

Hollywood Keeps Heflin

The films have been good to this Oklahoma thespian—and vice versa

VAN HEFLIN, '32ba, who has been practically a commuter between New York and Hollywood, going from stage to screen work and back again, has decided to settle down. From here on out it's the movies for Van.

Any why not? Just listen to his record. After completing a twenty-week road tour with Katherine Hepburn in *The Philadelphia Story* he decided to come to Hollywood again. It was *The Philadelphia Story* that caused him to make the decision. He figured out that more people saw the screen version in two weeks than did on the stage in two years. Certainly, then, the motion picture was a more far-reaching medium.

At Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer he was given a screen test. Everybody nodded wisely, said the boy had a splendid future and he was put under contract. His first role under this deal was with Rosalind Russell and Don Ameche in *The Feminine Touch*. But instead of being the dashing young leading man who had been seen in the test he was a bearded gentleman with amorous notions. Van didn't mind. He doesn't even care to be a leading man, much preferring the character role. In *The Feminine Touch* he was a New York publisher more interested in his authors' wives than their books.

A newcomer to a studio is always a point of interest to those who have been around for a long time. People from other sets just happened to drop by to watch Van work. W. S. Van Dyke was his director. Van Dyke is an impatient man. He works quickly, wastes no time with either persiflage or rehearsals. He insists on good actors in his films and trusts them. Watching Van Heflin one day, an actor who had worked with Van Dyke said, "He'll be okay on this lot. Standing up and making a good showing under the Van Dyke school is the ultimate proof of his talent."

He was next cast as Bill King, friend of Robert Young, in *H. M. Pulham, Esq.* The beard came off and Van was rather sorry to see it go. "I'd become fond of it in a grim sort of way," he said. The role in *Pulham* was not a large one but when the picture was previewed members of the audience wrote the studio either to know the name of the actor who played Bill King or to ask that Van Heflin be given more important roles. Audiences were becoming Heflin conscious.

The wish was granted and in a spectacular way. Robert Taylor was to star with Lana Turner in *Johnnie Eager*. One of the characters in the screen play was Taylor's



VAN HEFLIN, '32ba
Now settled down in Hollywood after
a period of stage success

only true friend—a down and out drunk who remained loyal to the gangster until the last. When that picture was previewed Van Heflin created a sensation. Every time he appeared on the screen there was a stir in the audience and the cards that were mailed in begged for "more Heflin." Taylor sent him a wire of congratulation. The performance was called one of the most vivid ever played by a newcomer.

Although he still dreams of the sea—he was a sailor before he became an actor—he has decided that he will stick to the sound stages. In many ways he finds it much the same as his days as a sailor—it means continual traveling with constant doubt as to where the future will find him.

"Every time you sign up with a new ship, you meet a new crew," says Heflin, "and it's the same in acting. Each new play or picture brings a new cast. And it brings close contacts, just as does shipboard."

Van lives in a charming California home with his mother, who formerly lived in Oklahoma City. Between films he spends as much time as possible in Palm Springs. His plans for the future are to go on in films "as long," he says, "as they'll have me."

Modest about his work in the extreme, he laughed when everyone was congratulating him upon his amazing performance in *Johnnie Eager*. "It was an actor proof role," he said.

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