

Norma Talmadge and Lillian Gish. It was all so friendly and informal, and those successful girls were awfully kind to the 'extras.' It was after that picture that I had my first real chance. I was playing a small part, that of a bridesmaid in a Constance Talmadge picture in New York, when an agent called to tell me that a test which I had taken at the Old Victor Studio a few days before was successful, and that they wanted me for the picture 'The Stealers.' When I told the assistant director that I had to leave and that my sister would take my place, he stormed at me, 'You can't do this to us. I'll have Joe Schenck put you out of the business.' Believe me, that made me feel important. But I left, and Athole took my place and I guess that Joe Schenck never heard about it!"

It was Norma's role in "The Stealers" which first attracted the attention of a young man named Irving Thalberg, who was then production manager of the Universal Studios in far-off Hollywood. He wrote to Norma's agent, offering Norma a contract. But nothing ever happened. The agent asked for more money. Thalberg refused to pay it. So Norma lost her first chance to go to Hollywood. For the same reason she lost many good jobs in New York.

"After 'The Stealers,' I thought that I would be established for life, but no other jobs were forthcoming. I didn't know about the salary my agent was asking, so I didn't understand the reason. Our money disappeared, and, for the first time, mother and I became desperately discouraged. We wrote to dad for money to take us home, but he did not have it to send us. Finally, when we were down to our last sou, we received a letter from Douglas with a money order for three hundred dollars—his entire savings. That paid our railroad expenses back home to Montreal.

"Going back to Montreal was the most humiliating experience of my life. It was an admission of failure after all our high hopes. It gave me a terribly low-down feeling. I hated to go on the streets, meet people, and answer their questions about our return. Then, one day I received a wire from the agent, saying that

## In Earlier Chapters . . .

*Norma Shearer was the daughter of a well-known business man in Montreal, Canada, and for the first ten years of her life in that city, she knew not a single trouble or care. But when she was little more than ten, Norma discovered that strange things were happening in their home. The beautiful horses that she loved so much were sold, and they moved to a much smaller home in a different district. Norma didn't mind the change at first, she was happy at her school and with her friends, but when she was fourteen, she was attacked by severe bronchitis, and she gave up school altogether. She soon tired of doing nothing, and a year later she got a job in a music store—playing popular hits to the customers. But her mother hated the thought of her working there, and after three days she gave it up. Then her aunt, who was an actress, suggested that Norma Shearer and her sister Athole should try their luck on the stage in New York, and after some opposition from their family, they did at last. In New York they lived very inexpensively, and spent their days interviewing agents and producers. Among the people they visited was Florenz Ziegfeld, who was very kind to them, and after they had been in New York for about six months, they received a card asking them to call at his office.*

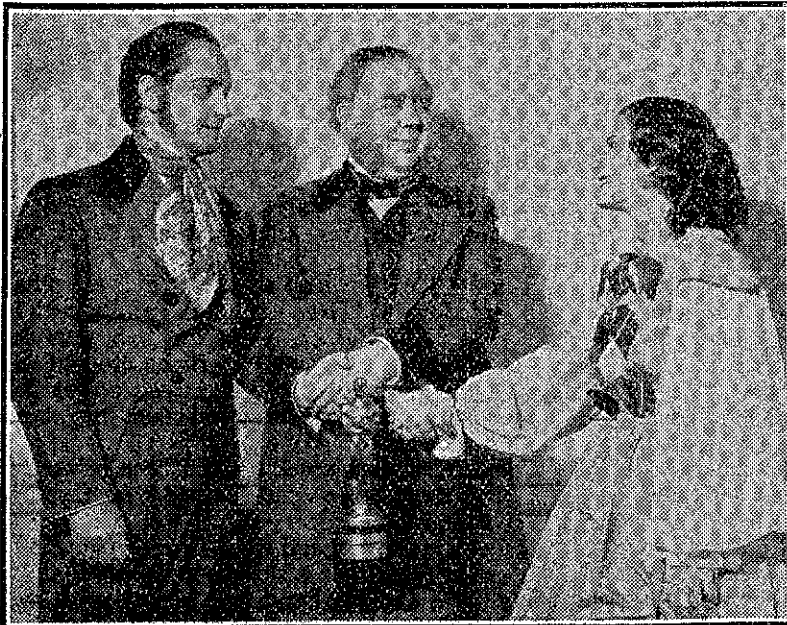
he had obtained a job for me to take Gladys Walton's place in a picture. Miss Walton was ill and I could have the job if I came at once. Mother and I left that night and, because we were sure of a good job, we went to an hotel instead of back to the place where we had lived before. But the job fell through; Miss Walton recovered, and mother and I found ourselves with an hotel bill and no money.

"Then we were really up against it. We couldn't go home. I remember we tried everything we knew to find a job. One rainy afternoon we walked from picture show to picture show, trying to find a job as a piano player. But they wouldn't hire me because I didn't belong to the Musicians' Union. Then someone suggested that I pose for commercial photographers. I registered at every studio and agency in town and began to get occasional work. Mother found a job as a clerk in a departmental store. After standing all day on her feet in the store, she used to hurry home to get dinner at night. Believe me, if ever a mother was a good sport, my mother was."

Norma posed for everything—hats, shoes, coats, jewellery—even for tire advertisements. Her picture, smiling through a huge tire with the words "Time to Retire" under it, hung for years in one of New York's busy thoroughfares, and Norma used to stop to look at it every time her job-hunting carried her to that neighbourhood.

Norma still kept up her contacts with pictures, and varied her posing with an occasional bit of work in films. She worked as "extra" in several pictures directed by Robert Z. Leonard, the man who later directed one of her greatest starring pictures, "The Divorcee."

Norma had given up all idea of ever becoming a star, she just hoped that she would be able to make a comfortable living by her work for the rest of her life. Then out of the blue came two offers of contracts from Hollywood. Read in next week's "Radio Record" how Norma Shearer rose from playing small parts to stardom.



Frederic March, Charles Laughton and Norma Shearer in the clothes which they wear in the screen version of "The Barrets of Wimpole Street," now being filmed in Hollywood. All three stars have recently won the Motion Picture Academy Award of Merit.