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CHARLES FROHMAN AS HIS FRIENDS KNEW HIM

PAUL POTTER

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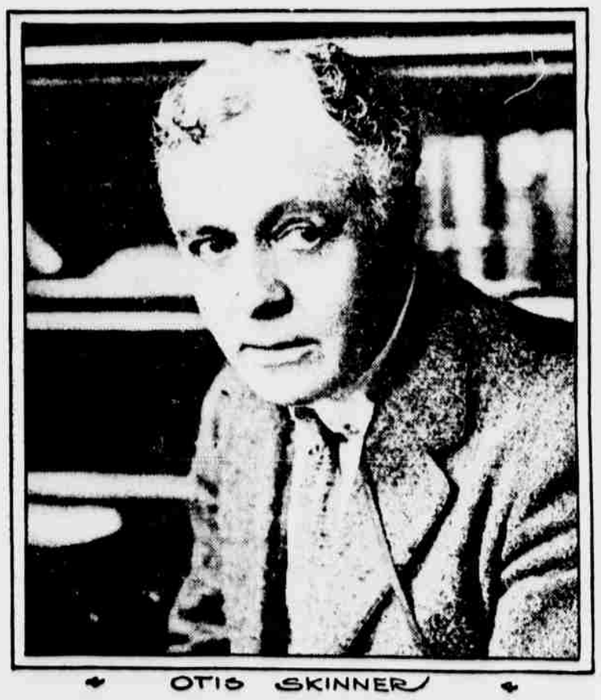
CHARLES FROHMAN

BLANCHE BATES

DANIEL FROHMAN and ISAAC F MARCOSSON



OTIS SKINNER

By PAUL M. POTTER.

THE theatrical manager is a popular mystery. To most people he is only the shadow of a name. He "presents," he "offers," he "announces," he "gives the public what it wants." But who is he? Where does he come from? What has his training been? What are his abilities? What are his functions? How does he know "what the public wants"?

To answer these vexing questions Daniel Frohman, dean of the managerial guild, and Isaac F. Marcosson, an author of repute, have written a remarkable book. It is called "Charles Frohman: Manager and Man" (Harper's). It has a foreword by James M. Barrie, and many portraits of notable stage people. Neither exalting its hero nor extenuating anything, it portrays Charles Frohman's career from cradle to grave and pictures a life so unusual, presents so fascinating a picture of what happens behind the footlights, that it is likely to rival any current novel as a best seller and is sure of its place as a standard authority in all the libraries of the world.

And lest the reader should take this to be the language of Mr. Jefferson Brick or the Hon. Elijah Pogram, I quote what Sir James Barrie, the sane and most sweet tempered Barrie, says of his friend Charles Frohman.

"I have never," he writes, "known any one more modest and no one quite so shy. I have seen him ordered out of his own theatre by subordinates who did not know him and he went cheerfully away. His innumerable companies were as children to him: he chided them as children, soothed them, forgave them, and certainly loved them as children. Charles Lamb was fond of the theatre, and I think, of all those connected with it that I have known, Mr. Frohman is the one with whom he would most have liked to spend an evening. What an essay Elia might have made of that night, none of it about the stories told, all about the man in the chair, the humorous, gentle, roughly educated, very fine American gentleman in the chair."

From a small cigar store kept by their father on Broadway and Eighth street the three Frohman brothers, Daniel, Gustave and Charles, passed into the ranks of Callender's Original Georgia Minstrels, hailing from Macon, Ga., and composed entirely of negroes. Daniel was advance agent, Gustave was manager, and Charles received this letter from Gustave:

"You can begin your theatrical career in the box office of Hooley's Theatre in Brooklyn. You will have to sell 25, 50 and 75 cent tickets, and they will all be hard tickets, that is, no reserved seats. Get some pasteboard slips or a pack of cards and practice handling them. Your success will lie in the swiftness with which you can hand them out."

Charles bought his playing cards, used his father's cigar counter as a box office and handed out the pasteboards to imaginary patrons. On the first Monday in August, 1874, being just fourteen years old, he raised the window of the real box office and sold out the house. When after the count up Gustave asked him if he was "short," "I am not short; I am fifty cents over," he replied. "You can keep that as a reward for good work," said Gustave. And Callender, the proprietor, stepped up and said: "Young fellow, I like your looks and your ways. You and I will be doing business some day."

The chance came soon. They were exhibiting at a small hall in Chestnut street, Philadelphia, the English illusion known as "Pepper's Ghost."

"Mr. Callender," said this lad of fourteen, "I believe there is money in the 'Ghost Show.' If you will let me have a hundred dollars I will take charge of it and I think we can make some money together."

Callender agreed. The show failed. Still the magnate of the minstrel stood by his little friend.

"He's going to back me on the road," said Charles Frohman.

"No," said Brother Gustave firmly, "your time has not yet come. Wait till you can go ahead of a show as Agent."

Cherishing this ambition, Charles went back to the circulation department of the *Graphic*, an illustrated daily, for which he counted papers and equipped the newsboys until one memorable morning in January, 1877, he received this telegram from Gustave:

"Your time has come at last. You begin as agent for John Dillon. Will meet you at 2 A. M. at Winona, Minn."

He threw himself into his mother's arms and gasped: "At last I'm in the business."

His brother met him at Winona, and thus expounded the situation:

"Why, Charley, we've got real New York actors and our leading lady, Louise Dillon, has a genuine sealskin coat. That coat will get us out of any town. You've got no 'Ghost Show' amateurs to handle now, but real actors and actresses, and your salary will be twenty-five dollars a week."

And it was not long before the chief bill poster in St. Paul wrote to Gustave:

"I have taught your brother Charley how to post bills. He took to it like a duck to water. He didn't mind how much paste he spattered over himself. I am going to make him the greatest theatrical agent in the world."

But dark days were ahead. The company tried its luck with Augustin Daly's "Lemons"; then with "Pink Dominoes," and fell back on "Uncle Tom." Louise Dillon's sealskin coat rendered heroic service; it was literally worn out as collateral. When landlords demanded payment Charles, being round and chubby, was left in pawn. If he ever rode on a train he had to hide in the coal box. Still, he got home alive and his first greeting to Gustave was: "When do we start again?"

He was nearing the end of his apprenticeship. In the summer of 1878 J. H. Haverly bought the Callender Minstrels and merged them with "Haverly's Mastodons." Haverly was a plunger. His shirt front shone with diamonds. He wore a large, flat crowned, stiff hat in which he carried his correspondence and private papers. Of his "Mastodons," known as "Forty—Count 'em—Forty," he made Charles Frohman treasurer on condition that Frohman should always wear a high silk hat when he headed the street parade. Now Frohman hated high silk hats, and when he was sent to London and found he had to wear evening clothes and receive royal people at Her Majesty's Theatre he chafed under the Haverly yoke, and Gustave Frohman was not surprised when in May, 1881, he received this telegram dated Salt Lake City:

"Am stranded here with the 'Big Forty.' So is Frank Sanger with 'A Bunch of Keys.' Wire what you can, Charles."

It was the last straw. At Indianapolis he left the "Mastodons." His minstrel days were done.

From now on he began to meet the men with whom his subsequent fortunes were to be linked. In the box office of the Cleveland Opera House, still wearing his Haverly garb, he saw a sturdy lad fingering a pile of silver dollars. "I wish I had that silk hat of yours," said the lad. "I wish I had your money," said Frohman. The boy in the box office was A. L. Erlanger. In a Philadelphia newspaper office Charles Frohman met a tall, keen eyed young man named Alf Hayman, who was advance agent for Mr. and Mrs. W. J. Florence. In San Francisco, at a rathskeller on Kearny street, he saw a youth with curly hair, dreamy eyes and the air of an artist; this was David Belasco. A telegram came to Daniel Frohman from Louisville: "There's a young lawyer here who is itching to get into the theatrical business. Why don't you give him a chance?" This was Marc Klaw. William Harris came from a minstrel company in Boston; Frank Sanger from the Hoyt plays. William Gillette, just from college, brought the manuscript of "The Professor" to the Madison Square Theatre. Joseph Brooks conducted the booking office of Brooks & Dickson.

Charles Dillingham entered the scene a little later. It seems that he had written a play. The play was called "12 P. M." and was done at the Bijou Theatre. He received a letter from Frohman, who was then a stranger, and who wrote: "I like your lines very much. Would you like to adapt a French farce for me?"

Dillingham was then dramatic editor of THE EVENING SUN. He not only accepted the commission to write a farce, but said he would also go out as an advance agent.

"Then go at once," said Frohman. "I want to get you off that paper. You write too many bad notices of my plays."

Instead they went to London and spent their time seeing plays. A haughty Englishman came to the Frohman offices one day and asked Dillingham to take in his card.

"I have no time," said Dillingham.

"What have you to do?" asked the man.

"I've got to wash the office windows first," said the author of "12 P. M."

It was Bronson Howard's "Shenandoah" which started Frohman's great career. Then came "Charley's Aunt" by Brandon Thomas, then the matchless line of successes by William Gillette, which Frohman always regarded as the keystone of his fortune. From Augustin Daly, who turned him out of his offices in Daly's Theatre, he took John Drew. With Drew he got Maude Adams, who was playing in a Hoyt farce. Belasco did Frohman a signal service by opening the new Empire Theatre, built for Frohman and William Harris by Sanger and Hayman, with "The Girl I Left Behind Me," a drama of Indians and dress clothes, by David Belasco and Franklin Fyles.

Frohman, who loved to create a sensation, was now able to gratify one of his favorite emotions with the production of "The Conquerors." Like many of the Frohman achievements, it began in a picturesque way.

During the summer of 1897 Frohman and I, being in Paris, dropped in at that chamber of horrors the Grand Guignol, in the Rue Chaptal. There we saw "Mademoiselle Fifi," a playlet lasting less than half an hour, adapted by the late Oscar Metenier from Guy de Maupassant's short story. It was the tale of a young Prussian officer who gets into a French country house during the war of 1870, abuses the aristocrats who live there, shoots out the eyes of the family portraits, entertains at supper a number of loose French girls from Rouen, and is shot by one of the girls for vilifying French women. Frohman was deeply impressed.

"Why can't you make it into a long play?" said Frohman.

"I can," said I.

"How?" queried Frohman.

"By showing what happened to the French aristocrats while the Prussian officer was shooting up the place," answered I.

"Do it," said Frohman, "and I'll open the next season of the Empire Stock Company in this drama, and get George Alexander interested for London."

As "The Conquerors" the play went into rehearsal about Christmas. Mrs. Dazian, wife of Henry Dazian, the costumer, was watching a scene in which William Faversham plans the ruin of Viola Allen, the leading woman.

"Well," said Mrs. Dazian, "if New York will stand for that it will stand for anything."

Frohman jumped up in excitement. "What is wrong with it?" he cried. "The manuscript was shown to a dozen people of the cleanest minds. They found nothing wrong. I've done the scene a dozen times. I have it upstairs on my shelves at this moment in 'The Sporting Duchess.'"

Mrs. Dazian was obdurate. "It is awful," she said.

The first night approached. I was to sail for Europe next day. Frohman had provided me with sumptuous cabin quarters on the New York. After the first performance I appeared on the Empire stage, where I found Frohman. The latter was worried.

"Paul," said he, "the first three acts are fine; the last is rotten. You must stay and rewrite the last act."

I had to postpone the trip which Frohman had made all the more delectable by placing me in charge of George Edwardes's "In Town" chorus, who were going home. At 10 next morning the new act was handed in, the company learned and rehearsed it by 4 in the afternoon, and that night at the second performance Frohman and I stood in the box office watching the audience file in.

"How's the house, Tommy?" demanded Frohman of Thomas Shea, his house manager.

"Over $1,700 already," said Shea.

"You can go to Europe, Paul," said Frohman. "Your last act is all right. We don't want you any more."

I sailed on the Bretagne. But the chorus girls had gone on the New York.

Continuing the story of my relations with Frohman, I might tell how Blanche Bates now swam into the Frohman ken. This was the way of it:

I was making a periodical visit to New York in 1901. David Belasco came to see me at the Holland House.

"Paul," said he, "C. F. and I want you to make us a version of Ouida's 'Under Two Flags' for Blanche Bates."

"I never read the novel," said I.

"You can dramatize it without reading it," remarked Belasco, and in a month he was sitting in Frohman's rooms at Sherry's and I was reading to them my dramatization of "Under Two Flags," throwing in, for good measure, a tide from "Mazeppa" and a sand storm from "The Queen of Sheba."

"I like all but the last scene," said Frohman. "When *Cigarette* rides up those mountains with her lover's pardon, the pardon is, to all intents and purposes, delivered. The actual delivery is an anti-climax. What the audience wants to see is a return to the garret where the lovers lived and were happy."

As we walked home that night Belasco said to me:

"That was a great point which C. F. made. What remarkable intuition he has!"

Frohman and I used to watch Belasco at work teaching the actors to act, the singers to sing, the dancers to dance.

Then came a hitch.

"Gros, our scene painter," said Frohman, maintains that *Cigarette* couldn't ride up any mountains near the Algerian coast, for the nearest mountains are the Atlas Mountains, 300 miles away."

He undertook to convert Mr. Gros. Fortunately for him I stood in the Garden Theatre while Belasco was rehearsing a dance.

"Oh!" said Gros, "it's a comic opera you can have all the mountains you please. I thought it was a serious drama."

Then Frohman ventured to criticise the mountain torrent.

"What's the matter with the torrent?" called Belasco, while *Cigarette* and her horse stood on the slope.

"It don't look like water at all," said Frohman.

Just then the horse plunged his nose into the torrent and licked it furiously. Criticism was silenced. The play was a big, popular success, and with it Blanche Bates arrived as a star.

One day, a year later, Frohman remarked to me in Paris, "What do you say to paying Ouida a visit in Florence?"

He and Belasco had paid her considerable royalties. He thought she would be gratified by a friendly call. Frohman and I obtained letters of introduction from bankers, consuls and Florentine notables, and sent them in advance to Ouida. The landlord of the inn gave us a resplendent two horse carriage, with a liveried coachman and a footman. Frohman objected to the footman as undemocratic. The landlord insisted that it was Florentine etiquette and shrugged his shoulders when we departed, seeming to think we were bound on a perilous journey.

Through the perfumed, flower laden hills we climbed, the Arno gleaming below. The footman took in our cards to the villa of Mlle. de la Ramee. He promptly returned.

"The signora is indisposed," he remarked.

We sent him back to ask if we might come some other day. Again he returned.

"The signora is indisposed," was the only answer he would give.

Frohman and I drove away. Frohman was hurt. He did not try to conceal it.

"That's the first author," he said, "who ever turned me down. Anyway the pancakes at lunch were delicious."

Then Charles Frohman put Maude Adams opposite John Drew in "The Masked Ball" he laid the foundation of what is in many respects his most remarkable achievement.

Brilliant as was his experience with the various men and women whom he raised from obscurity to fame and fortune, the case of Maude Adams stands out with peculiar distinctness. It is the one instance where Charles Frohman literally manufactured a star's future.

Yet no star ever served so rigorous or so distinguished an apprenticeship. Her five years as leading woman with John Drew tried all her resource. After her brilliant performance as *Suzanne Blondet* in "The Masked Ball" she appeared in "The Butterflies," by Henry Guy Carleton. She had a much better part in "The Double Shop," which followed the next year.

John Drew's vehicle in 1895 was

(Continued on Fourth Page.)