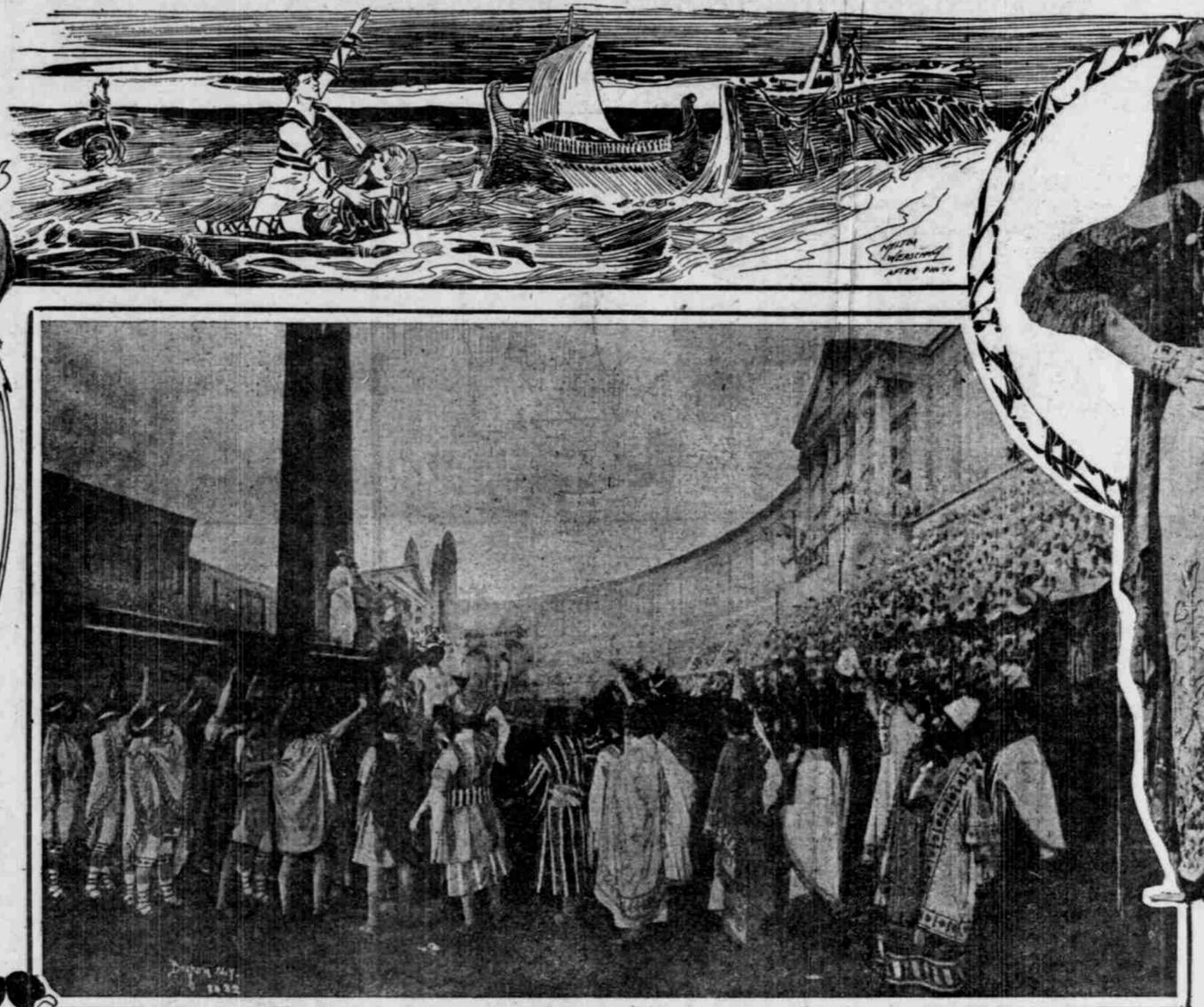


BEHIND THE SCENES WITH "BEN HUR"

Army of Men Works Like Clockwork Under a Stage Czar Amid a Chaos of Canvas and Machinery



ALPHONZ ETHIER AS BEN HUR

DOROTHY ROSS WIERE AS IRAS

THE CROWNING OF BEN HUR AS VICTOR IN THE CHARIOT RACE



THE EXTERIOR OF THE CIRCUS AT ANTIOCH WHERE BEN HUR AND MESSALA HAD THEIR GREAT CHARIOT RACE

UNLESS one has enjoyed the privilege of spending a night behind the scenes during the performance of a big stage spectacle, no idea can be formed of what goes to make it up. The world behind the scenes is so complicated and fascinating in every respect that the writer can easily understand why the "Theatrical bee" buzzes in the head of the rising generation. Everything in connection with the stage carries interest for the greater part of the public, and therefore a review of "A Night Behind the Scenes," with the Klaw & Erlanger company production of General Lew Wallace's "Ben Hur," admittedly acknowledged to be the most stupendous production ever made within the four walls of the playhouse in the history of the amusement world will give an excellent insight on subjects often discussed, but of which very little is really known.

Wonder has been expressed how those employed in the enactment of a play spend their leisure moments when not actively engaged, how hard the master stage carpenter and his assistants must work in the manipulation of the striking mechanical effects, the damage a single error of halt would make, the efforts of the electrical expert for brilliancy in lighting, the handling of the great horde of extra people, what the duties of the stage manager really are, and the change in feeling one experiences when the realms of stardom have been unfolded to his view.

When "Ben Hur" was petulantly staged in Portland, the writer was invited by the management to spend an evening behind the scenes and inspect the workings and the action of the play and the people employed. With this end in view, the visit to the theater was made at an early hour in order to see the arrival of the actor folk and how they prepared for the night's work. Although it was only 6:30 P. M. when the theater was reached, the lobby was all brightness, bustle and activity. The box office had its long line, and a large throng were eagerly awaiting the opening of the doors. I at once made my way to the stage entrance to await developments. Promptly at 7 o'clock two men sauntered slowly towards the stage door through the gloomy passageway at the side of the theater. The smaller man seemed to have a grievance, for his talk was emphasized by many gestures. His big gray-haired companion was replying in a low voice that sounded like the rumble of an emerald in a cellar. Later on I found the door-tender with a glum expression, they crossed the stage, which had just enough light to show it was perfectly bare. Returning from the room they had entered with a long printed list, the second assistant stage manager settled himself comfortably in a chair just inside the stage door.

Company Begins to Arrive.

In a few moments the company began to arrive, the ones who appear in the prelude and the first set being in the lead. They all had a pleasant word of greeting from the man at the door, and he carefully checked their names on the long printed slip. As time commenced to fly, instead of ones and twos the passageway was filled with a whole throng of people hurrying towards the mysterious stage door. A man with a black mustache, severe and commanding in appearance, that would cause you to pick him out from a lot of people, accompanied by a short, stocky man with a gray mustache and a little Auburn-haired chap about as round as a wire cable, and fully as strong, saunters in. The three take a hurried

glance at their surroundings and then disappear into a dressing-room to come out a moment later in their shirt sleeves. The big man is William Ayres, the master carpenter; the stocky man is Thomas Gosman, the master of properties; and the Auburn-haired man is H. D. Crockett, the master electrician. There is a sharp, quick step on the stage, and a slender blond man walks quietly up to the group. This is A. L. Rankin, the stage manager. His assistants immediately report to him those who are late or absent, and he makes note of each.

Army of Men on the Stage.

Suddenly there is a roar as of near-by thunder, softened by the buzz and hum of thousands of human voices. It is 7:30 P. M., the doors of the theater have been opened, and the audience is coming in. The next arrivals at the stage door are the orchestra men. They seek their music-rooms underneath the stage. Only a few seconds elapse and an army of stage hands, property men and electricians begin active work in arranging the scenery and effects. The great cyclorama used in the first act is noisily made to encircle the stage. Chairs, benches, rugs, pieces of scenery, the top of a house here, a bit of an arbor there, huge calcium lights with a man for each, and all the paraphernalia of the scene are being carried in seemingly endless confusion. Hardly a word is spoken, and in a few moments it is noticed that not a man makes either a useless step or motion. Master Carpenter Ayres stands close to the curtain line, giving quick orders here and there, when, all at once, we have the roof top of Ben Hur's house with the magnificent panoramic view of Jerusalem almost at our feet. In answer to a subdued whistle, a great scene drop is lowered to the floor noiselessly, which is to represent the Star of Bethlehem. Mr. Ayres turns about with a smile signals to Mr. Rankin that everything is all right. The stage manager takes a swift view of the scene and, missing nothing, he presses a button, the lights are lowered, the wonderfully impressive opening bars of the sacred music fill the theater, the curtain rises slowly, and the performance of "Ben Hur" begins.

To the man who sits in front during the performance, "Ben Hur" is a gigantic spectacle, with perfect scenic illusion, with mighty pictures of sea and city, of hills clothed with multitudes, and of the most sensational feature of all times, a terrific chariot race in which eight horses run with break-neck speed for two minutes within view of the audience.

Chaos of Canvas.

Behind the scenes the spectacle is a chaos of canvas and machinery; the mul-

titude, a horde of supernumeraries; the sea, a roll of blue denim; the city, mere slabs of paper-mache. Of course, this is so of every scene in this or any other play, but there is one time during each performance of this spectacle when all chaos assumes definite form, when every belt and shaft has work to do, when every inch of canvas takes on life and moves, when even the dead floor of the stage becomes a moving thing. This is during the chariot race, which, as seen from the front, has never been equaled as a stage picture, and seen from behind the scenes represents the mechanical dreams of half a hundred inventors. Besides this great race, the illusion of the Star of Bethlehem in the prelude to the play—a picture beautiful in itself—becomes a cheap trick in lighting effects. In comparison, the stage picture of the Roman galley in the second act is the clasp-trap of stage craft, and the massing of the multitude on Mount Olivet in the last act is as simple as child's play.

Although more than 250 persons are employed in the presentation of this play, very little confusion can be detected on the stage. A surging mass of people move about in order, garbed in the costume of all the ancient nations of the East—pretty figures on the stage are just human beings behind the scenes. An Indian Prince begs a chew of tobacco of a Roman soldier. The stage manager compels an Arabian maiden to toss aside her chewing gum. Everywhere, on the sails, in the wings down in the stage basement, up in the flies, Greek and Abyssinian, Hindoo and Arab, all talk in the same language, which lends a hearty laugh to the onlooker. Ben-Hur and Messala, bitter enemies before the audience, fraternize behind the scenes. The writer overheard a dancing girl from Egypt ask Messala for a pin with which to fasten up the torn hem of her gauzy skirt. She remarked: "Some durned Indian has stepped on my dress." Messala supplied the pin requested. It was the one that held Ben-Hur's badge of victory.

Stage Manager the Czar.

It takes a man with the patience of Job to handle the great crowd employed, for so many little things crop up that tend to mar a performance unless detected. That is why a man of great force and dignity is necessary for the handling of his productions. The stage manager with "Ben-Hur" is a Czar in authority, for whether right or wrong in issuing a command it must be respected until the final curtain falls, for he is held responsible for the production and is answerable to the firm of Klaw & Erlanger for its smooth working.

The master carpenter and his assistants, like the electrical experts, have their respective duties to perform in a

limited space of time. They are obliged to anticipate what is wanted of them, for should they make an error in shifting or setting a scene or adjusting any of the electrical effects and thereby cause a stage halt, a heavy fine or instant dismissal is likely to follow. So much of Ben Hur depends upon spectacular effects that the men employed have very few seconds for rest from the time they enter the theater until the exit.

The principals, when not actively taking part in the performance, generally keep to their dressing-rooms. The men employ their time in reading or playing

a game of cards, while the women pass their time sewing and reading. All keep a sharp watch for their cues. The large number of extra people are confined to several big dressing-rooms and only permitted on the stage when their services are required in scenes.

A spectator gets a new and curious sensation by watching this wonderful spectacle from behind the scenes. It is as if one puts himself in the place of one of the painted Orientals leaning from the panoramic canvas of the circus of Antioch itself. One can feel something like Mal-luch, when he bent from his seat above

the Gate of Triumph to witness the revenge of Ben-Hur—the breaking of Messala's chariot wheel and the tossing of the Roman in the dust. The sacred music of the Mount of Olives scene causes a lump to come into your throat, for the expression on the faces of the vast multitude assembled on this mountain top kneeling in adoration to the Nazarene, chanting Hosannas and with uplifted and outstretched arms and their faces turned toward heaven appealing for cleansing of leprosy with the powerful shaft of white light symbolizing the presence of the Nazarene, flooded across their faces,

causes one to feel that he is indeed in the house of the Lord.

The scene which comes prior to the Mount of Olives is a mixture of ancient and modern—the first and 23rd centuries. One jostles elbows with Romans, Jews, Arabs and Asiatics in trappings of the gorgeous East. Regiments of stage hands jab their elbows into your side; the strenuous Iras laughs at you as she pats her horse's nose, under the eye of the cool master mechanic in immediate stress. Everything is excitement for the thrilling chariot race is about to be run and the extra people are all struggling to get a satisfactory viewpoint. A curious thing about this race is that all the people on the stage hunch for an accident to the machinery so that Messala will win; they consider it fine fun to cheat Ben Hur of victory. The stage manager shouts his commands, Ben Hur in his white tunic clatters cautiously to his place in the race car, while Messala does likewise. The red garment of Messala is the signal to the horses. The instant they see him their hoofs start flying over the treadmill. Only a few feet from the roaring machinery and the plunging steeds one feels a sort of uncanny sensation, even though it be not dread, for he sees the fearfully aroused racers seemingly charge straight at him with flying leaps and nerves a-quiver. The illusory dust arises in clouds from their feet and the chariot wheels, with their crackling whips appear to dash upon all in front. It is a thrilling scene in every sense the word implies and makes one who has been able to secure the courtesy of a trip behind the scenes feel fortunate indeed.

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These were the heroes, and by the superiority of their muscular development dominated over their fellows. No fault was ever found with their actions, so they never needed a committee of their neighbors to whitewash them. But now they would run up against something that would end thusly: "Against the peace and dignity of the State of Oregon as in such cases made and provided." They were magnificent pirates.

Names change, but men never, and so today we call them Frenzied Financiers. They have their regular fields of plunder. Sometimes it is copper, sometimes wheat and sometimes oil.

The man who can rake in the biggest pile gets his picture in the papers. And the young boys dream of the time when they can own a railroad and go to the United States Senate, or, better still, send someone there.

After a particularly successful deal, a donation is always made to charity. Like the Vikings of old, it is the successful men that come out on top, but with this difference: The Vikings' superiority was mainly physical strength, while with the men who take their place today it is a superiority of trickery and scheming.

While we do not need to worry about any bare-legged Vikings with tawny hair turning up and swiping our warlike irons, it will do no harm to keep your eyes on an occasional street rail-

way president and never try to buck the stock market.

MARCUS W. ROBBINS.
Grant's Pass, Or.

Be Patient and Be Wise.

Be patient and be wise! The eyes of death look on us with a smile; her soft caress, that stills the anguish and that stops the breath.

Is nature's ordination, meant to bless Our mortal ways with peaceful nothingness. Be not afraid! The power that made the light

In your kind eyes and set the stars on high And gave us love meant not that all should die—

Like a brief day dream, quenched in sudden night.

Think that to die is but to fall asleep And wake refreshed where the new morning breaks.

And golden day her rosy vigor takes From winds that fan eternity's far height And the white crests of God's perpetual deep.

"His time is spent," our pilgrimage must be—

So the wise poet-wisdom of mankind— It admonishes that should make us see—

That our sole refuge is the constant mind. The steadfast purpose, brave and strong and free.

To bear affliction and to be resigned; Knowing that ruthless time will one day rend the veil that hides the deep that all must cross.

And that the eternity to which we tend, Where crown'd with peace, as with a diadem, Our lord's ones long for us even as we long for them.

—William Winter.

"Musings for Three Minutes" By Marcus W. Robbins

Noble Vikings and Their Ways as Compared With Degenerate Posterity of the Twentieth Century.

THE hero of one age is the criminal of the next. Will not some of our heroes turn out the same way?

Take the noble Vikings. Now, these fellows were the forebears of the Ole Olsons and Peter Petersons of Minneapolis, Minn. To look at Knute Neilson, United States Senator, one can hardly realize that he had such a wild ancestor, but then it is not safe for any of us to brag about our family tree.

These Vikings in their day were regarded as belonging to the better class of society and were looked on by the general public in much the same manner as the small boy of today looks on the captains, say of the Bailey Gatzert or the Cha. B. Spencer. They were able to throw out their chests and say "We're it." But if these same Vikings could come on deck today, they would be in danger of being classed as river pirates. Thus do the ideals of a world change.

Just imagine a bunch of them being brought to life and paddling up the Willamette in one of their warships, each man dressed in trousers out on the latest golf style, peckaboo shirts and forty-ninth-degree aprons. Then let them commence to whet their battleaxes and take a few swigs of their steam beer, drunk standing from Texas steer horns. Why, the Oregon National Guard would be patrolling the banks inside of 24 hours. That is, unless some enterprising Yankee did not

get is ahead and corral the whole bunch, organizing a troupe to tour the State the general public being admitted to see the sights at the rate of 50 cents a head. Just think what a magnificent exhibit they would have made for the Trail.

When Springtime came, the Vikings were accustomed to make their trips south as regularly as a Chicago drummer for a millinery house. Mr. Olaf would get his family and friends together, caulk up his warship, look over his sails and oars, and then some sunny Spring morning would pull away for the coast of France or Britain. Having chosen a particular spot on the coast, they would land and proceed to relieve the inhabitants of all their portable property.

These were strenuous times. For the ancient Britons were no slouches when it came to a free-for-all fight, and Mr. Norseman often got all that was coming to him. Blood had to flow before they could gather up the brass pots and gold bracelets.

The Viking that could bring home as his season's catch the largest amount of plunder was the hero of his fjord. He was feted and made much of; his legs were named after him, and all the young boys dreamed dreams of how, when they were grown up, they would be like Mr. Olaf and be able to split a man in twain with one stroke of the battleaxe.

Mr. Olaf was usually a discreet person, and at the end of each season always made an offering to the village

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