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By GENE GAUNTIER

AND now we come to the high moment in the history of the Kalem players, filming From the Manger to the Cross, the first moving picture of the life of Christ, made in the land where he lived and died.

It was late spring in 1913, when our director Sidney Olcott returned from London with the additional actors needed for the production, including Helen Lindroth of the southern Kalem company, and various female roles, eight experienced young English players, Sidney Stober, who was cast for the role of Jesus at twelve and last but most important, Mr. R. Henderson Bland who would interpret the mature Christ.

The choice of Mr. Bland was most fortunate. Formed leading man with Beaumont Tree, he was an actor of fine quality, possessing a spirituality which enabled him to portray the difficult role. I have never seen another man who could sustain the exaltation required for the role through days and weeks. When not engaged on a scene he did not mingle with the company but prowled alone among the various corners of the old city, absorbing its color, history and glamour. And once he donned the robes of the Man of Sorrows, he became rigorously apart, rarely speaking, seemingly out of harmony with the world.

In the Gethsemane scene, his speech was chiefly in the droning, the tranquility and beauty, the new spiritual quality which fitted him to the work and work they were to do.

And their work was not easy, for, barring Mr. Bland, the boy Jesus and me, who played Mary the Mother, every actor played a number of roles and had to make a careful study of make-up and costumes.

We started with the driving of the money changers from the temple, a critical moment, for here Mr. Bland made his first appearance before a moving picture camera. We fairly held our breath as we watched him but he had the good sense to forget that he was a popular London actor and put himself unrehearsed into the hands of the director.

So unchanged is the East, and especially Jerusalem, that when it came time for the rehearsals Ameen went down to the Jaffa Gate and brought back half a dozen money changers with their small square glass covered tables containing their money, and installed them in the setting without change of make-up or props. They were as they had always been.

Those first scenes were made quickly—the Annunciation, the visits of the shepherds and the wise men, the appearance of the latter before Herod, and all scenes in the temple.

Next we went to Bethlehem to take the arrival of Joseph and Mary at the inn, then out on the hills beyond Jerusalem to show the wise men on their way, the shepherds with their flocks. This brought us to the journey to the Sea of Galilee and Nazareth where we were to make the first scene of the production, Mary as a girl, taken at "Mary's Well," which is still used by the women of Nazareth; the return to Nazareth from Egypt with Jesus a lad of twelve.

Five scenes were made in Nazareth, three on the shores of Galilee and for these eight scenes we traveled two hundred and forty miles over cornucous roads, under heaving sun, making the grueling trip in five days and breaking all previous records. I made the entire trip on horseback in twenty-five hours of actual riding time.

For this trip we took with us only our director, photographer, Ameen Zatoun our faithful guide and drago

Blazing the Trail

Conclusion

Back in Jerusalem we worked hard and fast to finish the production before the heat became unbearable.

Swifly scene followed scene, the marriage scene at Cana, the miracles, such as healing the leper and the blind man, the story of the Magdalene, Mary, Martha, the Master of Bethany, and the Last Supper, those last fatal hours leading up to the betrayal. Then came the greatest event of all, thelimned of that fateful journey to Calvary.

The day of the nerve-racking work on the Via Dolorosa dawned clear and hot. The soldiers detailed by the Governor of Jerusalem were out early and the streets of this main thoroughfare were roped off. High up in their windows out of range of the camera or on the stone arches which joined the narrow walls, crowds of natives looked down curiously on the strange procession, the centurions on horseback, the men carrying ladders and the big inscription, the shouting, the galloping of the horses, the music and the passion of the Nazarene —all this, and the tragic majestic figure in his royal robe of purple staggering beneath the cross. Three times a tortured man fell beneath weight and the process halted; once Mary the Morl turned to from a narrow wall where, in agony, she had been awaiting the morf, and he took a foil farewell to her; and once he took another glance by the convent of St. Veronica, where, credibly, she told us, a certain wealthy woman was watching all the action with wine to refresh him and a napkin to wipe the blood from his face.

The temple of the Convent of St. Veronica, watching a scene from an arch above, passage, threw themselves the floor weeping and sobbing. Their cries pierced the roar of the crowd below and as rest for a moment while camera was being set up near down the street, the Mother Superior came out with flack of wine which she insisted on Mr. Bland's drinking. The stirring similarity of the incidents impressed us and we gratefully accepted her invitation to sit within the convent walls and rest.

Mr. Bland, with Miss Lindo and entered, and there in life-size figure was a replica of the scene, each person exactly as he had been playing, was two-thirds, we had no luncheon and had to under the beating sun for many hours. We relaxed in the dim coolness and partook gratefully of the cakes and the little nun pressed upon us. She was a dear, bashful little thing with a smiling rosy face and she poured over us, putting us and chirruping to her native tongue greatly brought up over this strange adventure. One day of the Crucifixion we sent a carriage for her, and she stayed near me all day, sitting with her arms about a crooning to me, insisting that during my brief recess with my head in her lap. To her I was Mary.

The spot selected for the Crucifixion was some miles out of Jerusalem and in topography ideal. Fortunately we were endeavoring to do as close as possible to the identical locations, it naturally possible to enact the scene by the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

I TAKE up Mr. Bland's striking record of his work:

At last our journey was ended and the scene was strangely and weirdly impressive. All Jerusalem is coming out to the Hill of Traveil, and never shall I forg the aweful cries and moaning that greeted me as in midst of the Roman soldiery I stepped into the eyes of hearts of the waiting multitude.

From now to the end events moved swiftly. The cross was laid flat upon the ground and while I stood and watched, the head on which was written its mocking title, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews," was nailed to the great transverse arm of Christianity's symboL

Now the insignia was firmly fastened to crucified and the soldiers sewed and hurried the forward to throm on the cross. Of a sudden the solemn solemnity of the cross ceased. A great sob caught at their breath and seemed to freeze upon their lips so that the stood watchful and silent with the tragedy of all it.

Swiftly my hands were lashed and fastened to til cross. The legs were placed on the stakes rested on above the other, the right foot and leg being straight down upon the timber, with the left leg bent and fastened above it. Ropes were bound to the right had and right foot. So for a minute I lay while the men dre
As if they feared themselves the next stage of their dreadful task.

To the cross ropes were now fixed one at each end. These ropes were thrown over the long cross bar which I had mentioned and dropped into the grooves set therein. Then all of the men drew away and I was alone in the world. All consciousness of the crowd departed, all sense of time, all sense of life.

Suddenly the sharp voice of the executioner stabbed my ear. He called an order to the soldiers who now held the other ends of the ropes fastened to my hands. As he spoke the noose commenced to pull and the cross, awkwardly, like a thing with no sense of direction, began to rear itself. Strange and dim appeared the crowd, next to the cross which was now in the same position to which I had been lying, but gradually they came more properly into my eyes as the cross rose higher and higher.

When near the vertical it took a lurch forward and so came clear off the ground. For a time that seemed like eternity hung there swinging with never a finger to steady it, and a loathsome feeling of vertigo swam over me.

There was a rattling of ropes on one side then a similar noise upon the other, a little jockeying to the right and then to the left, and then suddenly with a crash the great symbol which was to carry the message of mercy throughout the ages dropped into the socket provided for it.

The shock was awful. I seemed emptied of life on the moment. Every bone in my body seemed trying to start through the skin. As the cross fell the writhings of the people started again, as if the sob which had been caught on their breath a few minutes before had been set free. And all the while the great screeching voice of God beat down upon me. I felt rather than knew what had been done, for I could not turn my head but re- marked staring out at the people.

My emotions at this moment! I must not, dare not, attempt to describe them. Even now I shudder when an echo of these thoughts which surged through my brain comes back to me.

Mary, the Mother, draws near with the others. Tenderly I lowered from the cross, tenderly she takes my head upon her lap. "It is finished." Like a man come back from the grave I went again unto my own place, and dazed with the wonderful beauty and horror of it all, I sat again and saw no man.

There was a moment of horror that hot June day on Calvary for those of us who watched, a moment of which fortunately he was unaware for his eyes were closed and his mind undoubtedly upon that real Martyr. This was when the cross slipped into the space dog race to receive it and, swaying unexpectedly forward, made for the cross beam firmly nailed on a level with his face. A cry of horror broke from us all and we went white, for it did not stop, which it did as if by a miracle with two inches of the beam, his face serene would have been smashed. I turn sick even now when I think of that dreadful moment.

It was a terrible day for another as Mr. Blanc, Mr. Olofsson was a wreck physically and emotionally, and we all felt a terrible reaction from the strain. As we drove silently back to Jerusalem we all realized thanks that the long dreaded day was over.

The close of our stay in Jerusalem was fast approaching. Our passage out of Asia had been engaged and there remained but two more scenes to be taken in that city, the procession on the Mount of Olives and the triumphant entry of Christ into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

But one lucky streak was about to break. We accomplished the scene on the mountain with the crowds singing hosannas and waving palm branches as they followed the as Jesus, with the fool running beside, to the Golden City.

ARRIVED there the picture-makers found that a launchy had broken loose. A mob of angry Arabs and Turks awaited them, muttering threats and demanding back-shred. They had learned that this was the last scene and an important one and that the hold-up had been well timed.

Mr. Olofsson was not to be bluffed and gave them back in anger what they sent; but they pressed closer and knives flashed.

It was a dangerous moment, for Ameen, Sid and George faced them alone within the gate while the rest of our boys were with the procession some distance away on the outside. Here were a hundred or more savages and furious Mohammedans who would dare to do anything. George grabbed his camera; and he, Sid and Ameen backed against the wall of Jerusalem, covering the threatening mob with the revolvers they always carried. Ameen whispered to his native kavass, who slipped through the crowd to the governor. That worthy gentleman immediately caused soldiers to be sent to the rescue, the angry muttering crowd was dispersed and the boys were continued to their hotel.

That night by appointment Ameen met with the leaders in the native quarter and listened to their confessions on which they would allow him to finish the picture. But the argument was ended by a messenger from the governor who strongly advised us to attempt no further work and to go to Jerusalem and the Bakhchosheh. His spies and police had reported that the feeling against us was spreading and, possibly, his orientals, he feared that a religious revival was imminent and that in a few days he might not be able to control the people.

We were amazed. For three months we had worked in close harmony with them, with never a controversy or word of argument. Their generous wages had been most welcome to them and we were settled to go that night of Jerusalem had in one way or another shared in the bakhchosheh. And now in a few hours what a change! Ameen too knew his Asiatics, and added his advice to the governor's. Reluctantly Olofsson acceded. The missing scene was not worth bloodshed and mutiny.

So we packed hurriedly for flight leaving the most of our effects as they were. Quietly and unobtrusively we shoveled the great clump of Jerusalem into the van and a few hours later we were in Jaffa. Here with genuine sadness we bade good-by to Ameen, who had helped us so wonderfully, had treated us with a good grace, and who was returning to the cypress trees of his native Lebanon. From Jaffa we sailed for Tripoli to meet a steamer for Tientsin. I was to sail alone for New York on the Marustesia, June twenty-first, so we settled down in London for a few days and here I wrote several scenarios for the Kalem players to produce during my six weeks absence in America.

During this brief rest I visited family in Kansas City, where I found that the fame of the El Kalemad had preceded me for our pictures were being released with a great advertising campaign. I was interviewed by reporters; and I spoke at picture theaters. I opened the Gene Costello exhibition in New York and I was entertained so enthusiastically that my return to Ireland with all the hard work involved looked peaceful by contrast.

Then came long days in the projection-room of the Kalem offices in New York where from the Mangert the Cross was run off during the week. A country boy, my elbow taking notes and nearby there were Mr. Long and Mr. Marion who paid fitting tribute to George Hollister for the beautiful photographic results. Not only was Hollister's work admirable but a single retake had been necessary and we now had to cut only a few thousand feet in the five-reel picture. These last facts cannot fail to impress studio men of today when thousands of dollars are wasted on retakes and often face the task of reducing a million feet of film to five thousand.

Another feature which will interest both tile writers and picture fan of today was the matter of captions. I felt the quotations from the Scripture the most in the first scenes, the most effective verses. But evidently Mr. Marion did not agree with me. His artistic sense was overcome by a desire to educate the public with material facts. I saw the picture, complete and ready for market, to find that he had supplemented my carefully chosen tales with bracketed information like this.

"They found the robe wrapped in a piece cloth and lying in the grave. (This manger is identical with that of Christ's time.)"

My six weeks were almost up when on the day before I was to sail I arrived at the office to find Mr. Marion in a great state of mind. He had just discovered that he could not copyright a picture picture title as such, instead it must be written out as the scenario of a play, in acts and scenes with a few lines of dialogue for each scene, also lighting effects and stages that he had secured an especially fine Stereographer and I must dictate this before I sailed at noon the next day! At three o'clock we sat down by the side of the projection-room and I began dictating, for the first time in my life, by the way. As I remembered it there were five acts and seventy-eight scenes, dialogue for each of course in Biblical language. We finished in four hours and the book, a fast-paced one, was published just as dictated and without corrections. But at the finish I was ready for a supplement.

However, eight days on the Atlantic remedied this. I slept and rested, never appearing on deck until we were lying outside Queenstown. [continued on page 142]
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Blazing the Trail

[Continued from page 19]

with the result that an entirely rebuilght person greeted Mrs. Hollister and Mr. Offott when they met. We spent the next six weeks in Ireland and Scotland taking the scenes of Murphy and Boucicaut three-reelers, also My Hidion Lassie, Lady Peggy's Fiasco and The Wives of St. John.

Then for the last time as the O'Kalan, we boarded the Atlantic bound for New York. As usual the party was in high spirits. Were we not going home allied to the highest appreciation and applauded ever bestowed on a motion picture company? Had we not achieved for our managers the triumph of their career?

I alone had doubts about our reception. Somewhere in the brief interlude spent in the Kalem projection-room I had sensed that all was not right. What lay behind the changed attitude of the Kalem officials I have never learned. Certainly there was no sanctity of our work but a certain shoddiness and carelessness had replaced the old cordial relations. I have often wondered whether this grew out of the high-handed manner in which we had gone ahead taking the religious picture of the Man of God portrayed in the flesh instead of as a light or a shadow as ordered by Mr. Marion. Or could it be possible that this little group of players had become more important in the picture industry than the firm under whose name they sailed seas and crossed deserts?

W H A T E V E R the cause of the cold disapproval which greeted us, we hoisted colors on the other side of their heads; for from the Manger to the Cross held the record as a money maker for many years; in fact I doubt if any picture even to this time has yielded such a profit or the amount of money realized for at a low estimate it has drawn the paltry cost of the production would bring an incredible smile to the face of a modern director. It was somewhere between twenty and twenty-five thousand dollars. The good management and economy of costs.

The film created a furor in both the United States and England. The reception of the press was all that we could desire. We had ministers send letters and telegrams of congratulation. Congratulatory messages were addressed to the picture, school holidays were declared in it, cities which enforced strict Sunday closing of theaters waived the law and granted permits for its exhibition, and every word record attendances prevailed.

In London also, where the preview was given to ministers in Albert Hall, a furor was raised. But there it was not all laudatory. In fact many papers took up arms against the "public exhibition for money," and condemned the American picture-makers.

The was waged especially hot in Dublin where an order was asked of the court to abate the furor, and where priests and clergy under examination as witnesses, expressed their disapproval. But all this of course means on the whole rose magnificently to its defense, and many wise replies were recorded in the court proceedings.

The production in London was closed down and was directly responsible for its enactment. But the newly appointed committee no longer gave the film and the picture...
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Blazing the Trail (continued from page 145)

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