

BURLESQUE—BY AN EX-BURLESQUER

George Sidney, Translated to The Legitimate, Talks on Early Art Struggles

Today the name of George Sidney means just one thing to Philadelphians—"Busy Iszy." It means burlesque. Tuesday



GEORGE SIDNEY

morning, when the town has seen his work in "The Show Shop," it will mean something very different. At any rate that was the experience of New York when Mr. Sidney suddenly blossomed into Broadway fame as the perfect portrayer of the typical theatrical manager last year.

When Mr. Sidney made his hit he told some curious New Yorkers a little

of what he thinks made burlesque a great school for him and for others. Here is what he said:

"You can laugh if you want to, but I found out something while I was playing around in burlesque companies that proved to me that the big cities are going to produce the greatest actors the world has ever known within the next few generations.

"And I'll tell you why," he continued. "It's because these cities aren't melting pots and never were and never will be—they're open markets for the world. They're the one common meeting ground of all races and all nationalities, and they come there and keep up to concert pitch partly for commercial reasons and partly for sentimental ones, and end by producing the very best that all races are capable of.

"If you ask me what all this has got to do with burlesque, I'll tell you that you can learn pretty nearly everything in a little burlesque company, staying together year in and year out, made up of all sorts of people, and being acted on by pretty nearly all sorts of outside conditions. A burlesque company is the world in a nutshell.

"You see I'm a Jew, and I began by playing a caricature of a Jew Busy Iszy. I was young and pretty frisky, and I stood in danger of overplaying Iszy—making him a noisy burlesque of himself. Two things held me back. The first was that I didn't want to offend my own people; I was afraid they would stay away from the theatre and I'd be a failure. And the second reason is a little more creditable to me, though it's just as true—I had a feeling that I didn't want to misrepresent my people to all the others that might be in my audience. It was a sort of race pride.

"Mind you, in those fibbertigibbe, young days I didn't say all these things out—I just felt 'em. But I felt 'em so strongly that I kept Iszy within bounds, and, better still, I got into the habit of restraining myself.

"Well, after my second year with my own company, I noticed that I was getting the best steady work in my company from a young Irish boy that wore green whiskers. He had to have the green whiskers, he said, because they expected them of him; but he was just the quietest little comedian you ever saw. One day we were both sitting out in the property room, and I asked him how he felt about the whole business of acting those caricature things we did, and he said:

"I don't think much of it, if you must know; but I do all I can to make myself as inoffensive as I can and still get by."

"It kind of made me jump. 'What do you mean by that?' I asked him.

"I mean that it's no picnic to get out there and make an Irishman what they call funny. I'm an Irishman myself, and I don't like it. And there are a lot of other Irishmen out there in those audiences, and I'll bet a hat they don't like it, either. It seems like a low-lived trick. So I just keep toning down and toning down and trying not to slander my country every time I open a head."

"Well, we sat there an hour, I reckon, in the property room, chinning over our troubles. We finally concluded that for the sake of our own people we'd put on the soft pedal and just let come what might. That was when we were both still young enough to think that we were sacrificing our 'art.' Yes, sir, there we sat, solemnly renouncing the really great careers we thought we might have had, out of loyalty and sentiment, and all that, when what we were actually doing was making the one resolve that gave us any hope at all as actors. I've heard people say that no art is great except the kind that has great limitations. That probably means a good deal more than that Irishman and I meant, but we meant to accept those curbs ourselves, anyway.

"We stuck to them, too, through thick and thin. We wouldn't make zanyes out of our own people. We were not willing to belittle ourselves, and we were not willing to show ourselves up to each other.

"What was the result? That after 12 years I could come out of burlesque and go into legitimate comedy without altering a fraction of my comedy method. I may never be a great actor, but at least I was good enough for that.

"That principle works all through the

THE MOVIES' MASTER-LEAP



"Carmen" has acquired a new ending—at least, the "Carmen" of Theda Bara. It sends Don Jose to suicide over the highest cliff that a movie star has ever leapt without the aid of a dummy. Horse and rider took this 85-foot plunge at Au Sable Chasm, Fort Kent, in the Adirondacks, turning two loops. The horse escaped uninjured. The man broke his leg on the rocks in the bottom of the pool.

big cities—all through America. We assemble here from the four corners of the globe, and we are not willing to burlesque ourselves and libel ourselves because of all the strangers that are looking on. We put the kibosh on our exaggerations in sheer self-defense. And that's

all that saves us, most of us, anyhow. And it's what makes great actors more than anything else.

"Just give America time—and not too much time, either—and we'll be the nation of great interpreters, great playwrights and great actors."

THE PHOTOPLAY SPENDTHRIFT

Millions in Money and Energy Spent to Bring All the World to Your Feet

The wild chase of motion-picture directors for local color and atmospheric detail, if trailed by the average layman, would be the source within a few months of a wider education than the average Cook's tourist gleans in a year of constant travel. Trailing the atmospheric detail and local color to their lair constitutes a formidable effort on the part of the men who stage the big movie dramas, one sees upon entering the Bijou Dream, Idle Hour and Nickelodeon.

Any one who saw "Trilby" must have wondered how the night scenes of Paris were faked. If they solved the problem at all, they were wrong, for the Equitable Company sent a camera man to Paris with credentials from the State Department that secured him and his camera permission to focus the principal boulevards during their busy hours. The street and interior scenes in this same picture, wherein Trilby and Svengall are supposedly in Roumania, were taken on the plains of Staten Island, with real denizens of Bleeker, Delancey and Mulberry streets as the principal decorative elements.

In "The Fisher Girl," in which the Equitable Corporation is offering Muriel Ostriche, two location experts went to Block Island, where they spent two weeks prevailing upon the local fisher folks to take active part in the production. They did so at \$10 per participation, which included the use of their families, huts and fishing paraphernalia.

Webster Cullison, one of the Equitable's producing geniuses, is at Martinique, in the French West Indies, where, on the very edge of Mont Pelee, he will stage many scenes in "The Labyrinth," in which rugged coast lines, jagged rocks and abysmal mountain pits are to blend in with Gail Kane's romantic acting.

Charles Seay is in Washington taking scenes in the halls of Congress, the Capitol, White House grounds, Federal, Treasury and other buildings. These scenes are backgrounds for "The Senator," with Charles Ross playing the title role, and which Triumph Films will release early in December. It was necessary for Equitable to send a man, referred to by the office as "fixer," to Washington in advance to arrange details and secure permits. When "The Senator" is finally seen on the screen residents of Boise, Idaho; Valdosta, Ga., and other distant towns can take a personally conducted tour of the nation's capital and see a modern drama for the one price of admission.

When Thomas A. Wise selected Paul Armstrong's "Blue Grass" for his appearance on the screen, and half the picture was complete, the quandary of securing proper race track detail confronted the director. The big summer meet was on at Saratoga Springs, and thither went Wise and his thirty supporting players. After due process of "getting in good," a race was run one morning at sunrise, the usual clocking hour, and Blue Grass, the movie horse, beat out some of the foremost thoroughbreds at the track. Result, a perfectly good punch was gotten with real race track atmosphere and true-to-life types of touts, jockeys, exercising boys and owners.

Eighteen principals and fifty extra players, all in evening dress, wended their way to Bayside, L. I., several weeks ago, and on the lawn of the palatial residence of Alfred A. Aarons, on Wright avenue, a lawn fete was staged. The entire lawn, covering half a block, was hung and festooned with vari-colored lanterns. Gorgeously dressed women flitted from table to table serving crippled soldiers—numberless privates and officers from Fort Totten. It was a big scene in a picture that will be released soon. It required four days of work by 15 builders to put the lawn in proper shape, yet the scene is shown on the screen but an instant.

In "The Fisher Girl," Charles Seay bought, dynamited and scuttled a fishing schooner that had lain in the harbor of Block Island for two years. It was past its usefulness and was more a nuisance than a benefit to the colony. Yet when Seay tried to rid the harbor of it, the former owner suddenly discovered that he was going to use it again and demanded payment in the sum of \$100 before he would permit of its destruction.

Walter McNamara, who staged "Human Cargo," engaged 15 tough looking characters from the east side for a mob scene, and before he reached the scene where the big fight was to be staged, the gang had fallen out over a game of cards and half the gang had chased the other half off.

A train of nine cars and an engine was recently engaged for four hours from the New York Central to be used in a sensational railroad scene. John Ince, who directed the scene, made the arrangements himself with the railroad company. The total bill read:

Nine private cars at \$50.....	\$450.00
45 miles at 15c per mile each.....	60.75
Victualing one diner.....	47.60

\$558.35

Add to this several hundred dummies or supernumeraries at \$3 per day, 15 principals, ranging from \$10 to \$50 a day, and the star, at perhaps \$1500 a week, and an idea may be had of the expense involved in only one scene.