

With Chaplin in the Studio

WE are being entertained at "Romanoff's." A blackboard inside the lobby is covered with the signatures of the motion-picture stars who were the guests of the establishment on New Year's Eve. At a near-by table Charles Chaplin is giving a dinner-party to the principals in his coming film, *Limelight*. We are introduced before we leave, and invited to watch the next morning's filming. In ordinary life the famous comedian is a slight and dapper person, white-haired, distinguished, and with a charming voice.

Charles Chaplin has his own studio; but this morning he is using R.K.O.-Pathé's because it provides a ready-made theatre. We climb over planks and packing-cases and enter the plush and gold auditorium of what has seen better days. The place bristles with ladders and cameras and with rows of seats, these last purposely insecure so that they may be pushed around when necessary. The air is dusty and musty, yet alive with excitement—a thin, thrilling excitement that touches the grime and confusion and tawdriness with the glamour associated with theatre. A few people sit in the stalls—some, like ourselves, invited spectators, and some in shirt-sleeves ready to work at the given signal. A few are made-up and in costume like the pair in the far-off seats, he the hero of the play, she the dancer who substitutes for the heroine.

The stage is occupied by a piano, beside which stands Buster Keaton, veteran of the silent picture era, in the mis-shapen evening suit of the stage comedian. A characteristic lack of expression is on his mournful face as he watches three actors, dressed as stagehands, hold a broken drum and practice how to tilt it for the best effect. An orchestra of mock players in white starched shirts and dinner-jackets finger their chins and await directions. In front are the cameras, one mounted on a stand and swinging back and forth with noiseless ease as the camera-man pulls a lever. At the side is the recorder of sound, a man in shirt-sleeves, riding on a long projection like the neck of a giraffe with a microphone dangling from its nose.

Charles Chaplin appears, no longer the faultlessly turned out host, but the



CHARLIE CHAPLIN
The baggy trousers may survive

WILL the Charlie Chaplin whom we once knew ever come back again? Or have we seen the last—except in film revivals—of the baggy trousers, the battered bowler, the moustache, and the cane? It is perhaps unlikely that these comic elements will all return, but it would appear as if the baggy trousers at least will stage a comeback in the new Chaplin film "Limelight." The article on this page written by a New Zealander who visited Hollywood recently, before the film was completed, gives an intimate picture of Chaplin at work, both as a director and an actor.

director-cum-actor of his play. He wears brown baggy trousers with one leg longer than the other, and a collarless tuxedo fitting even more badly than Buster Keaton's. His face is masked with grease-paint, and his white hair touched with streaks of orange. He approaches the camera.

"It should be more like this, I think," he suggests, peering through and altering its position; and the camera-man enthusiastically agrees.

He goes to the mock orchestra to explain how they must gesticulate and look around them in order to convey to the living audience the knowledge that a celluloid audience is supposedly cheering and clapping. His face speaks more plainly than his spoken words, so that, beside his perfect miming, the best efforts of his stooges look inadequate and unconvincing. A wardrobe man, holding a packet of paper napkins, hovers beside him to dab at his make-up with a sheet of tissue. When the director is satisfied he goes on the stage and the curtains are drawn. There is an order for "Silence."

"Roll 'em," calls the deputy director. "We're rolling," answers the sound engineer.

"Speed," calls the deputy director, passing in front of the camera and clapping his hand. "Action!"

He signals to the orchestra, who begin their pantomime, and turns to the camera man: "Pan." The curtain goes up.

Down to the front of the stage come the three stage hands with Charlie Chaplin the actor wedged helplessly in the drum they carry and Buster Keaton immobile beside the piano. Charlie lifts a weak hand:

"On behalf of my partner, and myself . . . want to thank you . . . this wonderful evening." He droops and rallies. "I should like to finish the concerto but—I'm stuck." He smiles with an effort and raises his head in a final movement. The stage hands bear him off and the curtain closes.

Charles Chaplin the director looks through the curtain.

"Too slow?" he asks.

"Too slow," we tell him. So the scene is taken again, this time more quickly.

"Again?" On this occasion he muffs his lines, omitting the words "thank you." Yet the effect is more life-like, despite the protests of a purist who fusses his way to the front and anxiously points out the omission.

"O.K.," agrees Chaplin, wearily, "with the 'thank you,'" and for the fourth time the scene is shot. When it is over, the director-actor gives an absurd little skip and descends to the audience. People who a moment before had been deeply moved, come to themselves with a start.

"He's always like that," says somebody, half-exasperated, half-admiring. "He'll have you literally in tears and then turn a ridiculous somersault!" Chaplin overhears:

"And why not?" he demands. "Isn't it my trade? I'm just a fake, always have been!"—which tends to shock the listeners hanging on his words and waiting with strained eagerness for him to notice them, yet marks the essential difference between him and themselves—Chaplin, knowing what acting is and thus able to dismiss it in a stupendous understatement, and the others, less talented, still confusing it with violent personal emotion.

"Now the acrobats," he says, becoming once more the director. The acrobats in pink tights and spangles skip down to the footlights and are given their directions. Their scene is taken three times.

Charles Chaplin not only acts in and directs his pictures; he creates their scenario, their choreography and their music. His method of musical composition is to walk around a bare room with a musician friend and snatch, as it were, melodies from the air, announcing from time to time, "I hear horns here. . . Now there are violins. . . Now there is this tune"—all of which is recorded by the musician as it pours forth and later sifted and examined. What is kept is amplified until the ballet, the song, the concerto, is evolved.

This method of selection from a hotch-potch of ideas is used also in other fields, for example, in discovering comedy stunts. Days are spent during which the whole time is devoted to



CHARLES CHAPLIN
"He is a perfectionist"

thinking up unrelated, hilarious situations, the choicest of which are retained and the others discarded.

"And," we were told, "he will never accept stand-ins for his stunts. He threw himself into that drum yesterday time after time at any one of which he might have broken his neck. He simply won't avoid risks."

Chaplin is a man with theatre for ever in his veins. He experienced public disapproval with *The Great Dictator* for the comedian has no place in politics; but now that he is in the running again, all the old talent is at work.

"He is a perfectionist," his colleagues tell us, "taking unlimited pains to have everything exactly right and yet keeping people in good temper. He is creative and visionary, and, at the same time, experienced and practical. In Hollywood, we regard him as a genius."

The words sound pompous, but no one having seen Chaplin at his work would disagree with them. Genius Chaplin undoubtedly has, and a genius, in many respects, he undoubtedly is. It will be interesting, in the light of that morning's experience at the studio, to see what we think of *Limelight* when it is at last released.

—E.L.S.

WINTER SHOW BUSINESS

WHEN the Wellington Show and Industrial Fair gets under way on Thursday,

May 8, Station 2ZB will be on hand to keep listeners informed of the various activities going on in the Winter Show Buildings. The station staff have arranged a special schedule to include the broadcasting of several of their usual programmes from the small studio set up above the main thoroughfare at the Show. From the official opening by the Governor-General which will be broadcast by 2YA at 8.0 p.m. until the close of the show, radio audiences will be able to follow activities of especial interest to them. Each morning at 7.35, 2ZB will present, from the station studio, a short feature, "What's On At the Show," and during the remainder of the day spot announcements will keep listeners up to date on Show activities during the three weeks it is due to run. The 2ZB *Women's Hour* at 2.30 p.m. will be broadcast from the Show studio daily during these three weeks, and the Shopping Reporter's session at 11.30 a.m. will also be heard from this vantage point from May 12 to 16 inclusive, and May 26 to 30 inclusive. Two of 2ZB's quiz sessions will be heard from the Show studios, and *King of Quiz* will be held on the Show's entertainment stage at 8.45 p.m. on May 14, 21 and 28. The same arrangements have been made for three broadcasts of Selwyn Toogood's *Money-Go-Round* session.