

'Speak, and answer,' he said. "'T is in a nutshell, I reckon, and I'll spare you any soft speeches, since you don't want no love-making, seemin'ly. Be you going to be my missis, or ban't you? If you be, then tell me to kick this slack-twisted item down the hill; and if you ban't, then why the blazing hell am I up here?'

The fates were kind to Ann. They led her out, and she answered cheerfully.

'I am going to be your missis, Ned. That's all right, my dear.'

'Then, Ann Purchase, perhaps you'll throw a light on what you said to me,' murmured John Turtle.

'And I'm going to be your missis too, John!'

Neddy exploded in a volume of blistering but pardonable expletive.

'How the — What the — Be there bats in your belfry, girl? Share me with that —!'

'Do I hear you, Ann?' gasped Mr. Turtle. 'And a Christian land, and you a Christian woman!'

She jumped up.

'Come here, both of you,' she said, 'and I'll show 'e how 't is. I've told nought but the solemn truth, and I was going to break it different; but —'

She hurried into the hollow cup of the Windmill and showed them, low down on a flake of the rotting plaster, new initials set firmly together in the conventional outline of a heart. The setting sunlight broke through a rift in the walls and burned upon them.

'Look!' she said, pointing; and their heads bent down while they panted upon each other's faces to read 'J. W. — A. P.' within the famous symbol.

'There!' she said. 'Now you know. We've been tokened four days, and shall be axed out, first time, Sunday week.'

'Master!' groaned John Turtle.

[*The Observer*]

MR. CHARLES CHAPLIN

BY ST. JOHN ERVINE

LATELY, my head being exceedingly bloody, but, I trust, unbowed, I went forth in share of comfort, and, by great good fortune, came upon a picture palace where a film featuring Mr. Charlie Chaplin was being exhibited. I hesitated on the threshold of the theatre for a few moments, dubious for the first time in my life of Mr. Chaplin's power to dispel my dismal humor. 'I may have to endure a succession of pictures in which young women with big eyes and baby faces and incredibly innocent looks are wooed by rough diamonds whose principal means of earning a livelihood seems to consist of leaping on and off the backs of surpassingly swift ponies — and find that Charlie Chaplin fails to solace me for the tedium they occasion!' I said to myself, as I loitered on the doorstep. I remembered the name of a man whose friendship I had firmly rejected because he could not discover any merit in Mr. Chaplin. I could not continue to know a person so deplorably lacking in taste and judgment as that. But now, in such a state of dubiety was I that I wondered whether, after all, he had not been in the right. *Perhaps Mr. Chaplin was not funny!* . . .

It was not until I had reminded myself of the diversity of opinion in the world that I was able to pull myself together and enter the picture palace. There are moments in which one foolishly believes that meritable things immediately receive recognition — at least from meritable persons. I actually wrote this sentence on one occasion: 'The mountains nod to each other over the heads of the little hills.' I had forgotten that Tolstoi allowed little merit to Shakespeare; that Dr. Johnson

amazingly preferred Samuel Richardson to Henry Fielding; that Meredith most ineptly disparaged Dickens, and considered that *Pickwick Papers* was perishable stuff. (And now Meredith himself is under a cloud, but Dickens persists!) And in our own time, has not Mr. Chesterton belittled Mr. Hardy? Remembering these things, I took courage and resolved to trust in my own faith and judgment. I advanced boldly to the box office, paid money for a seat, and then entered the darkened auditorium.

I had remarkable luck. I took my seat just in time to see the beginning of a Chaplin film. Hardly had I sat down when that quaint, pathetic, wistful, self-dubious figure shuffled into the circle of light. He glanced about him in an uncertain fashion, twirled his cane twice, adjusted the position of his hat so that it became more unstable, twitched his features as if he were saying, 'Well, what's the good!' and then walked down the street with that air of engaging incompetence which is the characteristic of all great comedians. And while, enchanted, I watched him pursuing his adventurous career, I began to wonder what is the peculiar quality which has endeared this comic little man, who spent his early life somewhere in the neighborhood of the Walworth-road, to the whole world. Here am I, a dreary highbrow, who would go miles to see Charlie Chaplin on a film. There are you, who may be a low-brow or a no-brow-at-all, willing also to travel great distances for a similar purpose. What is the quality possessed by this Cockney in California which reconciles such incompatibles in the bonds of laughter?

I have a most vivid recollection of the first occasion on which I saw a Chaplin film. It was in France. A party of very tired and utterly depressed men came down one of those

interminable, ugly straight roads that take the spirit out of travelers. They were moving down from the 'line' to 'rest billets' after an arduous spell in outposts.

The weather had been very hard and bitter, so that the ground was frozen like steel, and many of the men had sore feet and walked with difficulty. The roads were covered with snow that had turned to ice, and at frequent intervals a man would lose his balance and fall heavily to the ground with a great clatter of kit and rifle, and a sergeant or a corporal would curse without enthusiasm. Three times during that desolate journey the parties were shelled, once with gas. One heard the gas shells going over, making that queer splashing noise that gas shells make on their journeys, and wondered whether one would have enough desire for life left to induce one to put on a gas mask! . . . I remember the party losing its way in a road where the snow was soft and knee-deep, in a road where misery had settled down so deeply on the men that no one swore and there was a most terrible silence, broken only by the sound of a man crashing on to the ground as he slipped on frozen places or by the sighs and groans of utterly exhausted boys. And I remember one of them, a very cheery lad from Dublin, suddenly losing heart for the first time in my knowledge of him, and turning to me and saying, 'God Almighty's very hard on us, sir!'

In that state of dejection, tired and dirty and very verminous, with unshaven faces and eyes heavy with sleep and with a most horrible feeling that it did not matter who won the war, that lost party staggered into the rest billets at three o'clock in the morning and was told that at the end of the week, instead of the promised Divisional rest they would receive orders to return to the line!

I recall now that following that night of exhaustion came the job of cleaning up, a morning of bathing and scraping and louse-hunting, and then, in the evening, after tea, with some recovery of cheerfulness, the men went off to the big barn in which the Divisional Concert Party gave its entertainments. There they sat, massed at the back of the barn, looking strangely childlike in the foggy interior, and listening without much demonstration to some songs. Their irresponsiveness was not due to inappreciation, but to something more terrible than individual fatigue — to an overwhelming collective fatigue, to a collective disgust, to the dreadful loathing of one's kind that comes from continuous association in congested quarters. And then the singing ended, and the lights were diminished, and the 'pictures' began. Into the circle of light thrown on the screen came the shuffling figure of Charlie Chaplin, and immediately the men forgot their misery and fatigue, and a great welcoming roar of laughter broke from them. That small, appealing, wistful, shuffling, nervous figure, smiling to disarm punishment, had only to show himself, and instantly a crowd of driven men forgot where they were and to what they were doomed and remembered only to laugh. That is an achievement which is very great.

But the mere statement of such a thing does not explain the peculiar quality of Charlie Chaplin. What is it in him that makes him distinct from all other men in his profession? I do not pretend to know what it is that separates him from other men, any more than I know what it was that made Shakespeare supreme and unique in his generation; but there are certain things about him which make him noticeably different from other film actors. He is almost the only one of his profession who can carry his personality through

the camera. Marvelously he retains the third dimension on the screen, whereas others cannot muster more than two dimensions and sometimes fail even to muster one. When you look at other comedians on the film you are conscious of photographs of men, but when you look at Mr. Chaplin you are conscious only of a distinct human being. Like all great comedians whom I have seen,— for example, Dan Leno or James Welch,— he demands primarily, not your laughter, but your pity.

A great comedian is like a child in his attitude toward the world, entirely trusting, rather helpless and a cause of laughter, not so much by deliberation as by sheer inability to cope with a complicated world. All the fun made by Mr. Chaplin comes, not from attempts to be clever, but from failures to be as other people are. Bergson, in his book on *Laughter*, tells his readers that laughter is the result of something mechanical being imposed upon something living — an explanation that does not appear to me to be complete or satisfactory. I do not know whether Mr. Chaplin can make philosophical speculations, but I do know that by his conduct he can explain much that puzzles philosophers; and it seems to me at times that Mr. Bergson might profitably study Mr. Chaplin before he produces a revised edition of *Laughter*.

[*The Nation and the Athenæum*]

SOCIETY AND SOLITUDE

BY GEORGE SANTAYANA

O solitudo, sola beatitudo, Saint Bernard said; but might he not have said just as well, *O societas, sola felicitas*? Just as truly, I think; because when a man says that the only happiness is this or that, he is like a lover saying that Mary Jane is the one woman in