



Unto a Place Called Gethsemane

Chapter IX

A Tribute

IN this chapter I shall confine myself to a few facts about the company, and stories about the film.

Gene Gauntier, who conceived the idea of making the film “From Manger to Cross” and portrayed the Virgin Mary in that film, was born in Texas. She influenced the American Biograph Company to engage the world-famous director, D. W. Griffith.

Miss Gauntier was leaving the Biograph studio to join the Kalem Company, but before her departure she earned the gratitude of Henry N. Marvin because of her plea to give Griffith a directorship.

After spending a year with the Biograph Company as its scenario editor she made a big success in the leading part in a film entitled “Texas” in 1907.

She accepted the position of leading lady with the Kalem Company and wrote the scenarios for the first film organisation to leave New York.

Following this European tour of film producing, Miss Gauntier proceeded to the Orient, where, under the direction of Sidney Olcott, the Kalem Company produced “From Manger to Cross.”

Miss Gauntier was married to Jack J. Clark in Jerusalem in 1912.

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Master Percy Dyer, who gave such an excellent and sympathetic performance of the boy Christ, was a charming boy, and a great favourite with the company.

Miss Alice Hollister, who portrayed the Magdalene, was a beautiful woman rather oriental in type. She has starred in many pictures since her visit to Palestine.

Miss Lindroth was a charming woman, who gave an excellent performance of Martha. I have often during the last few years seen her in pictures in this country.

Jack J. Clark, who played John, helped his wife, Gene Gauntier, with her company in New York for some years.

J. McGowan, who played Andrew, has, been a director of repute in America for some time now and has produced some fine pictures.

Robert Vignola, the Judas of the film, was a really magnificent actor. Before he portrayed Judas he had played a number of parts in a masterly fashion, and in the part of the great Betrayer he surpassed himself. I remember Mr. Gerald Maxwell, the well known critic, telling me about the Judas at OberAmmergau : how he got laughs from the crowd. He was very much impressed with Vignola's performance. Vignola is now one of the most important directors in America, and has made some fine pictures for the "Famous Players." His latest production "When Knighthood was in Flower," in which my friend, Mr. Lyn Harding, played Henry VIII, has lately been released for exhibition in this country. Incidentally, Vignola is a man of singular charm, and a favourite with everyone.

Mr. S. Baber, who played Lazarus in such an admirable manner, was well known in cinema circles, which he has now left. On his return from Palestine he was appointed London manager to the " Famous Players " films.

George Hollister, the camera man, who had a great reputation in America, where camera men command big salaries, was a splendid fellow, never ruffled and never overridden by Olcott in matters appertaining to his own department. If he thought that the light was not good nothing would get him to "take." He was chosen to photograph scenes in the Boer War in South Africa, and the Boxer campaign in China.

There are many other names I should like to mention, but unfortunately, they have escaped me, for all engaged on the making of the film gave of their best.

I salute all those old colleagues of mine, and wish them God-speed.

"From Manger to Cross" was the first picture in America to be accorded double pages in the Press. This tribute was genuine, and the publicity department of the Kalem Company did not take the initiative in this. I have by me many of those double pages now. The Hearst combine of newspapers had double pages in about twenty papers simultaneously all over the country and it was repeated till

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photographs of the seventy-eight episodes were exhausted. Over a thousand columns were written about the film in this country, most of them being in my possession.

Mr. S. L. Rothapfel, Manager of the Capitol in New York, the finest picture theatre in the world, told me when I was in New York in 1914 that his presentation of the film in Minneapolis had made him famous and secured his invitation to New York to take over the management of the Strand Theatre. He told me that thirty thousand paid for admission to see the film in three days. Mr. Rothapfel is the greatest exhibitor of motion pictures that has appeared up to the present.

In his book, entitled, "The Theatre of Science," Robert Grau, the well-known dramatic critic of New York, has a lot to say about what he terms "the epochal" film "From Manger to Cross." On the night of my arrival in New York Olcott brought me an autographed copy of this book; one of the many acts of thoughtfulness and courtesy that he is never tired of doing.

I could tell many extraordinary stories about the influence of this film, but the printer's devils are calling, and they will wait for no man, and so farewell.