

The True Tragedy of Olive Thomas

The Amazing Career of a
\$3 a Week Shopgirl Who
in Four Years Became a
\$5,000 a Week Film Star--
**AND NEVER
WAS
HAPPY**

Always Getting
What She
Wished For.

Always
Disappointed
When She
Got It.

FEW persons know the real story that lies behind the tragic death of Olive Thomas, the lovely little American motion picture star, in Paris.

After growing up in the direst poverty and working for a pittance that barely kept body and soul together, Olive Thomas had won every success and every prize within the reach of one whose gifts scarcely extended beyond a pretty face and figure. She had gained a prominent place on the variety stage and then she had become a famous motion picture star. But every step forward in fame and financial success brought her only bitterness and disappointment. It was the crowning tragedy of her career that, just after arriving in wonderful Paris with a dazzling fortune, she suddenly met a horrible death.

"Well, Doc., Paris has got me!" were her characteristic words as she lay dying.

Olive Thomas was born of the poorest working people in the iron and steel region of Pennsylvania. Her name was Olive Elaine Duffy.

Only six years ago Olive was working for \$3 a week as a shopgirl in McKees Rocks, a suburb of Pittsburgh.

She loathed the dingy gloom of McKees Rocks. As she handed out parcels of cheap goods her thoughts wandered away to mighty New York, with its "Great White Way" and its gorgeous stores and its innumerable attractions. She even thought vaguely of Paris, which she knew only from the newspapers as a place of almost indescribable joys and gayeties.

As a mere girl she married Bernard Krug Thomas, a hard-working young business man. This was one of her first disappointments, for she found that this marriage did not bring her appreciably nearer her ideal of a happy and luxurious life.

How could she escape from her gloomy surroundings into the brighter life beyond? She set her little head to work. She found that many, many poor girls had become actresses, singers and, recently, movie stars.

One day some alluring pictures of the Ziegfeld beauties excited the admiration of the simple-minded young men of her set in grimy McKees Rocks. Little Olive Thomas looked at herself critically in the glass and decided that she was prettier than any of these vaunted beauties.

Her mind was made up on the spot. She borrowed the money to go to New York and immediately applied for a place among the beauties. Mr. Ziegfeld, promptly recognizing her attractions, engaged her for "The Midnight Frolic." When she appeared in the marchings and counter-marchings of the chorus she was quickly ranked by connoisseurs as one of the most beautiful of the girls.

Soon after obtaining a place on the stage she divorced her McKees Rocks husband, and with him went another link with the peniless past.

But this step upward did not bring her all the happiness she expected. She found that she was far from rich enough to command all the luxuries enjoyed by the most fortunate members of the circle in which she moved. She had to depend on others for some of these luxuries, and this necessity was galling to her proud and ambitious nature.

Once more she exercised her little brain. She decided that the best way of becoming rich quickly was to be a motion picture star. She had already made friends who assured her of a good opportunity. She went to Hollywood, where she became a

leading figure in the social and artistic gayeties of the motion picture colony.

She made a rapid success in the movie field and earned a large income. She became one of the most popular "ingenue" types on the screen—a very innocent, childish, lovable, laughable type.

But after a few months of this work she began to feel that there was something lacking in her life. She had not found real happiness.

The disturbing influence of an immense income on a frivolous, superficial nature, reared in poverty and not trained for any serious duties in life, must be taken into consideration.

Imagine a young man or woman, with no education and no great natural gifts, but possessed merely of an ability to strut before the camera effectively and to look grotesque or pretty, as the case may be. Imagine an income of \$200,000 or more a

year thrust upon such a person a few months after he has emerged from grinding poverty. Is there any wonder that his reason, his sense of right and wrong, his conception of his real importance in the world should go astray?

Then professional work threw young Jack Pickford into Olive's society. He promptly succumbed to her fresh, vivacious young beauty, and she received his attentions in kindly spirit. Perhaps the prospect of becoming Mary Pickford's sister-in-law appealed to her ambition. He asked her to accept this dazzling position and she accepted.

Very serious obstacles to their marriage developed. Mrs. Charlotte Pickford, mother of Mary and Jack, who is immensely proud of the achievements of her family, declared that Olive Thomas should not marry into her family. Among her reasons for objecting were that Olive was

not a good enough actress to marry into the Pickford family, and that she would use her relationship to make herself a rival of Mary.

Olive was particularly incensed by the statement that she was not a good enough actress to bear the Pickford name. She therefore married Jack without delay, partly in order to spite Mrs. Pickford.

Thus Olive's second marriage, from which she hoped so much, began under rather unhappy conditions. Of course, she wasn't satisfied. She determined that she would be a truly great star just to prove Mrs. Pickford wrong.

With this ambition in view she paid \$200,000 to one of the big New York producers to make her a truly great star. She stipulated that he should always have her name in at least five big electric signs on Broadway. This form of publicity proved very effective, and in the opinion of the

movie world the producer succeeded in giving Olive something near the position she aimed at.

Among her most conspicuous successful films of this period were "Footlights and Shadows," "Youthful Folly," "The Flapper" and "Darling Mine." She acted in the same innocent, infantile kind of pictures as Mary Pickford, and was fast rivaling Mary Pickford as a star.

It is now no secret that her marriage with Jack Pickford, from which she had hoped so much, did not bring her happiness, however much it may have contributed to her professional success. Soon after her marriage differences of a serious nature arose between them.

After an unusually prosperous season she agreed to a reconciliation with her husband this Summer, and they decided to go to Paris for a grand holiday. That was another of the dreams which little Olive Thomas had cherished since her childhood in gloomy McKees Rocks. She wanted to enjoy wonderful, wicked Paris with all the money necessary to command its uttermost delights. Now it was within her power to realize this dream to its fullest extent.

The matrimonial reunion proved thorny. After their first arrival in Paris a letter stated that they were enjoying "an unbelievably happy second honeymoon."

Then came an interruption. According to one statement, Olive, broken-hearted and temporarily unbalanced, was convinced that she could never again bring herself to live with her husband. Jack made a hurried trip from Paris to London on August 25. When he rejoined his wife in Paris, Olive told him, according to a friend's letter, that further life with him would be abhorrent and impossible.

Wishing only to forget her sorrows and reckless of all other considerations, Olive started out one Saturday night to see the wildest sights that Paris offers to the visiting American. After a big dinner with an abundance of nearly priceless champagne,

she rolled off in a taxi to make a tour of the notorious resorts of Montmartre. Up to 1 a. m. she was in the Cafe du Rat Mort (Cafe of the Dead Rat), which offers the wildest exhibition of mad and degraded revelry permitted by the Paris police.

After that hour she left for a round of the secret and illicit places of amusement of the quarter, which are kept open all night, and though nominally under the police ban can easily be visited by tourists with a little money to spend.

As everybody knows, she returned to her apartment in the Hotel Ritz on Sunday morning. Her nerves on edge from her night of excitement and her many troubles, she recklessly seized a bottle and poured out what she believed was a sleeping draught which she kept for occasional use. As soon as she swallowed it she knew that she had swallowed bichloride of mercury which she used as a toilet preparation.

Dr. Choate, of the American Hospital at Neuilly, was summoned. When he arrived Olive Thomas, though writhing in agony, spoke up with her accustomed Broadway vocabulary and said:

"Well, Doc., Paris has got me." As usual in the case of bichloride poisoning, the struggle to save Olive Thomas was unsuccessful. After four days of the most intense suffering she died.

The events that immediately preceded the poisoning are surrounded with considerable mystery, and perhaps will always remain so. Why should an intelligent woman, who was accustomed to use the deadly drug bichloride of mercury, make such a childish mistake as to drink it in error for a medicine? The Paris police showed that they were in considerable doubt as to the nature of her act, but they were unable to find that it was other than an accident.

Undoubtedly the lures of Paris had their share in Olive Thomas's sad death, but those who knew her believe that unhappiness haunted this willing little creature at every step of her life.

"For a time she played with the wicked gaiety of Paris—the evil serpent in the fool's cap. And at last the coils tightened, the fangs struck! And—
"Well, Doc., Paris has got me!" she said. And died.
"In those few words are packed a whole world of warning."

A Favorite Photograph of Olive Thomas, Showing Her Fresh, Childish Beauty.

