

What Happened to Hayakawa

This Japanese Gentleman Reveals Why He Forsook The American Screen

By WINNIFRED EATON REEVE
(ONOTO WATANABE)

SESSUE Hayakawa. Once a name to conjure with in the motion picture world. Star of the first magnitude. His fame comparable to that of Valentino. His admirers legion. The star who opened the great Strand Theater in New York, and kept it packed for months.

One of the mysteries of Hollywood has been for four years why Sessue Hayakawa suddenly dropped out of pictures. What were the causes that led to his exit at the very peak of his popularity and fame? Why, literally overnight, did he close his magnificent residence, discharge all of his servants, except a couple of caretakers, and disappear from Hollywood?

A recent announcement in the newspapers gives forth the information that Hayakawa is about to return to the screen. His first picture is now in process of production.

Perhaps, thought I, Hayakawa will now speak. It may be he will want his host of friends and admirers to know the reason why he deserted the work he loved so well. With this thought in mind I called upon him. Almost the first question I put to him was:

"Why did you leave the movies?"

He looked somewhat startled by the direct question. He stared a moment, and then gazed off absently into space, as though turning the question over in his mind. After a moment, hesitantly and as if temporizing, he replied:

"Perhaps several reasons contributed. I did not like the stories I was required to play in."

He smiled slightly.

Any Story at All

THE last story was picked like the toss of a penny. I was given three stories to choose from. I do not like any of them. Still they insist I must choose one of these. So I say: 'Eenie, meenie, mynie, mo!' and put my finger on one. A story picked like that cannot be good. It is a gamble. Impossible to put the warm heart into it. I do not play well where is not my heart."

"Surely you did not drop out of pictures because of that?" I asked incredulously.

"Oh, no; oh, no!" said Hayakawa, hastily. "That was just one of many irritations."



Peyton

At the top, a portrait of Hayakawa as he is today; and below this, a glimpse of one of his greatest performances, in "The Cheat" with Fannie Ward

He thought a while, his face somewhat stern. Suddenly and almost roughly he spoke:

"I will tell you. I will tell you the true reason. It was something deep. It *struck* me inside!"

Hayakawa smote his chest hard. His dark eyes were smouldering now like black coals.

"It was something said to me that no true man should speak, and no true man can hear. Something that should not come out of the mouth. It was, you understand—not decent."

"I was associated with certain men in motion picture enterprise. They owe me \$500,000. I never ask for this money. I think there is plenty of time to pay. Perhaps it was that they think too much about this debt. They

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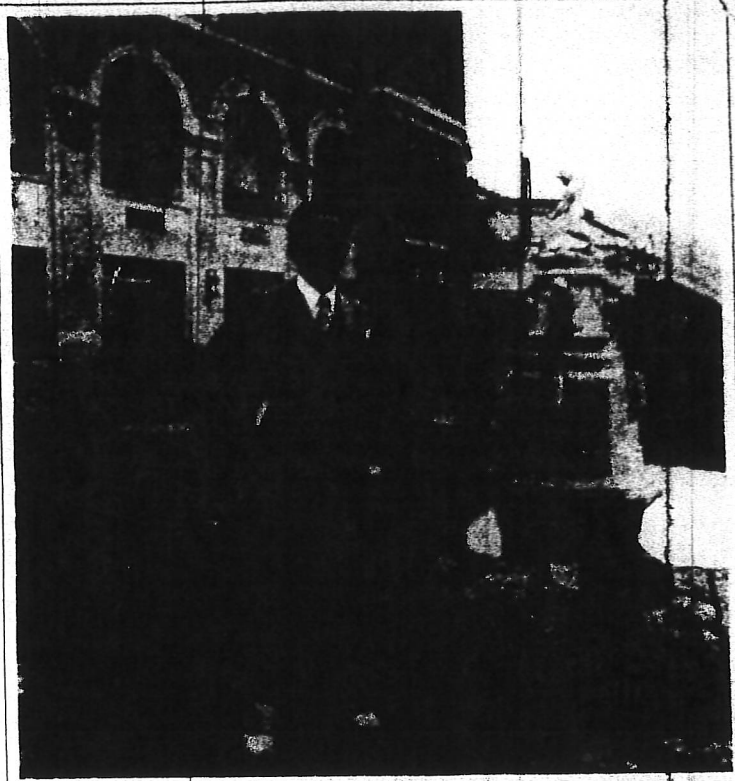
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Sessue Hayakawa takes his stand by the fountain at the Banff Springs Hotel at Banff, Alberta, to drink in the vistas of the Canadian Rockies

What Happened to Hayakawa

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think it good to goad and humiliate me—to pick a quarrel. I do not mind a quarrel. It is all one side, you understand. I let them say this, that, or what they wish, and I do not make reply with my mouth. Then it is that one of them—the chief one—get very angry, and he called me by a name. It is something should not come out of the mouth. Something that is unpardonable insult to me and an affront to my nationality. No man can help where he is born—what is his blood. Only an ignorant coward throws up to a man that he does not like his race. I come of a proud people—a man of my quality could not endure such insult. Still I did not speak. I stared at his face, but I say nothing. He says then 'People in this country have no use for Chinks.' I am not Chink. I am Japanese gentleman, and the word Chink is not fit to be spoke. I continue merely to stare at him, and speak no word. Every man in that room look uncomfortable. Then I bow with politeness to all and I leave that room.

LEAVING HOLLYWOOD FOR HOME

"THAT night they send me a letter to my house. How much I will settle my claim for \$50,000 for? I disdain to reply, but next day this is how I answer: I attach every piece of property of that company permitted by law. That same day, I dismiss all my servants—I close up my house and put caretaker in charge; I cancel all engagements. I said to myself: 'Now I am all through.' I take many little insult and humiliation—but no—nothing so big as this! I do not wait for any legal consequence of my action, but that night I take train for San Francisco, and from there, immediately I sail for Japan!

"I remain in Japan for three months. I pass back through America, by San Francisco,

San Francisco, but I do not even stop off at Hollywood. I go straight on to New York and from there to France."

Hayakawa drew a great breath. I think he was glad that the thing was out—out of his system. He had nursed a hurt so long that it had rankled intolerably. He had thrown over his career for an insult. "Did you get the \$50,000 back?" I asked practically.

Hayakawa shrugged, as though money were but a detail.

"Oh, yes. That is settled inside of half hour, with representative of new company that buy the assets. All that money paid to me when I am in France."

He moved restlessly, offered me a cigarette, lit one, smiled through the smoke. I knew he wanted to change the subject.

HIS FILM RUNS THREE YEARS

"HOW did the French treat you?" "Too kind! In Paris I made a Japanese picture called 'The Battle.' I had expected to return to Japan to make that picture, as it was necessary to have many battleships. The French Minister of War solve my problem. He put at my disposal seventeen French battleships. He made me a Commander in the French Navy. Already I am a Japanese naval officer. Every day come to me the captains, salute and ask: 'How many ships today, sir? How many men you require?' They put the Japanese flag on the French battleships. The French sailors and officers put on Japanese uniforms. Even the daughter of the Minister plays in picture as compliment to me. It was marvelous! Such generosity! What enthusiasm and exquisite consideration! What inspiration! We create a great picture. In one theater alone in Paris it runs for three years."

At a year ago Hayakawa returned to America. He admits to homesickness—a nostalgia. He wanted again to come to the land where he had made his greatest success and where he had been so cruelly hurt. Before returning to pictures, he determined to discover to what extent his popularity had waned during his long absence. He tested this out in a coast to coast vaudeville tour, where he was the headliner, and played to packed houses. Wherever he went, he was enthusiastically acclaimed.

THE COLONY IS KINDER

"YOU find things changed?"

"Human nature does not change, but time mellows and softens our natures. Prejudices vanish like smoke. Today I find a broader, friendlier feeling. There is even a marked desire for Oriental pictures. They may become a fad. Dolores del Rio will play 'The Darling of the Gods'; Metro Goldwyn prepares a Japanese picture; Norma Talmadge considers 'Madame Butterfly'; 'A Japanese Nightingale' will be revived. Oriental pictures lend themselves to technicolor, moreover. They will be beautiful."

"And sound? You will fuse sound in your pictures?"

"I do not know. I am not sure. Perhaps sound to the extent of the roar of waves, the wind, native chanting, booming of bells and so forth, but as to dialogue—"

He shook his head, sighed, troubled. "What do you think of the talkies?"

"Hard to say. One should not express an opinion too soon. Any prediction premature. Much development will be needed. Stage plays are rehearsed two weeks, then played on road till the actors know their lines and their parts perfectly. In picture we rehearse but a day; then shoot. The players who must speak lines will be too conscious of their voices; they will fear their effect and grope for the lines. This doubt will register in their faces. Their minds instead of on their motions and the acting will be concentrated on their lines—unless very careful. The result might prove automatic, puppet-like, mechanical motions. The players will miss the guidance of the director, who may not speak, since his voice would register in the microphone. Ah! We are but at the beginning."

THE TICKLISH TALKIES

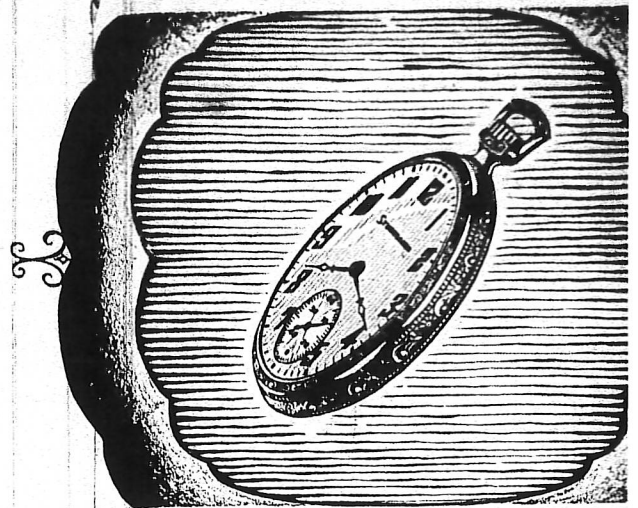
HE pondered the matter, walking up and down a bit restlessly, as though troubled.

"In my own ease. Suppose I use speech in my picture. Then it must be pidgin English, since I speak with accent."

He changed the subject abruptly. Began to talk of books—he is widely read; of golf—he is an addict, and says his idea of Nirvana is that moment when after a fine shot the ball drops into the hole. He talked of psychology; reincarnation, of his wife, who "makes things pleasant at my home," of his former scenarist, Eve Unsell—"A charming lady of great talent and beauty." (Incidentally, Eve Unsell has said of Hayakawa that he is one of the greatest actors the screen has produced—a man possessed of that rare quality—genius!)

Sessue Hayakawa has changed little since he left America. He is still in his twenties, a man above the average height, possessed of a figure as lithe as an acrobat's. He was born in Tokyo, of Samurai ancestry, is a graduate of the Imperial University, a naval officer, an amateur boxer, wrestler, fencer, ju-jitsu expert and swimmer.

"The Bandit Prince" is the name of the story in which he will make his reappearance in pictures. Hayakawa himself wrote the novel. It has to do with the capture of two American girls by bandits. There are two heroines, the blonde American girl and a little Manchu princess.



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