



Twelve years ago, Sophia's Neapolitan accent was so strong that someone else's voice had to be dubbed into her films, including those made in Italy. Today she speaks almost classic Italian, and her English is so flawless that when a visitor on the set of "The Fall of the Roman Empire" remarked about it, Sophia exclaimed, "Do you want the daughter of Marcus Aurelius to sound like a Neapolitan street urchin?" Thanks to her persistence, she even picked up enough French to make films in that language.

A heavier cross to bear was her illegitimacy. "When I was a teen-ager, I never dared have dates. I was afraid to go out with boys because I was different. I didn't have a real family of my own. It gave me such a complex that I felt everyone pointed at me when I went out of the house."

As she grew older, she became more defiant about it. Rather than avoid what most women would have considered adverse publicity, she brought it out in the open. As a result, in 1955, her father's wife—not Sophia's mother—dragged Sophia and her younger sister into court because Sophia insisted that her younger sister had the right to use their father's surname. She won her point.

IT WAS UNDOUBTEDLY this family background that made Sophia defy public opinion when she married Carlo Ponti, whose Mexican divorce was declared invalid in Italy and who was subsequently accused of bigamy. Eager to stay within the law but unperturbed about what people thought or said, Sophia and Carlo simply got a divorce—and continued to live together. "The important thing is not whether the marriage is recognized but whether or not a woman feels married. I do. Many married people don't," Sophia stated simply. While her point of view is certainly not shared even by the majority of her fans, few fail to appreciate her honesty and straightforwardness.

When Ponti actively took over the management of Sophia's career, she knew little about films, less about the financial aspects of the industry, and nothing about management.

She remembered a story someone once told her about an illiterate merchant in Madeira who, along with his competitors, supplied food to the ships that stopped there. The other merchants used to sneer at him because he could neither read nor write, but the others went broke and he was the only one who survived because, before signing any paper, he always took it to his lawyer. Thus, when Sophia put herself into the hands of Carlo Ponti, she trusted his judgment in all financial and contractual matters.

As a result, she and Elizabeth Taylor are the only actresses who can get \$1,000,000 per picture today! And Ponti's careful handling of their finances has made them multimillionaires, although Sophia doesn't like to talk about that.

Sophia isn't quite as unconcerned about public opinion as she pretends to be. In spite of her outspokenness, her illegitimacy has troubled her a great deal. She seems determined not to accept such responsibility for any children of her own. That's why the family she wants so much will have to wait until she and Carlo can find a legal solution to their marital status.

"Someday," Sophia sighs. "I want five *bambini* depending on me as their mother. Then I will have everything I want . . ."