The National Guide to Motion Pictures

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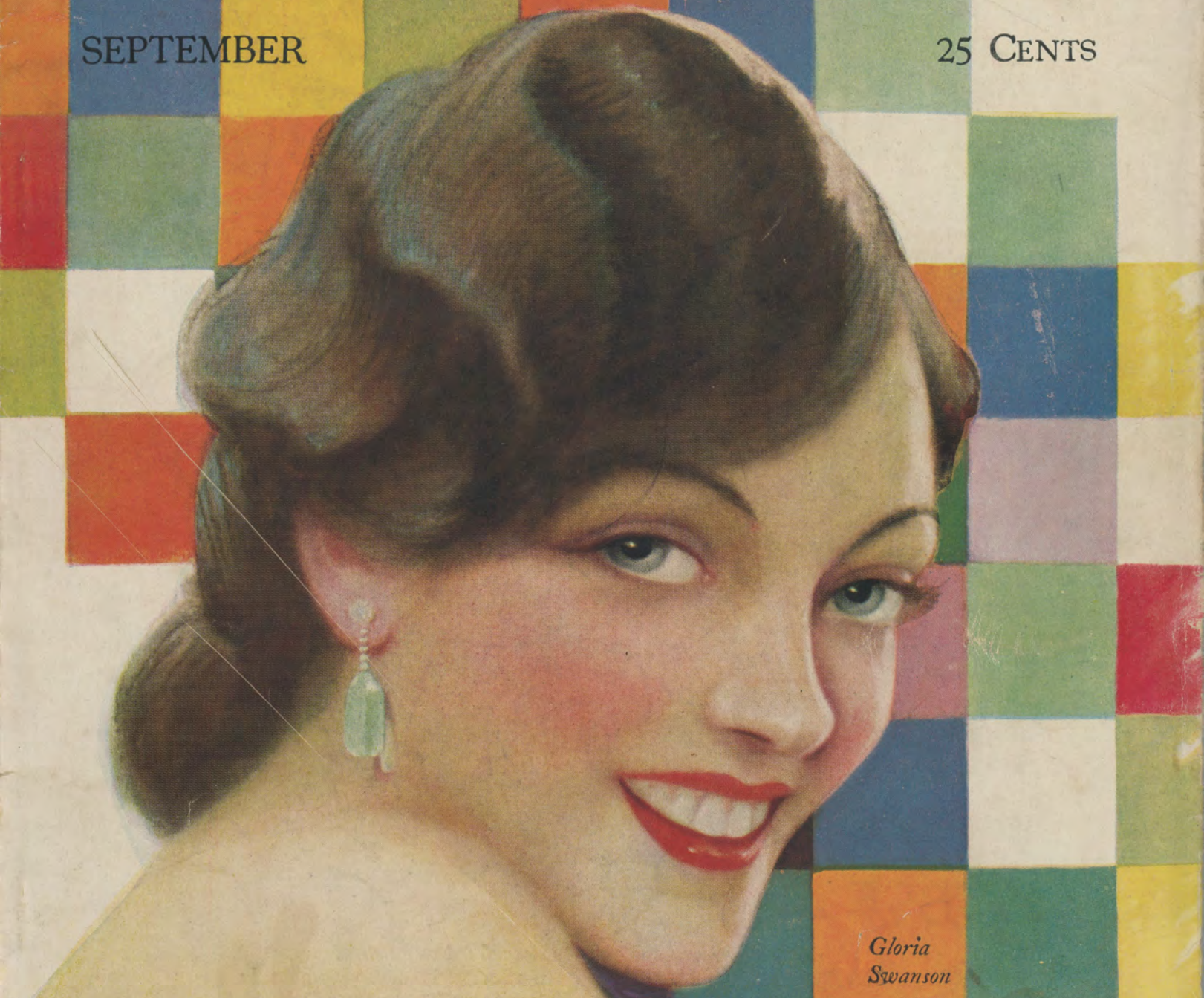

Gloria Swanson

Charles Sheldon

Why Mary Pickford Bobbed Her Hair

In This Issue

THE bob that created a new personality for Mary Pickford. Her hair is left rather long at the back of the neck. To Mary her bob means a new beginning in pictures, an adventure into unknown fields. Because Mary stood at the crossing of the artistic roads, she sacrificed the symbol of her little girl past, to be free to progress as a mature artist.

Why Mary Pickford Bobbed *Her* Hair

A Remarkable Insight into the Love that Existed Between Mary and Her Mother

By

ADELA ROGERS ST. JOHNS

MARY PICKFORD has bobbed her hair.

Behind that newspaper headline lies a great romantic drama.

It is the story of a mother love so great that it turned to gold everything it touched. Of a daughter's love so utter that it dominated completely the greatest career in screen history.

Of the founding by two women of an American tradition.

And now it has become the story of a woman's determination to surmount her own stupendous personal popularity and become truly great.

The last act is still to be written. As long as her mother lived, Mary Pickford would not bob her hair. It wasn't only that Mary's mother loved those curls as every mother loves the golden curls of her baby. That for many years she never allowed any hand but her own to comb and roll them and prepare their beauty.

To Charlotte Pickford, those curls were the symbol of the wonderful child and artistic genius she had given to the world. They represented Mary's greatness. They were the actual crown of the Pickford sovereignty over all the peoples of the earth who love motion pictures.

HOW nearly right she was is proven by the fact that there is now talk of placing them in the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D. C., along with Lindbergh's "Spirit of St. Louis" and other national prizes.

So, though she knew that she had outgrown her curls, though she knew that the world had passed by the time when "America's sweetheart" wore curls, though she knew that her progress as an artist was blocked and her development as a star hindered, Mary Pickford went on wearing her curls.

As long as her mother lived, Mary Pickford kept her golden curls. To Charlotte Pickford they represented Mary's greatness. Now, with her bobbed hair she will portray a new "sweetheart"

She would have worn them until they turned gray rather than cause her mother one moment's unhappiness or regret during the last years of her life.

It wasn't fear of her public that kept Mary from taking this drastic step.

Mary Pickford is too courageous for that, she has too deep a belief in the power of the fine thing. Mary Pickford is an artist. As an artist, she would have been willing to gamble on the public's understanding, their appreciation, their love for her. Even from the standpoint of the box office, and Mary Pickford has keen box office judgment, she must have seen the inevitability of the result—that if she went on too far and too long with the outgrown curls and the outgrown Pickford tradition the public would continue to love her, but would cease to go and see her pictures.

NO, it was love of her mother and care for that mother's happiness and the habit of bowing to her judgment in everything connected with her work that stayed Mary's hand and that made her attempts to at least do up her curls if she couldn't cut them, half hearted and feeble and therefore doomed to failure.

And, tragically enough, Charlotte Pickford's intense mother love blinded her usually shrewd eyes.

She wanted to keep her wonder child and so she held Mary back, held her to the things that had made her famous instead of lending her the strength and wisdom and vision to make the break from little girl parts into grown-up parts.

If, when Mary was past thirty, when an entirely new generation had evolved an entirely new type of girl, when Mary herself had grown beyond playing children and the world at large found such parts and such a personality as

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old-fashioned as leg o' mutton sleeves, Mrs. Pickford had helped her to find a new field for her artistry, all would have been well.

Instead of failing, as she did in "Rosita" and "Dorothy Vernon" because of lack of courage, they would have succeeded.

But Mary's mother couldn't bear to cut Mary's curls.

Nor can anyone blame her.

Her love was not a selfish, cramping, smothering thing.

SHE dominated Mary's entire life, professionally and privately up until Mary's marriage to Douglas Fairbanks. And after her marriage, Mrs. Pickford's influence did not diminish, for Douglas, like everyone else who knew her, respected his mother-in-law for her ability, enjoyed her company because she was one of the wittiest and most delightful of women, and loved her for Mary's sake as well as her own.

But if Mrs. Pickford dominated her daughter's life for many years, it was a loving and miraculously successful domination.

Without her mother, Mary Pickford would never have achieved her great place—the greatest place any woman ever has or ever will occupy in the motion picture art.

Their relation to each other was more than that of a loving mother and daughter. It was that of a sculptor and his masterpiece, of business associates, of great adventurers bound for the same goal.

Charlotte Smith, who kept a boarding house in Toronto, and was left a widow with three very young children and no money at all, was a great woman—one of the greatest figures ever produced by the motion picture business.

Early days of privation and trial, of starvation and denial, of battling the world for actual food and clothing and shelter for her little brood, did two great things for Charlotte Pickford. They developed her own strength and determination and they won her the deathless love and respect of her daughter.

Mary never forgot. She never forgot her mother's courage and cheerfulness, her fighting heart, her smiling face and her selfless devotion to her children. For those early days were days of real poverty which sear the soul and bring it forth withered and embittered, or strong and determined.

MRS. PICKFORD was, I think, one of the most charming women I have ever known. Impossible to resist her sweetness, her amiability, her tolerance, her merry eye and her Irish tongue. Her sympathy was as wide as the ocean. Impossible not to respect her air of authority, her keen, concise knowledge, her way of handling people.

It was only where she loved too much that her wisdom failed her.

And she loved Mary's curls.

Why not?

They were, in a way, her own creation.

You may remember that when Mary first went into motion pictures she did not have curls. She wore her hair as other girls did, in a knot at the back of her head. The long, beautifully arranged curls were Mrs. Pickford's idea. She saw what could be done with them, how they could be made into a symbol. She tended them, played them up in pictures and publicity.

At last they became a tradition—and Mary's mother never was able to overcome that tradition.

As Mary's fame grew and the love of the world flowed to her feet, Mrs. Pickford saw her masterpiece complete. There stood her darling, her beloved child, known to and loved by more people than any other single woman in history. And into her mother love, which was the strongest thing in her nature to begin with, came a sort of idolatry. There was no flaw in her idol.

Why change it?

During the years of Mary's greatest popularity, her mother stood beside her as a great prime minister might stand beside a queen. When Mary made "Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm," and "Daddy Longlegs" and "Stella Maris," her mother was the chief factor in every step, in every decision. And her decisions were always wise. She steered the ship steadily onward, watched the box office, watched the public, managed the finances and the studio, took from Mary's shoulders all the details, fought all the battles.

In those days, Mary was almost never seen in public without her mother. The lovely girl with the curls and the solid, black-haired, black-eyed woman were a familiar picture.

It is necessary to understand all these things and to understand a little of the character of Charlotte Pickford to understand the things that followed.

FOR time marched inexorably. It did not stand still even for that spirit of eternal youth, Mary Pickford.

Mary grew up.

She grew up sweetly. As a woman she has infinitely more beauty and charm and artistic ability than she had as a girl.

But she became a woman. She was no longer a little girl. Thirty should be the prime of womanhood. If there had been no Pickford tradition tied to her, if she had no long, golden curls, the Mary Pickford of thirty could have swept the public to ecstasy just as the Mary Pickford of sixteen did.

Perhaps she could have done it anyway—perhaps she can still do it.

But she failed in her first attempts because they lacked conviction, they were half-measures, they didn't possess the flame of her complete new personality. The curls were a constant reminder and she was just little Mary Pickford trying to play grown-up parts.

When Mary herself longed for new fields, new stories, new rôles, when Mary saw herself that she had changed and that times likewise had changed, her mother refused to recognize any of it. Always her advice was to follow the old formula, to retain the curls and all that went with them.

It is a significant fact that during her last picture, "My Best Girl" every bit of atmosphere that could be produced to correspond to the old days was produced. The same music was played during what were, practically, the same scenes that Mary had been making for fifteen years. The same personnel surrounded her. It was a complete throw-back.

And it was to be Charlotte Pickford's last picture.

I don't suppose anybody could have been happier than she was then. And nothing can take from Mary the joy of knowing that she never did one thing that shadowed those last days for her mother.

The masterpiece was still intact. The tradition was unaltered. The curls were still there.

SO Mary, the artist, for five years sacrificed herself to Mary, the daughter.

Mary, who through years of experience in pictures and because she inherited her mother's keen mind along with her own genius, never let her mother know, I don't suppose, that there was any sacrifice. Perhaps, because she loved her mother so much, she was unconscious of none.

But I do not believe, and even Mary herself couldn't make me believe, that she gave up her attempt to find a bigger field for herself, that she kept those curls, because she was afraid of

her public. She gave up because she saw what it meant to her mother.

There is so much beauty in the love those two bore each other that any mistakes dwindle into insignificance beside it. What, after all, could the world give comparable to what they gave each other? Mrs. Pickford made Mary what she was and Mary repaid her debt in full.

There were many people who thought that her mother's death would all but kill Mary Pickford. Her friends dreaded the day as it drew inevitably nearer, not only because of their affection for Mrs. Pickford, but because of their fear of its effect upon Mary.

But great love, real love, is seldom weak even in the face of death. Great love carries within itself a conviction of immortality and a command to carry on.

When it could no longer wound her mother, Mary cut off her curls.

THE action itself may seem simple. Mary herself may believe her own explanation that she felt old-fashioned, out of proportion, out of date, with them.

But it is one of those simple actions that mean so much. It has all the significance in Mary's life that the Boston Tea Party had in the lives of the American colonists.

It is the birth of a new Mary Pickford, it means that the screen has gained a new artist.

Mary is going to start out without her curls and try to win herself—not her old place but a new place. In her lifetime, in her prime, she has become a tradition which by its very nature is beloved but which has no part in the screen life of the world today.

She has got to make them accept Mary Pickford, not as a personality, not as "America's sweetheart," not as the girl with the curls, but as an artist.

For years she has gone through all sorts of cramping and limiting experiences. Wonderful stories, which she could have played better than any actress on the screen, have been turned down because she couldn't play them with curls. Great opportunities have been discarded because they didn't fit with the Pickford tradition. Ideas that grew in Mary's brain, advances in technique, growth of power as an actress, have been worthless because she was held to a field in which ideas were of necessity always the same, because power wasn't needed to play little girl rôles. Her womanly beauty and lure have been discounted entirely, yet photographically Mary Pickford is the most beautiful woman on the screen today.

Now the curls are gone.

Before her are new worlds to conquer. She is at a time in her life when most great stage actresses are just coming into their own. She is much younger than Duse was when she achieved world fame and acclaim, much younger than Bernhardt was when she conquered the world of the theater.

Yet she has already completed the greatest chapter in the life of any screen star. The battle before her is, practically, an attempt to come back. And she cannot come back as the girl with the curls. She must come back as a woman. She is photographing as well now as she has ever photographed.

A group of very famous screen folk were talking of Mary and her great step the other night. There were present two of the screen's greatest comediennes, a director whom other directors still call master, two well-known producers, the most famous dramatic screen star, two well-known critics and one or two authors.

The consensus of opinion was that Mary Pickford could today take a story written either for Clara Bow or for Gloria Swanson and play it better, more convincingly and with more appeal than either of those great stars.

But she will fail again as she failed before if she tries half-measures. She must cut off her past as she cut off her curls. There is a new generation of screen fans. There is a new thought in the world. She must cast aside all fear, all thought of what is expected of Mary Pickford, of what her public has always wanted, and start a new cycle.

EVEN now she is experimenting somewhat with the new talking picture. Her voice has great magnetism. The new era of the talking picture may help her to begin this new epoch. If she succeeds, and she will succeed if she has the courage of complete conviction, she will be something more than a great star, a deathless personality, a tradition.

She will be a truly great artist and her name may be added to those of Duse and Bernhardt upon the roster of fame.

And when somewhere she meets her mother again, her success will justify her defiance of that tradition and no one will rejoice more gloriously than that great and loving woman—Mary's mother.

How they get those scenes on moving trains. J. Roy Hunt, the cameraman, invented this platform to photograph James Hall as he looks out of the window of a speeding train in "The Fifty-Fifty Girl." It is a great contraption if the train doesn't dive into a tunnel