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THE GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT OF THE SUPERMAN OF THE MOVIES

WHEN David W. Griffith first revealed to the American public some of the unsuspected possibilities of the film-play, with his spectacular production "The Birth of a Nation," he not only created new standards and fashions for other directors and makers of "feature films" but imposed upon himself the difficult task of living up to the most spectacular success—both in an artistic and financial sense—known to the American screen.

Could he live up to it? "Intolerance" is Mr. Griffith's answer to this question. The consensus of critical opinion is that the "superman of the American movies" has not only succeeded but advanced the art of the motion picture a step further. "In it," writes James S. Metcalfe, the veteran dramatic critic of *Life*, "he has carried the picture play to the limit of its possibilities so far as doing everything that can be done with the motion picture. . . . 'Intolerance' illustrates admirably the big things the moving picture does do and equally the big things it doesn't do under its present inspiration." The *N. Y. Call* (Socialist) finds that Griffith is "an artist with a vision," who "thinks in masses and reflects it in his films." The critic of the *N. Y. Sun* sums up the mingled excellencies and deficiencies of the film in an apt comparison: "The audience is left with a feeling akin to the one-eyed boy at the three-ringed circus. The feeling is pleasurable and exciting, but there is regret that so much has to be missed."

Granville Barker once defined a play as anything that could be made effective and interesting on the stage by human effort. Mr. Griffith's new film-play, as a writer in the *Boston Transcript* suggests, adequately fulfills this loose definition. In a program note he explains his aim:

"The purpose of the production is to trace a universal theme through various periods of the race's history. Events are not set forth in their historical sequence or according to accepted forms of dramatic construction, but as they might flash across a mind seeking to parallel the life of the different ages. Through all these ages Time brings forth the same passions, the same joys and sorrows, the same hopes and anxieties—symbolized by 'the cradle endlessly rocking.'"

The "universal theme" is indicated in the title; but in developing it there are no less than four main stories in as many widely divergent epochs. The most effective scenes, all critics are agreed, are those of ancient Babylon.

Concerning these "K. M." writes in the *Boston Transcript*:

"But Babylon—Babylon the Magnificent—Babylon, the greatest scene of spectacle ever flashed upon the screen—it is literally tremendous. It is not alone that Mr. Griffith built walls, towers, courts, houses, which covered hundreds of acres; employed tens of thousands in his mobs, and ravaged whole storehouses of costumes. He built well, he made his places a genuine reconstruction of the spirit of Babylon, and he threw his people across them with a hand that had something nearer akin to genius than ever resides in the writings of our archeologists and historians. Mr. Griffith is showing the movies how to give us a vastly precious glimpse at the life of the past. He is reconstructing other worlds for us with a realism that makes their common humanity as fascinating as their bizar variation from our life to-day."

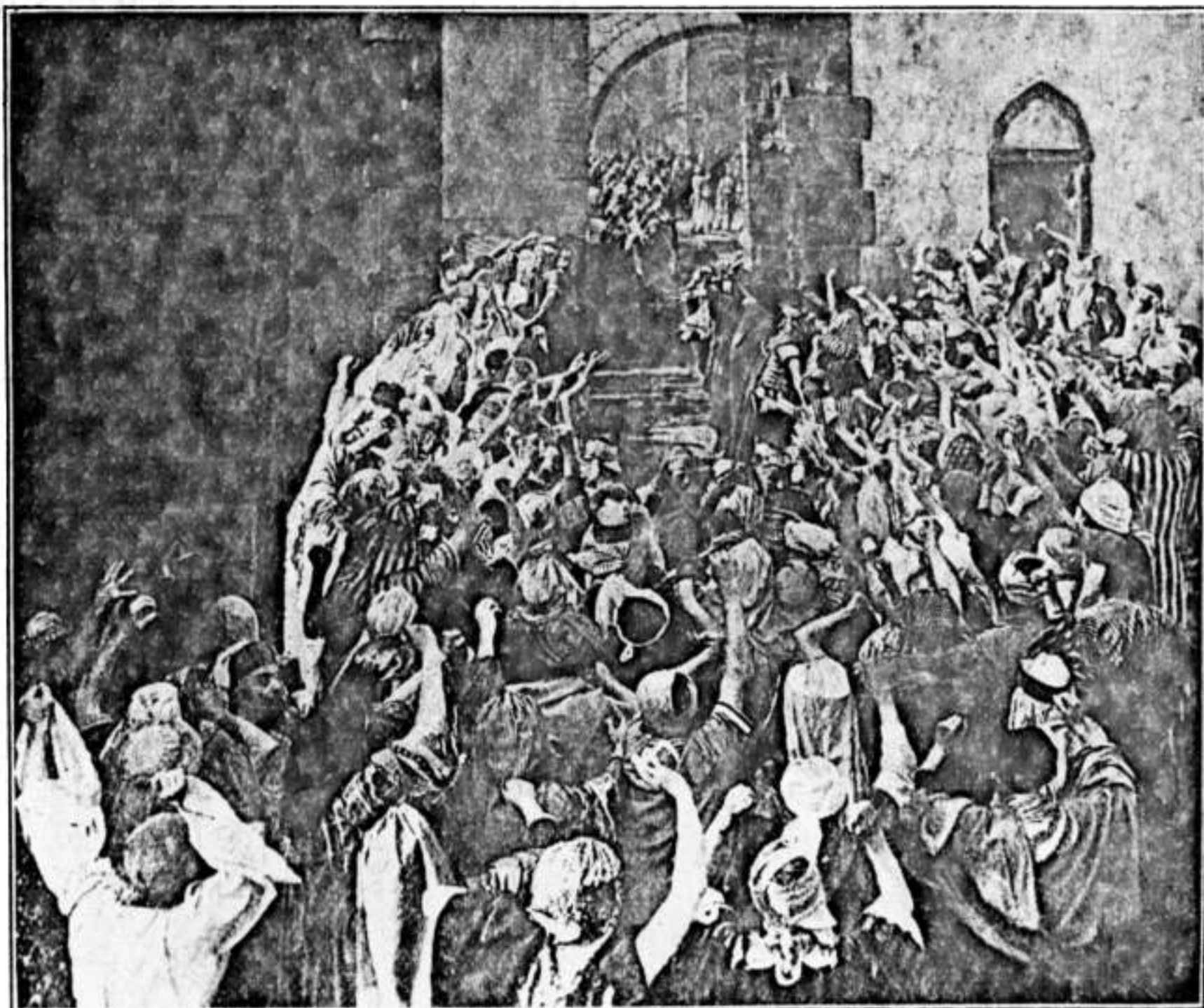
In contrast to these technical and imaginative triumphs, Mr. Griffith has not acquired the power of handling ideas with the same facility. Mr. Metcalfe praises this producer for daring to introduce ideas into motion pictures, tho he confesses that the idea is "completely smothered in the tremendous complexity of the pictures."

The *Transcript* critic, who reveals an unusual familiarity with all of Mr. Griffith's past productions, suggests that had he left the field of photo-spectacle for one of more resolute realism, his effort would have been of infinitely

more value in the struggle to elevate the motion picture to the dignity of an art:

"'The Birth' and its success bound him to a general line of extravagant spectacle and also to the necessity of both exceeding his previous effort and of striking some variation. He did this by the curious and absolutely original expedient of telling four stories instead of one, all of them full of crowds and violence, and all of them reenforcing—or intended to reenforce—a general ethical propaganda. The stories range through all time, from the Fall of Babylon, to Christ's life, the massacre of St. Bartholomew, and the industrial slums of to-day. The thread of propaganda intended to bind them together is the declaration that a spirit of intolerance filled all four with avoidable human tragedy. Mr. Griffith aimed to excel 'The Birth' not only by the magnitude of the Babylonian scenes, but by the virtuosity displayed in handling four stories in constant alternation, episode by episode, on a single screen.

"That great battle before the walls of Babylon; who could see it without a fascinated longing for still closer intercourse with the past? The long perspective of serried towers; the chariots rumbling along the tops of the great walls and swinging past their feet in a rush of armed hordes; the shining armor, the barbaric engines of war; the scaling ladders and siege towers flung down in dust and blood; sword and flame hurtling through the air; night visions of a fire-topped city; and crowds, crowds, crowds, battling crowds, the thousand details of primeval combat."



A GRIFFITH TRIUMPH

D. W. Griffith is master of the art of conveying on the screen an impression of ever present reality, of presenting the effect both of "sweep" and of detail. He splashes crowds, cities, battles and races on his celluloid as other artists might splash color on canvas.