

UNLIKE a famous Swedish star I don't want to be alone, but I do want to go away and transportation and snarling European nations willing I'm going as far away from Hollywood as I can get.

I'm tired physically and mentally and being tired I want to rest. Not being the sort of person who can rest by idling on a shiny beach or by soaking myself in the medicated waters of some celebrated spa perhaps my idea of a holiday won't jibe with that of most people.

Resting to me means a radical change of scene—traveling to the far places of the earth, seeing different people talking different languages, filling my eyes with new sights and my head with new ideas.

As a matter of fact, my contemplated rest will not classify under the head of a vacation at all. It may become a permanent absence from pictures and from the stage—I don't know.

ALL I'm certain of is that for the time being Mrs. Muni and I are going to shelve all responsibilities, see new people, make new friends, forget everything we've been doing for more years than we can remember off-hand.

I'm going to take my long-neglected fiddle with me and in peace and quiet perhaps resume the serious study of music which constantly increasing demands upon my time before the cameras has interrupted.

This isn't going to be a vacation of any definite duration; it may last two months, it may last two years. Perhaps it will never end. I honestly don't know.

When I complete my current Warner Bros. production, "The Life of Emile Zola," I'll be just one step away from the goal Mrs. Muni and I have had in our minds for some time. I'll have contractual obligations for just one more picture, which probably will start in September, and when that is finished, my future will be entirely my own.

Anyone who ever has had a vacation knows the acute pangs that come when you begin to count the days until you have to be back on the job. It usually spoils the last half of your holiday—just thinking about it.

BEING what might be called a spasmodic worker—making only a certain number of pictures a year—my vacations have been a lot longer than most working people get, but regardless of how long a time I've had off I've always returned disgruntled and dissatisfied because some definite obligation forced me to be in New York or Hollywood on a certain day.

That's why, at long last—to crib a phrase—I'm refusing to listen to any talk about new contracts. I want to be free to go away and stay until I'm sick of it or, if I like it better, to stay away permanently.

I'm not going away because I'm sore at Hollywood, at working conditions or for any other reason than that I'm tired of working and being tied down.

Hollywood has treated me well; I'd be an ingrate to say otherwise. It has given me everything that any reasonable person can possibly want. Perhaps it's given me too much. I don't know. Maybe if I hadn't succeeded so quickly and had had to fight longer for recognition and security, the old zest for achievement would keep driving me on.

I don't mean to convey the impression that I've had an easy time of it, for I haven't. When I first came to Hollywood in 1929, I made "The Valiant," which I liked very much, although it wasn't a boxoffice success.

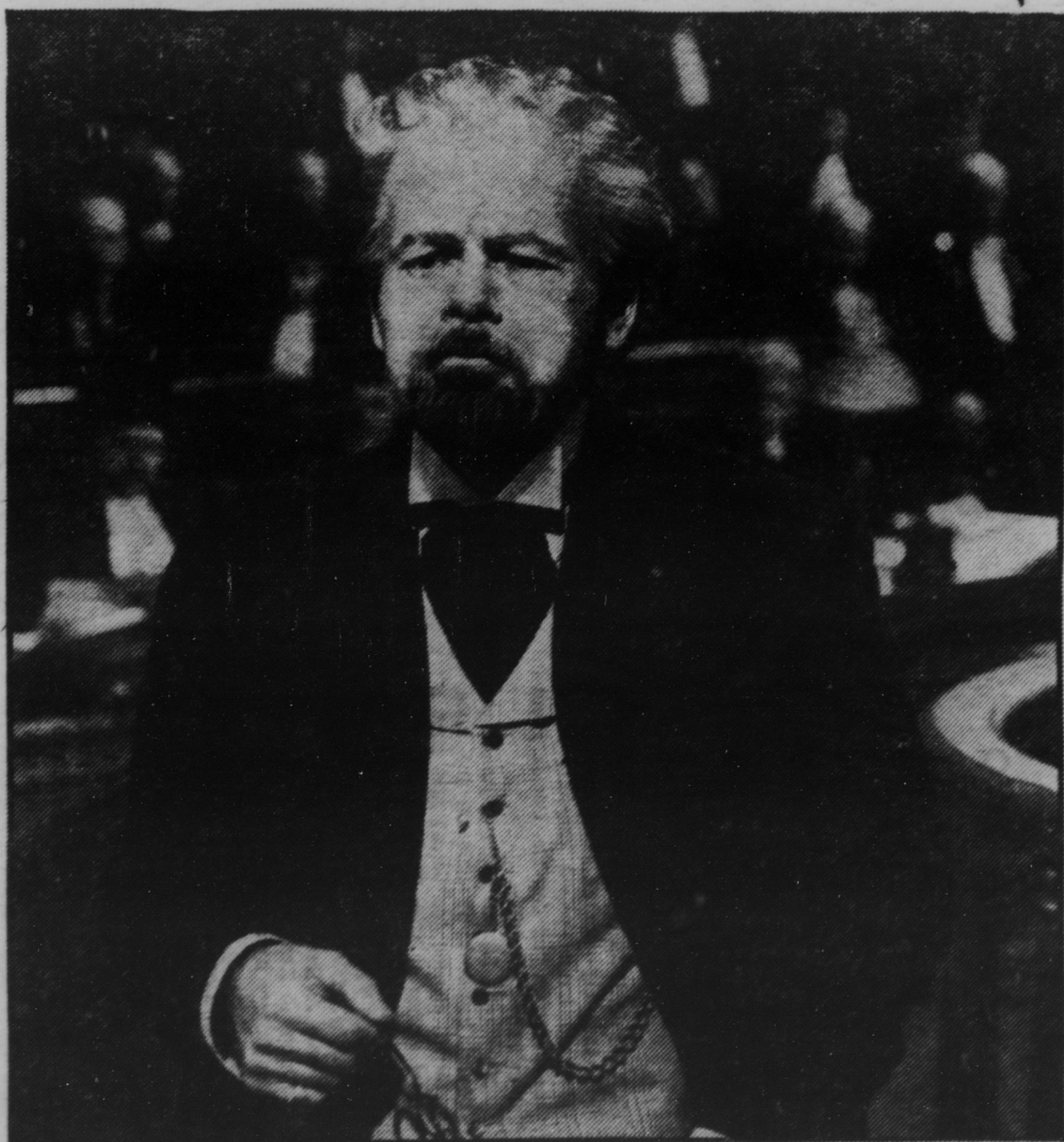
Then I made a little thing called "Seven Faces," which undoubtedly was the worst thing I ever did. In fact, when I got a good look at it in the projection room, I tucked my tail between my legs, tore up my contract and bade goodbye forever to films. I thought then I'd never make another picture, and that I'd confine all my future activity to the stage.



Paul Muni's versatility is shown in this character portrait.

Where To Now? By Paul Muni

As the humanitarian in Warner Bros.' "Life of Emile Zola"



BUT after nearly three years "Scarface" was waved in my face and I thought I'd take one more whirl at the movies to see if I really was so bad or if the stories I had done had something to do with my inconspicuous success. "Scarface" was a powerful story, one that had great possibilities, something I could really get my teeth into. Its success was extremely gratifying and quite surprising to me.

It convinced me that I must have strong stories, and when Warner Bros. showed me "I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang," I was easily lured into agreeing to do it. With my agreement went a promise to a certain number of other pictures, provided I approved the story material. This is the agreement that is just coming to an end, and one that has left me very tired.

To people who are familiar with the theatrical profession only from the audience viewpoint, it may sound silly to say that we actors work hard. Maybe some don't. Some people are naturally facile and they accomplish miracles without apparent effort. I envy them, because I've always had to plug.

Long ago David Warfield told me that the only way an actor can really get into a part is to practice a kind of self-hypnosis. I am inclined to agree with him. Before I start a picture and after I finish it, I am naturally anxious that it be a success with the public; that the audiences like it and like me in it. But while the picture is in the making, while I am playing the part, I have no time and no energy to think or worry about such things. I am too busy thinking and worrying about the character I am playing.

The result is that I use up an enormous supply of nervous energy during the weeks a picture is in production. I come out of it tired and cross and vowing I will never undertake such hard work again.

IN the last year and a half I've made four pictures, counting "Zola" which is just about finished. Every one of them has been hard work, requiring terrific concentration and grinding application.

First there was "The Story of Louis Pasteur," which took nearly every ounce of energy I possessed to portray in the manner I thought it deserved. With but a brief breathing spell I went into "The Good Earth" which, in addition to being a difficult role, had the added strain of being a world-wide best seller.

You can't deal lightly with a masterpiece that millions of people have read and acclaimed, and while that very fact acted as a spur to greater efforts, it also built up a responsibility complex that gave us many sleepless nights.

With scarcely a pause, I next did "The Woman I Love," and from that went into "The Life of Emile Zola," one of the most difficult roles I've ever tackled. Zola was a great humanitarian as well as one of France's most renowned novelists, and a character so complex that my preparatory studies had to be very complete to make him understandable.

PERHAPS it is the succession of hard roles that has dimmed a bit the zest of creating on the screen, perhaps the criticism of Zola once voiced by the famous artist, Paul Cezanne, fits me. He said: "Success and soft living are not good for an artist; otherwise he becomes fat and stodgy and complacent."

At any rate, I'm going away and probably after a short time my Utopia will turn a bit sour and I'll be perfectly miserable and come dusting back to Hollywood.

You know they say no actor ever voluntarily quits, but when and if I do come back, it will be with the satisfaction of having, for once in my life, been absolutely free.