

The Film World

No Ballyhoo About Gracie Fields' Love of Children Famous Star Adds New Wing To Orphanage

Some months ago a group of Lancashire lads and lasses living in Sydney (their ages ran from nothing to almost anything) got together and sent a joint message of congratulation and greeting to the most famous Lancashire lass of all—Gracie Fields, whose latest film, by the way, has just been released in New Zealand. By way of reply to this wholesale type of fan mail Gracie arranged for the Australian and New Zealand broadcast from London which was given the other Sunday.

Practically alone among the great ones of stage and screen, Gracie meets her public with simple unaffectedness, surrounded by no haze of glamorous publicity. As a girl of the people she has reached her present high estate, and with her wholesome, hilarious, big-hearted personality, she keeps her hold on her English audiences, and, as a screen artist, makes new friends abroad.

When Gracie signed a new contract recently with Associated Talking Pictures at Baling (at a salary which is said to equal that of Greta Garbo) she celebrated the occasion by setting to work immediately on a £5000 addition to the orphanage which is at once her chief interest and main joy in life. And this is how she went into the orphanage business. During the making of the film, "Love, Light and Laughter," certain scenes were made in a children's home. Gracie found the youngsters so delightful, so pathetically eager to be loved, that she decided at once to turn her old home, Peacehaven, into a home for orphaned children. "Orphanage, new style," this home might easily be described, for how could Gracie possibly run anything on orthodox lines?

Gracie is the sole supporter of Peacehaven, where she spends most of her spare time and every week-end she can spare. When the new £5000 addition is completed and filled with a new batch of orphans, it is obvious that a large part of Gracie's income will be needed to maintain her large family. But Gracie in any case is used to looking after people; there is nothing she likes better. As her own work, since she entered pictures, now keeps her in London most of the time, she has established her father and mother in a snug little home of their own, with every domestic problem foreseen and provided for. The old home has gone to the orphans, and for herself Gracie has a simple home in Chelsea, unaffected by any of the modern trends in furnishing.

Gracie Fields has never forgotten that she was once a mill hand, a winder in a cotton-mill at Rochdale, Lancashire. The work was anything

but interesting, so Gracie set about making the time pass more pleasantly by singing and entertaining her fellow-operatives. The workers loved it, but unfortunately the foreman did not approve, and Gracie soon found herself looking for another job. She found it in a paper-mill, but that lasted only a short time, too, so she thought she had better try some other line of work, which is how, at the age of 15, she joined a Manchester revue called, "Yes, I Think So."

Now when Gracie visits the scenes of her youth, it is like a royal progress. Mill operatives besiege her wherever she goes, and at all railway stations she is given a rousing reception. And Gracie is always ready to "act up." During the making of "Sing

As We Go" she entertained a number of artists from the various Blackpool shows. A small boy, driver of one of the sideshow donkeys, arrived to accompany Gracie to Pleasure Beach, where the afternoon was to be spent. Imagine his delight when Gracie climbed on the little animal and rode off in the direction of the main street!

Wherever Gracie appears on the stage there are always a few Lancastrians in the audience. They are almost certain to make a few interjections in their own dialect, to which Gracie makes merry response. These interludes are counted by the audience as one of the delights of the entertainment.

A recent visitor to Associated Talking Pictures was the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Hewart, whose wife hails from Wanganui. He also is a Lancastrian, and was greatly interested in meeting Gracie and watching her at work on "Look Up and Laugh"; a firm friendship was struck up at once. He was regaled at tea with special Lancashire fare, some of which he encountered for the first time in his career!

Lord Hewart showed great courage and good temper in facing a battery of 20 Press cameras, and the eagle eyes of as many journalists, all anxious to be in on the fun.

Shirley Temple entrants photographed free of charge. See details on pages 30 and 31.

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