



Monte Blue makes *Danton* in "Orphans of the Storm" a lovable and powerful figure. Vanished is the Monte Blue of old, the simple-hearted rollicking young cowboy. In his place we have Monte Blue, accomplished character actor, another great credit to D. W. Griffith, under whose direction so many actors have found their true metier.

This is one of the poignant scenes that Monte Blue plays with Lillian Gish in "Orphans of the Storm," which brings him many compliments. He would rather be praised for some of his other scenes. And the reason? He explains that in the story on the opposite page.



An Old Friend Becomes an Idol

Long a popular favorite, "Orphans of the Storm" has focused the spotlight of public interest on Monte Blue.

By Helen Klumph

UNDER the great elms near the Griffith studio, where the sloping lawns had been transformed into the gardens of Bellaire, a company of white-wigged and silk-clad French aristocrats, grouped about on the marble balustrades and around the playing fountains, stood pressing forward, tense with simulated excitement, as the young *Chevalier*, with a final thrust of his sword, pierced the leering *Marquis de Presle* to the heart, and catching the almost fainting Lillian Gish, ran with her up the steps—and to the end of the scene.

While this was going on there stood, unnoticed, in the background, out of range of the cameras, a tall, quiet figure, gaunt and plain—strangely out of place among the dazzling courtiers—whose face gave no hint of the tumult of genuine excitement that was making his heart pound beneath his long plebeian French coat until he almost felt that those around him could hear it.

"Monte," Mr. Griffith had said to him a few days before, "I've got my picture practically finished. That is, I've taken the picture of 'The Two Orphans.' As it stands it would make a fair picture." Then, with earnest intensity, "But I want to build it into something much bigger and finer. And I can't do that unless I can get the right man to play the part of *Danton*—who can help me bring into it the struggle between *Danton* and *Robespierre*—who can carry that great epoch-making phase of the French Revolution. I've tried out almost every actor I can think of and I'm not satisfied yet. I want to ask you if you will see what you can do for me." And Monte Blue, the man whom Griffith, a few years before, had rescued from a pick-and-shovel job and had given his first real chance in pictures, gulped, and said he'd be mighty glad to try.

Now he knew that the time had come when he must show whether or not he possessed the power to lift that huge undertaking from the ranks of "a pretty fair picture" and supply the character needed to make it another Griffith masterpiece. A few minutes later the summons came and he stood alone on the marble balustrade, now the center of the interested, expectant group, all ready to go through the test bit of acting which Mr. Griffith had previously explained to him.

With the cameras only six feet away, that every trace of feeling might be registered in close-ups, his face suddenly became transfused with a look of anguish, as the signal was given to begin, and the cameras began to click.

"You must let me pass!" he cried. "I am on an errand of mercy," and as his expression changed again into one of frenzied determination, he broke past an imaginary barrier, and dashed forward, stopping, when past the cameras, to recover himself and wipe the per-

spiration from his brow. Twice the little scene was repeated, and then—

"Very good," said a deep voice that carried above the patter of applause from the members of the company, as D. W. stepped forward and shook hands with him warmly. "Thank you very much, Mr. Blue." And Monte knew that whether, like the others, he had failed, or whether it would be decided upon seeing the developed film that he would do—at least he had had his chance and had done his best.

YEARS OF PREPARATION

lead up to the masterly playing of so great a rôle as that of *Danton* in "Orphans of the Storm." Perhaps when you heard that Monte Blue had made a great success of the part you recalled only one or two pictures he had been in, and perhaps you wondered if that was all the experience he had.

Far from it! Like almost all the other first-rate actors on the screen Monte Blue has had long, heartbreaking struggles on his way to fame. Recently, he played opposite Mae Murray in "Peacock Alley;" before that in "The Affairs of Anatol." Before that he was in "The Kentuckians," "The Perfect Crime," "Too Much Johnson," "Everywoman," "The Thirteenth Commandment," two of Mary Pickford's, two of Douglas Fairbanks' and any number of others.

His career is one more refutation of the fable that picture stars are made overnight.

As to what followed no doubt you know; how as *Danton* he proved so amazingly fine that Mr. Griffith kept adding and adding to the story, making his part more important; how at the end of a few weeks he was—next to the master director himself—the idol of the Griffith studio; and how finally, on the opening night, when the picture was first publicly shown, he flashed on the screen in one of the most intense and winning characterizations that has ever been seen, bringing from the audience applause and cheers second only to what was accorded the Gish sisters themselves, and you can imagine what they got.

It was Monte Blue's night—in one way more his than Mr. Griffith's or the Gish sisters', for they have had so many big opportunities in the past and have lived up to them so magnificently, that one is no longer surprised at their achievements. But it was Monte Blue's first really big chance, and he swept through it gloriously.

It was the night after the New York opening of "Orphans of the Storm" over one of the little side tables at the Algonquin that I asked him to tell me about this Monte Blue person, where he came from and how he ever happened to become an actor. And he obliged, pausing every little while to blush furiously and protest, "Oh, let's talk about something else; it's terrible talking about me all the time." And when the little old lady at the next table said in a hoarse whisper that could have been heard across the room, "I *will* stare at him; guess I paid two dollars and twenty cents to do it last night," I was afraid that he would balk at the whole proceeding, but he never even heard her.

"You know," he was saying, in that boyish, half-embarrassed way of his, "I almost sort of wish that folks wouldn't keep telling me how they liked my acting in that scene where *Danton* realizes he's in love with *Henriette*, where he says good-by to her. Gee, that wasn't acting! Why, when I looked down and saw those beautiful eyes of Lillian Gish looking up into mine—you know, you wouldn't have to be an actor to—well, you know what I mean."

And from that minute I liked him even better than I ever had before.

"But what scene would you like to have people praise you for?" I asked when the complexities of ordering our dinner were out of the way. He tried to evade answering that by telling me that he felt foolish talking about himself, but I kept at it until I got an answer.

"The scene where I speak before the Tribunal—you know where the subtitle comes—'The world's greatest orator delivering his greatest oration.' Whew—but we worked over that! It's awfully hard to put over speech-making in pictures. And that reminds me of the day Mr. Griffith gave me my start.

"He put me in pictures back in nineteen fifteen, sort of by accident," he went on. "He was supervising Christy Cabanne's first production—'The Absentee,' it was—and they were making a mob scene where some I. W. W.'s were supposed to incite a crowd of strikers to riot. Mr. Griffith said Cabanne didn't have enough extras to make the scene effective so he went around the studio and rounded up all of us who were working there and put us in the picture. One man was supposed to stand up on a soapbox and make a speech urging us on to violence but Mr. Griffith wasn't satisfied with the way he did it, so he gave every one else a trial and when most of the actors had fallen down on it he told me I could try if I wanted to. It just happened that up in the lumber camps where I'd worked a while before I'd heard a lot of I. W. W. speeches, and naturally I remembered some of the talk and the way they got it off and so when I got up on the box I sailed in and urged that crowd on like fury. Well, I got the part and when I finished Mr. Griffith accused me of being a real I. W. W.; said I'd done it too well for just pretending. I had quite a job to convince him that he was mistaken.

"They put me on a two-day guarantee then—that means I was to draw two days' salary, ten dollars, every week whether there was any work for me or not, and if I worked more than two days I was to be paid extra for it at the regular rate. Say, I was tickled! I hadn't been working in that studio by accident; no, sir, I was there with every intention of busting into the acting game.

"People talk about it being hard to break into the movies nowadays, but say, it wasn't any cinch years ago. I hung around the studios for weeks until I got on to the fact that the assistant casting directors had their favorites and always hired them whether they were the right type or not. But I kept thinking if I could only get inside that gate, somehow I'd break into acting. So one day when a man came rushing out and said he wanted some men to help the studio carpenters, I jumped at the chance. And don't tell the fans that I reluctantly consented to do menial labor just in order to see the inside of the studio. That wasn't the reason. The dollar and a half a day looked mighty good to me! And I'd gladly swing a pickax again if I needed the money.

"After a while they started me playing heavies and for months I just about lived in a long, black beard, and the dastardly deeds I've done to some of our best heroines would make your hair curl. The rest of the time I was a stunt man. I doubled for the leading men in all the most dangerous stunts, and when I think of the weeks that I lay in the hospital recovering from injuries I got I wonder why I ever did it. I even fractured my skull and for a while my eyes were crossed, but a good surgeon fixed that up.

"Finally Mr. De Mille rescued me from playing villains and doing stunts. I was standing around back of him watching him direct a scene for 'We Can't Have Everything'—I never left the studio so long as there

was any one to watch—and he kiddingly asked me if I was too proud to play extra.

"Course I wasn't, so he put me in a hospital scene where I was supposed to be a soldier with his arms shot off. In going through the scene Kathlyn Williams worked up a wonderful bit of business—she called attention to my not having any arms by lighting a cigarette for me, and then she looked at a picture of my sweetheart and looked at me and our eyes filled with tears.

"That finished my career as a heavy; from then on I was 'sympathy' man, the poor boob with a heart of gold. It is the sort of part I like to play. I don't care anything about trick clothes and fancy settings and this society stuff. When you play with wonderful people as I've done the chief thing in acting is playing up to the other fellow. You can't be thinking of yourself—you've just got to respond to every bit of feeling the other fellow puts into the scene."

He drawled on easily, his self-consciousness dropping away from him as he talked of the people who had befriended him and of his work. But he *would* lose interest in talking of himself and wander away to other things. He ignored my questions and asked, "Don't you think Lon Chaney's a marvel?"

And that tells you perhaps better than anything else could what his ambitions are. They are all toward doing big characters on the screen, not characters such as Lon Chaney does, for Monte Blue's great gift is the opposite of Chaney's repellent fascination; it is the gift of warm-hearted sympathy, a gift of reaching out from the screen and enlisting your unquestioning support.

There is nothing adroit, nothing subtle, nothing sly about Monte Blue. He is just big and substantial, and if you were a stranger lost in New York you would probably go right up to him and tell him your troubles.

A man with less than his six feet two of rangy strength wouldn't dare to be so sweet in his manner, or so graceful in his movements. Mr. Griffith says that he has more bodily grace than any one else of his size on the screen—and by that he doesn't mean the grace of a dancer, he means the expressive grace of an animal. But, incidentally, Monte Blue *is* a wonderful dancer.

He used to be a great kidder, and he danced around the studio a lot, but a change has come over him. The big things that he has done have given him a tremendous sense of responsibility toward the achievements he is capable of. He has three great idols—Mr. Griffith as a director (and Monte Blue wants to be a director one of these days, by the way), Lon Chaney as an actor, and—for all other things—Abraham Lincoln.

His Lincoln-worship dates from the time when he was down south making "The Kentuckians." His was the leading rôle, and yet the director told him very little about the part. "You're a boy from the mountains who gets educated, goes to the Legislature and sort of tears things up," was about all the director gave him to work on. Monte Blue wandered about the town where they were working—it was Frankfort, Kentucky—worrying about his part until he came to a monument of Lincoln. There he stopped and the great idea came to him of making this mountain-boy he played a counterpart of Lincoln. So, it was the soul of Lincoln, as he saw it, that he put into that part.

If this were fiction, it would naturally follow that in that part he created a furor. He did nothing of the sort. When that picture played on Broadway—and played to not particularly crowded houses, one film man met another film man on Broadway and remarked, "What's the matter with the public? There's Monte Blue, one of the finest and most likable actors on the



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An Old Friend Becomes an Idol

Continued from page 84

screen and he doesn't draw half the people this society stuff does. Why, some of his pictures are almost failures."

He was right then, but the public is beginning to change. Monte Blue's popularity began to jump when he played the lead in Alan Dwan's "The Perfect Crime;" his part stood out through the tawdry artificiality of "The Affairs of Anatol," and he brought a fine note of sincerity to Mae Murray's "Peacock Alley."

You can find out more about Monte Blue from the people who have played with him than you can from himself. He is a big man who rather bowls you over with his sincerity and earnestness—but he simply cannot display his inmost thoughts and characteristics to a prying interviewer. He would never tell, for instance, of the little theater in Thomasville, Georgia, that was about to close because of poor business when Monte Blue and the rest of the company making "My Old Kentucky Home" arrived on the scene a few weeks ago. He looked up the theater owner, got him to advertise in all the papers of the locality, and marshaled all the principals in his company to make personal appearances at the theater one night. The theater which was supposed to hold seven hundred and fifty people, held one thousand that night, and there was a thousand dollars in the treasury. And Thomasville now thanks Monte Blue that they still have movies.

No interview with Monte Blue would be complete without his most-quoted remark.

"Have you ever been on the stage?" interviewers are always asking him.

"Sure," he replies as though glad at last to be on familiar ground. "Why I drove the stage from Opal to Big Pine, Wyoming."

And I know of no better conclusion than the farewell Mr. Griffith gave him when he had finished his part in "Orphans of the Storm."

Mounting to the platform of the guillotine, Mr. Griffith took up his megaphone and called to the hundreds of actors and workmen gathered on the set. "Let's give three big cheers for Monte Blue, one hundred per cent man and a good all-round actor. And folks"—he raised one arm to hold back the great demonstration which he knew was all ready to burst forth, just long enough to add, "you know that's some combination!"



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