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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 1912 when our director Sidney Olcott returned from London with the additional actors needed for the production, including Helen Lindroth of the southern Kalem company who was to play various female rôles, eight experienced young English players, Sidney Baber, who was cast for the rôle 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. Formerly leading man with Beerbohm Tree, he was an actor of fine quality, possessing a spirituality which eminently fitted him for the difficult rôle. I have never seen another man who could sustain the exaltation required for the rôle through days and weeks. When not engaged on a scene he did not mingle with the company but prowled alone among the quaint corners of the old city, absorbing its color, history and glamour. And once he donned the robes of the Man of Sorrow, he kept rigorously apart, rarely speaking, seemingly solitary and alone. To great extent this may be said of all the players in this drama. The tranquillity and beauty, the new spiritual quality which entered into their work was most impressive to those who watched them.

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 rôles and had to make a careful study of make-ups and costuming.

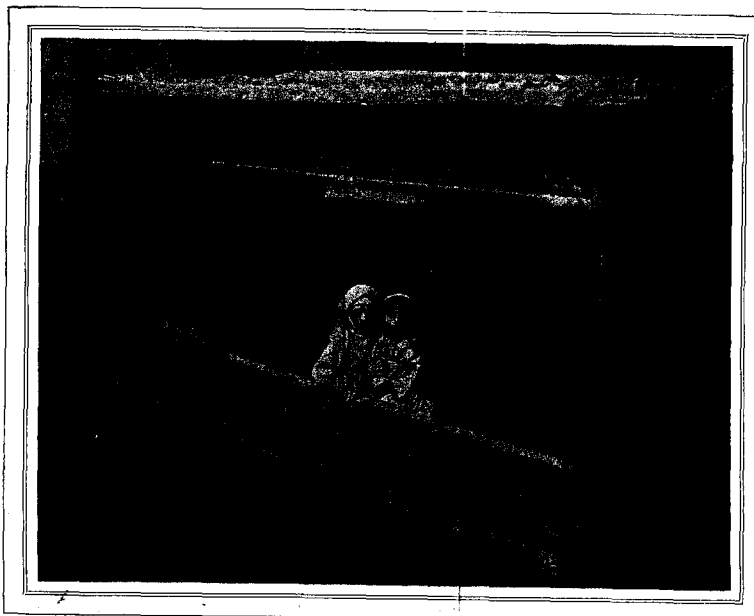
We started with the driving of the money changers from the temple, a critical moment, for here Mr. Bland made his first appearance before a moving picture camera. We fairly held our breath as we watched him but he had the good sense to forget that he was a popular London actor and to put himself unreservedly 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 tortuous roads, under broiling sun, making the grueling trip in five days and breaking all previous records. I made the entire trip on horseback in twenty-one hours of actual riding time.

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



Gene Gauntier as Mary
and little George Hol-
lister as the child Jesus



the big inscription, the shouting insulting rabble, the Marys and John the best loved, and the tragic mournful figure in his royal robe of purple staggering beneath the cross. Three times a tortured man fell beneath weight and the procession halted; once Mary the Mother, where, racked in agony, had been awaiting the mournful cortege, and he took a farewell of her; and once he halted close by the convent St. Veronica where, tradition tells us, a certain wealthy woman watched with wine to fresh him and a napkin to wipe the blood from his face.

The nuns of the Convent St. Veronica, watching the scene from an arch above the passage, threw themselves on the floor weeping and sobbing. Their cries pierced the tumult of the crowd below and as the camera was being set up far

down the street, the Mother Superior came out with a flask 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, Miss Lindroth and I entered, and there in life-size figure was a replica of the scene we had just been enacting. It was two-thirty, we had had no luncheon and had been 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 bustling little thing with a smiling rosy face and she hovered over us, patting us and chirruping in her native tongue greatly wrought up over this strange adventure. On the day of the Crucifixion we sent a carriage for her, and she stayed near me all day, sitting with her arms about me, crooning to me, insisting that during my brief rest lie 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 was ideal. For though we were endeavoring to adhere as closely as possible to the identical locations, it was naturally impossible to enact the scene by the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

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

"At last our journey was ended and the scene was strangely and weirdly impressive. All Jerusalem had come out to the Hill of Travail, and never shall I forget the awful cries and moaning that greeted me as in the 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 board on which was written the mocking title, 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews' was nailed to the great transverse arm of Christianity symbol.

"Now the insignia was firmly fastened to the crucifix and the soldiery seized and hurried me forward to throw me on the cross. Of a sudden the wailing of the crowd ceased. A great sob caught at their breath and seemed to freeze upon their lips so that they stood watchful and silent with the tragedy of it all.

"Swiftly my hands were lashed and fastened to the cross. The legs were placed so that the ankles 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 tightly round my chest. So for quite a minute I lay while the men drew

Blazing the Trail

Conclusion

man, Mr. Bland, the boy Jesus and five men to play the necessary rôles. Our equipment consisted of two three-seated covered wagons, drawn by three shaggy ponies hitched abreast, and three riding horses, one for me, one for Ameen and one used in turn by the other men when the crowded conditions in the wagons became unbearable. To the intolerable heat of the sun was added the misery of a strong east wind. But not even this daunted the spirit of the Kalem players as they drank in the weird beauty of the journey and trod historic ground.

BACK in Jerusalem we worked hard and fast to finish the production before the heat became unendurable. Swiftly scene followed scene, the marriage scene at Cana, the miracles, such as healing the lepers and the blind man, the stoning 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, the filming 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



Via Dolorosa

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 big cross bar which I have mentioned and dropped into the grooves set thereon. 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 centurion stabbed my ears. He called an order to the soldiers who now held the other ends of the ropes fastened to my hands. As he spoke the men 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, seen first from the horizontal position in 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 it hung there swinging with never a finger to steady it, and a loathsome feeling of vertigo swam over me.

"There was a rattle 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 empty of life on the moment. Every bone in my body seemed trying to start through the skin. As the cross fell the wailing 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 scorching eye of God beat down upon me. I felt rather than knew what had been done, for I could not turn my head but remained staring out at the people.

"My emotions at this moment? I must not, dare not, attempt to define 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 am 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 apart 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 dug 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 had it not stopped, which it did as if by a miracle and within two inches of the beam, his face and eyes would have been smashed. I turn sick even now when I think of that dreadful moment.

It was a terrible day for others than Mr. Bland. Mr. Olcott was a wreck physically and emotionally, and we all felt a terrific reaction from the strain. As we drove silently back to Jerusalem we all rendered 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 triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

But our 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 ass bearing Jesus, with the foal running beside, to the Golden City.

ARRIVED there the picture-makers found that anarchy had broken loose. A mob of angry Arabs and Turks awaited them, muttering threats and demanding baksheesh. They had learned that this was the last scene and an important one, and their hold-up had been well timed. Mr. Olcott 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 avaricious and murderous 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 our people were conducted to their hotel.

That night by appointment Ameen met with the leaders in the native quarter and listened to their conditions on which they would allow him to finish the



Old Jerusalem was as it had always been

picture. But the argument was ended by a message from the governor who strongly advised us to attempt no further work and to leave Jerusalem as quickly as possible. His spies and police had reported that the wave of feeling against us was spreading and, knowing his orientals, he feared that a religious revolt 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 it seemed to us that half of Jerusalem had in one way or another shared in the baksheesh. And now in a few hours what a change! Ameen too knew his Asiatics, and added his advice to the governor's. Reluctantly Olcott 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 shook the dust of Jerusalem from our feet and a few hours later were in Jaffa. Here with genuine sadness we bade good-by to Ameen, who had helped us so wonderfully, had proved such a good friend and guide, and who was returning to the cypress trees of his native Lebanon.

From Jaffa we sailed for Alexandria where we changed to a steamship for Trieste. I was to sail alone for New York on the *Mauritania*, 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 trip I visited my family in Kansas City, where I found that the fame of the El Kalem had preceded me for our oriental pictures were being released with a great advertising campaign. I was interviewed by reporters; and I spoke at picture theaters. I opened the Gene Gauntier Theater; and I was entertained so enthusiastically that my return to Ireland with all the hard work it involved looked peaceful by contrast.

Then came long days in the tiny projection-room of the Kalem offices in New York where From the Manger to the Cross was run off dozens of times. A cutting man sat at my elbow taking notes and nearby 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 not a single retake had been necessary and we now had to cut only a few thousand feet in the five-reel picture. These two facts cannot fail to impress studio men of today when thousands of dollars are wasted on retakes and when cutters often face the task of reducing a million feet of film to five thousand.

ANOTHER feature which will interest both title writers and picture fans of today was the matter of captions. I felt that quotations from the Bible were both simple and adequate, preserving the spirit of the picture. I searched the Scriptures diligently for 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. What was my horror when I saw the picture, complete and ready for market, to find that he had supplemented my carefully chosen titles with bracketed information like this:

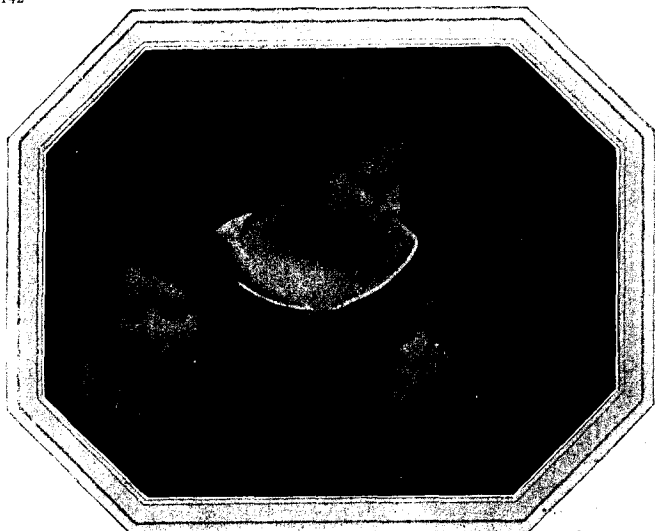
"They found the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in the manger. (This manger is identical with those of Christ's time.)"

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 motion picture film 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 stage directions. He had secured an especially fine stenographer and I must dictate this before I sailed at noon the next day! At three o'clock we sat down side by side in the projection-room and I began dictating, for the first time in my life, by the way. As I remember 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 fair-sized one, was published just as dictated and without corrections. But at the finish I was ready for a sanitarium.

However, eight days on the *Adriatic* remedied this. I slept and rested, never appearing on deck until we were lying outside Queenstown, [CONTINUED ON PAGE 121]



From the Manger to the Cross was the first picture of the life of Christ to be made in the Holy Land



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Why All the Mystery?

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 140]

The problem is so ved in the gear box or transmission. A gear is a wheel with a lot of teeth on it; you use the principle in your egg beater. There a big round wheel drives two smaller ones; that's the whole principle of the gears.

IF, using this tooth idea, we connect a small gear to a big one, the small one will go around several times while the big gear revolves once. That's the way we start our car in "low" gear. The small gear, hitched to the engine, goes around about three times to make the large gear, which drives our car, turn once. That lets the engine go fast while the car moves slowly. And laws of leverage, which do not really interest us, provide that the gear which turns most slowly shall turn with the most power.

This gives us the principle of the gear system: the more speed the less power, the more power the less speed. In first gear your car goes slowly, but pulls strongly; in high gear it goes fast, but will not pull against as much resistance. We will not try to take steep hills in high, but will connect our motor to our wheels in the manner

which gives the most power at the sacrifice of speed. We will not try to drive very slowly in high, because our motor doesn't do its best work until it is running rather rapidly.

This explains the other reason for having a clutch. If we are going to jam these toothed gears together, we must do it while they are standing still. That's why our clutch must be disengaged when we want to shift gears. That horrible racket you sometimes make means that you are pushing together these toothed gears while they are spinning around—perhaps in opposite directions. The remedy is to disconnect them from the motor with the clutch and give them a chance to stop. Naturally you don't step on the gas while doing this.

Think these things over while you are driving; it will be easier to "push this" and "pull that" if you know what really happens—not merely the result of the happening. You are not being urged to make repairs when things go wrong, but you should understand in a general way what has happened when your car stops. And if you really understand your car it won't stop as often as it does under the "push-pull" system.

Blazing the Trail

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19]

with the result that an entirely rebuilt person greeted Mrs. Hollister and Mr. Olcott when they met me.

We spent the next six weeks in Ireland and Scotland taking the popular Murphy and Boicault three-reelers; also My Hielan' Lassie, Lady Peggy's Escape and The Wives of Jamestown.

Then for the last time as the O'Kalems, we boarded the *Adriatic* bound for New York. As usual the party was in high spirits. Were we not going home and to the highest appreciation and applause 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. Somehow 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 criticism of our work but a certain aloofness and coldness 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 with 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?

WHATEVER the cause of the cold disapproval which greeted us, we heaped coals of fire on their heads; for from the Manager 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 on the amount invested, for at a low estimate it has drawn thirty times the cost of production. And the paltry cost of the production would bring an incredulous smile

to the face of a modern director. It was somewhere between twenty and twenty-five thousand dollars. The good management and economy of our director Mr. Olcott and our photographer Mr. Hollister were largely responsible for this low production cost, but I must not forget the hard work, the loyalty of the players who contributed carpentry, painting, decorating and costume-making. The picture was a heavy factor in making millionaires of the Kalem officials; and even now as I write, fifteen years after it was made, it is still in demand by churches and religious societies.

THE film created a furore in both the United States and England. The reception by the press was all that we could desire. Well-known ministers sent letters and telegrams of congratulation. Congregations were advised to see the picture, school holidays were declared for it, cities which enforced strict Sunday closing of theaters waived the law and granted permits for its exhibition, and everywhere record attendances prevailed.

In London also, where the preview was given to ministers in Albert Hall, a furore 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 picturemakers.

The war waged especially hot in Dublin where an order was asked of the court to restrain the showing, and where priests and clergy under examination as witnesses, expressed their views. The Catholic priests on the whole rose magnificently to its defense, and many witty replies are recorded in the court proceedings.

The production in London roused the cry for film censorship and was directly responsible for its enactment. But the newly appointed censor made no objection to our film and the picture

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 146]

No mop water coarsens hands that mop this way



SURELY you have wanted to own a Betty Bright Self-wringing Mop. To protect your hands as other modern women do.

With just a few turns of the handle grip this clever mop is wrung! Your hands never touch the dirty mop water. It's so much easier . . . nicer.

Why deny yourself a Betty Bright on another mopping day? You will find one at a local dealer's; the price is just \$1. Renewal cloths, which make excellent dry floor polishers, 50c.

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NOTE: Betty Bright Resealable Dust Mop, \$1.50; Betty Bright polish for lacquer, enamel, varnish, 50c, 60c. At dealer's or sent postpaid on request.

Woman's Home Companion March 1929

Blazing the Trail

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 142]

ture ran, with occasional interruptions, for eight months at Queen's Hall.

For us, the players who had toiled and suffered that this picture might be born, the great event of the Kalem publicity campaign was the first preview on record in the industry, the showing of our work in the auditorium of the John Wanamaker store in New York City, which occurred early in November, 1912.

A MUSICAL score had been prepared and an excellent quartet secured, which with the pipe organ of the auditorium provided suitable music. Invitations were sent to all the ministers and priests within a reasonable radius of New York and a minister volunteered to give an introduction.

The Kalem Players sat close together in a center balcony box, tense with anxiety. Only Mr. Olcott and I had seen the picture. And how could any of us foretell the reaction of the public to our work?

The five reels were run off amid intense silence. Then as the last reel began to flash across the screen—the triumphant procession on the Mount of Olives, the Last Supper, Gethsemane, the betrayal, the trial and the cruel march to Golgotha—as the agony of the Crucifixion was depicted stifled sobs could be heard. I found my own throat choke and the tears come unrestrained. I forgot my own part in the film. Indeed it all seemed unfamiliar; for the scenes clutched at the imagination, and in the quiet simplicity and dignity of their sadness they were real and not merely scenes enacted by motion picture players.

The story ended and the lights gradually came on, but still there was no sound for the space of several minutes; and then without applause but with a silence which was the greatest tribute of all, the audience quietly dispersed. Our little hour of triumph was over!

And thus ended the reign of the O'Kalems and the El Kalems. The attitude of the officials toward the players was as unmistakable as it was inexplicable. During the past year or so the names of cast, director and author had appeared on the more im-

portant films. Now we learned among other disconcerting facts that from the Manger to the Cross was to be distributed without our names. The Kalem Company alone would profit by our work. No credit to the players would be given on film or in publicity.

Sidney Olcott handed in his resignation which was promptly accepted. Next Jack Clark, Allen Farnham and I, having made plans to form our own producing company, gave our notices. They were accepted with alacrity and we were thanked, but behind the apparent cordiality we had the feeling that the Kalem Company was relieved by our action.

This too was the end of an epoch in thing-making. The old order of things passed. During our ten months abroad the trust had been beaten in the higher courts and Independents had sprung up all over the land, California, Hollywood, Santa Monica, Glendale, Long Beach and other towns up and down the Pacific coast were humming with activity. Multiple reels were becoming numerous and "feature pictures" were in demand. Thousands were being spent where hundreds had sufficed before. New stars were springing up; Melies and Vitagraph, inspired by the Kalem successes abroad, were preparing to send companies around the world and to the South Seas. The trail had been blazed and from now on there were guideposts and landmarks to point the way.

SO our family of pathfinders disbanded, as pioneers do when the long trail is ended, and each one departed into a new environment to build for himself. As settlers in a new land, some were submerged while others rode blithely on the top crest of popularity. Life never stands still, nor would we wish to have it. Suffice for us the memories of that epoch in our lives, with its joys and its sorrows, its thrills and adventures, its affections and achievements. We would not live through them again, nor yet would we desire to part with the memories of those days when we were blazing the trail.

[THE END]

Don't Be So Sure

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21]

today. And wouldn't it be splendid, Mr. Gunter, if he could make you all well again? Just think! Only I suppose Dr. Tuttle would—"

"Hang Tuttle! You send this new man around. Hear? Right away."

Miss Blair said meekly that she would do her best. Oh, these lily maids when they're meek!

Presently young Reuben Mead was being told casually, as if she had chanced to remember, that the town's wealthiest invalid wished to see him as soon as he could get around there.

"Not—not old Gunter?" he gasped.

She nodded. "The Honorable Thaddeus. Lives in that big brick house with the white portico and tall pillars, you know."

"You're sure it's me he wants? Professionally?"

"That is what he said."

"But—but how—why—" He spread his hands in vague query.

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