

Role of Rhett Butler Chance of A Lifetime

GABLE DREADED PART
However, Actual Filming of
"Gone With the Wind"
Was Enjoyable

CHOICE WAS COLMAN

By **CLARK GABLE**
My reaction to playing Rhett Butler is both frank and simple. "The condemned man ate a hearty meal." Now don't get me wrong. As an actor I loved it. As a character, he was terrific. As material for the screen, he was that "once in a life-time" opportunity. But as Clark Gable, who likes to pick his spots and found himself trapped by a series of circumstances over which he had no control, I was scared stiff. This is no alibi. I cannot but honestly admit that the actual making of the picture was one of the most thoroughly pleasant and satisfying experiences I have ever known. During the filming, I was

"Rhett Butler"



Clark Gable, as he appears in "Gone With the Wind" as "Rhett Butler."

on familiar ground. Once in the atmosphere of the settings, facing a camera in costume, playing scenes that were dramatically realistic, I felt for the first time that I had an understanding of Rhett. The long months I had studied him and tried to know him as I know myself made me believe I was Rhett. These were things I could get my hands on. They were part of my job as an actor. It was those things I couldn't get my hands on that had me worried.

In the interest of truth, I became a fan of Miss Mitchell's

with the rest of America after going half way through the book. It was good, too good, in fact. Rhett was everything a character should be and rarely is, clear, concise and very real. He breathed in the pages of the book. He was flawless as a character study. He stood up under the most careful analysis without exhibiting a weakness. That was the trouble. I realized that whoever played Rhett would be up against a stumbling block in this respect. Miss Mitchell had etched Rhett into the minds of millions of people, each of whom knew exactly how Rhett would look and act. It would be impossible to satisfy them all. An actor would be lucky to please even the majority. It wasn't that I didn't want to play Rhett. I did. No actor could entirely resist such a challenge. But the more popular Rhett became, the more I agreed with the gentleman who wrote, "Discretion is the best part of valor."

Having read the book enabled me to see clearly what I was in for if I played the part. I decided to say nothing. It became more apparent, anyhow, that it was out of my hands. The public interest in my doing Rhett puzzled me. Long before anyone had been cast for the picture, I was asked for interviews. When I refused comment, the columnists did it for me. My mail doubled and then trebled. I saw myself pictured as Rhett, with sideburns. I don't like sideburns. They itch. I was the only one, apparently, who didn't take it for granted that I was going to play Rhett. It was a funny feeling. I think I know now how a fly must react after being caught in a spider web. It wasn't that I didn't appreciate the compliment the public was paying me. It was simply that Rhett was too big an order. I didn't want any part of him.

To make sure that I hadn't erred in my first impression, I read "Gone" again. It convinced me more than ever that Rhett was too much for any actor to tackle in his right mind. But I couldn't escape him. I looked for every out. I even considered writing Miss Mitchell at one time. I thought it would be great if she would simply issue a statement saying, "I think Clark Gable would be the worst possible selection for Rhett Butler." Perhaps after Miss Mitchell sees my Rhett, or rather what I've done to her Rhett, she'll wish she had. It may be of interest as a sidelight that my own sincere choice for Rhett was Ronald Colman. I still think he would have done a fine job of it.

I found upon investigation that Miss Mitchell, very intelligently, didn't care a hang what Hollywood was going to do with her book. All she wanted was peace and quiet. She wrote a book because it was the thing she liked to do, and having innocently caused more excitement than any author in memory, asked only to be left alone. When I was told this, I immediately felt a sympathetic fellowship with Miss Mitchell. I was sure we would

understand one another, for, after all, Rhett has caused more than a little confusion in both our lives. Incidentally, I wanted to ask Miss Mitchell where she met a man like Rhett. I am just guessing, but to me he must have been the real thing, with very little fictional embroidery.

During the months when the casting of "Gone" reached the proportion of a national election, and acrimonious debate was being conducted on every street corner, Rhett became more of a mental hazard than ever. I was still the only one who didn't have anything to say about him. I never did have. For when the time came to get down to business, I was still out on a limb.

I knew what was coming the day David O. Selznick telephoned me. His purchase of the book for a mere \$50,000 had started the riot. Our talk was amicable. I did the sparring and he landed the hard punches. David's idea was to make a separate deal, providing my studio would release me to make the picture. I thought my contract was an ace in the hole. It specified that my services belonged exclusively to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. I told David that, adding on my own that I was not interested in playing Rhett.

That didn't stop David. Being a friend of long standing and knowing him, I knew that it wouldn't. He pointed out that no actor ever had been offered such a chance. There had never been a more talked of role than Rhett. That was exactly my reason for turning him down. He put his cards on the table. He was going to try to get me from M-G-M if he could. We shook hands on it.

I could have put up a fight. I didn't. I am glad now that I didn't. Hollywood always has treated me fairly. I have had no reason to complain about my roles and if the studio thought I should play Rhett, it was not up to me to duck out. I had nothing to do with the negotiations. I learned that I was to play Rhett in the newspapers. As a part of the deal, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer was to release the picture.

That was a weight off my mind. There was no longer anything to argue about. Now I had a job to do and it was up to me to give it all I had. I read and re-read the book until I could visualize Rhett as Miss Mitchell had pictured him. How he reacted to every situation. I memorized many of the revealing lines in the book and it may be of interest to know that most of the dialogue in the script is exactly as Miss Mitchell wrote it.

STATE ROAD

Mr. and Mrs. T. A. Gentry had as their guests Sunday their children and families, as follows: Mr. and Mrs. Noah Ray, Allen and Betty, of Salisbury; Mr. and Mrs. Ted Messick, Ruth and Junior, of Winston-Salem; Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Gentry and Jocelyn, of Lynchburg, Va.; and Mr. and Mrs. Burton Harpe and Jerry Burton, of Winston-Salem.

Mrs. Eugene Wilkerson of Kannapolis, spent the week with her mother, Mrs. Paul Phillips.

Miss Margaret Hutchens of Winston-Salem, is visiting her sister, Mrs. L. L. Irvin and family.

Mrs. Don Wiles and children, Marilyn and Judy, of Hays, were guests of their aunt, Mrs. Leatha Cockerham and family, Friday and Saturday.

Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Martin and children were week-end guests of Mrs. Martin's parents, Mr. and Mrs. E. H. Thompson.

Mr. and Mrs. James Poindexter and little son, Jimmy, went to Danville, Va., Sunday.

Mr. and Mrs. Clete Jenkins and Mr. and Mrs. G. F. Martin were visitors in Whitehead Sunday.

Mr. and Mrs. T. A. Gentry spent Tuesday in Statesville and Winston-Salem.

Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Thompson of Devotion, have purchased the J. A. Chipman farm in State Road, and expect to build and move there sometime in the near future.

Mr. and Mrs. Bob Walters entertained their Sunday school class at a weiner roast and picnic at Carter Falls Thursday evening. They were also invited to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Reese Couch, where they were delightfully entertained. The members of the class enjoying this outing were Misses Helen Dickerson, Juanita Carter, Juanita Gentry, Joy Darnell, Addie Wall and J. R. Gentry, Oliver Walters and Billy Donovan.

Rev. and Mrs. Eph Whisenant and little daughter, Edith Adair, were dinner guests of Mr. and Mrs. W. H. Combs Friday evening.

As Good As Any
Billy's mother looked at him accusingly.
"What have you done with all your money, son?" she asked. "Your little bank is empty."
"Well, mother," answered the boy, "yesterday was a rainy day, so I spent it."

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