

even then he had to limp through the first performance."

"BUT THESE," I objected, "are not real questions of art."

"Same thing," he cut me off positively. "Why, I tell you the most artistic of 'em would stand a poor show without the 'grips' having the real line on art. I remember when the 'Divine Sarah' first came over here. Light effects were n't so easy to get in those days as they are now and Bernhardt's figure and complexion had to be lit up just right or she would have made a picture of bony structure and impressionistic tints that no woman artist would ever stand for. We had an electrician named Kelly who spoke about as much French as Sarah did English, so she put it over to him in a pantomime that made her latest stunt in moving pictures look like a performance of Dago marionettes. Well, Kelly worked those lights about four hours, and believe me he got Sarah toned into the picture so that she looked beautiful from the front.

"Now with Lillian Russell I remember that we had to sit hard on her artistic temperament. Lillian was a good fellow and we all liked her and had stuck to her through several theatrical seasons and a few matrimonial ventures. Every time somebody led Lillian to the altar we all chipped in for our sacrifice and were there with a present. But Lillian was a great one to keep the chips flying and the block we were cutting was our salaries. Just about the time we thought she was settled down and we were settled up, why her artistic temperament would discover her mistake and start to rectify it, and we'd have to organize a new committee on ways and means. Finally, at the last announcement we all quit in a body. Well, the manager almost threw a fit and wanted to know what the matter was. We had to tell him the pressure was too strong. We could n't keep up with Lillian's ambition for presents."

"You're wandering into private matters," I protested.

"Nothing Lillian Russell does is a private matter," the Old Man answered. "But if we could n't put her on the right track I'll tell you about a stage carpenter that railroaded a whole production to safety all by himself. Brady had cleaned up big money in the cities with that old English melodrama 'After Dark' and then sent out a Number Thirteen company to tap the 'tanks.' They got into a little one night stand with S R O out before they hit the place, but the scenery was side-tracked somewhere and the manager faced a refund.

"Bill," he gasped to the carpenter, "there's the tunnel scene of the underground railroad. It's the hit of the piece, and we can't fake that."

"Sol," says Bill, "you go on out front and don't bother me when I'm busy or I'll quit without notice," and Sol sneaked out to die in the box office.

"WHEN the underground scene came, he could n't stand it no longer and went out into the foyer. Every light was out when the curtain rose and when the train materialized out of the darkness and roared and clanked across the stage with the house going wild Sol never stopped to count the curtain calls, but rushed back to solve the miracle.

"When he got there the carpenter was mopping off his face with one hand while he unwound a lot of chains from himself with the other. He'd set the tunnel with a prison back drop, put out all the lights, hung himself with all the hardware about the place and with a reflector lantern in each hand had choo-chooed across as the lightning express and got by with it.

"Of course, in this country the actors are getting wise that they're not the whole show; but in England

they won't even use the same entrance with a stage hand."

"Oh, you've been to England then?" I asked.

The Old Man nodded slowly.

"Sir Henry Irving was putting on 'Becket' when I dropped in to visit. The piece is laid in the Norman period before doors were in vogue and in one set Sir Henry was having trouble with the hangings that took the place of the doors. 'We'll have them a warm red,' he says; then he shakes his head: 'No, I think blue's more harmonizing;' then after a minute's thought: 'Or perhaps a soft brown will be more effective. What do you think?' and he turned to the stage carpenter.

"If you'll pardon my suggestion, sir," he answers, "I'd have them tapestry, sir."

"Why tapestry?" asks Sir Henry.

"Because tapestry was what they used at that period."

"Well, Sir Henry looked it up and found that he was right. "While I was there Irving put on 'Don Quixote' and in one scene he had to sit, clad in armor, upon his wobbly steed and deliver a long speech. As Sir Henry was n't exactly a rough rider, when the property man brought him the horse he wanted particularly to know if he'd stand.

"Ho, yes, sir!" 'Props' assures him.

"You must be very certain," persists Sir Henry, "for if I were to be thrown with these spikes on me knees and elbows there might be some question of my rising to the occasion."

"No fear o' that, sir," says 'Props'; "this 'orse 'as 'ad experience."

"Indeed, in the profession?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Beerbohm Tree used 'im, sir, an' durin' a long speech which 'e delivered from 'is back the 'orse always went to sleep, sir."

"Indeed," says Sir Henry, who loves Beerbohm Tree like a chorus lady does the prima donna. Then he looks the horse over affectionately: "What an intelligent animal, and how discerning a critic."

"THE Englishman we inspired with the greatest respect for American 'grips' was Sir John Hare. He came over here with a poor opinion of stage hands, which we did n't hold against him as it was the fault of his early training and Sir John was really a good fellow, and a fine gentleman.

"It seems quite remarkable to me, you know," he says to the manager one day, "the intelligence of the American stage mechanic. He seems actually to have a recognized place in society."

"He certainly has," the manager agrees, "why you're liable to see them making a set in evening dress any time."

"Sir John smiles kind of knowingly. "Come now, you can't chaff me quite that far even if I am an Englishman," he chuckles and walks off to his dressing room.

"But the manager knew the boys were all going to a ball the next night after the show. As it was an easy one to work, they all wore their evening clothes under their overalls so as to be able to make a quick get away after the last strike. The final scene was a box set, so the manager came around and asked us if we would n't take off our overalls and make it in full dress. Knowing he had some sort of a josh up his sleeve, we did. When we were almost set, here he comes dragging Sir John into the wings.

"Sir John stood pop-eyed a minute. "Most extraordinary!" he gasps. "Would not have believed it if I had n't seen it with me own eyes."

"And that's just the way with the people out in front," the Old Door Keeper concluded, looking regretfully at the long ash that marked my burnt offering at a new shrine. "All they see is the actor in the picture and not the men who put him there. But they're getting over it now, thanks to Belasco,—and what's he but the 'King of Grips?'"

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