PERSONAL

REMINISCENCES

OF

HENRY IRVING

THE WORLD'S GREATEST ACTRESS

MY DOUBLE LIFE

MEMOIRS OF

SARAH BERNHARDT

In One Volume, Demy 8vo, with

Illustrations in Colour and Black

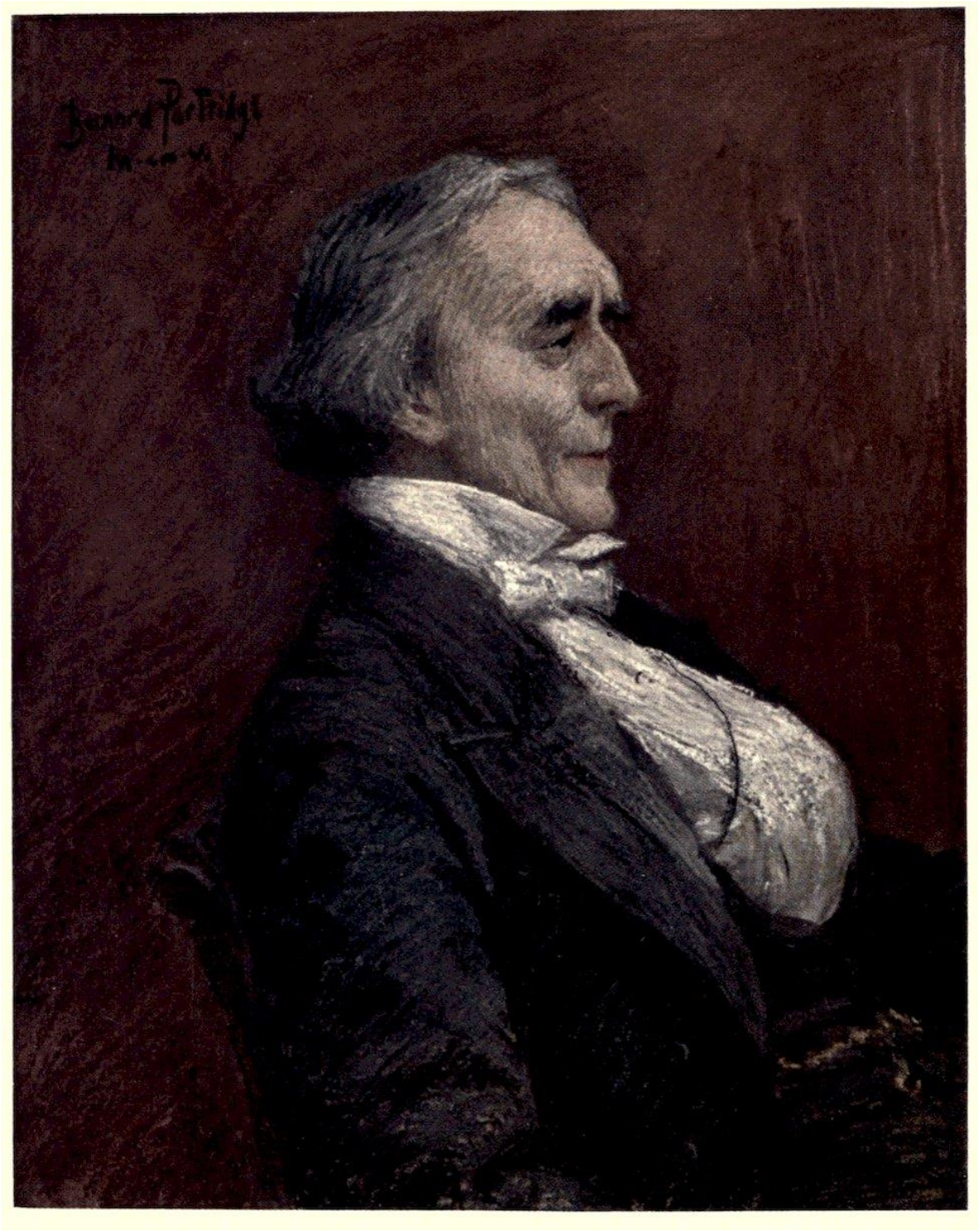
and White. Price 15s. net

These Memoirs, written in an easy flowing style, give the story of the early life and struggles of this celebrated actress down to the time when her genius was recognised in every civilised country and she became her own manageress.

Sarah Bernhardt's Memoirs are not merely an assembly of the stage stories of the most successful actress of modern times; they are the faithful record of a most interesting life—a life full of varied experiences—the reflections of a supremely intelligent mind, the story of a woman whose reminiscences alone of the celebrities she came into contact with, throw a vivid side-light on the history of the past fifty years.

LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN

1907



THE LAST PICTURE PAINTED OF HENRY IRVING

FROM A PASTEL

By J. BERNARD PARTRIDGE

(IN THE POSSESSION OF THE AUTHOR)

PERSONAL REMINISCENCES OF HENRY IRVING

BY

BRAM STOKER

ILLUSTRATED

LONDON

WILLIAM HEINEMANN

MCMVII

First printed (2 volumes) October 1906

Revised and Cheaper Edition October 1907

TO

THE MEMORY OF

JOHN LAWRENCE TOOLE

LOVING COMRADE AND TRUE FRIEND

OF

HENRY IRVING

PREFACE

Were my book a “life” of Henry Irving instead of a grouping of such matters as came into my own purview, I should probably feel some embarrassment in the commencement of a preface. Logically speaking, even the life of an actor has no preface. He begins, and that is all. And such beginning is usually obscure; but faintly remembered at the best. Art is a completion; not merely a history of endeavour. It is only when completeness has been obtained that the beginnings of endeavour gain importance, and that the steps by which it has been won assume any shape of permanent interest. After all, the struggle for supremacy is so universal that the matters of hope and difficulty of one person are hardly of general interest. When the individual has won out from the huddle of strife, the means and steps of his succeeding become of interest, either historically or in the educational aspect—but not before. From every life there may be a lesson to some one; but in the teeming millions of humanity such lessons can but seldom have any general or exhaustive force. The mere din of strife is too incessant for any individual sound to carry far. Fame, who rides in higher atmosphere, can alone make her purpose heard. Well did the framers of picturesque idea understand their work when in her hand they put a symbolic trumpet.

The fame of an actor is won in minutes and seconds, not in years. The latter are only helpful in the recurrence of opportunities; in the possibilities of repetition. It is not feasible, therefore, adequately to record the progress of his work. Indeed that work in its perfection cannot be recorded; words are, and can be, but faint suggestions of awakened emotion. The student of history can, after all, but accept in matters evanescent the judgment of contemporary experience. Of such, the weight of

evidence can at viiibest incline in one direction; and that tendency is not susceptible of further proof. So much, then, for the work of art that is not plastic and permanent. There remains therefore but the artist. Of him the other arts can make record in so far as external appearance goes. Nay, more, the genius of sculptor or painter can suggest—with an understanding as subtle as that of the sun-rays which on sensitive media can depict what cannot be seen by the eye—the existence of these inner forces and qualities whence accomplished works of any kind proceed. It is to such art that we look for the teaching of our eyes. Modern science can record something of the actualities of voice and tone. Writers of force and skill and judgment can convey abstract ideas of controlling forces and purposes; of thwarting passions; of embarrassing weaknesses; of all the bundle of inconsistencies which make up an item of concrete humanity. From all these may be derived some consistent idea of individuality. This individuality is at once the ideal and the objective of portraiture.

For my own part the work which I have undertaken in this book is to show future minds something of Henry Irving as he was to me. I have chosen the form of the book for this purpose. As I cannot give the myriad of details and impressions which went to the making up of my own convictions, I have tried to select such instances as were self-sufficient to the purpose. If here and there I have been able to lift for a single instant the veil which covers the mystery of individual nature, I shall have made something known which must help the lasting memory of my dear dead friend. In the doing of my work, I am painfully conscious that I have obtruded my own personality, but I trust that for this I may be forgiven, since it is only by this means that I can convey at all the ideas which I wish to impress.

As I cannot adequately convey the sense of Irving's worthiness myself, I try to do it by other means. By showing him amongst his friends, and explaining who those friends were; by giving incidents with explanatory matter of intention; by telling of the pressure of circumstance and his bearing under it; by affording such glimpses of his inner life and mind as one man may of another. I have earnestly tried to avoid giving pain to the living, to respect the sanctity of the dead; and finally to keep from any breach of trust—either that specifically confided in me, or implied by the ixaccepted intimacy of our relations. Well I know how easy it is to err in this respect; to overlook the evil force of irresponsible chatter. But I have always tried to bear in mind the grim warning of Tennyson's bitter words:

"Proclaim the faults he would not show;

Break lock and seal; betray the trust;

Keep nothing sacred; 'tis but just

The many-headed beast should know."

For nearly thirty years I was an intimate friend of Irving; in certain ways the most intimate friend of his life. I knew him as well as it is given to any man to know another. And this knowledge is fully in my mind, when I say that, so far as I know, there is not in this book a word of his inner life or his outer circumstances that he would wish unsaid; no omission that he would have liked filled.

Let any one who will read the book through say whether I have tried to do him honour—and to do it by worthy means: the honour and respect which I feel; which in days gone I held for him; which now I hold for his memory.

BRAM STOKER.

4 Durham Place,

Chelsea, London.

CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

1

I
EARLIEST RECOLLECTIONS OF HENRY IRVING

I

The first time I ever saw Henry Irving was at the Theatre Royal, Dublin, on the evening of Wednesday, August 28, 1867. Miss Herbert had brought the St. James's company on tour, playing some of the old comedies and Miss Braddon's new drama founded on her successful novel, *Lady Audley's Secret*. The piece chosen for this particular night was *The Rivals*, in which Irving played Captain Absolute.

Forty years ago provincial playgoers did not have much opportunity of seeing great acting, except in the star parts. It was the day of the stock companies, when the chief theatres everywhere had *good* actors who played for the whole season, each in his or her established class; but notable excellence was not to be expected at the salaries then possible to even the most enterprising management. The "business"—the term still applied to the minor incidents of acting, as well as to the disposition of the various characters and the entrances and exits—was, of necessity, of a formal and traditional kind. There was no time for the exhaustive rehearsal of minor details to which actors are in these days accustomed. When the bill was changed five or six times a week it was only possible, even at the longest rehearsal, to get through the standard outline of action, and secure perfection in the cues—in fact, those conditions of the interdependence of the actors and mechanics on which the structural excellence of the play depends. Moreover, the system by which great actors appeared as "stars," supported by only one or two players of their own bringing, made it necessary that there should be in the higher order of theatres some kind of standard way of regulating the action of the plays in vogue. It was a matter of considerable interest to me to see, when some fourteen years later Edwin Booth came to play at the Lyceum, that he sent his "dresser" to represent him at the 2earlier rehearsals, so as to point out to the stage management the disposition of the characters and general

arrangement of matured action to which he was accustomed. I only mention this here to illustrate the conditions of stage work at an earlier period.

This adherence to standard “business” was so strict, though unwritten, a rule that no one actor could venture to break it. To do so without preparation would have been to at least endanger the success of the play; and “preparation” was the prerogative of the management, not of the individual player. Even Henry Irving, though he had been, as well as a player, the stage manager of the St. James’s company, and so could carry out his ideas partially, could not have altered the broad lines of the play established by nearly a century of usage.

As a matter of fact, *The Rivals* had not been one of Miss Herbert’s productions at the St. James’s, and so it did not come within the scope of his stage management at all.

Irving had played the part of Captain Absolute in the Theatre Royal, Edinburgh, during three years of his engagement there, 1856–59, where he had learned the traditional usage. Thus the only possibility open to him, as to any actor with regard to an established comedy, was to improve on the traditional method of acting it within the established lines of movement; in fact, to impersonate the character to better advantage.

On this particular occasion the play as an entity had an advantage not always enjoyed in provincial theatres. It was performed by a company of comedians, several of whom had acted together for a considerable time. The lines of the play, being absolutely conventional, did not leave any special impress on the mind; one can only recall the actors and the acting.

HENRY IRVING BEFORE BECOMING AN ACTOR

1856

3To this day I can remember the playing of Henry Irving as Captain Absolute, which was different from any performance of the same part which I had seen. What I saw, to my amazement and delight, was a patrician figure as real as the persons of one's dreams, and endowed with the same poetic grace. A young soldier, handsome, distinguished, self-dependent, compact of grace and slumbrous energy. A man of quality who stood out from his surroundings on the stage as a being of another social world. A figure full of dash and fine irony, and whose ridicule seemed to *bite*; buoyant with the joy of life; self-conscious; an inoffensive egoist even in his love-making; of supreme and unsurpassable insolence, veiled and shrouded in his fine quality of manner. Such a figure as could only be possible in an age when the answer to offence was a sword-thrust, when only those dare be insolent who could depend to the last on the heart and brain and arm behind the blade. The scenes which stand out most vividly are the following: His interview with Mrs. Malaprop, in which she sets him to read his own intercepted letter to Lydia wherein he speaks of the old lady herself as "the old weather-beaten she-dragon." The manner with which he went back again and again, with excuses exemplified by action rather than speech, to the offensive words—losing his place in the letter and going back to find it—seeming to try to recover the sequence of thought—innocently trying to fit the words to the subject—was simply a triumph, of well-bred, easy insolence. Again, when Captain Absolute makes repentant obedience to his father's will his negative air of content as to the excellences or otherwise of his suggested wife was inimitable. And the shocked appearance, manner and speech of his hypocritical submission: "Not to please your father, sir?" was as enlightening to the audience as it was convincing to Sir Anthony. Again, the scene in the Fourth Act, when in the presence of his father and Mrs. Malaprop he has to make love to Lydia in his own person, was on the actor's part a masterpiece of emotion—the sort of thing to make an author grateful. There was no mistaking the emotions which came so fast, treading on each other's heels: his mental perturbation; his sense of the ludicrous situation in which he found himself; his hurried, feeble, ill-concealed efforts to find a way out of the difficulty. And through them all the sincerity of his real affection for Lydia which actually shone, coming straight and convincingly to the hearts of the audience.

But these scenes were all of acting a part. The reality of his character was in the scene of Sir Lucius O'Trigger's quarrel with him. Here he was real. Man to man the grace and truth of his character and bearing were based on no purpose or afterthought. Before a

man his manhood was sincere; before a gallant gentleman his gallantry was without flaw, and, as the dramatist intended, outshone even the chivalry of that perfect gentleman Sir Lucius O'Trigger.

The acting of Henry Irving is, after nearly forty years, so vivid in my memory that I can recall his movements, his expressions, the tones of his voice.

And yet the manner in which his acting in the new and perfect method was received in the local press may afford an object-lesson 4of what the pioneer of high art has, like any other pioneer, to endure.

During the two weeks' visit to Dublin the repertoire comprised, as well as *The Rivals*, *The School for Scandal*, *The Belle's Stratagem*, *The Road to Ruin*, *She Stoops to Conquer*, and *Lady Audley's Secret*.

Of these other plays I can say nothing, for I did not see them. Lately, however, on looking over the newspapers, I found hardly a word of even judicious comment; praise there was not. According to the local journalistic record, his Joseph Surface was "lachrymose, coarse, pointless, and ineffective. Nothing could be more ludicrously deficient of dramatic power than his acting in the passage with Lady Teazle in the screen scene. The want of harmony between the actual words and gesture, emphasis and expression, was painfully palpable."

And yet to those who can read between the lines and gather truth where truth—though not perhaps the same truth—is meant, this very criticism shows how well he played the hypocrite who meant one thing whilst conveying the idea of another. Were Joseph's acts and tones and words all in perfect harmony he would seem to an audience not a hypocrite but a reality.

Another critic considered him "stiff and constrained, and occasionally left the audience under the impression that they were witnessing the playing of an amateur."

The only mention of his Young Marlow was in one paper that it was "carefully represented by Mr. Irving," and in another that it was "insipid and pointless."

Of young Dornton in *The Road to Ruin* there was one passing word of praise as an "able impersonation." But of *The Rivals* I could find no criticism whatever in any of the Dublin papers when more than thirty-eight years after seeing the play I searched them, hoping to find some confirmation of my vivid recollection of Henry Irving's brilliant acting. The following only, in small type, I found in the *Irish Times* of more than a week after the play had been given:

“Of those who support Miss Herbert, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Matthews are undoubtedly the best. Mr. Stoyle is full of broad comedy, but now and then he is not true to nature. Mr. Irving and Mr. Gaston Murray are painstaking and respectable artists.”

It is good to think that the great player who, as the representative actor of his nation—of the world—for over a quarter of a 5century, was laid to rest in Westminster Abbey to the grief of at least two Continents, had after eleven years of arduous and self-sacrificing work, during which he had played over five hundred different characters and had even then begun quite a new school of acting, been considered by at least one writer for the press “a painstaking and respectable artist.”

II

I did not see Henry Irving again till May 1871, when with the Vaudeville company he played for a fortnight at the Theatre Royal Albery’s comedy *Two Roses*. Looking back to that time, the best testimony I can bear to the fact that the performance interested me is that I went to see it three times. The company was certainly an excellent one. In addition to Henry Irving, it contained H. J. Montague, George Honey, Louise Claire, and Amy Fawsitt.

Well do I remember the delight of that performance of Digby Grant, and how well it foiled the other characters of the play.

Amongst them all it stood out star-like—an inimitable character which Irving impersonated in a manner so complete that to this day I have been unable to get it out of my mind as a reality. Indeed, it was a reality, though at that time I did not know it. Years afterwards I met the original at the house of the late Mr. James McHenry—a villa in a little park off Addison Road.

This archetype was the late Chevalier Wikoff, of whom in the course of a friendship of years I had heard much from McHenry, who well remembered him in his early days in Philadelphia, in which city Wikoff was born. In his youth he had been a very big, handsome man, and in the days when men wore cloaks used to pass down Chestnut Street or Locust Street with a sublime swagger. He was a great friend of Edwin Forrest the actor, and a great “ladies’ man.” He had been a friend and lover of the celebrated dancer Fanny Elsler, who was so big and yet so agile that, as my father described to me, when she bounded in on the stage, seeming to light from the wings to the footlights in a single leap, the house seemed to shake. Wikoff was a pretty hard man, and as cunning as men are made. When I knew him he was an old man, but he fortified the deficiencies of age with artfulness. He was then a little hard of hearing, but he simulated complete deafness, and there was little said within a reasonable

distance that he did not 6hear. For many years he had lived in Europe, chiefly in London and Paris. There was one trait in his character which even his intimate friends did not suspect. Every year right up to the end of his long life he disappeared from London at a certain date. He was making his pilgrimage to Paris, where on a given day he laid some flowers on a little grave long after the child's mother, the dancer, had died. Wikoff was a trusted agent of the Bonapartes, and he held strange secrets of that adventurous family. He it was, so McHenry told me, who had brought in secret from France to England the last treasures of the Imperial house after the *débâcle* following Sedan.

This was the person whom Irving had reproduced in Digby Grant. Long before, he had met him at McHenry's. With that "seeing eye" of his he had marked his personality down for use, and with that marvellous memory, which in my long experience of him never failed him, was able to reproduce with the exactness of a "Chinese copy" every jot and tittle appertaining to the man, without and within. His tall, gaunt, slightly stooping figure; his scanty hair artfully arranged to cover the ravages of time; the cunning, inquisitive eyes; the mechanical turning of the head which becomes the habit of the deaf; the veiled voice which can do everything but express truth—even under stress of sudden emotion. Years after *Two Roses* had had its run at the Vaudeville and elsewhere I went to see Wikoff when he was ill in a humble lodging. In answer to my knuckle-tap he opened the door himself. For an instant I was startled out of my self-possession, for in front of me stood the veritable Digby Grant. I had met him already a good many times, but always in the recognised costume of morning or evening. Now I saw him as Irving had represented him; but I do not think he had ever seen him as I saw him at that moment. I believe that the costume in which he appeared in that play was the result of the actor's inductive ratiocination. He had studied the individuality so thoroughly, and was so familiar with not only his apparent characteristics but with those secret manifestations which are in their very secrecy subtle indicators of individuality grafted on type, that he had re-created him—just as Cuvier or Owen could from a single bone reconstruct giant reptiles of the Palæozoic age. There was the bizarre dressing-jacket, frayed at the edge and cuff, with ragged frogs and stray buttons. There the three days' beard, white at root and raven black at point. There the flamboyant smoking-cap with yellow tassel, which marks that epoch in the history of ridiculous dress out of which in sheer revulsion of artistic feeling came the Pre-Raphaelite movement.

HENRY IRVING AS DIGBY GRANT IN “TWO ROSES”

Drawing made in his dressing-room by Fred Barnard, 1870

7Irving had asked me to bring with me to Wikoff some grapes and other creature comforts, for which the poor old man was, I believe, genuinely grateful; but in the course of our chat he told me that Irving had "taken him off" for "that fellow in the *Two Roses*." Wikoff did not seem displeased at the duplication of his identity, but rather proud of it.

This wonderful creation in the play "took the town," as the phrase is, and for some time the sayings of the characters in it were heard everywhere. It was truly a "creation"; not merely in the actor's sense, where the first player of a character in London is deemed its "creator," but in the usual meaning of the word. For it is not enough in acting to know what to do; it must be done! All possible knowledge of Wikoff, from his psychical identity to his smoking-cap, could not produce a strong effect unless the actor through the resources of his art could transform reality to the appearance of reality—a very different and much more difficult thing.

When Irving played in *Two Roses* in Dublin in 1872 there was not a word in any of the papers of the acting of any of the accomplished players who took part in it; not even the mention of their names.

What other cities may have said of him in these earlier days I know not, but I take it that the standard of criticism is generally of the same average of excellence, according to the assay of the time. In the provinces the zone of demarcation between bad and good varies less, in that mediocrity qualifies more easily and superexcellence finds a wider field for work. Of one thing we may be sure: that success has its own dangers. Self-interest and jealousy and a host of the lesser and meaner vices of the intellectual world find their opportunity.

When the floodgates of Comment are opened there comes with the rush of clean water all the scum and rubbish which has accumulated behind them, drawn into position by the trickling stream.

8

II
THE OLD SCHOOL AND THE NEW

I

More than five years elapsed before I saw Henry Irving again. We were both busy men, each in his own way, and the Fates did not allow our orbits to cross. He did not come to Dublin; my work did not allow my going to London except at times when he was not playing there. Those five years were to him a triumphant progress in his art and fame.

He rose, and rose, and rose. *The Bells* in 1871 was followed in 1872 by *Charles I.*, in 1873 by *Eugene Aram*, and *Richelieu*, in 1874 by *Philip* and *Hamlet*, in 1875 by *Macbeth*, and in 1876 by *Othello* and *Queen Mary*.

For my own part, being then in the Civil Service, I could only get away in the "prime of summer time" as my seniors preferred to take their holiday in the early summer or the late autumn. I had, when we next met, been for five years a dramatic critic. In 1871 my growing discontent with the attention accorded to the stage in the local newspapers had culminated with the neglect of *Two Roses*. I asked the proprietor of one of the Dublin newspapers whom I happened to know, Dr. Maunsell, an old contemporary and friend of Charles Lever, to allow me to write on the subject in the *Mail*. He told me frankly that the paper could not afford to pay for such special work, as it was, in accordance with the local custom of the time, done by the regular staff, who wrote on all subjects as required. I replied that I would gladly do it without fee or reward. This he allowed me to carry out.

From my beginning the work in November 1871 I had an absolutely free hand. I was thus able to direct public attention, so far as my paper could effect it, where in my mind such was required. In those five years I think I learned a good deal. "Writing maketh an exact man"; and as I have always held that in matters critical the critic's personal honour is involved in every word he writes, the duty I had undertaken was to me a grave one. I did not shirk work in any way; indeed, I 9helped largely to effect a needed reform as to the time when criticism should appear. In those days of single printings from slow presses "copy" had to be handed in very early. The paper went to press not long after midnight, and there were few men who could see a play and write the criticism in time for the morning's issue. It thus happened that the critical article was usually a full day behind its time. Monday night's performance was not generally reviewed till Wednesday at earliest; the instances which I have already given afford the proof. This was very hard upon the actors and companies making short visits. The public *en bloc* is a slow-moving force, and when possibility of result is cut short by effluxion of time it is a sad handicap to enterprise and to exceptional work.

I do not wish to be egotistical, and I trust that no reader may take it that I am so, in that I have spoken of my first experiences of Henry Irving and how, mainly because of his influence on me, I undertook critical work with regard to his own art. My purpose in doing so is not selfish. I merely wish that those who honour me by reading what I have written should understand something which went before our personal meeting, and why it was that when we did meet we came together with a loving and understanding friendship which lasted unbroken till my dear friend passed away.

Looking back now after an interval of nearly forty years, during which time I was mainly too busy to look back at all, I can understand something of those root-forces which had so strange an influence on both Irving's life and my own, though at the first I was absolutely unconscious of even their existence. Neither when I first saw Irving in 1867, nor when I met him in 1876, nor for many years after I had been his close friend and fellow worker, did I know that his first experience of Dublin had been painful to the last degree. I thought from the way in which the press had ignored him and his work that they must have been bad enough in 1867 and 1871. But long afterwards he told me the story to this effect:

Quite early in his life as an actor—when he was only twenty-one—in an off season, when the "resting" actor grasps at any chance of work, he received from Mr. Harry Webb, then Manager of the Queen's Theatre, Dublin, and with whom he had played at the Edinburgh Theatre, an offer of an engagement for some weeks. This he joyfully accepted; and turned up in due course. He did 10not know then, though he learned it with startling rapidity, that he was wanted to fill the place of a local favourite who had been, for some cause, summarily dismissed. The public visited their displeasure on the new-comer, and in no uncertain way. From the moment of his coming on the stage on the first night of his engagement until almost its end he was not allowed to say one word without interruption. Hisses and stamping, cat-calls and the thumping of sticks were the universal accompaniments of his speech.

Now to an actor nothing is so deadly as to be hissed. Not only does it bar his artistic effort, but it hurts his self-esteem. Its manifestation is a negation of himself, his power, his art. It is present death to him *quâ* artist, with the added sting of shame. Well did the actors know it who crowded the court at Bow Street when the vanity-mad fool who murdered poor William Terriss was arraigned. The murderer was an alleged actor, and they wanted to punish him. When he was placed in the dock, with one impulse they *hissed* him!

In Irving's case at the Queen's the audience, with some shameful remnant of fair play, treated him well the last two nights of his performance, and cheered him. It was manifestly intended as a proof that it was not against this particular man that their protest was aimed—though he was the sufferer by it—but against *any one* who might have taken the place of their favourite, whom they considered had been injured.

Of this engagement Irving spoke to an interviewer in 1891 *apropos* of an outrage, unique to him, inflicted on Toole shortly before at Coatbridge—a place of which the saying is, "There is only a sheet of paper between Hell and Coatbridge."

"Did you ever have any similar experience in your own career, Mr. Irving?"

"... I did have rather a nasty time once, and suffered much as Mr. Toole has done from the misplaced emotions of the house. It was in this way. When I was a young man—away back about 1859" (should be 1860) "I should say it was—I was once sent for to fulfil an engagement of six weeks at the Queen's Theatre, a minor theatre in the Irish capital. It was soon after I had left here, Edinburgh. I got over all right, and was ready with my part, but to my amazement, the moment I appeared on the stage I was greeted with a howl of execration from the pit and gallery. There was I standing aghast, ignorant of having given any cause of offence, 11and in front of me a raging Irish audience, shouting, gesticulating, swearing probably, and in various forms indicating their disapproval of my appearance. I was simply thunderstruck at the warmth of my reception.... I simply went through my part amid a continual uproar—groans, hoots, hisses, cat-calls, and all the appliances of concerted opposition. It was a roughish experience that!"

"But surely it did not last long?"

"That depends," replied the player grimly, "on what you call long. It lasted six weeks.... I was as innocent as yourself of all offence, and could not for the life of me make out what was wrong. I had hurt nobody; had said nothing insulting; I had played my parts not badly for me. Yet for the whole of that time I had every night to fight through my piece in the teeth of a house whose entire energies seemed to be concentrated in a personal antipathy to myself."

It was little wonder that the actor who had thus suffered undeservedly remembered the details, though the time had so long gone by that he made error as to the year. No wonder that the time of the purgatorial suffering seemed fifty per cent. longer than its actual duration. Other things of more moment had long ago passed out of his mind—he had supped full of success and praise; but the bitter flavour of that month of pain hung all the same in his cup of memory.

How it hung can hardly be expressed in words. For years he did not speak of it even to me when telling me of how on March 12, 1860, he played Laertes to the Hamlet of T. C. King. It was not till after more than a quarter of a century of unbroken success that he could bear even to speak of it. Not even the consciousness of his own innocence in the whole affair could quell the mental disturbance which it caused him whenever it came back to his thoughts.

II

When, then, Henry Irving came to Dublin in 1876, though it was after a series of triumphs in London running into a term of years, he must have had some strong

misgivings as to what his reception might be. It is true that the early obloquy had lessened into neglect; but no artist whose stock-in-trade is mainly his own personality could be expected to reason with the same calmness as that Parliamentary candidate who thus expressed the grounds of his own belief in his growing popularity:

12"I am growing popular!"

"Popular!" said his friend. "Why, last night I saw them pelt you with rotten eggs!"

"Yes!" he replied with gratification, "that is right! But they used to throw bricks!"

In London the bricks had been thrown, and in plenty. There are some persons of such a temperament that they are jealous of any new idea—of any thing or idea which is outside their own experience or beyond their own reasoning. The new ideas of thoughtful acting which Irving introduced won their way, in the main, splendidly. But it was a hard fight, for there were some violent and malignant writers of the time who did not hesitate to stoop to any meanness of attack. It is extraordinary how the sibilation of a single hiss will win through a tempest of cheers! The battle, however, was being won; when Irving came to Dublin he brought with him a reputation consolidated by the victorious conclusions of five years of strife. The new method was already winning its way.

It so happens that I was myself able through a "fortuitous concourse" of facts to have some means of comparison between the new and the old.

My father, who was born in 1798 and had been a theatre-goer all his life, had seen Edmund Kean in all his Dublin performances. He had an immense admiration for that actor, with whom none of the men within thirty years of his death were, he said, to be compared. When the late Barry Sullivan came on tour and played a range of the great plays he had enormous success. My father, then well over seventy, did not go to the play as often as he had been used to in earlier days; but I was so much struck with the force of Barry Sullivan's acting that I persuaded him to come with me to see him play Sir Giles Overreach in *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*—one of his greatest successes, as it had been one of Kean's. At first he refused to come, saying that it was no use his going, as he had seen the greatest of all actors in the part, and did not care to see a lesser one. However, he let me have my way, and went; and we sat together in the third row of the pit, which had been his chosen locality in his youth. He had been all his life in the Civil Service, serving under four monarchs—George III., George IV., William IV., and Victoria—and retiring after fifty years of service. In those days, as now, the home Civil Service was not a very money-making business, and it was just as well that he

preferred 13the pit. I believed then that I preferred it also, for I too was then in the Civil Service!

He sat the play out with intense eagerness, and as the curtain fell on the frenzied usurer driven mad by thwarted ambition and the loss of his treasure, feebly spitting at the foes he could not master as he sank feebly into supporting arms, he turned to me and said:

"He is as good as the best of them!"

Barry Sullivan was a purely traditional actor of the old school. All his movements and gestures, readings, phrasings, and times were in exact accordance with the accepted style. It was possible, therefore, for my father to judge fairly. I saw Barry Sullivan in many plays: *Hamlet*, *Richelieu*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *The Gamester*, *The Wife's Secret*, *The Stranger*, *Richard III.*, *The Wonder*, *Othello*, *The School for Scandal*, as well as playing Sir Giles Overreach, and some more than once; I had a fair opportunity of comparing his acting over a wide range with the particular play by which my father judged. *Ab uno disce omnes* is hardly a working rule in general, but one example is a world better than none. I can fairly say that the actor's general excellence was fairly represented by his characterisation and acting of Sir Giles. I had also seen Charles Kean, G. V. Brook, T. C. King, Charles Dillon, and Vandenhoff. I had therefore in my own mind some kind of a standard by which to judge of the worth of the old school, tracing it back to its last great exemplar. When, therefore, I came to contrast it with the new school of Irving, I was building my opinion not on sand but upon solid ground. Let me say how the change from the old to the new affected me; it is allowable, I suppose, in matters of reminiscence to take personal example. Hitherto I had only seen Irving in two characters, Captain Absolute and Digby Grant. The former of these was a part in which for at least ten years—for I was a playgoer very early in life—I had seen other actors all playing the part in a conventional manner. As I have explained, I had only in Irving's case been struck by his rendering of his own part within the conventional lines. The latter part was of quite a new style—new to the world in its essence as its method, and we of that time and place had no standard with regard to it, no means or opportunity of comparison. It was therefore with very great interest that we regarded in 1876 the playing of this actor who was accepted in the main as a new giant. To me as a critic, with the experience of five years of the work, the occasion was of great moment; and I am free to confess that I was a little jealous lest 14the new-comer—even though I admired so much of his work as I had seen—should overthrow my friend and countryman. For at this time Barry Sullivan was more than an acquaintance; we had spent a good many hours together talking over acting and stage history generally. Indeed, I said in my critical article thus:

“Mr. Irving holds in the minds of all who have seen him a high place as an artist, and by some he is regarded as the Garrick of his age; and so we shall judge him by the highest standard which we know.”

At the first glance, after the lapse of time, this seems if not unfair at least hard upon the actor; but the second thought shows a subtle though unintentional compliment: Henry Irving had already raised in his critic, partly by the dignity of his own fame and partly through the favourable experience of the critic, the standard of criticism. He was to be himself the standard of excellence! His present boon to us was that he had taught us to think. Let me give an illustration.

Barry Sullivan was according to accepted ideas a great Macbeth. I for one thought so. He had great strength, great voice, great physique of all sorts; a well-knit figure with fine limbs, broad shoulders, and the perfect back of a prize-fighter. He was master of himself, and absolutely well versed in the parts which he played. His fighting power was immense, and in the last act of the play good to see. The last scene of all, when the “flats” of the penultimate scene were drawn away in response to the usual carpenter’s whistle of the time, was disclosed as a bare stage with “wings” of wild rock and heather. At the back was Macbeth’s Castle of Dunsinane seen in perspective. It was supposed to be vast, and occupied the whole back of the scene. In the centre was the gate, double doors in a Gothic archway of massive proportions. In reality it was quite eight feet high, though of course looking bigger in the perspective. The stage was empty, but from all round it rose the blare of trumpets and the roll of drums. Suddenly the Castle gates were dashed back, and through the archway came Macbeth, sword in hand and buckler on arm. Dashing with really superb vigour down to the footlights, he thundered out his speech:

“They have tied me to a stake; I cannot fly.”

Now this was to us all very fine, and was vastly exciting. None of us ever questioned its accuracy to nature. That Castle with 15the massive gates thrown back on their hinges by the rush of a single man came back to me vividly when I saw the play as Irving did it in 1888, though at the time we had never given it a thought. Indeed, we gave thought to few such things; we took them with simplicity and as they were, just as we accepted the conventional scenes of the then theatre, *the Palace Arches*, *the Oak Chamber*, *the Forest Glade* with its added *wood wings*, and all the machinery of tradition. With Irving all was different. That “easy” progress of Macbeth’s soldiers returning tired after victorious battle, seen against the low dropping sun across the vast heather studded with patches of light glinting on water; the endless procession of soldiers straggling, singly, and by twos and threes, filling the stage to the conclusion of an endless array,

conveyed an idea of force and power which impressed the spectator with an invaluable sincerity. In fact, Irving always helped his audience to think.

16

III
FRIENDSHIP

I

That Irving was, in my estimation, worthy of the test I had laid down is shown by my article on the opening performance of *Hamlet*, and in the second article written after I had seen him play the part for the third time running. That he was pleased with the review of his work was proved by the fact that he asked on reading my criticism on Tuesday morning that we should be introduced. This was effected by my friend Mr. John Harris, Manager of the Theatre Royal.

Irving and I met as friends, and it was a great gratification to me when he praised my work. He asked me to come round to his room again when the play was over. I went back with him to his hotel, and with three of his friends supped with him.

We met again on the following Sunday, when he had a few friends to dinner. It was a pleasant evening and a memorable one for me, for then began the close friendship between us which only terminated with his life—if indeed friendship, like any other form of love, can ever terminate. In the meantime I had written the second notice of his Hamlet. This had appeared on Saturday, and when we met he was full of it. Praise was no new thing to him in those days. Two years before, though I knew nothing of them at that time, two criticisms of his Hamlet had been published in Liverpool. One admirable pamphlet was by Sir (then Mr.) Edward Russell, then, as now, the finest critic in England; the other by Hall Caine—a remarkable review to have been written by a young man under twenty. Some of the finest and most lofty minds had been brought to bear on his work. It is, however, a peculiarity of an actor's work that it never grows stale; no matter how often the same thing be repeated, it requires a fresh effort each time. Thus it is that criticism can never be stale either; it has always power either to soothe or to hurt. To a great actor the growth of 17character never stops, and any new point is a new interest, a new lease of intellectual life.

II

Before dinner Irving chatted with me about this second article. In it I had said:

"There is another view of Hamlet, too, which Mr. Irving seems to realise by a kind of instinct, but which requires to be more fully and intentionally worked out.... The great,

deep, underlying idea of Hamlet is that of a mystic.... In the high-strung nerves of the man; in the natural impulse of spiritual susceptibility; in his concentrated action, spasmodic though it sometimes be, and in the divine delirium of his perfected passion there is the instinct of the mystic, which he has but to render a little plainer in order that the less susceptible senses of his audience may see and understand."

He was also pleased with another comment of mine. Speaking of the love shown in his parting with Ophelia I had said:

"To give strong grounds for belief, where the instinct can judge more truly than the intellect, is the perfection of suggestive acting; and certainly with regard to this view of Hamlet Mr. Irving deserves not only the highest praise that can be accorded, but the loving gratitude of all to whom his art is dear."

There were plenty of things in my two criticisms which could hardly have been pleasurable to the actor, so that my review of his work could not be considered mere adulation. But I never knew in all the years of our friendship and business relations Irving to take offence or be hurt by true criticism—that criticism which is philosophical and gives a reason for every opinion adverse to that on which judgment is held. When any one could let Irving believe that he had either studied the subject or felt the result of his own showing, he was prepared to argue to the last any point suggested on equal terms. I remember at this time Edward Dowden, the great Shakespearean critic, then, as now, Professor of English Literature in Dublin University, saying to me in discussing Irving's acting:

"After all, an actor's commentary is his acting!"—a remark of embodied wisdom. Irving had so thoroughly studied every phase 18and application and the relative importance of every word of his part that he was well able to defend his accepted position. Seldom indeed was any one able to refute him; but when such occurred no one was more ready to accept the true view—and to act upon it.

Thus it was that on this particular night my host's heart was from the beginning something toward me, as mine had been toward him. He had learned that I could appreciate high effort; and with the instinct of his craft liked, I suppose, to prove himself again to his new, sympathetic and understanding friend. And so after dinner he said he would like to recite for me Thomas Hood's poem *The Dream of Eugene Aram*.

That experience I shall never—can never—forget. The recitation was different, both in kind and degree, from anything I had ever heard; and in those days there were some noble experiences of moving speech. It had been my good fortune to be in Court when

Whiteside made his noble appeal to the jury in the Yelverton Case; a speech which won for him the unique honour, when next he walked into his place in the House of Commons, of the whole House standing up and cheering him.

I had heard Lord Brougham speak amid a tempest of cheers in the great Round Room of the Dublin Mansion House.

I had heard John Bright make his great oration on Ireland in the Dublin Mechanics' Institute, and had thrilled to the roar within, and the echoing roar from the crowded street without, which followed his splendid utterance. Like all the others I was touched with deep emotion. To this day I can remember the tones of his organ voice as he swept us all—heart and brain and memory and hope—with his mighty periods; moving all who remembered how in the Famine time America took the guns from her battleships to load them fuller with grain for the starving Irish peasants.

These experiences and many others had shown me something of the power of words. In all these and in most of the others there were natural aids to the words spoken. The occasion had always been great, the theme far above one's daily life. The place had always been one of dignity; and above all, had been the greatest of all aids to effective speech, that which I heard Dean (then Canon) Farrar call in his great sermon on Garibaldi "the mysterious sympathy of numbers." But here in a dining-room, amid a dozen friends, a man in evening dress stood up to recite a poem with which we 19had all been familiar from our schooldays, which most if not all of us had ourselves recited at some time.

But such was Irving's commanding force, so great was the magnetism of his genius, so profound was the sense of his dominance that I sat spell-bound. Outwardly I was as of stone; nought quick in me but receptivity and imagination. That I knew the story and was even familiar with its unalterable words was nothing. The whole thing was new, re-created by a force of passion which was like a new power. Across the footlights amid picturesque scenery and suitable dress, with one's fellows beside and all around one, though the effect of passion can convince and sway it cannot move one personally beyond a certain point. But here was incarnate power, incarnate passion, so close that one could meet it eye to eye, within touch of the outstretched hand. The surroundings became non-existent; the dress ceased to be noticeable; recurring thoughts of self-existence were not at all. Here was indeed Eugene Aram as he was face to face with his Lord; his very soul aflame in the light of his abiding horror. Looking back now, I can realise the perfection of art with which the mind was led and swept and swayed hither and thither as the actor wished. How a change of tone or time denoted the personality of the "Blood-avenging Sprite"—and how the nervous,

eloquent hands slowly moving, outspread fanlike, round the fixed face—set as doom, with eyes as inflexible as Fate—emphasised it till one instinctively quivered with pity! Then came the awful horror on the murderer's face as the ghost in his brain seemed to take external shape before his eyes, and enforced on him that from his sin there was no refuge. After this climax of horror the Actor was able by art and habit to control himself to the narrative mood whilst he spoke the few concluding lines of the poem.

Then he collapsed half fainting.

III

There are great moments even to the great. That night Irving was inspired. Many times since then I saw and heard him—for such an effort eyes as well as ears are required—recite that poem and hold audiences, big or little, spell-bound till the moment came for the thunderous outlet of their pent-up feelings; but that particular vein I never met again. Art can do much; but in all things 20even in art there is a summit somewhere. That night for a brief time, in which the rest of the world seemed to sit still, Irving's genius floated in blazing triumph above the summit of art. There is something in the soul which lifts it above all that has its base in material things. If once only in a lifetime the soul of a man can take wings and sweep for an instant into mortal gaze, then that "once" for Irving was on that, to me, ever memorable night.

As to its effect I had no adequate words. I can only say that after a few seconds of stony silence following his collapse I burst out into something like a violent fit of hysterics.

Let me say, not in my own vindication, but to bring new tribute to Irving's splendid power, that I was no hysterical subject. I was no green youth; no weak individual, yielding to a superior emotional force. I was as men go a strong man—strong in many ways. If autobiography is allowable in a work of reminiscence, let me say here what has to be said of myself.

In my earlier years I had known much illness. Certainly till I was about seven years old I never knew what it was to stand upright. This early weakness, however, passed away in time and I grew into a strong boy. When I was in my twentieth year I was Athletic Champion of Dublin University. When I met Irving first I was in my thirtieth year. I had been for ten years in the Civil Service, and was then engaged on a dry-as-dust book on *The Duties of Clerks of Petty Sessions*. I had edited a newspaper, and had exercised my spare time in many ways—as a journalist; as a writer; as a teacher. In my College days I had been Auditor of the Historical Society—a post which corresponds to the Presidency of the Union in Oxford or Cambridge—and had got medals, or

certificates, for History, Composition, and Oratory. I had been President of the Philosophical Society; I had got University Honours in pure Mathematics. I had won numerous silver cups for races of various kinds—for rowing, weight-throwing, and gymnastics. I had played for years in the University football team, where I had received the honour of a "cap!" When, therefore, after his recitation I became hysterical, it was distinctly a surprise to my friends; for myself surprise had no part in my then state of mind. Irving seemed much moved by the occurrence.

On piecing together the causes of his pleasure at finding an understanding friend, and his further pleasure in realising that that friend's capacity for receptive emotion was something akin in 21forcefulness to his power of creating it, I can now have some glimpse of his compelling motive when he went into his bedroom and after a couple of minutes brought me out his photograph with an inscription on it, the ink still wet:

"My dear friend Stoker. God bless you! God bless you!! Henry Irving. Dublin, December 3, 1876."

In those moments of our mutual emotion he too had found a friend and knew it. Soul had looked into soul! From that hour began a friendship as profound, as close, as lasting as can be between two men.

He has gone his road. Now he lies amongst the great dead; his battle won; the desire of his heart for the advancement of his chosen and beloved art accomplished: his ambition satisfied; his fame part of the history and the glory of the nation.

The sight of his picture before me, with those loving words—the record of a time of deep emotion and full understanding of us both, each for the other—unmans me once again as I write.

I have ventured to write fully, if not diffusely, about not only my first meeting with Irving but about matters which preceded it and in some measure lead to an understanding of its results.

When a man with his full share of ambition is willing to yield it up to work with a friend whom he loves and honours, it is perhaps as well that in due season he may set out his reasons for so doing. Such is but just; and I now place it on record for the sake of Irving as well as of myself, and for the friends of us both.

For twenty-seven years I worked with Henry Irving, helping him in all honest ways in which one may aid another—and there were no ways with Irving other than honourable.

Looking back I cannot honestly find any moment in my life when I failed him, or when I put myself forward in any way when the most scrupulous good taste could have enjoined or even suggested a larger measure of reticence.

By my dealing with him I am quite content to be judged, now and hereafter. In my own speaking to the dead man I can find an analogue in the words of heartbreaking sincerity:

“Stand up on the jasper sea,

And be witness I have given

All the gifts required of me!”

22

IV
HONOURS FROM DUBLIN UNIVERSITY

During that visit to Dublin, 1876, Irving received at the hands of the University two honours, one of them unique. Both were accorded by all grades of the College—for Dublin University is the University of the College.

Both honours were unofficial and yet both entirely representative. Both were originated by a few of us the morning after his first performance of *Hamlet*—before I had the honour of knowing him personally. The first was an Address to be presented in the Dining Hall by the Graduates and Undergraduates of the University. The movement came from a few enthusiasts, of whom the late G. F. Shaw and Professor R. Y. Tyrrell, both Fellows of the University, were included. As I had originated the idea I was asked by the Committee to write the draft address.

One of the paragraphs, when completed, ran as follows:

“For the delight and instruction that we (in common with our fellow citizens) have derived from all your impersonations, we tender you our sincere thanks. But it is something more than gratitude for personal pleasure or personal improvement that moves us to offer this public homage to your genius. Acting such as yours ennobles and elevates the stage, and serves to restore it to its true function as a potent instrument for intellectual and moral culture.

“Throughout your too brief engagement our stage has been a school of true art, a purifier of the passions, and a nurse of heroic sentiments; you have even succeeded in commending it to the favour of a portion of society, large and justly influential, who usually hold aloof from the theatre.”

The Address was signed with the names necessary to show its scope and wide significance.

To this Irving replied suitably. I give some passages of his speech; for the occasion was a memorable one, with far-reaching consequences to himself and his art and calling:

23"I believe that this is one of the very rare occasions on which public acknowledgment has been given by an Academic body to the efforts of a player, and this belief impresses me with the magnitude of the honour which you have conferred.... I feel not merely the personal pride of individual success which you thus avow, but that the far nobler work which I aim at is in truth begun. When I think that you, the upholders of the classic in every age, have just flung aside the traditions of three centuries, and have acknowledged the true union of poet and actor, my heart swells with a great pride that I should be the recipient of such acknowledgment. I trust with all my soul that the reform which you suggest may ere long be carried out, and that that body to whom is justly entrusted our higher moral education may recognise in the Stage a medium for the accomplishment of such ends. What you have done to-day is a mighty stride in this direction. In my profession it will be hailed with joy and gladness—it must elevate, not only the aims of individual actors, but our calling in the eyes of the world. Such honour as you have now bestowed enters not into the actor's dreams of success. Our hopes, it is true, are dazzling. We seek our reward in the approval of audiences, and in the tribute of their tears and smiles; but the calm honour of academic distinction is and must be to us, as actors, the Unattainable, and therefore the more dear when given unsought....

"It is only natural in the presence of gentlemen whose *Alma Mater* holds such state among institutes of learning that I should feel embarrassed in the choice of words with which to thank you; but I beg you to believe this. For my Profession, I tender you gratitude; for my Art, I honour you; for myself, I would that I could speak all that is in my soul. But I cannot; and so falteringly tender you my most grateful thanks."

The second honour given on the same day—December 11, 1876—was a "University Night." Trinity had taken all the seats in the theatre, and these had been allotted in a sort of rough precedence, University dignitaries coming first, and public men of light and leading—alumni of the University—next, and so on to the undergraduates who occupied pit and gallery. An announcement had been made by the Management of the theatre that only those seats not required by the University would be available on the evening for the public. What follows is from the account of the affair written by myself for the Dublin *Mail*:

“The grand reception given to Mr. Irving in Trinity College during the day had increased the interest of the public, and 24vast crowds had assembled to await the opening of the doors. A little before seven the sound of horns was heard in the College, and from the gate in Brunswick Street swept a body of five hundred students, who took the seats reserved for them in the pit of the theatre. Then gradually the boxes began to fill, and as each Fellow and Professor and well-known University character made his appearance, he was cheered according to the measure of his popularity.... All University men, past and present, wore rosettes. Long before the time appointed for beginning the play the whole house was crammed from floor to ceiling; the pit and galleries were seas of heads, and the box lobbies were filled with those who were content to get an occasional glimpse of the stage through the door. When Mr. Irving made his appearance the pit rose at him, and he was received with a cheer which somewhat resembled a May shower, for it was sudden, fierce, and short, as the burst of welcome was not allowed to interrupt the play. Mr. Irving’s performance was magnificent. It seemed as though he were put on his mettle by the University distinction of the day to do justice to the stateliness of his mighty theme, and, at the same time, was fired to the utmost enthusiasm—as it was, indeed, no wonder—at the warmth of his reception. In the philosophic passage ‘To be or not to be,’ and the advice to the players, there was a quiet, self-possessed dignity of thought which no man could maintain if he did not know that he had an appreciative audience, and that he was not talking over their heads. In the scene with Ophelia he acted as though inspired, for there was a depth of passionate emotion which even a great actor can but seldom feel; and in the play scene he stirred the house to such a state of feeling that there was a roar of applause. During the performance he was called before the drop-scene several times; but it was not till the green curtain fell that the pent-up enthusiasm burst forth. There was a tremendous applause, and when the actor came forward the whole house rose simultaneously to their feet, and there was a shout that made the walls ring again. Hats and handkerchiefs were waved, and cheer upon cheer swelled louder and louder as the player stood proudly before his audience, with a light upon his face such as never shone from the floats. It was a pleasant sight to behold—the sea of upturned faces in the pit, clear, strong young faces, with broad foreheads and bright eyes—the glimpse of colour as the crimson rosettes which the student’s wore flashed with their every movement—the gleaming jewels of the ladies in the boxes—the moving mass of hats and handkerchiefs, and above all the unanimity with which everything was done. It was evident that in the theatre this night was a body moved by a strong *esprit de corps*, for without any fugleman every movement was simultaneous. They took their 25cue from the situation, moved by one impulse to do the same thing. It was, indeed, a tribute of which any human being might be proud.

For many minutes the tempest continued, and then, as one man, the house sat down, as Mr. Henry Irving stepped forward to make his speech, which was as follows:

"'Ladies and Gentlemen,—Honest steadfast work in any path of life is almost sure to bring rewards and honours; but they are rewards and honours so unexpected and so unprecedented that they may well give the happy recipient a new zest for existence. Such honours you have heaped upon me. For the welcome you have given me upon these classic boards—for the proud distinction your grand University has bestowed upon me—for these honours accept the truest, warmest, and most earnest thanks that an overflowing heart tries to utter, and you cannot think it strange that every fibre of my soul throbs and my eyes are dim with emotion as I look upon your faces and know that I must say "Good-bye." Your brilliant attendance on this, my parting performance, sheds a lustre upon my life.'

"At the close of his speech Mr. Irving seemed much affected, as, indeed, it was no wonder, for the memory of Saturday night is one which he will carry to his grave. Not Mr. Irving alone, but the whole of the profession should be proud of such a tribute to histrionic genius, for the address in the University and the assemblage at the theatre not only adds another sprig to the actor's well-won crown of laurel, but it marks an era in the history of the stage."

When the performance was over a vast crowd of young men, nearly all students, waited outside the stage door to escort the actor to his hotel, the Shelbourne, in St. Stephen's Green. This they did in noble style. They had come prepared with a long, strong rope, and taking the horses from the carriage harnessed themselves to it. There were over a thousand of them, and as no more than a couple of hundred of them could get a hand on the rope the rest surrounded us—for I accompanied my friend on that exciting progress—on either side a shouting body. The street was a solid moving mass and the wild uproar was incessant. To us the street was a sea of faces, for more than half the body were turning perpetually to have another look at the hero of the hour. Up Grafton Street we swept, the ordinary passengers in the street falling of necessity back into doorways and side streets; round into St. Stephen's Green, where the shouting crowd stopped before the hotel. Then the cheering became more organised. The desultory 26sounds grew into more exact and recurring volume till the cheers rang out across the great square and seemed to roll away towards the mountains in the far distance. Irving was greatly moved, almost overcome; and in the exuberance of his heart asked me seriously if it would not be possible to ask all his friends into the hotel to join him at supper. This being manifestly impossible, as he saw when he turned to lift his hat and say good-night and his eyes ranged over that seething roaring crowd, he asked could he not ask them all to drink a health with him.

To this the hotel manager and the array of giant constables—then a feature of the Dublin administration of law and order, who had by this time arrived, fearing a possibility of disorder from so large a concourse of students—answered with smiling headshake a *non possumus*. And so amid endless cheering and relentless hand-shaking we forced a way into the hotel.

That the occasion was marked by rare orderliness—for in those days town and gown fights were pretty common—was shown by the official Notice fixed on the College gate on Monday morning:

"At Roll-call to-night the Junior Dean will express his grateful sense of the admirable conduct of the Students on Saturday last, at Mr. Irving's Reception in Trinity College and subsequently at the performance in the Theatre Royal."

After that glorious night Henry Irving, with brave heart and high hopes, now justified by a new form of success, left Ireland for his own country, where fresh triumphs awaited him.

27

V
CONVERGING STREAMS

I

In June 1877 Henry Irving paid a flying visit to Dublin in order to redeem his promise of giving a Reading in Trinity College. It must have been for him an arduous spell of work. Leaving London by the night mail on Sunday, he arrived at half-past six in the morning of Monday, June 18, at Kingstown, where I met him. He had with him a couple of friends: Frank A. Marshall, who afterwards edited Shakespeare with him, and Harry J. Loveday, then and afterwards his stage manager. The Reading was in the Examination Hall, which was crowded in every corner. It consisted of part of *Richard III.*, part of *Othello*, Calverley's *Gemini et Virgo*, Dickens' *Copperfield and the Waiter*, and *The Dream of Eugene Aram*.

He was wildly cheered in the Hall; and in the Quadrangle, when he came out, he was "chaired" on men's shoulders all round the place. Knowing how that particular game is best played by the recipient of the honour, and surmising what the action of the crowd would be, I was able to help him. I had already coached him when we had breakfasted together at the hotel as to how to protect himself; and in the rush I managed to keep close to him to see that the wisdom of my experience was put in force. Years afterwards, in 1894, I saw Irving saved by this experience from possibly a

very nasty accident when, at his being chaired in the Quadrangle of the Victoria University of Manchester, the bearers got pulled in different ways and he would otherwise have fallen head down, his legs being safe held tight in the clutches of two strong young men.

That night he dined in Hall with the Fellows at the High Table and was afterwards in the Commination Room where I too was a guest, and where we remained till it was time for him to leave for London by the night mail. I saw him off from Kingstown.

His reading that day of *Richard III*. gave me a wonderful 28glimpse of his dealing with that great character. There was something about it so fine—at once so subtle and so masterly—that it made me long to see the complete work.

II

Thirteen days afterwards I was in London and saw him at the Lyceum in *The Lyons Mail*; I sat in his dressing-room between the acts. My visit to London was to attend the Handel Festival. I saw a good deal of Irving, meeting him on most days.

I may here give an instance of his thoughtful kindness. Since our first meeting the year before, he had known of my wish to get to London, where as a writer I should have a larger scope and better chance of success than at home. One morning, July 12, I got a letter from him asking me to call at 17 Albert Mansions, Victoria Street, at half-past one and see Mr. Knowles. I did so, and on arriving found it was the office of the *Nineteenth Century*. There I saw the editor and owner, Sir (then Mr.) James Knowles, who received me most kindly and asked me all sorts of questions as to work and prospects. Presently while he was speaking he interrupted himself to say:

“What are you smiling at?” I answered:

“Are you not dissuading me from venturing to come to London as a writer?”

After a moment’s hesitation he said with a smile:

“Yes! I believe I am.”

“I was smiling to think,” I said, “that if I had not known the accuracy and wisdom of all you have said I should have been here long ago!”

That seemed to interest him; he was far too clever a man to waste time on a fool. Presently he said:

“Now, why do you think it better to be in London? Could you not write to me, for instance, from Dublin?”

“Oh! yes, I could write well enough, but I have known that game for some time. I know the joy of the waste-paper basket and the manuscript returned—unread. Now Mr. Knowles,” I went on, “may I ask you something?”

“Certainly!”

“You are, if I mistake not, a Scotchman?” He nodded acquiescence, keeping his eye on me and smiling as I went on:

29“And yet you came to London. You have not done badly either, I understand? Why did you come?”

“Oh!” he answered quickly, “far be it from me to make little of life in London or the advantages of it. Now look here, I know exactly what you feel. Will you send me anything which you may have written, or which you may write for the purpose, which you think suitable for the *Nineteenth Century*? I promise you that I shall read it myself; and if I can I will find a place for it in the magazine!”

I thanked him warmly for his quick understanding and sympathy, and for his kindly promise. I said at the conclusion:

“And I give you my word that I shall never send you anything which I do not think worthy of the *Nineteenth Century*!”

From that hour Sir James and I became close friends. I and mine have received from him and his innumerable kindnesses; and there is for him a very warm corner in my heart.

Strange to say, the next time we spoke of my writing in the *Nineteenth Century* was when in 1881 he asked me to write an article for him on a matter then of much importance in the world of the theatre. I asked him if it was to be over my signature. When he said that was the intention, I said:

“I am sorry I cannot do it. Irving and I have been for now some years so closely associated that anything I should write on a theatrical subject might be taken for a reflex of his opinion or desire. Since we have been associated in business I have never signed any article regarding the stage unless we shared the same view. And whilst we are so associated I want to keep to that rule. Otherwise it would not be fair to him, for he might get odium in some form for an opinion which he did not hold! As a matter of fact we join issue on this particular subject!”

The first time I had the pleasure of writing for him was when in 1890 I wrote an article on “Actor-Managers” which appeared in the June number. Regarding this, Irving’s

opinion and my own were at one, and I could attack the matter with a good heart. I certainly took pains enough, for I spent many, many hours in the Library of my Inn, the Inner Temple, reading all the "Sumptuary" laws in the entire collection of British Statutes. Irving himself followed my own article with a short one on the subject of the controversy on which we were then engaged.

III

In the autumn of that year, 1877, Irving again visited Dublin, opening in *Hamlet* on Monday, November 19. The year's work had smoothed and rounded his impersonation, and to my mind, improved even upon its excellence. I venture to quote again some sentences from my own criticism upon it as the evidence of an independent and sincere contemporary opinion. In the year that had passed not the public only had learned something—much; he too had learned also, even of his own instinctive ideas—up to then not wholly conscious. We all had learned, acting and reacting on each other. We had followed him. He, in turn, encouraged and aided by the thought as well as the sympathy of others and feeling justified in further advance, had let his own ideas grow, widening to all the points of the intellectual compass and growing higher and deeper than had been possible to his unaided efforts. For original thought must, after all, be in part experimental and tentative. It is in the consensus of many varying ideas, guesses and experiences—reachings out of groping intelligences into the presently dark unknown—that the throbbing heart of true wisdom is to be found. In my criticism I said:

"Mr. Irving has not slackened in his study of Hamlet, and the consequence is an advance. All the little fleeting subtleties of thought and expression which arise from time to time under slightly different circumstances have been fixed and repeated till they have formed an additional net of completeness round the whole character. To the actor, art is as necessary as genius, for it is only when the flashes of genius evoked by occasion have been studied as facts to be repeated, that a worthy reproduction of effect is possible.... Hamlet, as Mr. Irving now acts it, is the wild, fitful, irresolute, mystic, melancholy prince that we know in the play; but given with a sad, picturesque gracefulness which is the actor's special gift.... In his most passionate moments with Ophelia, even in the violence of his rage, he never loses that sense of distance—of a gulf fixed—of that acknowledgment of the unseen which is his unconscious testimony to her unspotted purity...."

The lesson conveyed to me by his acting of which the above is the expression was put by him into words in his Preface to the edition of Diderot's *Paradox of Acting*,

translated by Walter Pollock 31and published in 1883, six years after he had been practising the art by which he taught and illuminated the minds of others.

During this engagement Irving played *Richard III.*, and his wonderful acting satisfied all the hopes aroused by sample given in his Reading at the University. For myself I can say truly that I sat all the evening in a positive quiver of intellectual delight. His conception and impersonation of the part were so "subtle, complete, and masterly"—these were the terms I used in my criticism written that night—that it seemed to me the power of acting could go no further; that it had reached the limit of human power. Most certainly it raised him still higher in public esteem. Its memory being still with me, I could fully appreciate the power and fineness of Tennyson's criticism which I heard long afterwards. When the poet had seen the piece he said to Irving:

"Where did you get that Plantagenet look?"

IV

In those days a small party of us, of whom Irving and I were always two, very often had supper in those restaurants which were a famous feature of men's social life in Dublin. There were not so many clubs as there are now, and certain houses made a speciality of suppers—Jude's, Burton Bindon's, Corless's. The last was famous for "hot lobster" and certain other toothsome delicacies and had an excellent grill; and so we often went there. By that time Irving had a great vogue in Dublin, and since the Address in College and the University night in 1876 his name was in the public mind associated with the University. All College men were naturally privileged persons with him, so that any one who chose to pass himself off as a student could easily make his acquaintance. The waiters in the restaurant, who held him in great respect, were inclined to resent this, and one night at Corless's when a common fellow came up and introduced himself as a Scholar of Trinity College—he called it "Thrinity"—Irving, not suspecting, was friendly to him. I looked on quietly and enjoyed the situation, hoping that it might end in some fun. The outsider having made good his purpose, wished to show off before his friends, men of his own style, who were grinning at another table. When he went over towards them, our waiter, who had been hovering around us waiting for his chance—his napkin taking as many expressive 32flickers as the tail of Whistler's butterfly in *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*—stooped over to Irving and said in a hurried whisper:

"He said he was a College man, sur! He's a liar! He's only a Commercial!"

V

During his fortnight in Dublin I drove one Sunday with Irving in the Phœnix Park, the great park near Dublin which measures some seven miles in circumference. Whilst driving through that section known as the "Nine Acres" we happened on a scene which took his fancy hugely. In those days wrestling was an amusement much in vogue in Ireland, chiefly if not wholly among the labouring class. Bouts used to be held on each Sunday afternoon in various places, and naturally the best of the wrestlers wished to prove themselves in the Capital. Each Sunday some young man who had won victory in Navan, or Cork, or Galway, or wherever exceptional excellence had been manifested, would come up to town to try conclusions in the "Phaynix," generally by aid of a subscription from his fellows or his club, for they were all poor men to whom a long railway journey was a grave expense. There was no prize, no betting; it was Sport, pure and simple; and sport conducted under fairer lines I have never seen or thought of. We saw the gathering crowd and joined them. They did not know either of us, but they saw we were gentlemen, strangers to themselves, and with the universal courtesy of their race put us in the front when the ring had been formed. This forming of the ring was a unique experience. There were no police present, there were no stakes or ropes; not even a whitened mark on the grass. Two or three men of authority amongst the sportsmen made the ring. It was done after this fashion: One man, a fine, big, powerful fellow, was given a drayman's heavy whip. Then one of those with him took off his cap and put it before the face of the armed man. Another guided him from behind in the required direction. Warning was called out lustily, and any one not getting at once out of the way had to take the consequence of that fiercely falling whip. It was wonderful how soon and how excellently that ring was formed. The manner of its doing, though violent exceedingly, was so conspicuously and unquestionably fair that not even the most captious or quarrelsome could object.

33Then the contestants stepped into the ring and made their little preparations for strife. Two splendid young men they were—Rafferty of Dublin and Finlay of Drogheda—as hard as nails and full of pluck. The style of wrestling was the old-fashioned "collar and elbow" with the usual test of defeat: both shoulders on the ground at once. It was certainly a noble game. A single bout sometimes lasted for over a quarter of an hour; and any one who knows what the fierce and unrelenting and pauseless struggle can be, and must be in any kind of equality, can understand the strain. What was most noticeable by us however was the extraordinary fairness of the crowd. Not a word was allowed; not a hint of method of defence or attack; not an encouraging word or sign. The local men could have cheered their own man to the echo; but the stranger must of necessity be alone or with only a small backing at best.

And so, as encouragement could not be equal for the combatants, there should be none at all!

It was a lesson in fair play which might have shone out conspicuously in any part of the civilised world. Irving was immensely delighted with it and asked to be allowed to give a prize to be divided equally between the combatants; a division which showed the influence on his mind of the extraordinary fairness of the conditions of the competition. In this spirit was the gift received. Several of the men came round me whom they had by this time recognised as an old athlete of "the College"—now a "back number" of some ten years' standing. When I told them who was the donor they raised a mighty cheer.

The only difficulty we left behind us was that of "breaking" the bank-note which had been given. We saw them as we moved off producing what money they had so as to make up his half for the stranger to take with him to Drogheda.

VI

One evening in that week Irving came up to supper with me in my rooms after *The Bells*. We were quite alone and talked with the freedom of understanding friends. He spoke of the future and of what he would try to do when he should have a theatre all to himself where he would be sole master. He was then in a sort of informal partnership with Mrs. Bateman, and had of course the feeling of limitation of expansive ideas which must ever be when 34there is a sharing of interests and responsibilities. He was quite frank as to the present difficulties, although he put them in the most kindly way possible. I had a sort of dim idea that events were moving in a direction which within a year became declared. He had spoken of a matter at which he had hinted shortly after our first meeting: the possibility of my giving up the post I then occupied in the Public Service and sharing his fortunes in case he should have a theatre quite his own. The hope grew in me that a time might yet come when he and I might work together to one end that we both believed in and held precious in the secret chamber of our hearts. In my diary that night, November 22, 1877, I wrote:

"London in view."

VI
JOINING FORCES

I

Henry Irving produced Wills's play *Vanderdecken* at the Lyceum on June 8, 1878. I had arrived in London the day before and was able to be present on the occasion. The play was a new version of the legend of the "Flying Dutchman" and was treated in a very poetical way. Irving was fine in it, and gave one a wonderful impression of a dead man fictitiously alive. I think his first appearance was the most striking and startling thing I ever saw on the stage. The scene was of the landing-place on the edge of the fiord. Sea and sky were blue with the cold steely blue of the North. The sun was bright, and across the water the rugged mountain-line stood out boldly. Deep under the shelving beach, which led down to the water, was a Norwegian fishing-boat whose small brown foresail swung in the wind. There was no appearance anywhere of a man or anything else alive. But suddenly there stood a mariner in old-time dress of picturesque cut and faded colour of brown and peacock blue with a touch of red. On his head was a sable cap. He stood there, silent, still and fixed, more like a vision made solid than a living man, realising well the description of the phantom sailor of whom Thekla had told him in the ballad spoken in the first act:

"And the Captain there

In the dismal glare

Stands paler than tongue can tell

With clenchéd hand

As in mute command,

And eyes like a soul's in Hell!"

It was marvellous that any living man should show such eyes. They really seemed to shine like cinders of glowing red from out the marble face. The effect was instantaneous, and boded well for the success of the play.

But the play itself wanted something. The last act, in which 36Thekla sails away with the phantom lover whose soul had been released by her unselfish love, was impossible of realisation by the resources of stage art of the time. Nowadays, with calcium lights and coloured "mediums" and electricity, and all the aids to illusion which Irving had himself created or brought into use, much could be done. For such acting the play ought to have been a great one; but it fell short of excellence. It was a great pity; for Irving's appearance and acting in it were of memorable perfection.

On the next day, Sunday, I spent hours with Irving in his rooms in Grafton Street helping him to cut and alter the play. We did a good deal of work on it and altered it considerably for the better I thought.

The next morning I breakfasted with him in his rooms; and, after another long spell of work on the play, I went with him to the Lyceum to attend rehearsal of the altered business.

That even I attended the Lyceum again and thought the play had been improved. So had Irving too, so far as was possible to a performance already so complete. I supped with him at the Devonshire Club, where we talked over the play and continued the conversation at his own rooms till after five o'clock in the morning.

The next day I went to Paris, but on my return saw *Vanderdecken* again and thought that by practice it had improved. It played "closer," and the actors were more at ease—a most important thing in an eerie play!

II

In August of the same year, 1878, Henry Irving paid another visit to Ireland. He had promised to give a Reading in the Ulster Hall for the benefit of the Belfast Samaritan Hospital, and this was in the fulfilment of it. By previous arrangement the expedition was enlarged into a holiday. As the Reading was to be on the 16th he travelled from London on the night mail of the 12th. I met him on his arrival at Kingstown in the early morning, as he was to stay with my eldest brother, Sir Thornley Stoker. He was in great spirits; something like a schoolboy off on a long-expected holiday. Here he spent three very enjoyable days, a large part of which were occupied in driving-excursions to Lough Bray and Leixlip. On the 15th Irving and Loveday and I went to Belfast. After 37having a look at the Ulster Hall, a huge hall about as big as the Manchester Free Trade Hall, we supped with a somewhat eccentric local philanthropist, Mr. David Cunningham. Mr. Cunningham was a large man, tall and broad and heavy, and with a great bald head which rose dome-shaped above a massive frontal sinus. He was the best of good fellows, the mainstay of the Samaritan Hospital and a generous helper of all local charities.

The Reading was an immense success. Over three thousand persons were present, and at the close was a scene of wild enthusiasm. We supped again with David Cunningham—he was one of the "Christian name" men whose surname is seldom heard, and never alone. A good many of his friends were present, and we had an informal and joyous time. There were of course lots of speeches. Belfast is the very home of fiery and flamboyant oratory, and all our local friends were red-hot Orangemen.

On this occasion, however, we were spared any contentious matter, though the harmless periods of the oratory of the "Northern Acropolis," as some of them called

their native city, were pressed into service. One speaker made as pretty an “Irish bull” as could be found—though the “bull” is generally supposed to belong to other provinces than the hard-headed Ulster. In descanting on the many virtues of the guest of the evening he mentioned the excellence of his moral nature and rectitude of his private life in these terms:

“Mr. Irving, sir, is a gentleman what leads a life of unbroken blemish!”

We sometimes kept late hours in the seventies. That night we left our host’s house at three o’clock A.M. On our return to the hotel Irving and I sat up talking over the events of the day. The sun was beginning to herald his arrival when we began, but in spite of that we sat talking till the clock struck seven.

I well understood even then, though I understand it better now, that after a hard and exciting day or night—or both—the person most concerned does not want to go to bed. He feels that sleep is at arm’s-length till it is summoned. Irving knew that the next day he would have to start at three o’clock on a continuous journey to London, which would occupy some fifteen hours; but I did not like to thwart him when he felt that a friendly chat of no matter how exaggerated dimensions would rest him better than some sleepless hours in bed.

III

Irving’s visit to Dublin as an actor began in that year, 1878, on September 23, and lasted a fortnight. During this time I was a great deal with him, not only in the theatre during rehearsals as well as at the performances, but we drove almost every day and dined and supped at the house of my brother and sister-in-law, with whom he was great friends; at my own lodgings or his hotel; at restaurants or in the houses of other friends. It was a sort of gala time to us all, and through every phase of it—and through the working time as well—our friendship grew and grew.

We had now been close friends for over two years. We understood each other’s nature, needs and ambitions, and had a mutual confidence, each towards the other in his own way, rare amongst men. It did not, I think, surprise any of us when six weeks after his departure I received a telegram from him from Glasgow, where he was then playing, asking me if I could go to see him at once on important business.

I was with him the next evening. He told me that he had arranged to take the management of the Lyceum into his own hands. He asked me if I would give up the Civil Service and join him; I to take charge of his business as Acting Manager.

I accepted at once. I had then had some thirteen years in the public service, a term entitling me to pension in case of retirement from ill-health (as distinguished from "gratuity" which is the rule for shorter period of service); but I was content to throw in my lot with his. In the morning I sent in my resignation and made by telegram certain domestic and other arrangements of supreme importance to me at that time—and ever since. We had decided that I was to join him on December 14 as I should require a few weeks to arrange matters at home. I knew that as he was to open the Lyceum on December 30 time was precious, and accordingly did all required with what expedition I could.

I left Glasgow on November 25, and took up my work with Irving at Birmingham on December 9, having in the meantime altered my whole business life, arranged for the completion of my book on *The Duties of Petty Sessions Clerks*, and last, not least, having got married—an event which had already been arranged for a year later.

Irving was staying at the Plough and Harrow, that delightful 39little hotel at Edgbaston, and he was mightily surprised when he found that I had a wife—*the* wife—with me.

IV

We finished at Birmingham on Saturday, December 14, and on Sunday he went on with the company to Bristol whilst we came on to London. The week at Birmingham had been a heavy time. I had taken over all the correspondence and the letters were endless. It was the beginning of a vast experience of correspondence, for from that on till the day of his death I seldom wrote, in working times, less than fifty letters a day. Fortunately—for both myself and the readers, for I write an extremely bad hand—the bulk of them were short. Anyhow I think I shall be very well within the mark when I say that during my time of working with Henry Irving I have written in his name nearly half a million letters!

But the week in Birmingham was child's play compared with the next two weeks in London. The correspondence alone was greater; but in addition the theatre which was to be opened was in a state of chaos. The builders who were making certain structural alterations had not got through their work; plasterers, paper-hangers, painters, upholsterers were tumbling over each other. The outside of the building was covered with scaffolding. The whole of the auditorium was a mass of poles and platforms. On the stage and in the paint-room and the property-rooms, the gas-rooms and carpenter's shop and wardrobe-room, the new production of *Hamlet* was being hurried on under high pressure.

On the financial side of things too, there were matters of gravity. Irving had to begin his management without capital—at least without more than that produced by his tour and by such accommodation as he could get from his bankers on the security of his property.

These were matters of much work and anxiety, for before the curtain went up on the first night of his management he had already paid away nearly ten thousand pounds, and had incurred liability for at least half as much more by outlay on the structure and what the lawyers call "beautifyings" of the Lyceum.

He had taken over the theatre as from the end of August 1878, so that there was a good deal of extra expense even whilst the 40theatre was lying idle; though such is usual in some form in the "running" of a theatre.

In another place I shall deal with Finance. I only mention it here because at the very start of his personal enterprise he had to encounter a very great difficulty.

Nearly all the work was new to me, and I was not sorry when on the 19th my colleague, the stage manager, arrived and took in hand the whole of the stage matters. When Irving and the company arrived, four days after, things both on the stage and throughout the house were beginning to look more presentable. When the heads of departments came back to work, preparations began to hum.

V

One of these men, Arnott, the property master and a fine workman, had had an odd experience during the Bristol week. Something had gone wrong with the travelling "property" horse used in the vision scene of *The Bells*, and he had come up to town to bring the real one from the storage. In touring it was usual to bring a "profile" representation of the gallant steed. "Profile" has in theatrical parlance a special meaning other than its dictionary meaning of an "outline." It is thin wood covered on both sides with rough canvas carefully glued down. It is very strong and can be cut in safety to any shape. The profile horse was of course an outline, but the art of the scene-painter had rounded it out to seemingly natural dimensions. Now the "real" horse, though a lifeless "property," had in fact been originally alive. It was formed of the skin of a moderately sized pony; and being embellished with picturesque attachments in the shape of mane and tail was a really creditable object. But it was expensive to carry as it took up much space. Arnott and two of his men ran up to fetch this down as there was not time to make a new profile horse. When they got to Paddington he found that the authorities refused to carry the article by weight on account of its bulk, and asked him something like £4 for the journey. He expressed his

feelings freely, as men occasionally do under irritating circumstances, and said he would go somewhere else. The clerk in the office smiled and Arnott went away; he was a clever man who did not like to be beaten, and railways were his natural enemies. He thought the matter over. Having looked over the time-table and 41found that the cost of a horse-box to Bristol was only £1 13*s.*, he went to the department in charge of such matters and ordered one, paying for it at once and arranging that it should go on the next fast train. By some manœuvring he so managed that he and his men took Koveski's horse into the box and closed the doors.

When the train arrived at Bristol there had to be some shunting to and fro so as to place the horse-box in the siding arranged for such matters. The officials in charge threw open the door for the horse to walk out. But he would yield to no blandishment, nor even to the violence of chastisement usual at such times. A little time passed and the officials got anxious, for the siding was required for other purposes. The station at Bristol is not roomy and more than one line has to use it. The official in charge told him to take out his damned horse!

"Not me!" said he, for he was now seeing his way to "get back" at the railway company; "I've paid for the carriage of the horse and I want him delivered out of your premises. The rate I paid includes the services of the necessary officials."

The porters tried again, but the horse would not stir. Now it is a dangerous matter to go into a horse-box in case the horse should prove restive. One after another the porters declined, till at last one plucky lad volunteered to go in by the little window close to the horse's head. Those on the platform waited in apprehension, till he suddenly ran out from the box laughing and crying out:

"Why you blamed fools. He ain't a 'orse at all. He's a stuffed 'un!"

VI

As I have said, Arnott always got even in some way with those who tried to best him. I remember once when a group of short lines, now amalgamated into the Irish Great Northern Railway and worked in quite a different way, did what we all considered rather too sharp a thing. We had to have a special train to go from Dublin to Belfast on Sunday. For this they charged us full fare for every person and a rate for the train as well. Then when we were starting they took, at the ordinary rate, other passengers in our train for which we had paid extra. This, however, was not that which awoke Arnott's ire. The *causa teterrima belli* was that whilst they gave us only open trucks for goods they charged us extra for the use of tarpaulins, which are necessary in railway 42travelling where goods are inflammable and sparks many. Having made the

arrangement I had gone back to London on other business, and did not go to Belfast, so I did not know, till after the tour had closed, what had happened later. When I was checking the accounts in my office at the Lyceum, I found that though the railway company had charged us what we thought was an exorbitant price, still the cost of the total journey compared favourably with that of other journeys of equal length. I could not understand it until I went over the accounts, comparing item by item with the other journeys. Thus I "focussed" the difference in the matter of "goods." Then I found that whereas the other railways had charged us on somewhere about nineteen tons weight this particular line had only assessed us at seven. I sent for Arnott and asked him how could the difference be, as on the first journey I had verified the weight as I usually did, such saving much trouble throughout a tour as it made the check easier. He shook his head and said that he did not know. I pressed him, pointing out that either this railway had underweighed us or that others had overweighed.

"Oh, the others were all right, sir," he said. "I saw them weighed at Euston myself!"

"Then how on earth can there be such a difference?" I asked. "Can't you throw any light on it?" He shook his head slowly as though pondering deeply and then said with a puzzled look on his face:

"I haven't an idea. It must have been all right, for the lot of them was there, and the lot of us, too. There couldn't have been any mistake with them *all* looking on. No, sir, I can't account for it; not for the life of me!" Then seeing that I turned to my work again he moved away. When he was half way to the door he turned round, his face brightening as though a new light had suddenly dawned upon him. He spoke out quite genially as though proud of his intellectual effort:

"Unless it was, sir, that there was some mistake about the weighin'. You see, while the weighin' was goin' on we was all pretty angry about things. We because they was bestin' us, and they because we was tellin' em so, and rubbin' in what we thought of 'em in a general way. Most of us thought that there might have been a fight and we was all ready—the lot of us—on both sides. We was standin' close together, for we wouldn't stir and they had to come to us.... An'—it might have been that me and the 43boys was standin' before they came to join us on the platform with the weights! I daresay we wasn't so quarrelsome when we moved a bit away, for there was more of them than of us; an' they stood where we had been. They didn't want to follow us. An'—an'—the weighin' was done by them!"

VII

One more anecdote of the Property Master.

We were playing in Glasgow at the Theatre Royal, which had just been bought by Howard and Wyndham. J. B. Howard was a man of stern countenance and masterful manner. He was a kindly man, but Nature had framed him in a somewhat fierce mould. His new theatre was a sacred thing, and he liked to be master in his own house. We were playing an engagement of two weeks; and on the first Saturday night it was found that a certain property—a tree trunk required for use in *Hamlet*, which was to be played on Tuesday night—was not forthcoming. So Arnott was told to make another at once and have it ready, for it required time to dry. Accordingly he went down to the theatre on Sunday morning with a couple of his men. There was no one in the theatre; in accordance with the strict Sabbath-keeping then in vogue at Glasgow, local people were all away—even the hall-keeper. Such a small matter as that would never deter Arnott. He had his work to do, and get in he must. So he took out a pane of glass, opened a window, and went in. In the property shop he found all he required; wood, glue, canvas, nails, paint; so the little band of expert workmen set to work, and having finished their task, came away. They had restored the window-pane, and came out by the door. On Monday morning there was a hubbub. Some one had broken into the theatre and taken store of wood and canvas, glue, nails and paint, and there in the shop lay a fine property log already "set" and drying fast. Inquiry showed that none of the local people were to blame. So suspicion naturally fell on our men, who did not deny the soft impeachment. Howard was fuming; he sent for the man to have it out with him. Arnott was a fine, big, well-featured north-countryman, with large limbs and massive shoulders—such a man as commanded some measure of respect even from an angry manager.

"I hear that you broke into my theatre yesterday and used up a lot of my stores?"

44"Yes sir! The theatre was shut up and there was no time."

"Time has nothing to do with it, sir. Why did you do it?"

"Well, Mr. Howard, the governor ordered it, and Mr. Loveday told me not to lose any time in getting it ready as we had to rehearse to-day." This accounted to Mr. Howard, the man, for the breach of decorum; but as the manager he was not satisfied. He was not willing to relinquish his grievance all at once; so he said, and he said it in the emphatic manner customary to him:

"But, sir, if Mr. Loveday was to tell you to take down the flys of my theatre would you do that, too?"

The answer came in a quiet, grave voice:

"Certainly, sir!"

Howard looked at him fixedly for a moment, and then raising both hands in front of him said, as he shrugged his shoulders:

“In that case I have nothing more to say! I only wish to God that my men would work like that!” and so the quasi-burglar went unreproved.

45

VII
LYCEUM PRODUCTIONS

During Henry Irving’s personal management of the Lyceum he produced over forty plays, of which eleven were Shakespeare’s: *Hamlet*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Twelfth Night*, *Macbeth*, *Henry VIII.*, *King Lear*, *Cymbeline*, and *Richard III*. *Coriolanus* was produced during his agreement with the Lyceum Company. He also reproduced six plays which he had before presented during his engagement by and partnership with the Batemans: *Eugene Aram*, *Richelieu*, *Louis XI.*, *The Lyons Mail*, *Charles I.*, *The Bells*. He also produced the following old plays, in most of which he had already appeared at some time: *The Lady of Lyons*, *The Iron Chest*, *The Corsican Brothers*, *The Belle’s Stratagem*, *Two Roses*, *Olivia*, *The Dead Heart*, *Robert Macaire*, and a good many “curtain-raisers” whose excellences were old and tried.

The new plays were in some instances old stories told afresh, and in the remainder historic subjects treated in a new way or else quite new themes or translations. In the first category were *Faust*, *Werner*, *Ravenswood*, *Iolanthe* (one act). In the second were: *The Cup*, *The Amber Heart*, *Becket*, *King Arthur*, *Madame Sans-Gêne*, *Peter the Great*, *The Medicine Man*, *Robespierre* and the following one-act plays: *Waterloo*, *Nance Oldfield*, and *Don Quixote*. *Dante* was produced after the Lyceum Company had been unable to carry out their contract with him.

This gives an average of two plays, “by and large” as the sailors say, for each year from 1878 to 1898, after which time he sold his rights to the Lyceum Theatre Company, Limited. Regarding some of these plays are certain matters of interest either in the preparation or the working. I shall simply try, now and again, to raise a little the veil which hangs between the great actor and the generations who may be interested in him and his work.

46

VIII
IRVING BEGINS MANAGEMENT

I

The first half-year of Irving's management was, in accordance with old usage, broken into two seasons; the first ending on May 31 and the second beginning on June 1. This was the last time, except in the spring of 1881, that such an unnatural division of natural periods took place. After that, during the entire of his management the "season" lasted until the theatre closed. And as the coming of the hot weather was the time when, for the reason the theatre-going public left London, the theatre had to be closed, about the end of July became practically the time for recess. It had become an unwritten law that Goodwood closed the London theatre season, just as in Society circles the banquet of the Royal Academy, on the first Saturday in May, marked the formal opening of the London "season." This made things very comfortable for the actors, who by experience came to count on from forty-six to forty-eight weeks' salary in a year. This was certainly so in the Lyceum, and in some other theatres of recognised position.

II

The first season made great interest for the public. It was all fairly new to me, for except when I had been present at the first night of Wills's *Medea* played by Mrs. Crowe (Miss Kate Bateman) in July 1872 and had seen Irving in *The Lyons Mail* in 1877 and had been at the performance and rehearsal of *Vanderdecken* in 1878, I had not been into the theatre till I came officially. As yet I knew nothing at all of the audiences, from the management point of view. I soon found an element which had only anything like a parallel in the enthusiasm of the University in Dublin. Here was an audience that *believed* in the actor whom they had come to see; who took his success as much to heart as though it had been their 47own; whose cheers and applause—whose very presence—was a stimulant and a help to artistic effort.

This was the audience that he had won—had made; and I myself, as a neophite, was in full sympathy with them. With such an audience an artist can go far; and in such circumstances there seems nothing that is not possible on the hither side of life and health. The physicists tell us that it is a law of nature that there must be two forces to make impact; that the anvil has to do its work as well as the hammer. And it is a distinguishing difference between scientific and other laws that the former has no exceptions. So it is in the world of the theatre. Without an audience in sympathy no actor can do his best. Nay more, he should have the assurance of approval, or else sustained effort at high pitch becomes impossible. Some people often think, and sometimes say, that an actor's love of applause is due to a craving vanity. This may be in part true, and may even be wholly true in many cases; but those who know the

stage and its needs and difficulties, its helps and thwarting checks, learn to dread a too prolonged stillness. The want of echoing sympathy embarrasses the player. For my own part, having learned to understand their motives, to sympathise with their aims, and to recognise their difficulties, I can understand the basic wisdom of George Frederick Cook when on the Liverpool stage he stopped in the middle of a tragic part and coming down to the footlights said to the audience:

"Ladies and gentlemen, if you don't applaud I can't act!"

It was from Irving I heard the story; and he certainly understood and felt with that actor of the old days. If the members of any audience understood how much better value they would get for their money—to put the matter on its lowest basis—when they show appreciation of the actor's efforts, they would certainly now and again signify the fullest recognition of his endeavour.

This "Lyceum audience," whose qualities endeared them to me from that first night, December 30, 1878, became for twenty-four years of my own experience a quantity to be counted on. Nay more, for when the Lyceum came as a theatre to an end, the audience followed Irving to Drury Lane. They or their successors in title were present on that last night of his season, June 10, 1905, that memorable night when he said farewell, not knowing that it would be the last time, except one benefit performance, he should ever appear in London as a player.

III

The production with which the season of 1878–9 opened was almost entirely new. When Irving took over the Lyceum the agreement between him and Mrs. Bateman entitled him to the use of certain plays and *matériel* necessary for their representation. But he never contented himself with the scenery, properties or dresses originally used. The taste of the public had so improved and their education so progressed, chiefly under his own influence, that the perfection of the seventies would not do for later days. For *Hamlet* new scenery had been painted by Hawes Craven, and of all the dresses and properties used few if any had been seen before. What we had seen in the provinces was the old production. I remember being much struck by the care in doing things, especially with reference to the action. It was the first time that I had had the privilege of seeing a play "produced." I had already seen rehearsals, but these except of pantomime had generally been to keep the actors, supers and working staff up to the mark of excellence already arrived at. But now I began to understand *why* everything was as it was. With regard to stagecraft it was a

liberal education. Often and often in the years since then, when I have noticed the thoughtless or careless way in which things were often done on other stages, I have wondered how it was that the younger generation of men had not taken example and reasoned out at least the requirements of those matters incidental to their own playing. Let me give an example:

“In the last act, the cup from which Gertrude drinks the poison is an important item inasmuch as it might have a disturbing influence. In one of the final rehearsals, when grasped by Hamlet in a phrenzy of anxiety lest Horatio should drink: ‘Give me the cup; let go; by heaven, I’ll have it!’ the cup, flung down desperately rolled away for some distance, and then following the shape of the stage rolled down to the footlights. There is a sort of fascination in the uncertain movement of an inanimate object, and such an occurrence during the play would infallibly distract the attention of the audience. Irving at once ordered that the massive metal goblet used should have some bosses fixed below the rim, so that it could not roll. At a previous rehearsal he had ordered that as the wine from the 49cup splashed the stage, coloured sawdust should be used—which it did to exactly the same artistic effect.

In another matter of this scene his natural kindness made a sweet little episode which he never afterwards omitted. When he said to the pretty little cup-bearer who offered him the poisoned goblet: “Set it by awhile!” he smiled at the child and passed his hand caressingly over the golden hair.

Certain other parts of his Hamlet were unforgettable; his whirlwind of passion at the close of the play scene which, night after night, stirred the whole audience to frenzied cheers; the extraordinary way in which by speech and tone, action and time, he conveyed to his auditory the sense of complex and entangled thought and motive in his wild scene with Ophelia; his wonderment at the announcement of Horatio:

“I think I saw him yester-night.”

Hamlet. “Saw who?”

Horatio. “My Lord, the King your Father.”

Hamlet. “The King—my father?”

And the effective way in which he conveyed his sense of difference of the subjective origin of the ghost at its second appearance at which Shakespeare hinted, following out Belleforest’s remark on the novel:

“In those days, the northe parts of the worlde, living as then under Sathans lawes, were full of inchanters, so that there was not any young gentleman whatsoever that

knew not something therein sufficient to serve his turne, if need required.... Hamlet, while his father lived, had been instructed in that devilish art, whereby the wicked spirite abuseth mankind, and advertiseth him (as he can) of things past."

Of things past! Hamlet could know of things that had been though he could not read the future. This it was which was the essence of his patient acquiescence in the ways of time—half pagan fatalism, half Christian belief—as shown in that pearl amongst philosophical phrases:

"If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come; the readiness is all."

IV

Hamlet was played ninety-eight nights on that first season. Four of them hang in my mind for very different reasons. The 50first was that wonderful opening night when the great audience all aflame with generous welcome and exalted by ready sympathy lifted us to unwonted heights.

The second was on January 18, the eighteenth night of *Hamlet*. The Chinese Ambassador, the Marquis Tsêng, came to see the play and with him came Sir Halliday Macartney.

After the third act the Ambassador and Sir Halliday Macartney came to see Irving in his dressing-room, where they stayed some time talking. It was interesting to note—Sir Halliday translated his remarks verbally—how accurately the Ambassador followed the play, which he had not read nor heard of. Where he failed was only on some small points of racial or theological difference. He seemed to be absolutely correct on the human side.

Presently we all went down on the stage whilst Ellen Terry as Ophelia was in the midst of her mad scene. Irving and Sir Halliday and I were talking and, in the interest of the conversation, we all temporarily overlooked the Ambassador. Presently I looked round instinctively and was horrified to see that he had moved in on the stage and was then close to the edge of the arch at the back of the scene where Ophelia had made her entrance and would make her exit. He was in magnificent robes of Mandarin yellow, and wore such adornments as are possible to a great official who holds the high grade and honour of the Peacock's Feather. I jumped for him and just succeeded in catching him before he had passed into the blaze of the limelight. I could fancy the sudden amazement of the audience and the wild roar of laughter that would follow when in the midst of this most sad and pathetic of scenes would enter unheralded this gorgeous anachronism. Under ordinary circumstances I think I should have allowed

the *contretemps* to occur. Its unique grotesqueness would have ensured a widespread publicity not to be acquired by ordinary forms of advertisement. But there was greater force to the contrary. The play was not yet three weeks old in its run; it was a tragedy, and the holy of holies to my actor chief to whom full measure of loyalty was due; and beyond all it was Ellen Terry who would suffer.

V

The third was a very sad occasion, but one which showed that the manager of a theatre must have "nerve" to do the work 51entailed by his high responsibility. He remained in the wings O.P. ("Opposite Prompt" in stage parlance) after scene ii of Act I of *Hamlet*. The following scene (iii) is a front scene ready for the change to the scene where Polonius gives good advice to his children Laertes and Ophelia. After the few words between the brother and sister on the cue of Laertes: "here my father comes," Polonius enters speaking quickly as one in surprise: "Yet here Laertes! Aboard, aboard, for shame!"

Irving instinctively turned on hearing the intonation of the voice, and after one lightning glance signed to the prompter to let down the act drop, which was done instantly. I was standing beside him at the time talking to him and was struck by the marvellous rapidity of thought and action; of the decision which seemed almost automatic. Then, the curtain having been drawn back sufficiently to let him pass, he stepped to the footlights and said:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I regret to have to tell you that something has happened which I should not like to tell you; and will ask you to bear in patience a minute. We shall, with your permission, go on from the beginning of the third scene of Act I." He stepped back amid instantaneous and sympathetic applause. Perhaps they knew; some few must have seen for themselves what had occurred, and many undoubtedly guessed. But all recognised the mastery and decision which had saved a very painful and difficult situation. The curtain straightened behind him as he passed in on the stage.

In an incredibly short time all was ready, for stage workmen as well as actors are adepts at their trade. Within seven or eight minutes the curtain went up afresh and the play began anew—with a different Polonius.

That night a call went up for the whole company and employees—"Everybody concerned on the stage" at noon next day.

It was a grave and solemn gathering; and all were there except one who had received a kindly intimation that he need not attend. Irving came on the stage at the stroke of the

hour. Loveday and I were with him. He stood in front of the footlights with his back to the auditorium. He spoke for a few minutes only; but that speech must have sunk deeply into the hearts of every listener. He reminded them of the loyalty which is due from craftsmen to one another; of the loyalty which is due to a manager who has to think for all; and finally of the loyalty which is due—and was on the unhappy occasion to which he referred—due to their own comrade. "By that want of loyalty," he said, "in any of the forms, you have 52helped to ruin your comrade. Some of you *must* have noticed; at least those who dressed in the room with him or saw him in the Green Room. Had I been told—had the stage manager had a single hint from any one, we could, and would have saved him. The lesson would perhaps have been a bitter one, but it would have saved him from worse disaster. As it is, no other course was open to me to save him from public shame. As it is, the disaster of last night may injure him for life. And it is *you* who have done this. Now, my dear friends and comrades, let this be a lesson to us all. We must be loyal to each other. That is to be helpful, and it is to the honour of our art and our calling!"

There he stopped and turned away. No one said a word. For a short space they stood still and then melted slowly away in silence, like the multitude of a dream.

VI

The fourth occasion was on the night of March 27 when Irving, having been taken with a serious cold, was unable to play—the first time he had been out of the bill for seven years! The note in my diary runs:

"Stage very dismal. Ellen Terry met me in the passage and began to cry! I felt very like joining her!"

I instance this as a fair illustration of how Irving was loved by all with whom he came in personal contact.