act I had admired earlier for her apparent disregard of danger. She had placed two pedestals about ten feet apart and whipped a lion onto each of them; then she stood in the middle and made one protesting lion leap over her head. "That's the one that killed her husband a year ago," Tommy whispered. "Instead of landing on the empty pedestal, the lion jumped him. He was dead before the attendants could get the lion off." I could not help comparing this lively, attractive girl with the current crop of studio beauties who almost fainted if they saw a mouse.

Cupid's hit man must have taken a contract on me that night. For the rest of the week I went to the circus every night, and took Olga to dinner at the Ship Café after the show. The Ship had good food and an orchestra. Like most Russians, she was a fine dancer. She was in such good form on the dance floor that people applauded us.

Soon the blues went away. Olga had a small apartment on the beach, where I stayed. Hollywood did not see me again until it was time to report for work. If this remarkable girl fascinated me, it was because I had never met anyone like her. After we had taken a swim, for instance, she produced a couple of big towels and we dried each other. "In Russia," she said simply, "it is the custom." I was happy to agree with her entirely. Once, while we were taking a long walk on the beach, she stopped and put her arms around me and said something in Russian. When I looked blank, she laughed and said, "I simply told you that I love you."

We took a trip to Catalina, and she gave me the same treatment. When I queried her, she kissed me and informed me that this was our honeymoon.

ME: But we're not even married.

OLGA: What has marriage to do with love? We have each other.

I invited her to the studio later to see how pictures were made. It got to be routine. She was either in Hollywood with me or I was at her apartment in Venice. This mutual happiness continued until I went back to New York.

It would be libeling a fine man to call D. W. Griffith a slave driver. Yet he expected a full day's work for what was then considered a good day's pay. While I was in Mexico making the Villa picture, Griffith had started filming his first feature-length epic, *The Birth of a Nation*. I suspected that he had me in mind for the part of John Wilkes Booth, but Frank Woods made no mention of it when I got back to the studio. In his office, Griffith