7. The First Talkies

While Charlie was busy perfecting his technique in silent movies, other people in the industry had begun to work on the next logical step --- sound.

The first talking sequence was produced by Warner Brothers. It was a picture about a beautiful princess. The first part was silent, showing a lovely actress. Suddenly she began to speak with a strange voice, as though talking through sand. The audience got a big shock. The sounds, too, were very funny. For example, a door closing made a noise like two trucks bumping into each other.

Charlie was sure sound would fail, but he was wrong. Gradually techniques improved, and soon all the theatres prepared for the arrival of talkies.

Meanwhile, Charlie continued with silent films. He loved pantomime and he was a master of it. So he decided to make a film called City Lights. His friends --- actors, producers and directors --- were surprised to hear this. "You have a lot of courage," they said. Some magazine articles even said there was no future for Charlie Chaplin. But Charlie thought City Lights was an ideal silent picture, and he was determined to make it.

The picture is about a tramp who often gets drunk and who falls in love with a blind flower-seller. She thinks he is very rich, so to please her he pretends that he is. When Charlie started to make this picture, he found two difficulties. With talkies popular from three years before, the actors had forgotten how to do pantomime. The timing of their action was not good. Another difficulty was to find a girl who could look blind and still look beautiful. Luckily, he came across Virginia Cherrill one day on the beach. Virginia had not done much acting, but she was beautiful and she had the ability to look blind.

Charlie wanted perfection, and City Lights took more than a year to make. In one famous scene, the tramp escapes from a traffic jam by walking through a car and getting out the other side. The flower-girl hears the noise of the door, thinks he is the owner, and offers him some flowers. With his last money he buys a flower, which the flower-girl drops by mistake. She bends down, feeling the ground for it. The tramp points to it, but she continues feeling the ground. Picking it up himself, he wonders if she can see. Suddenly realizing she is blind, he helps her to her feet, feeling very sorry. The whole scene lasted seventy seconds, but it took five days to get it right.

When the picture was all ready, Charlie had it shown downtown as a preview. That was a disaster. The audience had not been told about it. They had come to see a drama and not a comedy, so there was little laughter, and before the end people started to walk out. Charlie was shocked, with the feeling that two million dollars and nearly two years of work had gone down the drain. He tried to smile to those around him, saying that everything would be all right when the film was shown in a full house. But would it?

The film opened in a new theatre in Los Angeles. When Charlie and his friends arrived at the theatre, the street was packed with people for several blocks. Policemen helped Charlie get through the crowd and into the theatre. Charlie hated first nights. They made him feel very nervous, and that night he was especially nervous.

The picture finally started. First came the credit-titles, and everyone applauded as they always did on the first night. Then at last the first scene opened. Charlie's heart beat very hard. It was a comedy scene. The audience began to laugh. Then they laughed more and more. It was a success! All Charlie's doubts and fears began to disappear. He wanted to cry. All through the picture the people laughed. They did not stop. And Charlie, so nervous and excited, laughed with them. With talkies already so popular, no one but he could have dared to make another silent picture. It took a genius like Charlie to do it, and to do it with such brilliant success.

EXERCISES (7)

Ａ　（　）に適切な日本語を入れ、本文のあらすじを完成させなさい．

映画界は（ア　 　 ）映画から（イ　 　 ）の時代に入り、すべての映画館にその設備が整った．しかしチャーリーは、（ア）映画の『街の灯』を作る決心をした．この映画は（ウ　 　　　　　）に恋をする（エ　 　 ）を描いたもので、（オ　 ）年近くの年月と（カ　 ）ドルをつぎこんだ意欲作であった．

　（キ　 　 ）では不評で、チャーリーは不安な公開初日をむかえたが、満員の観客は始終笑い通しで、彼もいっしょに笑うほどだった．すでに新時代に入っている中でのこの映画の成功は、まさにチャーリーの（ク　 　 ）ぶりを示すものであった．

Ｂ　本文の内容に合うものにはＴ、合わないものにはＦを書きなさい．

(1) The sound was very unnatural in the first talking movie. ( )

(2) Virginia Cherill was beautiful and good at acting as if she couldn't see. ( )

(3) He entered the theatre with the help from policemen because he felt too nervous. ( )

(4) Charlie always looked forward to the opening of his new films. ( )

Ｃ　（　）内の語句を並べかえて、英文を完成させなさい．

(1) It took me (ｱ.to ｲ.through ｳ.ten days ｴ.the book ｵ.read).

(2) I (ｱ.Father ｲ.my bicycle ｳ.had ｴ.fixed ｵ.by).

(3) I couldn't see well (ｱ.the ｲ.with ｳ.off ｴ.light).

(4) No ( ｱ.but ｲ.understood ｳ.one ｴ.he ｵ.could ｶ.have) it.