

# BEN HUR AT HOME.

A CHAT WITH GENERAL LEW WALLACE ABOUT HIMSELF AND HIS WORKS.

(Special Correspondence of the Deseret News by Frank G. Carpenter.)

INDIANAPOLIS.—Gen. Lew Wallace is writing his autobiography. He is working upon it at his home in Crawfordsville, 40 miles from here, in the same surroundings where he wrote "Ben Hur," "The Fair God" and "The Prince of India." He has already finished several hundred pages and has, perhaps, that much more to write.

Gen. Wallace is now seventy-seven, and is still in the thick of political, military and literary life since the Mex-

ican agent of Gen. Grant in giving the Americans such assistance as enabled them to keep their country a republic. Louis Napoleon wanted to make it a monarchy. He was backing Maximilian, and was in a fair way to succeed. This was just at the close of the rebellion, when we were still in an unsettled condition, and did not dare risk a war with France. I was sent by Gen. Grant without the knowledge of Secy. Seward, to consult with Gen. Juarez, the Mexican president, to see if we could not in some way assist the republic. I went to the Rio Grande and pushed my way through the country to Chihuahua, where I met Juarez.

He Talks of His Autobiography and Tells How Grant Kept Mexico a Republic—Stories of President Garfield and the Turkish Mission—"Ben Hur" and Bob Ingersoll—"The Prince of India" and Its Dramatization—Wallace Talks of the Sultan as a Man of Ability—His Costly Presents—A Story of Leland Stanford, Etc.

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German family that has not 'Ben Hur' in translation. Indeed, it may be said to have gone all over the world."

"How about its dramatization?"

"That has been one of the great successes of the stage. It has been presented in our chief cities and in Europe. 'The Prince of India' will be ready for presentation this year."

"Well, those are the topics I want you to discuss," said I.

"Ingersoll thereupon began to speak. He went over the whole question of the Bible, of the immortality of the soul, of the divinity of God and of heaven and hell. He vomited forth ideas and arguments, like an intellectual volcano, overwhelming my soul with them. He kept this up all the way to Indianapolis and the result was that, when I left the train there, I walked the streets for an hour to quiet myself before going to bed. Prior to that I had paid almost no attention to the Bible or religion. My life had been full and I had overlooked matters of the soul. I then decided that these were the great questions for man to study, and also that every man must investigate them for himself. I began at once to read the Bible, devoting my time chiefly to the New Testament and the life and sayings of Christ. I did not pay much attention to the Apostles nor the gospels, but I did try to study Christ and His works."

"The result was that I came to believe in the Bible. I gave up all doubt of the existence of a God, and that fact is as firmly settled in my mind as the fact of my own existence. I came also to believe in Christ as the best embodiment of the Divine Spirit in man and to accept Him as my model. This study caused me to remodel my plan of 'Ben Hur.' I changed it throughout and the whole of the book, with the exception of the first chapter, was, you may say, influenced by my talk with Ingersoll."

As we talked of the sultan Gen. Wallace took down a little oil painting upon a card board about the size of one-half a newspaper page. It was a bust portrait of the sultan as the general knew him. The relations of the sultan and Lew Wallace were intimate. The two men became strong friends, and although the general could not or would not accept presents from his majesty during his ministry, he had some forced upon him when he was going away.

He was then a private citizen, having given up his mission. In the cabin of his steamer upon leaving two velvet covered boxes were found. One was labeled with the general's name, and the other with that of his wife. Upon opening them a note dropped out stating that the inclosed mementoes were sent from the sultan as tokens of his friendship esteem.

The contents of the general's box were a solid gold snuff box set with thirty-eight large solitaire diamonds, and the order of the Mejdideh, which also blazed with diamonds. The box labeled "Mrs. Wallace" contained a brooch too large for ordinary wear, set with magnificent diamonds. These presents were so rich that the customs officers at New York refused to put a value upon them, and they were, by the order of the secretary of the treasury, afterward admitted free. They

are now kept in a safe deposit, and General Wallace says he is most forcibly reminded of them by their annual appearance in his tax bill.

THE SULTAN'S PICTURE.

General Wallace looked at the portrait of the sultan as he talked about him. He has considerable skill as an artist, and he made the portrait himself from pencil sketches which he drew from time to time while with the sultan. It is perhaps the best representation of him ever made. Said General Wallace:

"There is no public man so misunderstood as the sultan of Turkey. He is one of the ablest rulers of his time, and he has proved himself the peer of the monarchs and statesmen of Europe, with whom he has had to fight one continuous diplomatic battle for the past 21 years. The fact that the sultan is still on the throne shows his ability. He has reigned 22 years, while the average reign of the sultans of the past has been but three and one-half years. The sultan is a man of broad sympathies, wide knowledge and great ability, and that he cannot stir for fear of assassination. That is not true. He has his guard, but so has our president, and so has every monarch of Europe."

A STORY OF STANFORD.

"As an incident of the wide knowledge of the sultan," General Wallace continued, "I remember an interview which he once had with Leland Stanford. When Senator Stanford was visiting Constantinople the sultan sent him a note saying that I should ask him to dinner at the palace. We went

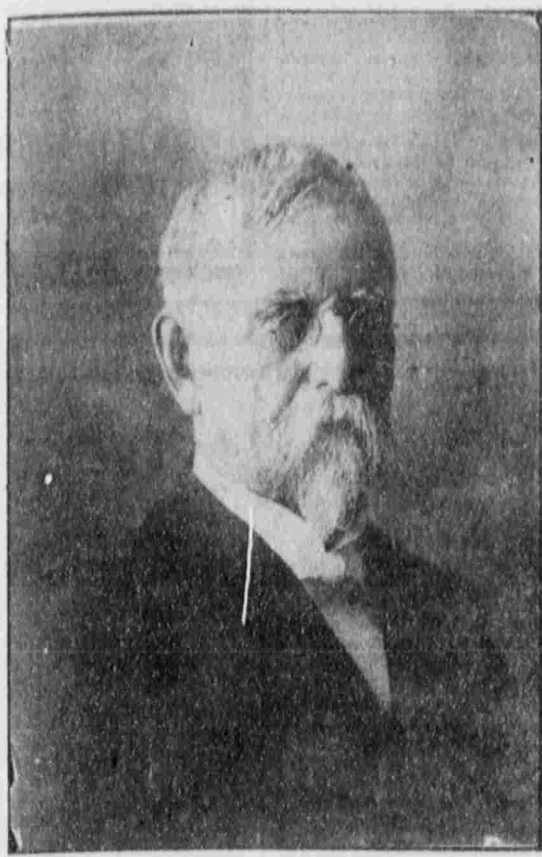
together. During the meal the sultan brought up the subject of railroads, and questioned Senator Stanford as to the cost of their construction and operation. He wanted to know all about how the rights of way were secured, the profits of passenger and freight traffic, the difference in gage as compared with cost, and almost every detail regarding the management of railroads. I was surprised at his knowledge and Senator Stanford also was surprised that he asked me how long I had been coaching the sultan on railroads. Said he: 'I never had such a catechism as that before, and I do not believe that any other man but a railroad manager could ask such questions.' The sultan was then thinking of developing Turkey by railroads, and I suppose he had inquired into the subject."

FRANK G. CARPENTER.

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GENERAL LEW WALLACE.

How the Author of "Ben Hur" Looks Today.

war, in which he served as a lieutenant. He did noble work during the civil war, entering the northern army as a colonel and rising to be major-general. He was one of the court-martial which tried the assassin of Lincoln, and president of that which convicted Wirz, the head of the Andersonville prison. Later on he was sent on a secret mission to Mexico by Gen. Grant, and in 1881 was made our minister to Turkey by President Garfield. Before he went to Turkey Gen. Wallace had written "The Fair God" and "Ben Hur," a tale of the Christ. During his stay there he collected the materials for "The Prince of India," which is now dramatized and which will probably be presented on the stage during the coming winter.

## BEN HUR AT HOME.

I went out to Crawfordsville yesterday and spent several hours with General Wallace chatting with him about himself and his work. He lives in the heart of Crawfordsville in a comfortable home surrounded by seven acres of magnificently beeches and elms which have already large trees when the Declaration of Independence was signed. Much of his writing during the summer has been done under these trees, and under one of these, especially he wrote a great part of "Ben Hur." This tree stands some distance from his home and at the corner of his library, which is perhaps the most remarkable of the literary workshops of the United States.

The library was built by the general several years ago. I remember his telling me that it was in course of construction when I talked with him at St. Louis at the time of President McKinley's first nomination. It was a one-story structure of brick and stone, with a lot of glass and bronze plates. It is lighted from the top, and its surroundings are such that its owner can close the door and be as far away from the noise of modern civilization as though he were in the heart of the Rocky mountains. The structure is fireproof and it contains the general's treasures in fine editions and valuable manuscripts. It has but one room, which is lined with shelves above which pictures hang.

## HOW WALLACE WRITES.

There is a desk in the center of the room, but General Wallace does all his work on a low rocker, writing upon a lap board which is just fits across the square arms of the chair. The lap board is covered with chamois skin to keep the papers from slipping off and the desk is so arranged to bring it at the right height for writing.

The general uses a lead pencil for his first draft. He writes a beautiful hand, even now, in his 73d year, and his manuscript looks like copper plate. He always uses the same kind of paper, and to sheets of such a size that each will make a page of the completed book. He numbers these pages consecutively so that he knows just how far along he is with the work upon which he is engaged. He tells me that he writes slowly, revising each day the work of the day before, and when a chapter or paragraph is not satisfactory, throwing it away and writing it over again. "It is better," he said, "to destroy unsatisfactory work than to try to patch up here and there." After his manuscript is finished it is carefully copied, being arranged and punctuated just as it is to be in the published book. Nothing is left to the judgment of the printers.

## LEW WALLACE TALKS OF HIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

Talking with me about his autobiography, Gen. Wallace said: "I will not be like the ordinary work of the kind. There will be no letters quoted in it. I should as soon think of throwing a log across the driveway to my house as to ask my friends to travel over a corridor road of letters in telling the story of my life."

"How far back does your memory go, Gen. Wallace?" I asked.

"I can remember things that happened when I was 5 years old. I was born in 1827, and this takes me back to 1822, which is quite a long period. I have an excellent memory, and it seems as good now as it has ever been. Indeed, I am surprised to find how well I remember conversations and incidents. The most important ones of my life seem to have been photographed on my brain, and I can have them in their fullest detail."

HOW MEXICO WAS SAVED.

"I suppose your memoirs will contain much unwritten history, general?"

"Yes. I had to do with the important matters in the life of the nation, and with some things the real history of which is unknown. For instance, I was

the agent of Gen. Grant in giving the Americans such assistance as enabled them to keep their country a republic. Louis Napoleon wanted to make it a monarchy. He was backing Maximilian, and was in a fair way to succeed. This was just at the close of the rebellion, when we were still in an unsettled condition, and did not dare risk a war with France. I was sent by Gen. Grant without the knowledge of Secy. Seward, to consult with Gen. Juarez, the Mexican president, to see if we could not in some way assist the republic. I went to the Rio Grande and pushed my way through the country to Chihuahua, where I met Juarez.

## A STORY OF THE TELEGRAPH.

Before coming to Crawfordsville, I attempted to call up Gen. Wallace by telephone, but the pretty little "Hello Girl" in Indianapolis told me it was useless to try. She said the general had no phone in his residence, that he wouldn't have anything to do with telephone messages, and that he thought the system was a nuisance. I telephoned Crawfordsville, nevertheless, and succeeded only in finding that Gen. Wallace was in town. During my conversation with him the subjects of the telephone and telegraph came up and he told me how his father was instrumental in making the first telegraph line successful. Said he:

"After Morse had invented the telegraph he wanted Congress to appropriate \$30,000 to build a line from Washington to Baltimore. This was to be experimental, no practical long distance test of the telegraph having been made. The matter created a great deal of discussion. Morse was sneered at and jeered at, and many thought him insane. My father was a member of Congress at that time, and he was one of the committee to whom the question of the appropriation was referred. When the committee met my father was dispatched from the house to the senate. Wires had been stretched and the inventors were operating the instruments. My father saw them work, he sent messages and received replies. He saw that the invention must be a success and believed that if words could be dispatched from the house to the senate they could be sent from Washington to Baltimore and if to Baltimore to anywhere. He was full of this thought when he went to his committee room and found the committee in session. They had had their vote on the appropriation and their vote was a tie. He cast his vote in his favor and this caused the appropriation to go through. The result was the first telegraph line of the world."

"Strange to say that vote lost my father his seat in Congress," continued Gen. Wallace. "Thirty thousand dollars was then a big sum, and this vote became one of the issues of the next congressional campaign. Father was charged with wasting the people's money, and his opponent ridiculed him on the stump by referring to his 'unhappily lost vote.' To destroy unsatisfactory work than to try to patch up here and there. After his manuscript is finished it is carefully copied, being arranged and punctuated just as it is to be in the published book. Nothing is left to the judgment of the printers."

## BOB INGERSOLL AND "BEN HUR."

The conversation here took a literary turn, and I asked the general if there was any truth in the intimation that certain words of Robert G. Ingersoll had caused him to write "Ben Hur."

"No," said he, "Bob Ingersoll had nothing to do with beginning 'Ben Hur,' but a talk I had with him had considerable influence upon the story. I may say it caused me to change the whole plan and nature of it. The talk occurred as we were going home from the Cincinnati convention, at which Bob Ingersoll had made his great speech nominating Blaine, one of the greatest speeches of our history and of all time. Ingersoll and I left Cincinnati on the same sleeping car. He had the drawing room, I was sitting talking with some men, when he came to the door in his night gown and said: 'Is that you, Gen. Wallace?' When you come into my room, I want to talk."

"I went to the door and there stood, saying: 'I will come in, general, but only on one condition, and that is that I am to fix the topic of conversation.'"

"All right," said Ingersoll. "What is your topic?"

"I replied, 'Is there a God?'"

"The answer came quick: 'I don't

## HOW HE WROTE "BEN HUR."

General Wallace's work on "Ben Hur" lasted seven years. He started the book as a novelette, thinking it might be a serial for Harper's magazine, but became more and more interested in it as he went on with his studies of Christ. One of the remarkable things about the work made for "Ben Hur," I knew that the novel would be criticised by men who had devoted their lives to biblical lore, and I studied Palestine through maps and books. I read everything in the way of travel, scientific investigation and geography. I had scores of maps and worked with them about me. My best guide was a relief map of Palestine made in Germany. This was hung on my wall, and by means of it I took my characters through the passes of the mountains and up and down the hills, measuring their daily travel by the scale of miles. I also made studies of the bird and animal life of the time and place. Indeed, my work of this kind was so thorough that I have, I believe, made only one mistake in the book.

"What mistake was that, general?" I asked.

"It was in the smoking of Vesuvius," was the reply. "I had the mountain in eruption four years before the eruption burst forth. I afterward looked up the date and found it fixed by the time of Pliny's death. Pliny, you know, went out to describe the volcano and was never heard of thereafter. This was four years later than the time of the incident mentioned in my story."

## GARFIELD AND THE TURKISH MISSION.

It was the writing of "Ben Hur" that made Gen. Lew Wallace minister to Turkey. This is how it occurred, as he told me yesterday:

"President Garfield and I had been friends for years, and when he was elected President he sent for me to come to the White House. Our relations were such that he usually called me Lew, or Wallace. As I entered his room he said that he was anxious to have me in the diplomatic service, and that he thought of making me minister to Uruguay or Paraguay. I replied that I knew but little of South America, and did not think that my going there would help either the government or myself. He then replied that he would send me to Constantinople on condition that I would write a book during my stay. Said he: 'I want you to give the world another novel as good as "Ben Hur."'

"But, Mr. President," said I, "if I am minister to Turkey I shall have precious little leisure to write books. My time will be taken up in diplomatic work."

"That matter will arrange itself," said Garfield. "If you will take the appointment we will see that you have plenty of time."

"Well, I thought it over, and decided to go, and shortly afterward received my commission, with the words and initials 'Ben Hur, J. A. G.' in the lower left-hand corner. I then sailed for Europe, and when I reached there received a cable, saying that Garfield had been shot during my voyage."

## "THE PRINCE OF INDIA."

"I carried out President Garfield's suggestion, however, as to Turkey. As soon as I was settled at my post I began to study the country and its people. I read all I could find about Turkey, went everywhere and mixed with all classes of the Mohammedans. All the while I made voluminous notes, and upon my return I wrote "The Prince of India." It is the result of my mission to Constantinople, and I feel that in writing it I have carried out my implied contract with Garfield."

## TWO GREAT LITERARY SUCCESSSES.

"Was the 'Prince of India' as successful as 'Ben Hur'?"

"Not in the number of copies sold," replied Gen. Wallace, "but it has had a large sale, and my copyright arrangements are such that it has paid me well. 'Ben Hur' has had an enormous circulation. I cannot say just how large, for it has been published in many foreign countries by persons with whom I have no connection. There were several editions in Great Britain and the colonies, and the sales there was as large as in the United States. The book has been issued in French, Italian, Spanish, Swedish and even in Arabic. It has circulated largely in Germany, and I am told there is not a well-to-do

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