IX
SHAKESPEARE PLAYS—I

I

Irving did not think of playing *The Merchant of Venice* until he had been to the Levant. The season of 1879–80 had been arranged before the end of the previous season. We were to commence with *The Iron Chest*; Irving had considerable faith in Coleman's play and intended to give it a run. It was to be followed in due course, as announced in his farewell speech at the end of the second season, by *The Gamester*, *The Stranger*, *Coriolanus*, and *Robert Emmett*—a new play by Frank Marshall. It was rather a surprise, therefore, when on October 8, before the piece had run two weeks, he broached the subject of a new production. It had been apparent to us since his return from a yachting trip in the Mediterranean that he was not so much in love with the play as he usually was with anything which he had immediately in hand. Even if a play did not seem to possess him, I never saw him show the slightest sign of indifference to it in any other case.

On that particular evening he asked Loveday and me if we could stay and have a chop in the Beefsteak Room. He was evidently full of something of importance; it seemed a relief to him when supper was finished and the servant who waited had gone. When we had lit our cigars he said quietly:

"I am going to do *The Merchant of Venice*." We both waited, for there was nothing to say until we should know a little more. He went on:

"I never contemplated doing the piece, which did not even appeal very much to me, until when we were down in Morocco and the Levant. You know the *Walrus*" (that was the fine steamer which the Baroness Burdett Coutts had chartered for her yachting party) "put into all sorts of places. When I saw the Jew in what seemed his own land and in his own dress, Shylock became a different creature. I began to understand him; and now I want 54to play the part—as soon as I can. I think I shall do it on the first of November! Can it be done?"

Loveday answered it would depend on what had to be done.

"That is all right," said Irving. "I have it in my mind. I have been thinking it over and I see my way to it. Here is what I shall have in the 'Casket' scene." He took a sheet of notepaper and made a rough drawing of the scene, tearing out an arch in the back and propping another piece of paper in it with a rough suggestion of a Venetian scene. "I will have an Eastern lamp with red glass—I know where is the exact thing. It is, or used

to be two or three years ago, in that furniture shop in Oxford Street, near Tottenham Court Road."

Then he went on to expound his idea of the whole play; and did it in such a way that he set both Loveday and myself afire with the idea. We talked it out till early morning. Indeed the Eastern sun was outlining the beauty of St. Mary's-le-Strand as the time-roughened stone stood out like delicate tracery against the blush of the sunrise. Then and often since have I thought that Sir Christopher Wren must have got his inspiration regarding St. Mary's on returning late—or early in the morning—from a supper in Westminster. The church is ugly enough at other times, but against sunrise it is a picturesque delight.

As we parted Irving smiled as he said:

"Craven had better get out that red handkerchief, I think."

Therein lay a little joke amongst us. Hawes Craven who was—as happily he still is—a great scene painter, could work like a demon when time pressed. Ordinarily he wore when at work in those days a long coat once of a dark colour, and an old brown bowler hat, both splashed out of all recognition with paint. Scene-painting is essentially a splashy business, the drops of paint from the great brushes, of necessity vigorously used to cover the acres of canvas, "come not in single spies but in battalions." But when matters got desperate, when the pressure of the time-gauge registered not in hours but in minutes, the head-gear was changed for a red handkerchief which twisted round the head made a sort of turban. This became in time a sort of oriflamme. We knew that there was to be no sleep, and precious little pause even for food, till the work was all done.

Of course no mortal man could do the whole of the scenery in the three weeks available. Scenes had to be talked over, entrances and exits fixed and models made. Four scene-painters bent their 55shoulders to the task. Craven did three scenes, Telbin three, Hann three, and Cuthbert one. The whole theatre became alive with labour. Each night had its own tally of work with the running play; but from the time the curtain went down at night till when the doors were opened the following night full pressure never ceased. Properties, dresses, and "appointments" came in completed perpetually. Rehearsals went on all day. On Saturday night, November 1—just over three weeks after he had broached the idea, and less than three from the time the work was actually begun—the curtain went up on *The Merchant of Venice*.

It had an unbroken run of two hundred and fifty nights, the longest run of the play ever known.

It is a noteworthy fact that one of the actors, Mr. Frank Tyars, who played the Prince of Morocco, after being perfect for two hundred and forty-nine nights, forgot some of his words on the two hundred and fiftieth.

For twenty-six years that play remained in the working *répertoire* of Henry Irving. He played Shylock over a thousand times.

II

The occasion of Irving's producing *Othello* during his own management was due to his love and remembrance of Edwin Booth. In 1860, at the Theatre Royal, Manchester, Irving began a long engagement. In the bill his name is announced: "His first appearance." In November of the following year Booth appeared as a star, playing *Othello*, Irving being the Cassio; *Hamlet*, Irving being the Laertes; *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, he of course taking Sir Giles Overreach, and Irving Wellborn. For his benefit he gave on Friday night *Romeo and Juliet*, in which Irving played Benvolio to his Romeo. Often, when we talked of Booth some twenty years afterwards, he told me of the extraordinary alertness of the American actor; of his fierce concentration and tempestuous passion; of the blazing of his remarkable eyes. It will be seen from the comparison of their respective parts in the plays set out that the difference between them in the way of status as players was marked. The theatre had its own etiquette, and stars were supposed to have a stand-off manner of their own. These things have changed a good deal in the interval, but in the early sixties it was a real though an impalpable barrier, as hard to break through as though it were 56compact of hardier material than shadowy self-belief. Naturally the men did not have much opportunity for intimacy, but Irving never forgot the bright young actor who had won his heart as well as his esteem. Twenty years afterwards, when the younger man had won his place in the world and when his theatre was becoming celebrated as a national asset, Booth again visited England. Whoever had arranged his business did not choose the best theatre for him. For in those days the Princess's in Oxford Street did not have a high dramatic *cachet*. He got a good reception of course; but the engagement was not a satisfactory one, and Booth was much chagrined. I was there myself on the night of his opening, November 6, 1880, on which he played *Hamlet*. I was much disappointed in the *ensemble*; for though Booth was fine, neither the production nor the support was worthy of his genius and powers. The management was a new one, and the manager a man who had been used to a different class of theatre. Also there were certain things which jarred on the senses of any one accustomed to a finer order. This was none of Booth's doings; but he was the sufferer by it. Booth and Irving had met at once after the former had come to London, and had renewed their old acquaintance—on a more intimate basis. In those days there was a certain class of

busybodies who tried always to make mischief between Americans and English; twenty-five years ago the *entente cordiale* was not so marked as became noticeable after the breaking out of the war between America and Spain. There were even some who did not hesitate to say that Booth had not been fairly received in London. Irving jumped to the difficulty, went at once to Booth and said to him:

"Why don't you come and play with me at the Lyceum? I'll put on anything you wish; or if there is any piece in which we can play together, let us do that."

Booth was greatly delighted, and took the overture in the same good spirit in which it was meant. He at once told Irving that he would like to appear in *Othello*. Irving said:

"All right! You decide on the time; and I'll get the play ready, if you will tell me how you would like it arranged."

Booth said he would like to leave all that to his host, as he had not himself taken a part in the production of plays for years and did not even attend rehearsals. So Irving took all the task on himself. When he asked Booth whether he would like to play Othello or Iago—for he played both—he said he would like to begin with Othello and that it would, he thought, be well if they 57changed week about; and so it was arranged. The performance began on May 2, 1881.

By Booth's wish *Othello* was only to be played three times a week, as he was averse from the strain of such a heavy part every night. The running bill—*The Cup* and *The Belle's Stratagem*—kept its place on the other three. For the special performances some of the prices were altered, stalls nominally ten shillings becoming a guinea, the dress-circle seats being ten shillings instead of six. The prices for the off nights remained as usual.

The success of *Othello* was instantaneous and immense. During the seven weeks the arrangement lasted the houses were packed. And strange to say the takings of the off nights were not affected in any way.

III

The two months thus occupied made a happy time for Booth. He came down to rehearsal early in the week before the production, and was so pleased that he never missed a rehearsal during the remainder of the time. He said more than once that it had given him a new interest in his work. In social ways too the time went pleasantly. Several of his distinguished countrymen were then staying in London, and no matter how strenuous work might be, time was found for enjoyment though the days had to be stretched out in the manner suggested in Tommy Moore's ballad:

“For the best of all ways to lengthen our days

Is to steal a few hours from the night, my dear!”

On Sunday, June 12, John McCullough gave a party at Hampton Court, where we dined at the Greyhound. We drove down in four-in-hand drags and spent the late afternoon walking through the beautiful gardens of Hampton Court. June in that favoured spot is always delightful.

There was an amusing episode on our dilatory journeying among the flowers. One of the gardeners, a bright-faced old fellow for whom Nature had been unkind enough to use the mould wrought for the shaping of Richard III., on being asked some trivial question gave so smart an answer that we all laughed. Then began a hail of questions; the old man, smiling gleefully, answered them as quick as lightning. One by one nearly all the party joined in; but to one and all a cunning answer was given without slack of 58speed, till the whole crowd was worsted. One of the party asked the gardener if he would lend him his hat for a minute. The old man handed it, remarking in a manifestly intended stage aside:

“It’ll be no use to him. The brains don’t go with it!” The man who borrowed it, “Billy” Florence, put it on the grass, open side up, and said:

“Now boys!”

Instantly a rain of money—more of it gold than silver, and some folded notes—fell into the hat. Then with a handshake all round the clever old fellow toddled off. The names of that party will show most people of the great world, even twenty years afterwards, that there was no lack of “brains” in that crowd, even enough possibly to answer effectually to the sallies of one old man. Most of them may be seen on the dinner *menu* which they signed.

One night at supper in the Beefsteak Room, Irving told me an amusing occurrence which took place at Manchester when Booth played there. He said it was “about” 1863, so it may have been that time of which I have written—1861. *Richard III.* was put up, Charles Calvert, the manager, playing Richmond, and Booth Gloster. Calvert determined to make a brave show of his array against the usurper, and being manager was able to dress his own following to some measure of his wishes. Accordingly he drained the armoury of the theatre and had the armour furbished up to look smart. Richard’s army came on in the usual style. They were not much to look at though they were fairly comfortable for their work of fighting. But Richmond’s army enthralled the senses of the spectators, till those who knew the play began to wonder how such an army *could* be beaten by the starvelings opposed to them. They were not used to fight,

or even to move in armour, however; and the moment they began to make an effort they one and all fell down and wriggled all over the stage in every phase of humiliating but unsuccessful effort to get up; and the curtain had to be lowered amidst the wild laughter of the audience.

SUGGESTION FOR IAGO'S DRESS

Drawn by Henry Irving, 1881

59

X
SHAKESPEARE PLAYS—II

I

Romeo and Juliet was the first great Shakespearean production which Irving made under his own management. *Hamlet* had been done on very simple lines, the age in which it is set not allowing of splendour. *The Merchant of Venice* had been entirely produced and rehearsed within three weeks. But the story of "Juliet and her Romeo," perhaps the greatest and most romantic love-story that ever was written, is one which not only lends itself to, but demands, picturesque setting. For its tragic basis the audience must understand the power and antiquity of the surroundings of each of those unhappy lovers. Under conditions of humbler life the tragedy would not have been possible; in still loftier station, though there might have been tragedy, it would have been wrought by armed force on one of the rival Houses or the other. It is necessary to give something of the luxury, the hereditary feud of two dominant factions represented by their chiefs, of the ingrained bloodthirstiness of the age of the Italian petty States. Irving knew this well, and with his superlative stage instinct grasped the picturesque possibilities. The Capulets and the Montagues must be made not only forces, but typal.

What Irving's intention was may be seen in the opening words which he wrote himself in the short preface to the published Acting Version of the play:

"In producing this tragedy, I have availed myself of every resource at my command to illustrate without intrusion the Italian warmth, life, and romance of this enthralling love-story."

It was produced on May 8, 1882, and ran for one hundred and sixty-one nights, the summer vacation intervening.

Extraordinary care was taken in the preparation of the play. In the beginning Irving had asked Mr. Alfred Thompson, known as a 60popular designer of dresses for many plays, to design the costumes. This he did; but as they were not exactly what was wanted, not a single one of them was used in the piece. Irving himself selected the costumes from old pictures and prints, and costume books. He chose and arranged the colours

and stuff to be used. Nevertheless, with his characteristic generosity, he put in the playbill and advertisements Mr. Thompson's name as designer. For the scenery also he made initial suggestions, all in reference to exactness of detail and the needs of the play in the way of sentiment as well as of action. The scenery was really most beautiful and poetic and won much κυδος for the painters, Hawes Craven, William Telbin and Walter Hann.

In another way too a new departure was made. Hitherto it had been a custom in theatres that the musical director should compose or select whatever incidental music was necessary. In every great theatre might be found a really good musician in charge of the orchestra; and on him the management wholly relied for musical help and setting. But with regard to *Romeo and Juliet* Irving thought that the theme was a tempting one for a composer of note to take in hand. If this could be arranged not only would the play as a whole benefit enormously, but even its business aspect be greatly enhanced by the addition of the new strength. He wished that Sir Julius Benedict should compose special music for the new production. We were then on a provincial tour; but I ran up to London and saw Sir Julius, who was delighted to undertake the task. In due time charming music was completed.

So long before as June 1880, on two different nights, 14th and 16th, Irving and I supped alone in the Beefsteak Room, and on each occasion talked of *Romeo and Juliet*. For a long time the play had been in Irving's mind as one to be produced when the proper opportunity should come. In his early days in the "fifties" he had played both Paris and Tybalt; and we may be sure that in his ambitious soul and restless eager brain the tragic part of Romeo was shaping itself for future use. More than twenty years afterwards when the dreams of power to do as he wished on the stage had grown first to possibilities and then to realities, he certainly convinced me that his convictions of the phases of character were quite mature. He had followed Romeo through all his phases, both of character and emotion. He seemed to have not only the theory of action and pose and inflection of voice proper for every moment of his appearance, but the habit of doing it, which is the 61very stronghold of an actor's art. To me his conception was enlightening with a new light.

The words: "Thou canst not teach me to forget" he took to strike a key-note of the play. He rehearsed them over and over again, not only on the stage, but on several occasions when we were alone, or when Loveday was also with us. I well remember one night when we three were alone and had supped after the running play, *Two Roses*, when he was simply bubbling over with the new play. Over and over again he practised the action of leaning on Benvolio, and the tone and manner of the speech. In it there was a distinct duality of thought—of existence. He managed to convey that

though his mind was to a measure set on love with a definite object, there was still a sterner possibility of a deeper passion. It seemed to show the heart of a young man yearning for all-compelling love, even at the time when the pale phantom of such a love claimed his errant fancy.

Once he was started on this theme he went on with fiery zeal to other passages in the play, till at last the pathos of the end touched him to his heart's core. I find an entry in my diary:

"H. much touched at tragedy of last act, and in speaking the words wept."

That night too we practised carrying the body of Paris into the tomb. In the first instance he asked me, as one who had been an athlete, to show him how I would do it. Accordingly Loveday lay on the floor on his back whilst I lifted him, Irving keenly watching all the time. Standing astride over the body I took it by the hinches—as the wrestlers call the upper part of the hips—and bending my legs whilst at the same moment raising with my hands, keeping my elbows down, and swaying backwards I easily flung it over my shoulder. Irving thought it was capital, and asked me to lift him so that he could understand the motion. I did so several times. Then I lay down and he lifted me, easily enough, in the same way. It must have required a fair effort of strength on his part; for he was a thin, spare man whilst I was over twelve stone. He said that that method would do very well and looked all right, but that it might prove too much of a strain in the stress of acting. So we put off other experiments till another evening.

Some ten days after, my brother George, who had been all through the Russo-Turkish war as a surgeon in the Turkish service, was in the theatre. He had been Chief of Ambulance of the Red 62Crescent and had been in the last convoy into Plevna and had brought to Philippopolis all the Turkish wounded from the battle at the Schipka Pass, and so had had about as much experience of dead bodies as any man wants. Irving thought it might be well to draw on his expert knowledge, and after supper asked him what was the easiest way of carrying a dead body, emphasising the "easiest"; accordingly I, who was to enact the part of "body," lay down again. George drew my legs apart, and stooping very low with his back to me, lifted the legs in turn so that the inside of my knees rested on his shoulders. Then, catching one of my ankles in each hand, he drew my body up till the portion of my anatomy where the back and legs unite was pressed against the back of his neck. He then straightened his arms and rose up, my body, face outward, trailing down his back and my arms hanging limp. It was just after the manner of a butcher carrying the carcase of a sheep. It was most certainly the "easiest" way to carry a body—there was no possible doubt about that; but its picturesque suitability for stage purpose was another matter. Irving laughed

consumedly, and when next we discussed the matter he had come to the conclusion that the best way was to *drag* the body into the entrance of the monument. He would then appear in the next scene dragging the body down the stone stair to the crypt. To this end a body was prepared, adjusted to the weight and size of Paris so that in every way *vraisemblance* was secured.

That production was certainly wonderfully perfect. Some of the scenes were of really entrancing beauty, breathing the Italian atmosphere. Even the supers took fire with the reality of all around them. No matter how carefully rehearsed, they would persist in throwing into their work a martial vigour of their own. The rubric of the scene, as printed from the original, does not give the slightest indication of the wonderful stress of the first scene:

"Enter Several Persons of both Houses, who join in the Fray: then enter Citizens and Peace Officers, with their Clubs and Partisans."

The scene was of the market-place of Verona with side streets and at back a narrow stone bridge over a walled-in stream. The "Several Persons," mostly apprentices of the Capulet faction, entered, at first slowly, but coming quicker and quicker till quite a mass had gathered on the hither side of the bridge. The strangers were being easily worsted. Then over the bridge came a rush of 63the Montagues armed like their foes with sticks or swords according to their degree. They used to pour in on the scene down the slope of the bridge like a released torrent, and for a few minutes such a scene of fighting was enacted as I have never elsewhere seen on the stage. The result of the mighty fight was that during the whole time of the run of the play there was never a day when there was not at least one of the young men in hospital. We tried to make them keep to the business set down for them, for on the stage even a fight between supers is so carefully arranged that no harm can come if they keep to their instructions. But one side or the other would grow so ardent that a mighty trouble of some kind had to be counted upon.

When I look back upon other presentations of *Romeo and Juliet* I can see the exceeding value of all the picturesque realism of Irving's production. I have in my mind's eye two others in London, one of which I saw and the other of which I heard, for we were then in America, where tragedy was lost in the mirth of the audience.

The former was held in the old Gaiety Theatre, then under the management of the late John Hollingshead. It was at a *matinée* given by a lady who was ambitious of beginning her theatrical career as Juliet. Of course on such an occasion one has to be contented with the local scenery; either such as is used in the running play or can be easily taken from and to the storage. The play went fairly well until the third act; William Terriss was

the Romeo, and his performance, if not subtle, was full of life and go. But when the scene went up on Juliet's chamber there was a sudden and wild burst of laughter from every part of the house. The stage management had used a picturesque scene without any idea of suitability. Juliet's bed was set right in the open, on a wide marble terrace with steps leading to the garden!

The other occasion was when the property master, with a better idea of customary utility than of picturesque accuracy, had set out for Juliet's bed one of double width—a matrimonial couch with *two* pillows!

II

Much Ado About Nothing followed close after *Romeo and Juliet*, the theatre being closed for three nights to allow of full-dress rehearsals. It began on October 11, 1882, and had an unbroken 64run of two hundred and twelve nights, being only taken off because the other plays of the *répertoire* for the coming American tour had to be made ready and rehearsed by playing them. This was not only the longest run the play had ever had, but probably the only real run it had ever had at all. It was always one of those plays known as "ventilators" which are put up occasionally with hope on the part of the management that they *may* do something this time, and a moral conviction that they can't in any case do worse than the plays that have already been tried. But Irving had faith in it, and in his own mind saw a way of doing it which would help it immensely. It was beautifully produced and carefully rehearsed. The first act was all brightness and beauty. The cathedral was such as was never before seen on the stage. Even the cathedral servants were new, their brown dresses giving picturesque sombre richness to the scene. Irving had seen such dresses in the cathedral of Seville or Burgos—I forget which—and had noted and remembered. Ellen Terry was born for the part of Beatrice. It was almost as though Shakespeare had a premonition of her coming.

Don Pedro. "Out of question, you were born in a merry hour."

Beatrice. "No, sure, my lord, my mother cried; but then there was a star danced, and under that was I born."

Surely such a buoyant, winsome, merry, enchanting personality was never seen on the stage—or off it. She was literally compact of merriment, until when her anger with Claudio blazed forth in a brief tragic moment, half passion and whole pathos, that carried everything before it. And as for tragic strength, none who have ever seen or may ever see it can forget her futile helpless anger—the surging, choking passion in

her voice, as striding to and fro with long paces, her whirling words won Benedick to her as in answer to his query "Is Claudio thine enemy," she broke out:

"Is he not approved in the height a villain, that hath slandered, scorned, dishonoured my kinswoman?—O, that I were a man!—what? bear her in hand until they come to take hands; and then with public accusation, uncovered slander, unmitigated rancour—O God, that I were a man! I'd—I'd—I'd eat his heart in the market-place!"

And then after some combative words with her lover?

"I cannot be a man with wishing, therefore I will die a woman with grieving."

65It was that last feminine touch that won Benedick to her purpose of revenge. All the audience felt that he could do no less.

III

By the way, a curious evidence of the truth of its emotional effect came one night, not very long after the play began its long career. I was in my office just after the curtain had gone up on the fourth act when I was sent for to the front of the house to see some one. In the vestibule I found a tall, powerful, handsome man. He had masterful eyes, a resonant voice and a mouth that shut like steel. A most interesting personality I thought. I introduced myself, and as I had been told he had expressed a wish to see Irving I asked him if he could wait a little as the curtain had gone up. He was very cheery and friendly, and he said at once:

"Of course I'll wait. I've just come to London and I came at once to see my cousin Johnny. I haven't seen him since we were boys." I had been trying to place him. This gave me the clue I wanted.

"Are you John Penberthy?" I asked. This delighted him, and he shook my hand again. I said that I had often heard of him. From the moment of our meeting we became friends.

John Penberthy was one of the sons of Sarah Behenna, sister of Irving's mother, who had married Captain Isaac Penberthy, a famous mining captain of his time in Cornwall. Whilst a very young man John had gone to South America and had soon become, by his courage and forceful character as well as by his gifts and skill as a miner himself, a great mining captain. He was mostly in the silver mines; he it was who had developed and worked the great Huanchaca mine in Bolivia. For some twenty or more years he had lived in a place and under conditions where a quick eye and a ready hand were the surest guarantees of long life—especially to a man who had to control the fierce spirits of a Spanish mine.

I took him round on the stage, thinking what a surprise as well as a pleasure it would be to Irving to find him there when he came off after the scene. He at once got deeply interested in the scene going on, and now and again as I stood beside him I could see his strong hands closed and hear him grind his teeth. When the scene was over and Irving and Ellen Terry were bowing in the glare of the footlights amid a storm of applause, 66Captain Penberthy turned to me, his face blazing with generous anger, and said in his native Cornwall accent which he had never lost:

"It was a damned good job for that cur Claudio that I hadn't my shootin' irons on me. If I had I'd soon have blasted hell out of him!"

IV

An instance of the interest of the public in a Lyceum production was shown by a letter received by Irving a few nights after the play had been produced. For one of the front scenes the scene-painter, Hawes Craven, had been given a free hand. He chose for the subject a walk curving away through giant cedars, brown trunks and twisted branches—a noble spot in which to muse. Irving's correspondent pointed out, as well as I remember, that whereas the period is set in the third quarter of the fifteenth century, the cedar was not introduced into Messina until the middle of that century and could not possibly have attained the stature shown in the scene.

Perhaps I may here mention that Irving had some other experiences of the same kind:

When he reproduced *Charles I.* in June 1879, some critical observer called attention to the fact that the trees in the Hampton Court scene, having been planted in the time of Charles, could not possibly have grown within his reign to the size represented.

Again, whilst in Philadelphia in 1894, where we had played *Becket*, the secretary of a Natural History Society wrote a letter—a really charming letter it was too—pointing out that Tennyson had made a mistake in that passage of the last act of the play where Becket speaks of finding a duck frozen on her nest of eggs. Such might certainly occur in the case of certain other wild birds; but not in the case of a duck whose habits made such a tragedy impossible. Irving replied in an equally courteous letter, saying, after thanking him for the interest displayed in the play and for his kindness in calling attention to the alleged error, that there must have been some misreading of the poet's words as he did not mention a duck at all!

"... we came upon

A wild-fowl sitting on her nest...."

V

It may be well to mention here the way in which Irving cared always and in every way for the feelings of the public. In religious matters he was scrupulous against offence. When the church scene of *Much Ado About Nothing* was set for the marriage of Claudio and Hero, he got a Catholic priest to supervise it. He listened carefully whilst the other explained the emblematic value of the points of ritual. The then Property Master was a Catholic and had taken some pains to be correct as to details. When the reverend critic pointed out that the white cloth spread in front of the Tabernacle on the High Altar meant that the Host was within Irving at once ordered that a piece of cloth of gold should be spread in its place. Again, when he was told that the cross on the ends of the stole of the marrying priest was emblematical of the Sacrament he ordered a fleur-de-lis to be embroidered instead. In the same way, on knowing that the red lamp, hung over the altar-rail by his direction for purely scenic effect, was a sacramental sign he had it altered and others placed to destroy the significance. But not so when as Becket he put on the pall to go into the cathedral where the murderous huddle of knights awaited him. There he wore the real pall. There were no feelings to be offended then, though the occasion was in itself a sacrament—the greatest of all sacraments—martyrdom. All sensitiveness regarding ritual was merged in pity and the grandeur of the noble readiness:

“I go to meet my King.”

XI
SHAKESPEARE PLAYS—III

I

Of all the plays of which Irving talked to me in the days of our friendship when there was an eager wish for freedom of effort, or in later times when a new production was a possibility rather than an intention, I think *Macbeth* interested me most. When I met him in 1876 he had already played it at the Lyceum; but somehow it was borne in on me that what had been done was not up to his fullest sense of truth. His instinctive idea of treatment—that which is the actor’s sixth sense regarding character—was correct. So much I could tell, for the conviction which was in him came out from him to others. But I do not think that at that time his knowledge of the part was complete. In the consideration of such a play it has to be considered what was Shakespeare’s knowledge of its origin; for it is by this means that we can get a guiding light on his intention. That he had studied Wintown and Holinshed is manifest to any one who has

read the “Cronykil” of the former or the Chronicle of the latter. Now Irving had got hold of the correct idea of Macbeth’s character, and from his own inner consciousness of its working out, combined with the enlightenment of the text, knew that Macbeth had thought of and intended the murder of Duncan long before the opening of the play, and that he and his wife had talked it over. But I think that not at first, nor till after he had re-studied the play, was he aware of the personal relationship between Macbeth and Duncan: that after the King and his sons Macbeth was the next successor to the crown of Scotland. This is according to history, and Shakespeare knew it from Holinshed. But even Shakespeare is somewhat wanting in his way of setting it forth in the play. I know that I myself had from my earliest recollection been always puzzled by the passage in Act I, scene iv, where Macbeth in an aside says:

69“The Prince of Cumberland! that is a step

On which I must fall down, or else o’erleap,

For in my way it lies.”

Nothing that has gone before in the play can afford to any unlearned member of an audience any possible clue as to how Macbeth could have been injured or thwarted by an honour shown to his own son by the King who had already showered honours and thanks upon his victorious general. In his Address at Owens College, Manchester, six years after his second production of the play, Henry Irving set forth this and many other critical points with admirable lucidity.

To me Irving’s intellectual position with regard to the character was from the first irrefragable. He added scholarship as the time went on; but every addition was a help to understanding. Between the time when I had first heard him talk over the play and the character in 1876 and when I saw him play it, twelve years elapsed. In all that time it was a favourite subject to talk between us, and I think it was one evening in February 1887 on which after he and I, having supped alone in the Beefsteak Room, talked over the play till the windows began to show their edges brightening in the coming day, that he made up his mind to the reproduction.

We were then deep in the run of *Faust*, which had passed its three hundredth representation at the Lyceum; but in the running of a London theatre it is necessary to look a long way ahead; a year at least. In this case there was need of a longer preview, for our plans had already been made for a considerable time. We were to run *Faust* through the season except some weeks at the end to prepare other plays which together with *Faust* we were to take to America in the tour already arranged for 1887–8. As we should not be back till the spring of the later year the production of a

new play, together with the music and selection of the company, had all to be thought of in time. Irving had—and justifiably—great hopes of the play, and spared on it neither pains nor expense. With regard to the scenery he thought that he would get Keeley Halswelle, A.R S.A., to make the designs. He was very fond of his work and considered that it would be exactly suitable for his purpose. The painter consented and made some lovely sketches.

He expressed a wish to paint the scenes himself, and when the sketches and then the models in turn had to be approved of, we engaged the great paint-rooms of the Covent Garden Opera House 70then available, for his use. The canvas-cloths, framed pieces, borders and wings were got ready by our own carpenters and "primed" for the painting.

After a while we began to get anxious about the scenery. We kept asking and asking and asking as to time of completion; but without result. Finally I paid a visit of inspection to Covent Garden and to my surprise and horror found the acres of white untouched even to the extent of a charcoal outline.

The superb painter of pictures, untutored in stage art and perspective, had found himself powerless before those vast solitudes. He had been unable even to begin his task!

The work was then undertaken by Hawes Craven, J. Harker, T. W. Hall, W. Hann, and Perkins and Caney, with magnificent result.

Macbeth is a play that really requires the aid of artistic completeness. Its diction is so lordly, so poetical, so searching in its introspective power that it lifts the mind to an altitude which requires and expects some corresponding elevation of the senses.

Here, by the way, a certain incident comes back to my memory. In the Queen's Theatre, Dublin, some forty years ago the tragedy was being given, and when the actor who played Lennox came to the lines

"The night has been unruly: where we lay,

Our chimneys were blown down…."

he spoke them, in the very worst of Dublin accents, as follows:

"The night hath been rumbunctious where we slep,

Our chimbleys was blew down."

For the music incidental to the play Sir Arthur Sullivan undertook the composition. He wrote overtures, preludes, incidental music and choruses, one and all suitable as well as fine. Throughout there is a barbaric ring which seems to take us back and place us amongst a warlike and undeveloped age. Wherever required he altered it during the progress of rehearsal.

It was a lesson in collaboration to see the way in which these two men, each great in his own craft, worked together. Arthur Sullivan knew that with Irving lay the responsibility of the *ensemble*, and was quite willing to subordinate himself to the end which the other had in view. Small-minded men are unwilling, or perhaps unable, to accept this position. If their susceptibilities are in any way wounded by even a non-recognition of the superiority of their work 71they are apt to sulk; and when an artist sulks those who have to work with him are apt to encounter a paralysing dead-weight. In any form *vis inertia* is cramping to artistic effort. But both these men were too big for chagrin or jealousy. As example of the harmony of their working and of the absolute necessity in such matters for absolute candour let me instance one scene. Here the music had all been written and rehearsed, and Sir Arthur sat in the conductor's chair. In a pause of the rehearsal of action on the stage he said:

"We are ready now, Irving, if you can listen."

"All right, old man; go ahead!" When the numbers of that particular piece of incidental music had been gone through the composer asked:

"Do you like that? Will it do?" Irving replied at once with kindly seriousness:

"Oh, as music it's very fine; but for our purpose it is no good at all. Not in the least like it!"

Sullivan was not offended by the frankness. He was only anxious to get some idea of what the other wanted. He asked him if he could give any hint or clue as to what idea he had. Irving, even whilst saying in words that he did not know himself exactly what he wanted, managed, by sway of body and movement of arms and hands, by changing times and undulating tones, and by vowel sounds without words, to convey his inchoate thought, instinctive rather than of reason. Sullivan grasped the idea and the anxious puzzlement of his face changed to gladness.

"All right!" he said heartily, "I think I understand. If you will go on with the rehearsal I shall have something ready by-and-by." Sitting where he was, he began scoring, the band waiting. When some of the scenes had been rehearsed there was some movement in the orchestra—the crowding of heads together, little chirpy sounds from some of the instruments and then in a pause of the rehearsal:

“Now, Mr. Ball!”—John Meredith Ball was the Musical Director of the Lyceum. “If you are ready now, Irving, we can give you an idea. It is only the theme. If you think it will do I will work it out to-night.”

The band struck up the music and Irving’s face kindled as he heard.

“Splendid!” he said. “Splendid! That is all I could wish for. It is fine!”

I could not help feeling that such recognition and praise from 72a fellow artist was one of the rewards which has real value to the creator of good work.

II

It was necessary that *Henry VIII.* should be very carefully done; for its period is well recorded in architecture, stone-carving, goldsmith work, tapestry, stuffs, embroideries, costumes and paintings. Indeed many historical lessons may be taken from this play. Shakespeare, if he did not actually know or intend this, had an intuition of it. *Henry VIII.* marks one of the most important epochs in history, and as it was by the very luxury and extravagance of the nobles of the time that the power of the old feudalism was lowered, such naturally becomes a pivotal point of the play. It was a part of the subtle policy of Cardinal Wolsey to bring the great nobles to London, instead of holding local courts of their own and surrounding themselves with vast retinues of armed retainers. Combination amongst a few such might shake even the throne. When once at the Court of the King they were encouraged and incited to vie with each other in the splendour of their dress and equipment; and soon their capacity for revolt was curbed by the quick wasting of their estates. The wonderful pageant of the Field of the Cloth of Gold had its political use and bearing which the student of the future will do well to investigate. In his play Shakespeare bore all this in mind, and took care to lay down in exact detail the order of his processions and rituals. It can be, therefore, seen that in this renaissance of art with a political meaning—and, therefore, a structural part of a historical play—it was advisable, if not necessary, to be exact in the *décor* of the play. To this end the greatest care was taken, with of course the added managerial intention of making the piece as attractive as possible. Seymour Lucas (then A.R.A. now R.A.), who undertook to superintend the production, went to and fro examining the buildings and picture and art work of the period wherever to be found. For months he had assistants working in the South Kensington Museum making coloured drawings of the many stuffs used at that time; reproducing for the guidance of the weavers, who were to take up their part of the work in turn, both texture and pattern and colour. Further months were occupied with the looms before the antique stuffs thus reproduced were ready for the costumier.

Irving's own dress—his robe as Cardinal—was, after months of 73experiment, exactly reproduced from a genuine robe of the period, kindly lent to him by Rudolph Lehmann, the painter.

Many lessons in stage values and effects were to be learned from this magnificent production. Let me give a couple of instances. As the period was that of the Field of the Cloth of Gold, there was naturally a good deal of cloth of gold used in the English Court; and such, or the effect of it, had to be set forth in the play. A day was fixed when Seymour Lucas was to choose the texture, make and colour of the various patterns of gold cloth submitted. For this purpose the curtain was taken up and the footlights were turned on. A row of chairs, back out, were placed along the front of the stage, and on each was hung a sample of cloth of gold. Lucas and Irving, with Loveday and myself, sat in the stalls; and with us the various artists and workpeople employed in the production of the play—property master, wardrobe mistress, costumiers, &c. Something like the following took place as the painter's eye ranged along the glittering line of fabrics:

"That first one—well, fair. Let it remain! The next, take it away. No use at all! Third and fourth—put them on one side—We may want them for variety. Fifth—Oh! that is perfect! Just what we want!"

When the examination was finished we all went on the stage to look at the specimens accepted and discarded. There we found the second so peremptorily rejected was real cloth of gold at ten guineas a foot; whilst the fifth whose excellence for the purpose we had so enthusiastically accepted was Bolton sheeting stencilled in our own property-room, and costing as it stood about eighteen pence a yard.

Again, very fine jewellery—stage jewellery—had been prepared to go with the various dresses. In especial in the procession at the beginning of the fourth act the collars of the Knights of the Garter were of great magnificence. One of the actors, however, was anxious to have everything as real as possible, and not being content with the splendour of the diamond collars provided, borrowed a real one from one of the Dukes, whose Collar of the Garter was of a magnificence rare even amongst such jewels. He expected it to stand out amongst the other jewelled collars seen in the procession. But strange to say, it was the only one amongst them all that did not look well. It did not even look real. Stage jewels are large, and are backed with foil, which throws back the fierce light of the "floats," and the "standards," and the "ground 74rows," and all those aids to illusion which have been perfected by workmen competent to their purpose.

III

The play ends with the christening of the infant Princess Elizabeth, in which of course a dummy baby was used. This gave a chance to the voices clamant for realism on the stage. When the play had run some forty nights Irving got a letter, from which I quote:

"The complete success of *Henry VIII.* was marred when the King kissed the china doll. The whole house tittered.... Herewith I offer the hire of our real baby for the purpose of personating the offspring...." To this I replied:

"Mr. Irving fears that there might be some difficulty in making the changes which you suggest with regard to the infant Princess Elizabeth in the play. If reality is to be achieved it should of necessity be real reality and not seeming reality; the latter we have already on the stage. A series of difficulties then arises, any of which you and your family might find insuperable: If your real baby were provided it might be difficult, or even impossible, for the actor who impersonates King Henry VIII. to feel the real feelings of a father towards it. This would necessitate your playing the part of the King; and further would require that your wife should play the part of Queen Anne Boleyn. This might not suit either of you—especially as in reality Henry VIII. had afterwards his wife's head cut off. To this your wife might naturally object; but even if she were willing to accept this form of reality, and you were willing to accept the responsibility on your own part, Mr. Irving would, for his own sake, have to object. By law, if you had your wife decapitated you would be tried for murder; but as Mr. Irving would also be tried as an accessory before the fact, he too would stand in danger of his life. To this he distinctly objects, as he considers that the end aimed at is not worth the risk involved.

"Again, as the play will probably run for a considerable time, your baby would grow. It might, therefore, be necessary to provide another baby. To this you and your wife might object—at short notice.

"There are other reasons—many of them—militating against 75your proposal; but you will probably deem those given as sufficient."

Henry VIII. was produced on the night of Tuesday, January 5, 1892, and ran at the Lyceum for two hundred and three performances, ending on November 5. Its receipts were over sixty-six thousand pounds.

XII
SHAKESPEARE PLAYS—IV

I

In the Edinburgh theatre during his three years' engagement there, 1856–9, Irving had played the part of Curan in *King Lear*. This was, I think, the only part which he had ever played in the great tragedy; and it is certainly not one commending itself to an ambitious young actor. It is not what actors call a "fat" part; it is only ten lines in all, and none of those of the slightest importance. But the ambitious young actor had his eye on the play very early, and had thought out the doing of it in his own way. The play was not produced till the end of 1892; but nearly ten years before he had talked it over with me. I find this note rough in my diary for January 5, 1883:

"Theatre 7 till 2. H. and I supper alone. He told me of intention to play Lear on return from America. Gave rough idea of play—domestic—gives away kingdom round a wood fire, &c."

On the night of the 9th he spoke again of it under similar circumstances. And on April 10 he returned to the subject.

King Lear, in the production of which Ford Madox Brown advised, was produced on November 10, 1892, and ran in all seventy-six nights. My diary of November 10 says:

"First night; *King Lear*. Great enthusiasm between acts. Whilst scenes on, stillness like the grave. An ideal audience. Thunders of applause and cheers at end."

II

On the morning of January 19, after *King Lear* had run for sixty nights, I received a hurried note, written with pencil, from Irving, asking me to call and see him as soon as possible. I hurried to his 77rooms and found him ill and speechless with "grippe." This was one of the early epidemics of influenza and its manifestations were very sudden. He could not raise his head from his pillow. He wrote on a slip of paper:

"Can't play to-night. Better close the theatre."

"No!" I said, "I'll not close unless you order me to. I'll *never* close!" He smiled feebly and then wrote:

"What will you do?"

"I don't know," I said; "I'll go down to the theatre at once. Fortunately this is a rehearsal day and everybody will be there." He wrote again:

"Try Vezin."

"All right," I said. Just then Ellen Terry, to whom he had sent word, came in. When she knew how bad he was she said to me:

“Of course you’ll close, Bram” (we use Christian names a good deal on the stage).

“No!” I said again.

“Then what will you do?”

“I don’t know. But we’ll play—unless *you* won’t consent to!”

“Don’t you know that I’ll do anything!”

“Of course I do! It will be all right.” This was a wild presumption, for at the time the Stage Manager was away ill.

All the time Irving was hearing every word, and smiled a little through his pain and illness. He never liked to hear of any one giving up; and I think it cheered him a little to know that things were going on. I went to Mr. Vezin’s rooms at once but he was out of town. When I got to the theatre all the company were there, I asked Terriss if he could play Lear. He said no, that he had not studied the part at all—adding in regret: “I only wish to goodness that I had. It will be a lesson to me in the future.” I then asked the company in general if any of them had ever played Lear—or could play it; but there was no affirmative reply.

In the company was Mr. W. J. Holloway, who played the part of Kent. He was an old actor—that is, the *actor* was old though the *man* was in active middle age. He had, I knew, played in what is called “leading business” with his own company in Australia, where he had made much success. I asked him if he could read the part that night. If so, I should before the play ask the favour of the audience in the emergency; and that he would then play it “without the book” on the next night. He answered 78that he would rather wait till the next night, by which time he would be ready to play. To this I replied that if we closed for the night we should not re-open until Mr. Irving was able to resume work. After thinking a moment he said:

“Of course any one can *read* a part.”

“Then,” said I, “will you read it to-night and play to-morrow?”

He answered that he would. So I said to him:

“Now, Mr. Holloway, consider that from this moment till the curtain goes up you own the theatre. If there is anything you want for help or convenience, order it; you have *carte blanche*. Mr. Irving’s dresser will make you up, and the Wardrobe Mistress will alter any dress to suit you. We will have a rehearsal if you wish it, now or in the evening before the play; or all day, if you like.”

“I think,” he said after a pause, “I had better get home and try to get hold of the words. I know the business pretty well as I have been at all the rehearsals. I am usually a quick study, and it will be so much better if I can do without the book—for part of the time at any rate.”

In this he was quite wise; his experience as an old actor stood to him here. Kent is all through the play close to Lear, either in his own person or in disguise. The actor, therefore, who played the part, which in stage parlance is a “feeder,” had been at all the rehearsals of Lear’s scenes when the “business” of the play is being fixed and when endless repetitions of speech and movement make all familiar with both text and action. Also for sixty nights he had gone through the play till every part of it was burned into his brain. Still, knowledge of a thing is not doing it; and it was a very considerable responsibility to undertake to play such a tremendous part as Lear at short notice.

When he came down at night he seemed easier in his mind than I expected; his wife, who was present—though without his knowing it lest it might upset him—told me privately that he was “letter perfect” in at least the two first acts. “I have been going over it with him all day,” she said, “so I am confident he will be all right.”

And he was all right. From first to last he never needed a word of prompting. Of course we had prepared for all emergencies. Not only had the prompter and the call-boy each a prompt-book ready at every wing, but all his fellow actors were primed and ready to help.

79I shall never forget that performance; it really stirred me to look at it as I did all through from the wings in something of the same state of mind as a hen who sees her foster ducklings toddling into the ditch. I had known that good actors were fine workmen of their craft, but I think I never saw it realised as then. It was like looking at a game of Rugby football when one is running with the ball for a touch-down behind goal with all the on-side men of his team close behind him. He *could* not fail if he wanted to. They backed him up in every possible way. The cues came quick and sharp and there was not time to falter or forget. If any of the younger folk, upset by the gravity of the occasion, forgot or delayed in their speeches, some one else spoke them for them. The play went with a rush right through; the only difference from the sixty previous performances being that though the *entr’actes* were of the usual length the play was shorter by some twenty minutes. When the call came at the end the audience showed their approval of Mr. Holloway’s plucky effort by hearty applause. When the curtain had finally fallen the actor received that most dear reward of all. His comrades of all ranks closed round him and gave him a hearty cheer. Then the

audience beyond the curtain, recognising the rare honour, joined in the cheer till from wall to wall the whole theatre rang.

It was a moving occasion to us all, and I am right sure that it bore two lessons to all the actors present, young and old alike: to be ready for chances that *may* come; and to accept the responsibility of greatness in their work when such may present itself.

Of acting in especial, of all crafts the motto might be:

"The readiness is all!"

III

One other incident of the run of *King Lear* is, I think, worthy of record, inasmuch as it bears on the character and feeling of that great Englishman, Mr. Gladstone. In the second week of the run he came to see the play, occupying his usual seat on the stage on the O.P. corner. He seemed most interested in all that went on, but not entirely happy. At the end, after many compliments to Mr. Irving and Miss Terry, he commented on the unpatriotic conduct of taking aid from the French—from any foreigner—under any circumstances whatever of domestic stress.

IV

Saturday, December 19, 1896, was an eventful day in Irving's life. That evening, in the full tide of his artistic success and with a personal position such as no actor had ever won, he placed on the stage *Richard III.*, his acting in which just twenty years before had added so much and so justly to the great reputation which he had even then achieved.

His early fight had long been won. The public, and in especial the growing generation whose minds were free from the prejudice of ancient custom, had received his philosophic acting without cavil; the "Irving school" of acting had become a part of the nation's glory.

From the early morning of that day crowds were waiting to gain admission. Many of those in the passage to the pit door, leading in from the Strand, had camp-stools. One man had brought a regular chair so that he might sit all day with as little discomfort as possible. At four o'clock, when a great crowd had assembled, Irving had them all supplied with tea and bread-and-butter at his own expense. This was a custom which had grown up under his care and which made for a feeling of great personal kindness between the actor and his unknown friends. Most of those who waited at the pit door

on first nights were young ladies and gentlemen, and of course quite able to provide for themselves. But nothing would induce them to have a cup of tea till it was sent out to them by the management. That came to be a part of their cherished remembrance of such occasions, and was not to be foregone.

Many and many a time since then have I met in society persons, both ladies and gentlemen, who introduced themselves as old friends since the days when I had spoken to them, whilst waiting, through the iron rail which kept them from lateral pressure by newcomers and preserved the *queue*.

That day they were in great force, and even then, long before the house was, or could be, opened, there was no denying the hope-laden thrill of expectation with which they regarded the coming of the night's endeavour.

They were well justified, for nothing, so far as the Richard was concerned, could have gone with more marked success. The audience was simply wild with enthusiasm. That alone helps to make success in a theatre; the whole place seems charged with 81some kind of electric force and every one is lifted or even exalted beyond the common—the actors to do, the others to be receptive. At the close of the performance there were endless calls and cheering which made the walls ring.

In his very early youth Irving had found a certain attractiveness in *Richard III.*, though doubtless he did not then know or realise what a play was. His cousin, John Penberthy, told me in 1890 how when they were both boys "Johnny" had a book opening out into long series of scenes of plays and that he used to be fond of saying dramatically? "My horse! my horse! A kingdom for my horse!" Whether the error lay with the child's knowledge or the man's memory I know not.

Some of the scenes—not merely the painted or built pictures, but that which took in the persons as well as the setting of the stage—were of great beauty. In especial was the first scene when the funeral procession of King Henry VI. came on. Irving had tried to realise some of the effect of the great picture by Edwin A. Abbey, R.A. Here the tide of mourners seems to sweep along in resistless mass, with an extraordinary effect of the spear-poles of royal scarlet amidst the black draperies.

Whilst the bulk of the audience were taking their reluctant way home certain invited guests from their body were beginning to fill up again the great stage which had by now been transposed into a room surrounded by supper-tables. Irving was receiving his friends after what had by then grown to be an established custom of first and last nights. From the buoyancy and joy of the guests it was easy to see how the play had gone. All were rejoicing as if each one had achieved a personal success.

V

In his own rooms that night he met with an accident which prevented his working for ten weeks. And so the run of *Richard III.* at that time was limited to one triumphant night.

On February 27 it was resumed till the coming of the time, which had long before been fixed, for the production of *Madame Sans-Gêne*.

XIII
IRVING'S METHOD

I

The first time I saw *Eugene Aram*, June 6, 1879, I was much struck with one fact—amongst many—which afforded a real lesson in the art of acting in all its phases—philosophy, effect, value and method. It is that of the effect, intellectual as well as emotional, of a lightning-like change in the actor's manner. In this play, the Yorkshire schoolmaster, who under the stress of violent emotion wrought by wrong to the woman he loved, has avoided the danger of discovery and has for a long time remained in outward peace in the house of Parson Meadows, the Vicar of Knaresborough. The evil genius of his early day, Richard Houseman, who alone knew of his crime, had succeeded in "tracking" him down; and now, being in desperate straits, tried to blackmail him. Knowing his man, however, he will not meet him. Such a one as Houseman is a veritable "daughter of the horseleech"; the giving is each time a firmer ground for further *chantage*. Houseman, grown desperate, threatens him that he will expose him to Meadows; and Eugene Aram, who has loved in secret the Vicar's daughter Ruth, seeing all his cherished hopes of happiness shattered, grows more desperate still. All the murderous potentialities which have already manifested themselves wake to new life in the "climbing" passion of the moment—the *hysterica passio* of *King Lear*. As Irving played it, the hunted man at bay was transformed from his gentleness to a ravening tiger; he looked the spirit of murder incarnate as he answered threat by threat. Just at that moment the door opened and in walked Ruth Meadows, bright and cheery as a ray of spring sunshine. In a second—less than a second, for the change was like lightning—the sentence begun in one way went on in another without a quaver or pause. The mind and powers of the remorse-haunted man who had for weary years trained himself for just such an emergency worked true. Unfailingly a sudden and marked burst of applause rewarded on each occasion this remarkable artistic *tour de force*.

II

The play of *Richelieu* had always a particular interest for those who knew that in it he made his first appearance on the stage in the small part of Gaston, Duke of Orleans.

Regarding this first appearance three names should be borne in memory as those who helped the ambitious young clerk to an opening in the art he had chosen. The names of two of these are already known. One was William Hoskins, who at considerable self-sacrifice had helped to teach him his craft, and who had predicted good things for him. The other was E. D. Davis, an old actor, who was just entering upon the management of the Lyceum Theatre, Sunderland; and who at Mr. Hoskins' request gave him an engagement.

The third friend made his way possible, and gave him opportunity of appearing to advantage in his parts by supplying him with the sinews of war. This friend was none other than his uncle, Thomas Brodribb, the second of the four brothers of whom Irving's father, Samuel, was fourth. He was—perhaps fortunately for his nephew—a bachelor. He had but small means; but also, happily, small wants. Amongst his assets he had a policy of insurance on which many premiums had been paid; and wishing to do something for his nephew on his starting on a new life, he made over to him this policy so that he might realise on it. This his nephew did to the result of nearly one hundred pounds sterling, all of which was by degrees laid out carefully with most anxious thought on such wardrobe and personal properties as are not usually "found" by provincial managements. This kindly and timely assistance enabled the young actor to appear during his first years on the stage in many parts with something of that suitability of presence which his characters demanded. In those early days the wardrobe of country theatres was limited and the actors often chose their dresses in the sequence of importance; so that it was much to a young man to be able to supplement such costume as came to him. Could the generous, kindly-hearted Uncle Thomas have lived to see the grand consequences eventually resulting in part from his thoughtful kindness he might have indeed been proud.

There was this difference in Irving's Richelieu and the same part as played by any other actor I have seen. In the great scene of the quarrel between Baradas and the Cardinal, when the former 84wants, for his own purposes, to take, by the King's authority, Julie from his custody, the latter hurls at him the magnificently effective speech beginning: "Then wakes the power which in the Age of Iron…."

This by the players of the old school was thundered out with the same vigour with which they fought in their sword combats; and certainly the effect was very telling. It was the act as well as the word of personal mastery.

Irving kept the full effect; but did it in such a way that he superadded to the Cardinal's character the flickering spasmodic power of an infirm old man. He too began in tones of thunder. To his full height he drew the tall form that seemed massive in the sacerdotal robes. He was manifestly inspired and borne up by the divine force of his sacred office. But at the end he collapsed, almost sinking into a swoon. Thus the effect was magnified and the sense of both reality and characterisation enhanced.

III

With Louis XI., a part which in France is called *le grand rôle*, Henry Irving was fairly familiar in his early years on the stage. He had played the part of both Coitier and Tristan, and as one or other of these in most of the scenes he had full experience of the acting value of the title *rôle*. It would be very unlike the method of study habitual to him even before he went on to the stage if he had not all the time, both at rehearsal and performance, grasped the acting possibilities of both character and situations, and devised new and subtle means for characterisation. When in 1878 he had run the piece for some three months he had learned much, both by practice and from the opinions of his friends. In those days he did not often read criticisms of an ordinary kind. He found that some of them, written by irresponsible writers imperfectly equipped for their task, only disturbed and irritated him. And so he only read such as had filtered through the judgment of his friends; a habit which George Eliot had adopted about the same time.

Though I had not seen his performance that year I could tell, in 1879, from his anxiety about the rehearsal of certain scenes and the care bestowed on the new or altered scenery and appointments, that his new work was to be on a slightly different plane from the old.

85After a few performances Louis XI. became a sort of holiday part to him. There is in it but one change of dress: that between the fourth and fifth acts. This change, though exceptionally heavy, is as nothing to the exhaustion consequent on the many changes of costume necessary in most heavy plays. These ordinarily absorb in swift and laborious work the only breathing times between the periods of action. A series of small labours may in the long run amount to more than one large one.

The limitation of violent effort in this play made him very "easy" in it. In one scene only does such occur; that at the end of the fourth act as originally played. Of late years he

played it in four acts altogether, amalgamating the first and second acts with much benefit to the play.

Only once have I seen him put out at anything during the playing of *Louis XI*. It was in Chicago on the night of Saturday, February 13, 1904. For five weeks following the burning of the Iroquois Theatre in that city no theatre had been allowed to open. The official world, which had itself been gravely in fault in allowing the theatre to be opened before it had been tested, tried to show their integrity by imposing rigid perfection—after the event—on other people. The Illinois Theatre, where we were to play, was the first theatre opened, and naturally we had to stand the brunt of official over-zeal. We had been harassed beyond belief from the moment we entered the theatre.

On the night of *Louis XI.* all went well till the end of the bedroom scene between the King and Nemours. Here, when the Duke had escaped, the King calls for aid and his guards rush in with torches, and by their master's direction search the room for his enemy. The effectiveness of the scene depends on the light thus introduced, for the scene is a dark one, lit only by the King's chamber-lamp. To Irving's dismay the cue for the lights was not answered. True, the guards came on, but in darkness. The firemen in the wings had seized from the guards the spirit torches—implements carefully made to obviate any possible danger from fire and each carried by one of our men practised in the handling of them.

After a night or two matters got a little easier. The fire regulations, which directed that the men of that department on the stage should make requisition to the responsible manager who would see them carried out, began to be more decorously observed.

IV

The Lyons Mail is the especial title of Charles Reade's version of *Le Courier de Lyons*. The play has often been done in its older form but in the newer only by Charles Kean and Henry Irving. Indeed when Irving took it in hand he got Reade to make some changes, especially in the second act, where Joseph Lesurques has the interview with his father, who believes that he is guilty and that he saw him fire the shot by which he himself was wounded.

Irving has often told me that in playing the double part the real difficulty was not to make the two men unlike and guilt look like guilt, but the opposite. He used to adduce instances told him by experienced judges and counsel of where they had been themselves deceived by demeanour. It is indeed difficult for any one to discriminate

between the shame, together with the submission to the Divine Law to which he has been bred, of the innocent, and the fear, whose expression is modified by hardihood, of the guilty. In Irving's case the points of difference were not merely overt; there were subtle differences of tone and look and bearing—loftiness, for instance, as against supreme and fearless indifference and brutality.

The Lyons Mail was always one of the most anxious and exhausting of his plays. In the first place he was always on the stage, either in the one character of Lesurques or the other of Dubose—except at the end of the play, where he appeared to be both. All the intervals were taken up with necessary changes of dress. In the next place the *time* is all-important. In any melodrama accuracy as to time is important to success; but in this one of confused identity it is all-important. There are occasions when the delay of a single second will mar the best studied effect, and when to be a second too soon is to spoil the plot. In certain plays the actors must "overlap" in their speeches; the effect of their work must be to carry the thought of the audience from point to point without wavering. Thus they receive the necessary information without the opportunity of examining it too closely. This is a part of the high art of the stage. There can be illusions by other means than light.

Once there was a peculiar *contretemps* in the acting. Tom Mead was a fine old actor with a tall thin form and a deep voice that sounded like an organ. His part was that of Jerome Lesurques, 87the father of the unhappy man whose double was the villain Dubose. He had played it for many years and very effectively. The end of the first act comes when Dubose, the robber and murderer, is confronted by Jerome Lesurques. The old man thinks it is his son whom he sees rifling the body of the mail guard. As he speaks the words: "Good God! my son, my son," Dubose fires at him, wounding him on the arm, and escapes as the curtain comes down.

On this particular night—it was one of the last nights in New York, closing the tour of 1893–4—Mead forgot his words. Dubose stood ready with his pistol to fire; but no words came. Now, if the audience do not know that Jerome Lesurques thinks that his son is guilty the heart is taken out of the play, for it is his unconscious evidence that proves his son's guilt. The words had to be spoken at any cost by *some one*. Irving waited, but the old man's memory was gone. So he himself called out in a loud voice: "I'm not your son!" and shot him. And, strange to say, none of the audience seemed to notice the omission.

Tom Mead was famous in his later years amongst his comrades for making strange errors, and when he had any new part they always waited to see what new story he would beget. Once on a voyage to America when we were arranging the concert for the

Seamen's Orphans, he said he would do a scene from *Macbeth* if Mrs. Pauncefort would do it with him. She, a fine old actress, at once consented and from thence on the members of the company were waiting to see what the slip would be. They were certain there would be one; to them there was no "might" or "if" in the matter. The scene chosen was that of the murder of Duncan, and all went well till the passage was reached:

"And Pity, like a naked new-born babe

Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim, horsed

Upon the sightless carriers of the air."

This noble passage he repeated as follows:

"And Pity, like a naked new-born babe

Seated on the horse. No! Horsed on the seat!

No! What is the word?"

Once before, during the first run of *Macbeth*, he played one of the witches; when circling round the cauldron he had to say: "Cool it with a baboon's blood." This he changed to:

"Cool it with a dragoon's blood!"

88As the words are spoken before Macbeth enters, Irving, standing ready in the wings, of course heard the error. Later in the evening he sent for Mead and called his attention to the error, pointing out that as the audience knew so well the words of the swinging lines they might notice an error, and that it would be well to read over the part afresh. This he promised to do. Next night he got very anxious as the time drew near. He moved about restlessly behind the scenes saying over and over again to himself, "dragoon, no baboon—baboon!—dragoon!—dragoon!—baboon!" till he got himself hopelessly mixed. His comrades were in ecstasy. When at last he came to say the word he said it wrong; and as he had a voice whose tones he could not modify this is what the audience heard:

"Cool it with dragoon's blood—No, no, baboon's. My God! I've said it again! baboon's blood."

When we did *Iolanthe*, a version by W. G. Wills of *King René's Daughter*, Mead took the part of Ebn Jaira, an Eastern Wizard. At one part of the piece, where things look very black indeed for the happiness of the blind girl, he has to say: "All shall be well in that

immortal land where God hath His dwelling." One night he got shaky in his words and surprised the audience with:

"In that immortal land where God hath His—Ah—um—His apartments!"

Such mental aberrations used to be fairly common in the old days when new parts had to be learned every night, and when the prompter, in so far as the "book" was concerned, was a hard-worked official and not an anachronism, as now. Macready had an experience of it once when playing Hamlet. The actor who took the part of the Priest in the graveyard scene was inadequately prepared and in the passage;

"for charitable prayers,

Shards, flints, and pebbles shall be thrown on her."

he said, "shards, flints and beadles." This almost overcame the star, who was heard to murmur to himself before he went on: "Beadles! Beadles!" and at the end of the play one behind him heard him say as he walked to his dressing-room:

"He said 'beadles'!"

V

Charles I. is rather too slight and delicate a play for great popularity; and in addition its politics are too aggressive. Whenever I think of it in its political aspect I am always reminded of a pregnant saying of Dion Boucicault—I mean Dion Boucicault the Elder, for the years have run fast—spoken in the beautiful Irish brogue which was partly natural and partly cultivated:

"The rayson why historical plays so seldom succeed is because a normal audience doesn't go into the thayatre with its politics in its breeches pockets!"

This is really a philosophical truth, and the man who had then written or adapted over four hundred plays knew it. A great political situation may, like any other great existing force, form a *milieu* for dramatic action; making or increasing difficulties or abrogating or lessening them; or bringing unexpected danger or aid to the persons of the drama. But where the political situation is supposed to be lasting or eternally analogous, it is apt to create in the minds of an audience varying conditions of thought and sympathy. And where these all-powerful forces of an audience are opposed they become mutually destructive, being only united into that one form which makes for the destruction of the play.

One of the most notable things of Irving's *Charles I.* was his extraordinary reproduction of Van Dyck's pictures. The part in its scenic aspect might have been called "Van Dyck in action." Each costume was an exact reproduction from one of the well-known paintings; and the reproduction of Charles's face was a marvel. In this particular case he had a fine model, for Van Dyck painted the King in almost every possible way of dignity. To aid him in his work Edwin Long made for him a triptych of Van Dyck heads, and this used to rest before him on his dressing-table on those nights when he played Charles.

Irving was a painter of no mean degree with regard to his "make-up" of parts. He spared no pains on the work, and on nights when he played parts requiring careful preparations, such as Charles I., Shylock, Louis XI., Gregory Brewster (in *Waterloo*), King Lear, Richelieu and some few others he always came to his dressing-room nearly an hour earlier than at other times. It has often amazed me to see the physiognomy of Shylock gradually emerge from the actor's own generous countenance. Though I have 90seen it done a hundred times I could never really understand how the lips thickened, with the red of the lower lip curling out and over after the manner of the typical Hebraic countenance; how the bridge of the nose under his painting—for he used no physical building up—rose into the Jewish aquiline; and, most wonderful of all, how the eyes became veiled and glassy with introspection—eyes which at times could and did flash lurid fire.

But there is for an outsider no understanding what strange effects stage make-up can produce. When my son, who is Irving's godson, then about seven years old, came to see *Faust* I brought him round between the acts to see Mephistopheles in his dressing-room. The little chap was exceedingly pretty—like a cupid, and a quaint fancy struck the actor. Telling the boy to stand still for a moment he took his dark pencil and with a few rapid touches made him up after the manner of Mephistopheles; the same high-arched eyebrows; the same sneer at the corners of the mouth; the same pointed moustache. I think it was the strangest and prettiest transformation I ever saw. And I think the child thought so too, for he was simply entranced with delight.

Irving loved children, and I think he was as enchanted over the incident as was the child himself.

XIV
ART-SENSE

I

No successful play, perhaps, had ever so little done for it as *The Bells* on its production. Colonel Bateman did not believe in it, and it was only the concatenation of circumstances of his own desperate financial condition and Irving's profound belief in the piece that induced him to try it at all. The occasion was in its effect somewhat analogous to Edmund Kean's first appearance at Drury Lane; the actor came to the front and top of his profession *per saltum*. The production was meagre; of this I can bear a certain witness myself. When Irving took over the management of the Lyceum into his own hands the equipment of *The Bells* was one of the assets coming to him. When he did play it he used the old dresses, scenery and properties, and their use was continued as long as possible. Previous to the American tour of 1883–4, fifty-five performances in all constituted the entire wear and tear.

On our first expedition to America everything was packed in a very cumbrous manner, the amount of timber, nails and screws used was extraordinary. There were hundredweights of extracted screws on the stage of the Star Theatre of New York whilst the unpacking was in progress. When I came down to the theatre on the first morning after the unloading of the stuff, Arnott, who was in charge of the mechanics of the stage, came to me and said:

"Would you mind coming here a moment, sir, I would like you to see something!" He brought me to the back of the stage and pointed out a long heap of rubbish some four feet high. It was just such as you would see in the waste-heap of a house-wrecker's yard.

"What on earth is that?" I asked.

"That is the sink-and-rise of the vision in *The Bells*. In effecting a vision on the stage the old method used to be to draw the back scenes or "flats" apart, or else to raise the whole scene from 92above or take it down through a long trap on the stage. The latter was the method adopted by the scene-painter of *The Bells*."

"Did it meet with an accident?" I asked.

"No, sir. It simply shook to bits just as you see it. It was packed up secure and screwed tight like the rest!"

I examined it carefully. The whole stuff was simply rotten with age and wear; as thoroughly worn out as the deacon's wonderful one-horse shay in Oliver Wendell Holmes' poem. The canvas had been almost held together by the overlay of paint, and as for the wood it was cut and hacked and pieced to death; full of old screw-holes and

nail-holes. No part of it had been of new timber or canvas when *The Bells* was produced eleven years before. With this experience I examined the whole scenery and found that almost every piece of it was in a similar condition. It had been manufactured out of all the odds and ends of old scenery in the theatre.

Under the modern conditions of Metropolitan theatres it is hard to imagine what satisfied up to the "seventies." Nowadays the scenery of good theatres is made for travel. The flats are framed in light wood, securely clamped and fortified at the joints; and in folding sections like screens, each section being not more than six feet wide, so as to be easily handled and placed in baggage-waggons. The scenes are often fixed on huge castors with rubber bosses so as to move easily and silently. But formerly they were made in single panels and of heavy timber and took a lot of strength to move.

II

From the time of my joining him in 1878 till his death Irving played *The Bells* in all six hundred and twenty-seven times, being one hundred and sixty-eight in London; two hundred and seventy-three in the British provinces, and one hundred and eighty-six in America. During its first run at the Lyceum in 1872–3 it ran one hundred and fifty-one nights, so that in all he played *The Bells* seven hundred and seventy-eight times, besides certain occasions when he gave it in his provincial tours previous to 1878. Altogether he probably played the piece over eight hundred times.

Colonel Bateman originally leased the rights of the play from the author Leopold Lewis. Finally, at a time of stress—sadly frequent in those days with poor old Lewis—he sold them to Samuel French, 93from whom Irving finally purchased them. Notwithstanding this double purchase Irving used, after the death of Lewis, to allow his widow a weekly sum whenever he was playing—playing not merely *The Bells* but anything else—up to the time of his death.

Mathias was an exceedingly hard and exhausting part on the actor, but as years rolled on it became in ever greater demand.

III

The original choice of the play by Irving is an object-lesson of the special art-sense of an actor regarding his own work. Irving *knew* that the play would succeed. It was not guessing nor hoping nor any other manifestation of an optimistic nature. Had Bateman, in the business crisis of 1872, not allowed him to put it on, he would infallibly have put it on at some other time.

It would be difficult for an actor to explain in what this art-sense consists or how it brings conviction to those whose gift it is. Certainly any one not an actor could not attempt the task at all. In the course of a quarter of a century of intimate experience of this actor, when he has confided to me the very beginnings of his intentions and let me keep in touch with his mind when such intentions became at first fixed and then clamorous of realisation, I have known him see his way to personal success with regard to several characters. For instance:

When in 1885 he had arranged to do *Olivia* and was making up the cast he put himself down as Dr. Primrose. I had not seen the play in which Ellen Terry had appeared under John Hare's management—with enormous success for a long run—and I had no guiding light, except the text of the play, as to the excellence of the part as an acting one. But neither had Irving seen it. He too had nothing but the text to go by, but he was quite satisfied with what he could do. He knew of course from report that Ellen Terry would be fine. For myself I could not see in the Vicar a great part for so great an actor, and tried my best to dissuade him from acting it. "Get the best man in London, or out of it—at any price," I said; "but don't risk playing a part like that, already played exhaustively and played well according to accounts!"—Hermann Vezin had played it in the run. Irving answered me with all his considerate sweetness of manner:

94"My dear fellow, it is all right! I can see my way to it thoroughly. If I can't play the Vicar to please I shall think I don't know my business as an actor; and that I really think I do!" This was said not in any way truculently or self-assertively, but with a businesslike quietude which always convinced. When any man was sincere with Irving, he too was always both sincere and sympathetic, even to an opposing view to his own. When one was fearless as well as sincere he gained an added measure of the actor's respect.

Again, when in 1885 *Faust* was being produced I began to have certain grave doubts as to whether we were justified in the extravagant hopes which we had all formed of its success. The piece as produced was a vast and costly undertaking; and as both the *décor* and the massing and acting grew, there came that time, perhaps inevitable in all such undertakings of indeterminate bounds, as to whether reality would justify imagination. With me that feeling culminated on the night of a partial rehearsal, when the Brocken scene on which we all relied to a large extent was played, all the supers and ballet and most of the characters being in dress. It was then, as ever afterwards, a wonderful scene of imagination, of grouping, of lighting, of action, and all the rush and whirl and triumphant cataclysm of unfettered demoniacal possession. But it all looked cold and unreal—that is, unreal to what it professed. When the scene was over—it was then in the grey of the morning—I talked with Irving in his dressing-room

before going home. I expressed my feeling that we ought not to build too much on this one play. After all it *might* not catch on with the public as firmly as we had all along expected—almost taken for granted. Could we not be quietly getting something else ready, so that in case it did not turn out all that which our fancy painted we should be able to retrieve ourselves. Other such arguments of judicious theatrical management I used earnestly.

Irving listened, gravely weighing all I said; then he answered me genially:

"That is all true; but in this case I have no doubt. I *know* the play will do. To-night I think you have not been able to judge accurately. You are forming an opinion largely from the effect of the Brocken. As far as to-night goes you are quite right; but you have not seen my dress. I do not want to wear it till I get all the rest correct. Then you will see. I have studiously kept as yet all the colour scheme to that grey-green. When my dress of flaming 95scarlet appears amongst it—and remember that the colour will be intensified by that very light—it will bring the whole picture together in a way you cannot dream of. Indeed I can hardly realise it myself yet, though I know it will be right. You shall see too how Ellen Terry's white dress, and even that red scar across her throat, will stand out in the midst of that turmoil of lightning!"

He had seen in his own inner mind and with his vast effective imagination all these pictures and these happenings from the very first; all that had been already done was but leading up to the culmination.

IV

Let me say here that Irving loved sincerity, and most of all in those around him and those who had to aid him in his work—for no man can do all for himself. Alfred Gilbert the sculptor once said to me on seeing from behind the scenes how a great play was pulled through on a first night, when every soul in the place was alive with desire to aid and every nerve was instinct with thought:

"I would give anything that the world holds to be served as Irving is!"

He was quite right. There must be a master mind for great things; and the master of that mind must learn to trust others when the time of action comes. The time for doubting, for experimenting, for teaching and weighing and testing is in the antecedent time of preparation. But when *the* hour strikes, every doubt is a fetter to one's own work—a barrier between effort and success.

In artistic work this is especially so. The artist temperament is sensitive—almost super-sensitive; and the requirements of its work necessitate that form of quietude

which comes from self-oblivion. It is not possible to do any work based on individual qualities, when from extrinsic cause some unrequired phase of that individuality looms large in the foreground of thought.

This quality is of the essence of every artist, but is emphasised in the actor; for here his individuality is not merely a help to creative power but is a medium by which he expresses himself. Thus it will be found as a working rule of life that the average actor will not, if he can help it, do anything or take any responsibility which will make for the possibility of unpopularity. The 96reason is not to be found in vanity, or in a merely reckless desire to please; it is that unpopularity is not only harmful to his aim and detrimental to his well-being, but is a disturbing element in his work *quâ* actor. In another place we shall have to consider the matter of "dual consciousness" which Irving considered to be of the intellectual mechanism of acting. Here we must take it that if to a double consciousness required for a work a third—self-consciousness—is added, they are apt to get mixed; and fine purpose will be thwarted or overborne.

Thus it is that an actor has to keep himself, in certain ways at least, for his work. When in addition he has the cares and worries and responsibilities and labours and distractions of management to encounter daily and hourly, it is vitally necessary that he has trustworthy, and to him, sufficing assistance. It is quite sufficient for one man to originate the scope and ultimate effect of a play; to bring all the workers of different crafts employed in its production; to select the various actors each for special qualities, to rehearse them and the less skilled labourers employed in effect; in fact to bring the whole play into harmonious completeness. All beyond this is added labour, exhausting to the individual and ineffective with regard to the work in hand. When, therefore, an actor-manager has such trusty and efficient assistance as is here suggested many things become possible to him with regard to the finesse of his art, which he dared not otherwise attempt. *Somebody* must stand the stress of irritating matters; there must be *some* barrier to the rush of mordant distractions. Irving could do much and would have in the long run done at least the bulk of what he intended; but he never could have done *all* he did without the assistance of his friend and trusty stage-lieutenant, who through the whole of his management stood beside him in all his creative work and shaped into permanent form his lofty ideas of stage effect. It is not sufficient in a theatre to see a thing properly done and then leave it to take care of itself for the future. Stage perfection needs constant and never-ending vigilance. No matter how perfectly a piece may be played, from the highest to the least important actor, in a certain time things will begin to get "sloppy" and fresh rehearsals are required to bring all up again to the standard of excellence fixed. To Loveday and the

able staff under him, whose devotion and zeal were above all praise, the continued excellence of the Lyceum plays had to be mainly trusted.

97Let it be clearly understood here, however, that I say this not to belittle Irving, but to add to his honour. In addition to other grand qualities he had the greatness to trust where trust was due. With him lay all the great conception and imagination and originality of all his accomplishments. He was quite content that others should have their share of honour.

When one considers the amazing labour and expense concerned in the "production" of a play, he is better able to estimate the value of devoted and trusted assistance.

V

Even the thousand and one details of the business of a theatre need endless work and care—work which would in the long run shatter entirely the sensitive nervous system of an artist. In fact it may be taken for granted that no artist can properly attend to his own business. As an instance I may point to Whistler, who, long after he had made money and lost it again and had begun to build up his fortune afresh, came to me for some personal advice before going to America to deliver his "Five o'clock" discourse. In the course of our conversation he said:

"Bram, I wish I could get some one to take me up and attend to my business for me—I can't do it myself; and I really think it would be worth a good man's while—some man like yourself," he courteously added. "I would give half of all I earned to such a man, and would be grateful to him also for a life without care!"

I think myself he was quite right. He was before his time—long before it. He did fine work and created a new public taste ... and he became bankrupt. His house and all he had were sold; and the whole sum he owed would, I think, have been covered by the proper sale of a few of the pictures which were bought almost *en bloc* by a picture-dealer who sold them for almost any price offered. He had a mass of them in his gallery several feet thick as they were piled against the wall. One of them he sold to Irving for either £20 or £40, I forget which.

This was the great picture of Irving as King Philip in Tennyson's drama *Queen Mary*. It was sold at Christie's amongst Irving's other effects after his death and fetched over five thousand pounds sterling.

98

VI

During the run of *Cymbeline* a pause of one night was made for a special occasion. November 25, 1896, was the twenty-fifth anniversary of the first performance of *The Bells*, and on that memorable birth-night the performance was repeated to an immense house enthusiastic to the last degree.

After the curtain had finally fallen the whole of the company and all the employees of the theatre gathered on the stage for a presentation to Irving to commemorate the remarkable occasion. One and all without exception had contributed in proportion to their means. Most of all, Alfred Gilbert, R.A., who had given his splendid genius and much labour as his contribution. Of course on this occasion it was only the model which was formally conveyed. The form of the trophy was a great silver bell standing some two feet high, exquisite in design and with the grace and beauty of the work of a Cellini; a form to be remembered in after centuries. I had the honour of writing the destined legend to be wrought in a single line in raised letters on a band of crinkly gold on the curve of the bell. Gilbert had made a point of my writing it, and be sure I was proud to do so. It ran:

HONOUR TO IRVING THROUGH THE LOVE OF HIS COMRADES I RING THROUGH THE AGES.

Gilbert was enthusiastic about it, for he said it fulfilled all the conditions of the legend on a bell. In the first place, according to the ancient idea, a bell is a person with a soul and a thought and a voice of its own; it is supposed to speak on its own initiative. In the second place, the particular inscription was short and easily wrought and would just go all round the bell. Moreover from its peculiar form the reading of it could begin anywhere. I felt really proud when he explained all this to me and I realised that I had so well carried out the idea.

VII

It may perhaps be here noted that according to the tradition of the Comédie-Française a play becomes a classic work when it has held the boards for a quarter of a century. The director, M. Jules 99Claretie, asked Irving if they might play *The Bells* in the House of Molière. Of course he was pleased and sent to Claretie a copy of the prompt-book and drawings of the scenes and appointments.

Jules Claretie was by now an old friend. In 1879, when the Comédie-Française came to London and played at the Gaiety Theatre, he came over as one of the men of letters interested in their success. It was not till afterwards that he was selected as Director. I remember well one night when he came to supper with Irving in the Lyceum. This was before the old Beefsteak Room was reappointed to its old use; and we supped in the

room next to his own dressing-room, occasionally used in these days for purposes of hospitality. There came also three other Frenchmen of literary note: Jules Clery, Jacques Normand and the great critic Francisque Sarcey. There was a marked scarcity of language between us; none of the Frenchmen spoke in those days a word of English, and neither Irving nor I knew more than a smattering of French. We got on well, however, and managed to exchange ideas in the manner usual to people who *want* to talk with each other. It was quite late, and we had all begun to forget that we did not know each other's language, when we missed Sarcey. I went out to look for him, fearing lest he might come to grief through some of the steps or awkward places in the almost dark theatre. In those days of gas lighting we always kept alight the "pilot" light in the great chandelier of bronze and glass which hung down into the very centre of the auditorium—just above the sight-line from the gallery. This pilot was a matter of safety, and I rather think that we were compelled, either by the civic authorities or the superior landlord, to see it attended to. The gas remaining in the pipes of the theatre was just sufficient to keep it going for four and twenty hours. If it went out there must be a leak somewhere; and that leak had to be discovered and attended to without delay.

I could not find Sarcey on the dim stage or in the front of the house. In a theatre the rule is to take up the curtain when the audience have passed out so that there may be as much time and opportunity as possible for ventilating the house. I began to get a little uneasy about the missing guest; but when I came near the corner of the stage whence the private staircase led to Irving's rooms I heard a queer kind of thumping sound. I followed it out into the passage leading from the private door in Burleigh Street to the Royal box. This was shut off from the theatre by an iron door—not 100locked, but falling gently into the jambs by its own weight. When I pushed open the door I found Sarcey all by himself, dancing an odd sort of dance something after the manner of the "Gillie Callum." It was positively weird. I never afterwards could think of Sarcey without there rising before me the vision of that lively, silent, thick-set, agile figure moving springily in the semi-darkness.

Jules Claretie was many times at the Lyceum after the first visit, and in his *régime* the Theâtre-Français was the home of courtesy to strangers.

XV
STAGE EFFECTS

I

The Lady of Lyons was produced on April 17, 1879. It kept in the bill for a portion of each week for the remainder of the first and the whole of the second season; in all forty-five times—no inconsiderable run of such an old and hackneyed play.

The production was a very beautiful one. There was a specially attractive feature in it: the French army. At the end of the fourth act Claude, all his hopes shattered and he being consumed with remorse, accepts Colonel Damas' offer to go with him to the war in that fine melodramatic outburst:

"Place me wherever a foe is most dreaded—wherever France most needs a life!"

As Irving stage-managed it the army, already on its way, was tramping along the road outside. Through window and open door the endless columns were seen, officers and men in due order and the flags in proper place. It seemed as if the line would stretch out till the crack of doom! A very large number of soldiers had been employed as supers, and were of course especially suitable for the work. In those days the supers of London theatres were largely supplied from the Brigade of Guards. The men liked it, for it provided easy beer-money, and the officers liked them to have the opportunity as it kept them out of mischief. We had always on our staff as an additional super-master, a Sergeant of Guards who used to provide the men, and was of course in a position to keep them in order.

The men entered thoroughly into the spirit of the thing, and it was really wonderful how, availing themselves of their professional training, they were able to seemingly multiply their forces. Often have I admired the dexterity, ease and rapidity with which that moving army was kept going with a hundred and fifty men. Four abreast they marched across the stage at the back. The scene 102cloth of the landscape outside the cottage was set far up the stage so that there was but a narrow space left between it and the wall, scarcely room for one person to pass; and it was interesting to see the perfection of drill which enabled those soldiers to meet the difficulties of keeping up the constant stream of the troops. They would march into the wings with set pace, but the instant they passed out of sight of the audience they would break into a run; in perfect order they would rush in single file round the back of the scene and arrive at the other side just in time to fall into line and step again. And so the endless stream went on. When Claude ran out with Damas the ranks opened and a cheer rose; he fell into line with the rest and on the army marched.

That marching army never stopped. No matter how often the curtain went up on the scene—and sometimes there were seven or eight calls, for the scene was one specially exciting to the more demonstrative parts of the house—it always rose on that

martial array, always moving on with the resistless time and energy of an overwhelming force.

It was only fair that Irving should always get good service from supers, for they never had such a friend. When their standard pay was sixpence per night he gave a shilling. When that sum became standard he gave one and sixpence. And when that was reached he paid two shillings—an increase of 300 per cent. in his own time.

If the smallness of the pay, even now, should strike any reader, let me remind such that supers are not supposed to live on their pay. There are a few special people who generally dress with them, but such are in reality minor actors and get larger pay. The super proper is engaged during the day as porter, workman, gasman, &c. They simply add to their living wage by work at night. At the Lyceum, if a man only worked as a super, we took it for granted that he was in reality a loafer, and did not keep him.

II

The Corsican Brothers is one of the pieces which requires picturesque setting. The story is so weird that it obtains a new credibility from unfamiliar *entourage*. Corsica has always been accepted as a land of strange happenings and stormy passions. Things are accepted under such circumstances which would 103ordinarily be passed by as bizarre. The production was certainly a magnificent one. There are two scenes in it which allow of any amount of artistic effort, although their juxtaposition in the sequence of the play makes an enormous difficulty. The first is the scene of the Masked Ball in the Opera House in Paris; the other the Forest of Fontainebleau, where takes place the duel between Fabian and de Château-Rénaud. Each of these scenes took up the whole stage, right away from the footlights to the back wall; thus the task of changing from one to the other, with only the interval of the supper at Baron de Montgiron's to do it in, was one of extraordinary difficulty. The scene of the Masked Ball represented the interior of the Opera House, the scenic auditorium being furthest from the footlights. In fact it was as though the audience sitting in the Lyceum auditorium saw the scene as though looking in a gigantic mirror placed in the auditorium arch. The scene was in reality a vast one and of great brilliance. The Opera House was draped with crimson silk, the boxes were practical and contained a whole audience, all being in perspective. The men and women in the boxes near to the footlights were real; those far back were children dressed like their elders. Promenading and dancing were hundreds of persons in striking costumes. It must be remembered that in those days there were no electric lights, and as there were literally thousands of lights in the scene it was a difficult one to fit. Thousands of feet of gas-piping—the joining hose being flexible—were used; and the whole resources of

supply were brought into requisition. We had before that brought the use of gas-supply to the greatest perfection attainable. There were two sources of supply, each from a different main, and these were connected with a great "pass" pipe workable with great rapidity, so that if through any external accident one of the mains should be disabled we could turn the supply afforded by the other into all the pipes used throughout the house. This great scene came to an end by lowering the "cut" cloth which formed the background of Montgiron's salon, the door leading into the supper-room being in the centre at back. Whilst the guests were engaged in their more or less rapid banquet, the Opera scene was being obliterated and the Forest of Fontainebleau was coming down from the rigging-loft, ascending from the cellar and being pushed on right and left from the wings. Montgiron's salon was concealed by the descent of great tableau curtains. These remained down from thirty-five to 104forty *seconds* and went up again on a forest as real as anything can be on the stage. Trees stood out separately over a large area, so that those entering from side or back could be seen passing behind or amongst them. All over the stage was a deep blanket of snow, white and glistening in the winter sunrise—snow that lay so thick that when the duellists, stripped and armed, stood face to face, they each secured a firmer foothold by kicking it away. Of many wonderful effects this snow was perhaps the strongest and most impressive of reality. The public could never imagine how it was done. It was *salt*, common coarse salt which was white in the appointed light, and glistened like real snow. There were tons of it. A crowd of men stood ready in the wings with little baggage-trucks such as are now used in the corridors of great hotels; silent with rubber wheels. On them were great wide-mouthed sacks full of salt. When the signal came they rushed in on all sides each to his appointed spot and tumbled out his load, spreading it evenly with great wide-bladed wooden shovels.

III

One night—it was October 18—the Prince of Wales came behind the scenes as he was interested in the working of the play. It was known he was coming, and though the stage hands had been told that they were not supposed to know that he was present they all had their Sunday clothes on. It was the first time his Royal Highness had been "behind" in Irving's management; and he seemed very interested in all he saw. King Edward VII. has and has always had a wonderful memory. That night he told Irving how Charles Kean had set the scenes, the rights and lefts being different from the present setting; how Kean had rested on a log in a particular place; and so forth. Some of our older stage men who had been at the Princess's in Kean's time bore it out afterwards that he was correct in each detail.

That night the men worked as never before; they were determined to let the Prince see what could, under the stimulating influence of his presence, be done at the Lyceum, of which they were all very proud. That night the tableau curtains remained down only *thirty seconds*—the record time.

The Corsican Brothers was produced on September 18, 1880, and ran for one hundred and ninety performances in that season, *The Cup* 105being played along with it ninety-two times. The special reason for *The Corsican Brothers* being played during that season was that Ellen Terry had long before promised to go on an autumn tour in 1880 with her husband, Charles Kelly. It was, therefore, necessary that a piece should be chosen which did not require her services, and there was no part suitable to her in *The Corsican Brothers*. This was the only time she had a tour except with Irving, until when during his illness in 1899 she went out by herself to play *Madame Sans-Gêne* and certain other plays. When she returned to the Lyceum at the close of her tour *The Cup* was added to the bill.

IV

In the course of the run of *The Corsican Brothers* there were a good many incidents, interesting or amusing. Amongst the latter was one repeated nightly during the run of the piece. In the first scene, which is the house of the Dei Franchi in Corsica, opportunity had been taken of the peculiarity of the old Lyceum stage to make the entrance of Fabian dei Franchi—the one of the twins remaining at home—as effective as possible. The old stage of the Lyceum had a "scene-dock" at the back extending for some thirty feet beyond the squaring of the stage. As this opening was at the centre, the perspective could by its means be enlarged considerably. At the back of the Dei Franchi "interior" ran a vine-trellised way to a wicket-gate. As there was no side entrance to the scene-dock it was necessary, in order to reach the back, to go into the cellarage and ascend by a stepladder as generously sloped as the head-room would allow. But when the oncomer did make an appearance he was some seventy feet back from the footlights and in the very back centre of the stage, the most effective spot for making entry as it enabled the entire audience to see him a long way off and to emphasise his coming should they so desire. In that scene Irving wore a Corsican dress of light green velvet and was from the moment of his appearance a conspicuous object. When, therefore, he was seen to ascend the mountain slope and appear at the wicket the audience used to begin to applaud and cheer, so that his entrance was very effective.

But in the arrangement the fact had been lost sight of that another character entered the same way just before the time of his oncoming. This was Alfred Meynard, Louis's

friend from Paris, a 106somewhat insignificant part in the play. Somehow at rehearsal the appearance of the latter did not seem in any way to clash with that of Fabian, and be sure that the astute young actor who played Alfred did not call attention to it by giving himself any undue prominence. The result was that on the first night—and ever afterwards during the run—when Alfred Meynard appeared the audience, who expected Irving, burst into wild applause. The gentleman who played the visitor had not then achieved the distinction which later on became his and so there was no reason, as yet, why he should receive such an ovation. From the great stage talent and finesse which he afterwards displayed I am right sure that he saw at the time what others had missed—the extraordinary opportunity for a satisfactory entrance so dear to the heart of an actor. It was a very legitimate chance in his favour, and nightly he carried his honours well. That first night a play of his own, his second play, was produced as the *lever de rideau*. The young actor was A. W. Pinero, and the play was *Bygones*. Pinero's first play, *Daisy's Escape*, had been played at the Lyceum in 1879.

V

The Masked Ball was a scene which allowed of any amount of fun, and it was so vast that it was an added gain to have as many persons as possible in it. To this end we kept, during the run, a whole rack in the office full of dominoes, masks and slouched hats, so that any one who had nothing else to do could in an instant make a suitable appearance on the scene without being recognised. As the masculine dress of the time, the forties, was very much the same as now, a simple domino passed muster. I shall never forget my own appearance in the scene a few nights after the opening. We had amongst others engaged a whole group of clowns. There were eight of them, the best in England; the pantomime season being still far off, they could thus employ their enforced leisure—they were of course changed as their services were required elsewhere according to their previously made agreements. These men had a special dance of their own which was always a feature of the scene, and in addition they used to play what pranks they would, rushing about, making fun of others, climbing into boxes and then hauling others in, or dropping them out—such pranks and *intrigué* funniments as give life to a scene of the kind. When I ventured 107amongst them they recognised me and made a ring round me, dancing like demons. Then they seized me and spun me round, and literally played ball with me, throwing me from one to the other backwards and forwards. Sometimes they would rush me right down to the footlights and then whirl me back again breathless. But all the time they never let me fall or gave me away. I could not but admire their physical power as well as their agility and dexterity in their own craft.

The second time I went on I rather avoided them and kept up at the back of the stage. But even here I was, from another cause of mirth, not safe. I was lurking at the back when Irving, his face as set as flint with the passion of the insult and the challenge in the play, came hurriedly up the stage on his way to R.U.E. (right upper entrance). When he saw me the passion and grimness of his face relaxed in an instant and his laughter came explosively, fortunately unnoticed by the audience as his back was towards them. I went after him and asked him what was wrong, for I couldn't myself see anything of a mirthful nature.

"My dear fellow!" he said, "it was you!" Then in answer to my look he explained:

"Don't you remember how we arranged when the scene was being elaborated that in order to increase the effect of size we were to dress the shorter extras and then boys and girls and then little children in similar clothes to the others and to keep in their own section. You were up amongst the small children and with your height"—I am six feet two in my stockings—"with that voluminous domino and that great black feathered hat and in the painted perspective you look fifty feet high!" And he laughed again uproariously.

VI

The Corsican Brothers was, so far as my knowledge goes, the first play—under Irving's management—which Mr. Gladstone came to see. The occasion was January 3, 1881—the first night when *The Cup* was played. He sat with his family in the box which we called in the familiar slang of the theatre "The Governor's Box"—the manager of a theatre is always the Governor to his colleagues of all kinds and grades. This box was the stage box on the stall level, next to the proscenium. It was shut off by a special door which opened with a pass key and thus, as it was approachable from the 108stage through the iron door and from the auditorium by the box door, it was easy of access and quite private. After *The Cup* Mr. Gladstone wished to come on the stage and tell Irving and Ellen Terry how delighted he was with the performance. Irving fixed as the most convenient time the scene of the masked ball, as during it he had perhaps the only "wait" of the evening—a double part does not leave much margin to an actor. Mr. Gladstone was exceedingly interested in everything and went all round the vast scene. Seeing during the progress of the scene that people in costume were going in and out of queer little alcoves at the back of the scene he asked Irving what these were. He explained that they were the private boxes of the imitation theatre; he added that if the Premier would care to sit in one he could see the movement of the scene at close hand, and if he was careful to keep behind the little silk curtain he could not be seen. The statesman took his seat and seemed for a while to enjoy the

life and movement going on in front of him. He could hear now and again the applause of the audience, and by peeping out through the chink behind the curtain, see them. At last in the excitement of the scene he forgot his situation and, hearing a more than usually vigorous burst of applause, leaned out to get a better view of the audience. The instant he did so he was recognised—there was no mistaking that eagle face—and then came a quick and sudden roar that seemed to shake the building. We could hear the "Bravo, Gladstone!" coming through the detonation of hand-claps.

VII

One night, Wednesday, November 17, 1880, the sixty-first performance of the play, Lord Beaconsfield came to a box with some friends. I saw him coming up the stairs to the vestibule of the theatre. This was the only time I ever saw him, except on the floor of the House of Commons. He was then a good deal bent and walked feebly, leaning on the arm of his friend. He stayed to the end of the play and I believe expressed himself very pleased with it. His friend, "Monty" Corry—afterwards Lord Rowton—who was with him, told Irving that it seemed to revive old memories. As an instance, when he was coming away he asked:

"Do you think we could have supper somewhere, and ask some of the *coryphées* to join us, as we used to do in Paris in the fifties?"

109The poor dear man little imagined how such a suggestion would have fluttered the theatrical dovecote. These *coryphées*, minor parts of course in the play, were supposed to be very "fast" young persons, and the difficulty of getting them properly played seemed for a long time insurmountable. The young ladies to whom the parts were allotted were all charming-looking young ladies of naturally bright appearance and manner. But they would *not* act as was required of them. One and all they seemed to set their faces against the histrionic levity demanded of them. It almost seemed that they felt that their personal characters were at stake. Did they act with their usual charm and brightness and nerve somebody *might* to their detriment mix up the real and the simulated characters. The result was that never in the history of choregraphic art was there so fine an example of the natural demureness of the *corps de ballet*. They would have set an example to a Confirmation class.

VIII

For the tableau curtain in *The Corsican Brothers*, Irving had had manufactured perhaps the most magnificent curtains of the kind ever seen. They were of fine crimson silk-velvet and took more than a thousand yards of stuff. The width and height of the Lyceum proscenium were so great that the curtains had to be fastened all over

on canvas, fortified with strong webbing where the drag of movement came. Otherwise the velvet would with the vast weight have torn like paper. They were drawn back and up at the same time, so as to leave the full stage visible, whilst picturesquely draping the opening. Material, colour and form of these curtains—which were a full fifty per cent. wider than the opening which they covered—brought both honour and much profit to the manufacturers, who received many orders for repetitions on a smaller scale. When John Hollingshead burlesqued *The Corsican Brothers* at the Gaiety Theatre this curtain was made a feature. It was represented by an enormous flimsy patchwork quilt which tumbled down all at once in the form of a tight-drawn curtain covering the whole proscenium arch.

In this burlesque too there was a notable incident when E. W. Royce—an actor with the power and skill of an acrobat—who personated Irving, walked up a staircase in *one step*.

IX

Another feature was the "double." In a play where one actor plays two parts there is usually at least one time when the two have to be seen together. For this a double has to be provided. In *The Corsican Brothers*, where one of the two *sees the other seeing his brother*, more than one double is required. At the Lyceum, Irving's chief double was the late Arthur Matthison, who though a much smaller man than Irving resembled him faintly in his facial aspect. He had a firm belief that he *was* Irving's double and that no one could tell them apart. This belief was a source of endless jokes. There was hardly a person in the theatre who did not at one time or another take part in one. It was a never-ending amusement to Irving to watch and even to foment such jokes. Even Irving's sons, then little children, having been carefully coached, used to go up to him and take his hand and call him "Papa." On the Gaiety stage they had about twenty doubles of all sizes and conditions—giants, dwarfs, skinny, fat—of all kinds. At the end of the scene they took a call—all together. It was certainly very funny.

One more funny matter there was in the doing of the play. The supper party at Baron Montgiron's house was supposed to be a very "toney" affair, the male guests being the *crême de la crême* of Parisian society, the ladies being of the *demi-monde*; all of both classes being persons to whom a "square" meal was no rarity. As, however, the majority of the guests were "extras" or "supers" it was hard to curb their zeal in matters of alimentation. When the servants used to throw open the doors of the supper-room and announce "*Monsieur est servi!*" they would make one wild rush and surround the table like hyenas. For their delectation bread and sponge-cake—media

which lend themselves to sculptural efforts—and *gâteaux* of alluring aspect were provided. The champagne flowed in profusion—indeed in such profusion and of so realistic an appearance that all over the house the opera-glasses used to be levelled and speculations as to the brand and *cuvée* arose, and a rumour went round the press that the nightly wine bill was of colossal dimensions. In reality the champagne provided was lemonade put up specially in champagne bottles and foiled with exactness. It certainly *looked* like champagne and foamed out as the corks popped. The orgy grew nightly in violence till at the 111end of a couple of weeks the noblesse of France manifested a hunger and thirst libellous to the Faubourg St. Germain. Irving pondered over the matter, and one day gave orders that special food should be provided, wrought partly of plaster-o'-Paris and partly of *papier-mâché*. He told the Property Master to keep the matter secret. There was hardly any need for the admonition. In a theatre a joke is a very sacred thing, and there is no one from highest to lowest that will not go out of his way to further it. That night, when the emaciated noblesse of France dashed at their quarry, one and all received a sudden check. There were many unintentional ejaculations of surprise and disappointment from the guests, and much suppressed laughter from the stage hands who were by this time all in the secret and watching from the wings.

After that night there was a notable improvement in the table manners of the guests. One and all they took their food leisurely and examined it critically. And so the succulent sponge-cake in due time reappeared; there was no need for a second lesson against greed.

XVI
THE VALUE OF EXPERIMENT

I

In 1883 the Prince of Wales was very much interested in the creation and organisation of the new College of Music, and as funds had to be forthcoming very general efforts were made by the many who loved music and who loved the Prince. On one occasion the Prince hinted to Irving that it would show the interest of another and allied branch of art in the undertaking if the dramatic artists would give a benefit for the new College. He even suggested that *Robert Macaire* would do excellently for the occasion and could have an "all-star" cast. Irving was delighted and got together a committee of actors to arrange the matter. By a process of natural selection Irving and Toole were appointed to Macaire and Jacques Strop.

The Prince and Princess of Wales attended at the performance. The house was packed from floor to ceiling, and the result to the College of Music was £1002 8*s*. 6*d*.—the entire receipts, Irving himself having paid all the expenses.

An odd mistake was made by Irving later on with regard to this affair. In the first year of its working, when the class for dramatic study was organised, he was asked by the directorate to examine. This he was of course very pleased to do. In due season he made his examination and sent in his report. Then in sequence came a letter of thanks for his services. It was, though quite formal, a most genial and friendly letter, and to the signature was appended "Chairman." In acknowledging it to Sir George Grove, the Director of the College, Irving said what a pleasure it had been to him to examine and how pleased he would be at all times to hold his services at the disposal of the College and so forth. He added by way of postscript:

"By the way, who is our genial friend, Mr. Edward? I do not think I have met him!"

He got a horrified letter sent by messenger from Sir George 113explaining that the signature was that of "Albert Edward"—now His Most Gracious Majesty Edward VII., R. et I. In his modest estimate of his own worth Irving had not even thought that the Prince of Wales would himself write. But the gracious act was like all the kindness and sweet courtesy which both as Prince and King he always extended to his loyal subject the player—Henry Irving.

II

Faust was produced on December 19, 1885. It ran till the end of that season, the tenth of Irving's management; the whole of the next season, except a few odd nights; again the latter part of the short season of 1888; and for a fourth time in the season of 1894. The production was burned with the other plays in storage in 1898, but the play was reproduced again in 1902.

Altogether it was performed in London five hundred and seventy-seven times: in the provinces one hundred and twenty-eight times; and in America eighty-seven times—in all seven hundred and ninety-two times—to a total amount of receipts of over a quarter of a million pounds sterling.

Irving had a profound belief in *Faust* as a "drawing" play. He was so sure of it that he would not allow of its being presented until it was in his estimation ready for the public to see. This scrupulosity was a trait in his artistic character, and therefore noticeable in his management. When he had been with Miss Herbert at the St. James's Theatre he was cast for the part of Ferment in *The School of Reform* at short notice; he insisted on delaying the piece for three days as he would not play without proper rehearsal.

This he told me himself one night when we were supping together at the theatre, December 7, 1880. As *Faust* was an exceedingly heavy production there was much opportunity for delay. It had been Irving's intention to produce the play very early in the season which opened on September 5, but as the new play grew into shape he found need for more and more care. Many of the effects were experimental and had to be tested; and all this caused delay. As an instance of how scientific progress can be marked even on the stage, the use of electricity might be given. The fight between Faust and Valentine—with Mephistopheles in his supposed invisible quality interfering—was the first time when electric flashes were used in a play. This effect was arranged 114by Colonel Gouraud, Edison's partner, who kindly interested himself in the matter. Twenty years ago electric energy, in its playful aspect, was in its infancy; and the way in which the electricity was carried so as to produce the full effects without the possibility of danger to the combatants was then considered very ingenious. Two iron plates were screwed upon the stage at a given distance so that at the time of the fighting each of the swordsmen would have his right boot on one of the plates, which represented an end of the interrupted current. A wire was passed up the clothing of each from the shoe to the outside of the indiarubber glove, in the palm of which was a piece of steel. Thus when each held his sword a flash came whenever the swords crossed.

The arrangement of the fire which burst from the table and from the ground at command of Mephistopheles required very careful arrangement so as to ensure accuracy at each repetition and be at the same time free from the possibility of danger. Altogether the effects of light and flame in *Faust* are of necessity somewhat startling and require the greatest care. The stage and the methods of producing flame of such rapidity of growth and exhaustion as to render it safe to use are well known to property masters. By powdered resin, properly and carefully used, or by lycopodium great effects can be achieved.

There was also another difficulty to be overcome. Steam and mist are elements of the weird and supernatural effects of an eerie play. Steam can be produced in any quantity, given the proper appliances. But these need care and attention, and on a stage, and below and above it, space is so limited that it is necessary to keep the tally of hands as low as possible. In the years that have elapsed, inspecting authorities have become extra careful with regard to such appliances; nowadays they require that even the steam kettle be kept outside the cartilage of the building.

In addition to all these things—perhaps partly on account of them—the stage manager became ill and Irving had to superintend much of the doing of things himself. The piece we were then running, *Olivia*, however, was comparatively light work for

Irving, and as it was doing really fine business the time could partially be spared. I say "partially," because prolonged rehearsals mean a fearful addition to expense, and when rehearsals come after another play has been given the expense mounts up in arithmetical progression. For instance, the working day of a stage hand is eight working hours. If he be employed for longer, the next four hours 115is counted as a day, and the two hours beyond that again as a third day. All this time the real work done by the stage hands is very little. Whilst actors or supers or ballet or chorus, or some or all of them, are being rehearsed the men have to stand idle most of the time. Moreover they are now and again idle *inter se*. Stage work is divided into departments, and for each division are masters, each controlling his own set of men. There is the Master Machinist—commonly called Master Carpenter—the Property Master, the Gas Engineer, the Electric Engineer, the Limelight Master. In certain ways the work of these departments impinge on each other in a way to puzzle an outsider. Thus, when a stage has to be covered it is the work of one set of men or the other, but not of both. Anything in the nature of a painted cloth, such as tessellated flooring, is scenery, and therefore the work of the carpenters; but a carpet is a "property," and as such to be laid down by the property staff. A gas light or an electric light is to be arranged by the engineer of that cult, whilst an oil lamp or a candle belongs to properties. The traditional laws which govern these things are deep seated in trade rights and customs, and are grave matters to interfere with. In the production of *Faust* much of the scenery was what is called "built out"; that is, there are many individual pieces—each a completed and separate item, such as a wall, a house, steps, &c. So that in this particular play the property department had a great deal to do with the working of what might be broadly considered scenery.

When Irving was about to do the play he made a trip to Nuremberg to see for himself what would be most picturesque as well as suitable. When he had seen Nuremberg and that wonderful old town near it, Rothenburg, which was even better suited to his purpose, he sent for Hawes Craven. That the latter benefited by his experience was shown in the wonderful scenes which he painted for *Faust*. He seemed to give the very essence of the place.

III

When the Emperor Frederick—then Crown Prince of Germany—came to the Lyceum to see *Faust*, I was much struck by the way he spoke of the great city of the Guttenbergs and Hans Sachs. He had come alone, quite informally, from Windsor, where he was staying with Queen Victoria. As he modestly put it in his own 116way when speaking to me? "The Queen was gracious enough to let me come!" He was delighted and almost fascinated with the play and its production and acting. I had

good opportunity of hearing his views. It was of course my duty to wait upon him, as ceremonial custom demanded, between the acts. In each "wait" he went into the Royal room to smoke his cigarette, and on each occasion was gracious enough to ask me to join him. Several times he spoke of Nuremberg with love and delight, and it seemed as if the faithful and picturesque reproduction of it had warmed his heart. Once he said:

"I love Nuremberg. Indeed I always ask the Emperor to let me have the autumn manœuvres in such a place that I can stay there during part of the time they last!"

IV

As a good instance of how on the stage things may change on trial I think we may take the last scene of *Faust*—that where the scene of Margaret's prison fades away—after the exit of Faust in answer to the imperious summons of Mephistopheles: "Hither to me." Then comes the vision of Margaret's lying dead at the foot of the Cross with a long line of descending angels. For this tableau a magnificent and elaborate scene had been prepared by William Telbin—a rainbow scene suggestive of Hope and Heavenly beauty. In it had been employed the whole resources of scenic art. Indeed a new idea and mechanism had been used. The edges of the great rainbow which circled the scene were made of a series of stuffs so fine as to be actually almost invisible, beginning with linen, then skrim, and finally ending up with a tissue like gold-beaters' skin; all these substances painted or stained with the colours of the prism in due order. I believe Telbin would have put in the "extra violet ray" if it had been then common property.

When, however, the scene was set, which was on the night before the presentation of the play, Irving seemed to be dissatisfied with it. Not with its beauty or its mechanism; but somehow it seemed to him to lack simplicity. Still he waited till it was lit in all possible ways before giving it over. The lighting of scenes was always Irving's special province; later on I shall have something to say about it. To do it properly and create the best effect he spared neither time nor pains. Many and many and many a 117night did we sit for four or five hours, when the play of the night had been put aside and the new scene made ready, experimenting.

On this occasion Irving said suddenly:

"Strike the scene altogether, leaving only the wings!"

This was done and the "ladder" of Angels was left stark on the empty stage. For such a vision a capable piece of machinery has to be provided, for it has to bear the full weight of at least a dozen women or girls. The backbone of it is a section of steel rail

which is hung from the flies with a steel rope, to this are attached the iron arms made safe and comfortable for the angels to be strapped each in her own “iron.” The lower end of the ladder rests on the stage and is fastened there securely with stage screws. The angels are all fixed in their places before the scene begins, and when the lights are turned on they seem to float ethereally. This ladder was of course complete with its living burden when the lighting was essayed, for as in it the centre figures are pure white—the strongest colour known on the stage—it would not be possible to judge of effect without it. Again Irving spoke:

“Now put down a dark blue sky border as a backing; two if necessary to get height enough.” This was done. He went on:

“Put sapphire mediums on the limelights from both sides so as to make the whole back cloth a dark night blue. Now turn all the white limelights on the angels!”

Then we saw the nobly simple effect which the actor had had in his imagination. Never was seen so complete, so subtle, so divine a vision on the stage. It was simply perfect, and all who saw it at once began to applaud impulsively. After a minute Irving, turning to Telbin, who stood beside him, said:

“I think, Telbin, if you will put in some stars—proper ones you know—in the back cloth when you have primed it—it had better be of cobalt!”—a very expensive paint by the way—“it will be all right. They can get a cloth ready for you by morning.”

The device of the “ladder of angels” was of course an old one; it was its suitable perfection in this instance that made it remarkable. For this ladder it is advisable to get the prettiest and daintiest young women and children possible, the point of honour being the apex. A year before, during the run of *Henry VIII.*, a box was occupied by a friend of Irving’s whose three little girls were so beautiful that between the acts the people on the stage kept peeping out at them. Then the Master Carpenter asked 118Ellen Terry to look out from the prompt entrance. As she did so he whispered to her:

“Oh, miss! Wouldn’t that middle one make a lovely ‘top angel’!”

Even children as well as grown-ups have their vanities. It became a nightly duty of the Wardrobe Mistress to inspect the “ladder” when arranged. She had to make each of the angels in turn show their hands so that they should not wear the little rings to which they were prone.

V

The educational effect of *Faust* was very great. Every edition of the play in England was soon sold out. Important heavy volumes, such as Anster's, which had grown dusty on the publisher's shelves were cleared off in no time. New editions were published and could hardly be printed quick enough. We knew of more than a hundred thousand copies of Goethe's dramatic poem being sold in the first season of its run.

One night early in the run of the play there was a mishap which might have been very serious indeed. In the scene where Mephistopheles takes Faust away with him after the latter had signed the contract, the two ascended a rising slope. On this particular occasion the machinery took Irving's clothing and lifted him up a little. He narrowly escaped falling into the cellar through the open trap—a fall of some fifteen feet on to a concrete floor.

VI

When we played *Faust* in America, it was curious to note the different reception accorded to it undoubtedly arising from traditional belief.

In Boston, where the old puritanical belief of a real devil still holds, we took in one evening four thousand eight hundred and fifty-two dollars—more than a thousand pounds—the largest dramatic house up to then known in America. Strangely the night was that of Irving's fiftieth birthday. For the rest the lowest receipts out of thirteen performances was two thousand and ten dollars. Seven were over three thousand, and three over four thousand.

In Philadelphia, where are the descendants of the pious Quakers who followed Penn into the wilderness, the average receipts were 119even greater. Indeed at the *matinée* on Saturday, the crowd was so vast that the doors were carried by storm. All the seats had been sold, but in America it was usual to sell admissions to stand at one dollar each. The crowd of "standees," almost entirely women, began to assemble whilst the treasurer, who in an American theatre sells the tickets, was at his dinner. His assistant, being without definite instructions, went on selling till the whole seven hundred left with him were exhausted. It was vain to try to stem the rush of these enthusiastic ladies. They carried the outer door and the checktaker with it; and broke down by sheer weight of numbers the great inner doors of heavy mahogany and glass standing some eight feet high. It was impossible for the seat-holders to get in till a whole posse of police appeared on the scene and cleared them all out, only readmitting them when the seats had been filled.

But in Chicago, which as a city neither fears the devil nor troubles its head about him or all his works, the receipts were not much more than half the other places. Not nearly so good as for the other plays of the *répertoire* presented.

In New York the business with the play was steady and enormous. New York was founded by the Bible-loving righteous-living Dutch.

XVII
THE PULSE OF THE PUBLIC

I

In 1882 Irving purchased from Herman Merivale the entire acting rights in his play *Edgar and Lucy*, founded on Scott's novel *The Bride of Lammermoor*; but it was not till eight years later that he was able to produce it.

This delay is a fair instance of the difficulties and intricacies of theatrical management. So many things have to be considered in the high policy of the undertaking; so many accidental circumstances or continuations of causes necessitate the deviation of intention; so many new matters come over the horizon that from a long way ahead to undertake to produce a play at a given time is almost always attended with great risk.

Ravenswood is a thoroughly sad, indeed lugubrious play, as any play must be which adheres fairly to the lines of Scott's tragic novel. By the way this novel was written at Rokeby, the home of the Morritt family, in Yorkshire. The members of that family tell a strange circumstance relating to it. Sir Walter Scott was a close friend of the family and often stayed there; he wrote two of his novels whilst a guest. Whilst at Rokeby on this occasion he was in very bad health; but all the time he worked hard and wrote the novel. When he had finished he was laid up for a while; and when he was well he could not remember any detail at all of his story. He could hardly believe that he had written it.

For seven years after Irving had possession of Merivale's play he had thought it over. He had in his own quiet way made up his mind about it, arranging length and way of doing the play and excogitating his own part till he had possession of it in every way. Then one evening—November 25, 1889—he broached the subject of its definite production. The note which I find in my diary is succinct and explanatory and comprehensive:

“Theatre 7 (P.M.) till 5 (A.M.) H.I. read for Loveday and me *Edgar and Lucy*, Merivale’s dramatisation to his order of 121*The Bride of Lammermoor*. It was delightful. Play very fine. Literature noble. H.I. had cut quite one-half out.”

I can supplement this brief note from memory. Irving read the play with quite extraordinary effect. He had quite a gift for this sort of work. I heard him read through a good many plays in the course of a quarter of a century of work together and it was always enlightening. He had a way of conveying the *cachet* of each character by inflection or trick of voice or manner; and his face was always, consciously or unconsciously, expressive. So long before as 1859, when he had read *The Lady of Lyons* at Crosby Hall, the *Daily Telegraph* had praised, amongst other matters, his versatility in this respect. I have heard him read in public in a large hall both *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, and his characterisation was so marked that after he had read the entries of the various characters he did not require to refer to them again by name. On this occasion he seemed familiar with every character, and, I doubt not, could have played any of them, so far as his equipment fitted him for the work, within a short time. Naturally the most effective part was that of Edgar of Ravenswood. Not only is it the most prominent part in the cast, but it was that which he was to play himself, and to which he had given most special attention. In it he brought out all the note of destiny which rules in both novel and play. Manifestly Edgar is a man foredoomed, but not till the note of doom is sounded in the weird and deathly utterances of Ailsie Gourlay could one tell that all must end awfully. Throughout, the tragic note was paramount. Well Edgar knew it; the gloom that wrapped him even in the moment of triumphant love was a birth-gift. As Irving read it that night, and as he acted it afterwards, there was throughout an infinite and touching pathos. But not this character alone, but all the rest were given with great and convincing power. The very excellence of the rendering made each to help the other; variety and juxtaposition brought the full effect. The prophecies, because of their multiplication, became of added import on Edgar’s gloom, and toned the high spirit of Hayston of Bucklaw. Lucy’s sweetness was intensified by the harsh domination of Lady Ashton. The sufferings of the faithful Caleb under the lash of Ailsie’s prophecy only increased its force.

We who listened were delighted. For myself I seemed to see the play a great success and one to be accomplished at little cost. We had now, since 1885, produced in succession three great plays, 122*Faust*, *Macbeth*, and *The Dead Heart*, and had in contemplation another, *Henry VIII.*, which would exceed them all in possibilities of expense both of production and of working. These great plays were and always must be hugely expensive. As I was chancellor of the exchequer I was greatly delighted to

see a chance of great success combined with a reasonable cost and modest accessories. From the quiet effectiveness of Irving's reading I was satisfied that the play would hold good under the less grand conditions. This opinion I still hold. I must not, however, be taken as finding fault with Irving's view, which was quite otherwise. He looked on the play as one needing all the help it could get; and I am bound to say that his views were justified by success, for the play as he did it was an enormous success. The production account was not large in comparison with that of some other great plays, being a little under five thousand pounds. There were no author's fees, as the play had long ago been bought outright and paid for, so that expense had been incurred and was chargeable against estate whether the play was produced or not. But the running expenses were very heavy, between £180 and £200 a performance. As it was, the play was a heavy one for Ellen Terry; she could only play in it six times a week. To the management there is always an added advantage in a *matinée* or any extra performance.

Ravenswood was presented on September 20, 1890, and altogether was given during the season one hundred and two times.

II

During its run we had a strange opportunity of experiencing the extraordinary way in which a play fluctuates with the public pulse. From the first night it was a great success, and the booking became so great that we were obliged to enlarge the time for the advance purchase of seats. Our usual time was four weeks, and as a working rule it was found well to keep to this. Where booking is not under great pressure, too long a time means extra particularity in choice of seats, and a *de facto* curtailment of receipts. For *Ravenswood* we had to advance, first one week and then a second; so that about the end of the first month we were booking six weeks ahead. I may say that we were *booked* that long, for as each day's advance sheet was opened it became quickly filled. The agents, too, were hard at work and we were not able to allot to any of them the full 123number of seats for which they asked. I have a special reason for mentioning this, as will appear. Now at the Lyceum from the time of my taking charge of the business we did not ever "pencil" to agents—that is, we did not let them have seats after the customary fashion "on sale or return." We had, be sure, good reason for this. Whatever seats they had they took at their own risk by week or month, in a sort of running agreement terminable at fixed notice. When we arrived at the fiftieth performance the play was going as strong as ever, the receipts being on or about two thousand pounds per week. Towards the end of the year, theatre receipts generally began to drop a little; Christmas is coming, and many things occupy family attention; the autumn visitors have all departed; and the fogs of November are bad for business.

We did not, therefore, give it a second thought that the door receipts got a little less, for all the bookable seats were already secure. On Thursday, November 20, I had an experience which set me thinking. During that day I had visits from three of the theatre agents having businesses in the West End and the City. They came separately and with an unwonted secrecy. Each wished to see me alone, and being secured from interruption, stated the reason. Each had the same request and spoke in almost identical terms, so that the conversation of one will illustrate all. The first one asked me:

"Will you tell me frankly—if you don't mind—are you really doing good business with *Ravenswood*?"

"Certainly," I answered. "All we can do. Why you know that we can only let you have for six weeks ahead a part of the seats you have asked for. After some odd nervousness he said again:

"I suppose I may take it that that applies to every one you deal with? I know I can trust you, for you always treat me frankly; and this is a matter I am exceedingly anxious about." For answer I rang the bell for the commissionaire in waiting on the office and sent him round to the box-office to bring me the booking sheets for six weeks ahead. These I duly placed before the agent—Librarian they called them in those days, as they were the survivors of the old lending libraries who used to secure theatre tickets for their customers.

"See for yourself!" I said; and he turned over the sheets, every seat on which was marked as sold.

"It is very extraordinary!" he said after a pause. By this 124time my own curiosity was piqued and I asked him to tell me what it all meant.

"It means this," he said. "Things can't go on at this rate. We have not sold a single ticket this week for any theatre in London!"

I opened a drawer and took out what we called the "Ushers' Returns" for each night that week. We used to have, as means of checking the receipts of the house in addition to the tickets, a set of returns made by the ushers. Each usher had a sectional chart of the seats under his charge, and he had to show which was occupied during the evening, and which, if any, were unoccupied. I had not gone over these as all the seats having been sold it did not much matter to us whether they were occupied or not. To my surprise I found that on each night, growing as the week went on, were quite a number of seats unoccupied. On reference to the full plan I found that most of these were seats sold to the libraries, but that a good proportion of them

had been booked at our own office. Neither of us could account for such a thing in any way. When the next, and then the third agent came there was a strong sense over me that *something* was happening in the great world. As a rule when there is pressure in a theatre the seats belonging to agents remaining unsold can always be disposed of in the theatre box office.

That night Irving had a little supper party of intimate friends in the Beefsteak Room; amongst them one man, Major Ricarde-Seaver, well skilled in the world of *haute finance*. In the course of conversation I asked him:

"What is up? There is something going to happen! What is it?" He asked me why I thought so, and I told him.

"That is certainly strange!" was his comment. "Then you don't know?"

"Know what?" I asked. "What is going to happen?" His answer came after a pause.

"You will know soon. Possibly to-morrow; certainly the next day!" The mystery was thickening. Again I asked:

"What is it?" The answer came with a shock:

"Baring's! They've gone under!"

Now any one of a speculative tendency in London, or out of it, could have that day made a fortune by selling "bears"—and there is no lack of sportsmen willing to make money on a "sure thing." And yet for three days at least there must have been in business 125circles some uneasiness of so pronounced a character that it for the time obliterated social life with many people. Had they knowledge where the public pulse lay, and how to time its beats, they might have plucked fortune from disaster.

In the Lyceum we became wide awake to the situation. In a time of panic and disaster there is no need for mimetic tragedy; the real thing crowds it out. The very next day we arranged to change the bill on the earliest day possible. As we were booked for six weeks we arranged to change the tragic *Ravenswood* for *Much Ado About Nothing*—the brightest and cheeriest comedy in our *répertoire*—on Monday, January 3.

This we did with excellent result. From the day of the failure of Baring's the receipts began to dwindle. The nightly return dropped from three hundred pounds odd to two hundred pounds odd, and finally to one hundred pounds odd. With the change to Comedy they jumped up again at once to the tune of an extra hundred pounds a performance.

Except for some performances in the provinces in the autumn that was the last of *Ravenswood*. There was never a chance for its revival, though from that we might have expected much; it was burned in the fire at our storage in 1898—of which more anon.

III

Nance Oldfield, as Ellen Terry plays it, is the concentration of a five-act comedy into one act and one scene. It is a play that allows an adequate opportunity of the gifts of the great actress. For Ellen Terry's gifts are of so wide a range that the mere variety of them is in itself a gift; and the congruity of them in such a play allows them to help each other and each to shine out all the stronger for the contrast.

Ellen Terry had long had in her mind Reade's play as one to be given in a single act. And now that its opportunity came over the horizon she began to prepare it. This she did herself, I having the honour of assisting her. That preparation was a fine lesson in dramatic construction. Ellen Terry has not only a divine instinct for the truth in stage art, but she is a conscious artist to her finger-tips. No one on the stage in our time—or at any other time—has seen more clearly the direct force of sympathy and understanding between the actor and the audience; but at the 126same time she was not herself an experienced dramatist. She knew in a general way what it was that was wanting and what she aimed at, but she could not always give it words. During rehearsal or during the play she would in a pause of her own stage work come dancing into my office to ask for help. Ellen Terry's movements, when she was not playing a sad part, always gave one the idea of a graceful dance. Looking back now to twenty-seven years of artistic companionship and eternal community of ideas, I cannot realise that she did not always actually dance. She would point to some mark which she had made in the altered script and say:

"I want two lines there, please!"

"What kind of lines? What about?" I would ask. She would laugh as she answered.

"I don't know. I haven't the least idea. You must write them!" When she would dance back again I would read her the lines. She would laugh again and say:

"All wrong. Absolutely wrong. They are too serious," or "they are too light; I should like something to convey the idea of——" and she would in some subtle way—just as Irving did—convey the sentiment, or purpose, or emotion which she wished conveyed. She would know without my saying it when I had got hold of the idea and would rush off to her work quite satisfied. And so the little play would grow and then be cut again and grow again; till at last it was nearly complete. This last bit of it puzzled us both for

a long time. At last she conveyed her idea to me that Alexander must not be left with a serious personal passion for Mrs. Oldfield and that yet she should not sink in his esteem. Finally I wrote a line which had the reward of her approbation. The actress was explaining to Mr. Alworthy how his son did not really love her:

“It was the actress he loved and not the woman!”

In this little play, which is typical of her marvellous range of varied excellences, she runs the whole gamut of human emotion. The part where the great actress, wishing to disenchant her boy lover, exemplifies her art and then turns it into ridicule, could not be adequately played by any one not great in both tragedy and comedy. Her rendering here of Juliet’s great speech before taking the potion: “My dismal scene I needs must act alone,” is given with the full tragic force with which she played the real part—when she swept the whole audience—and yet, without the delay of 127a second she says to the emotional poet: “Now, that’s worth one and ninepence to me!” It is such moments as these that put an actor into history. Records are not troubled with mere excellence.

Happy, I say, should be the real dramatist who has the co-operation of Ellen Terry in a play she is to appear in—of a part she is to act.

XVIII
TENNYSON AND HIS PLAYS—I

I

Irving had been a friend of Tennyson before I had first met him in 1876. When during the Bateman rule *Queen Mary* had been produced, he had naturally much to do with the author, and the friendship thus begun lasted during the poet’s life. In my own young days Tennyson was a name of something more than reverence. Not only was his work on our tongue-tips, but the extraordinary isolation of his personal life threw a halo of mystery over him. It is a strange thing how few of the people of his own time—and all through his long life of such amazing worth and popularity, had ever seen him. Naturally a man who knew him was envied if only from this source alone. Whenever we met in early days Irving, knowing my love and reverence for the poet, used to talk about him—always with admiration. More than once when speaking of his personality as distinguished from his work he said:

“Tennyson is like a great Newfoundland dog. He is like an incarnate truth. A great creature!”

From some persons comparison with a dog might not have seemed flattery, but to Irving a dog was the embodiment of all the virtues. Often and often he compared the abstract dog to the abstract man, very much to the detriment of the latter. And certainly Tennyson had all that noble simplicity which is hard to find in sophisticated man—that simplicity which lies in the wide field of demarcation between naked brutal truth and an unconsciousness of self. That simplicity it is which puts man on an altitude where lesser as well as greater natures respect him. To him truth was a simple thing; it was to be exact. Irving told me of an incident illustrating this. He had heard a story that not long before Tennyson had been lunching with friends of his in his own neighbourhood not far from Haslemere. His hostess, who was a most gracious and charming woman whom later I had the honour to know, said to him as they went into the dining-room:

129"I have made a dish specially for you myself; I hope you will try it and tell me exactly what you think of it."

"Of course I shall," he answered. After lunch she asked him what he thought of it and he said:

"If you really wish to know, I thought it was like an old shoe!"

When they met, Irving asked him if the story were true.

"No!" he answered at once, "I didn't say that. I said something; but it wasn't that it was like an old shoe!"

"What did you say?"

"I said it was like an old boot!"

With him ethical truth was not enough; exactness was a part of the whole. I had myself an instance of his mental craving for truth on the very last day I saw him.

Irving had a wonderful knowledge of character. I have never in my own experience known him to err in this respect; though many and many a time has he acted as though he trusted when he knew right well that a basis was wanting. This was of the generosity of his nature; but be it never so great, generosity could not obscure his reason. This was shown, even at the time, by the bounds set to his trust; he never trusted beyond recall, or to an amount of serious import. He had, in the course of a lifetime spent in the exercise of his craft, which was to know men from within, given too much thought to it not to be able from internal knowledge to fathom the motives of others. In philosophy analysis precedes synthesis. On one occasion there was a man with whom we had some business dealings and who, to say the least of it, did not

impress any of us favourably. Irving was very outspoken about him, so much so that I remonstrated, fearing lest he might let himself in for an action for libel. I also put it that we had not sufficient data before us to justify so harsh a view. Irving listened to me patiently and then said:

"My dear fellow, that man is a crook. I *know* it. I have studied too many villains not to understand!"

In another matter also Tennyson had the quality of a well-bred dog: he was a fighter. I do not mean that he was quarrelsome or that he ever even fought in any form. I simply mean that he had the quality of fighting—quite a different thing from determination. In a whole group of men of his own time Tennyson would have, to any physiognomist, stood as a fighter. A glance at his mouth would at once enlighten any one who had the "seeing eye." In the 130group might be placed a good many men, each prominent in his own way, and some of whom might not *primâ facie* be suspected of the quality. In the group, all of whom I have known or met, might be placed Archbishop Temple, John Bright, Gladstone, Sir Richard Burton, Sir Henry Stanley, Lord Beaconsfield, Jules Bastien Lepage, Henry Ward Beecher, Professor Blackie, Walt Whitman, Edmund Yates. I have selected a few from the many, leaving out altogether all classes of warriors in whom the fighting quality might be expected.

Tennyson had at times that lifting of the upper lip which shows the canine tooth, and which is so marked an indication of militant instinct. Of all the men I have met the one who had this indication most marked was Sir Richard Burton. Tennyson's, though notable, was not nearly so marked.

Amongst other things which Irving told me of Tennyson in those early days was regarding the author's own ideas of casting *Queen Mary*. He wanted Irving to play Cardinal Pole, a part not in the play at all as acted. One night years afterwards, January 25, 1893,, at supper in the Garrick Club with Toole and two others, he told us the same thing. I think the circumstance was recalled to him by the necessary excision of another character in *Becket*.

It was my good fortune to meet Tennyson personally soon after my coming to live in London. On the night of March 20, 1879, he being then in London for a short stay, he came to the Lyceum to see *Hamlet*. It was the sixty-ninth night of the run. James Knowles was with him and introduced me. After the third act they both came round to Irving's dressing-room. In the course of our conversation when I saw him again at the end of the play he said to me:

“I did not think Irving could have improved his Hamlet of five years ago; but now he has improved it five degrees, and those five degrees have lifted it to heaven!”

Small wonder that I was proud to hear such an opinion from such a source.

I remember also another thing he said:

“I am seventy, and yet I don’t feel old—I wonder how it is!” I quoted as a reason his own lines from the *Golden Year*:

“Unto him that works, and feels he works,

The same grand year is ever at the doors.”

He seemed mightily pleased and said:

131“Good!”

After this meeting I had a good many opportunities of seeing Tennyson again. Whenever he made a trip for a few days to London it was usually my good fortune to meet him and Lady Tennyson. My wife and I lunched with them; and their sons, Hallam and Lionel, spent Sunday evenings in our house in Cheyne Walk. Meeting with Tennyson and his family has given us many many happy hours in our lives, and I had the pleasure of being the guest of the great poet both at Farringford and Aldworth. I am proud to be able to call the present Lord Tennyson my friend. My wife and I were lunching with the Tennysons during their stay in London when the first copy arrived from Hubert Herkomer—now Von Herkomer—R.A., of his fine portrait etching of the Poet Laureate. It is an excellent portrait; but there is a look in the eye which did not altogether please the subject.

II

Just before the end of the season 1879–80, Irving completed with Tennyson an agreement to play *The Cup*. This play, which he had not long before finished, he had offered to Irving. It had not yet been seen by any one, and he was willing that it should not be published till after it had been played. The play required some small alterations for stage purposes—little things cut out here and there, and a few explanatory words inserted at other places. Tennyson assented without demur to any change suggested. As it has been said that Tennyson was absolutely set as to not altering a line for the stage, let me say here, after an experience of his two most successful plays that any such statement was absurd. Of course he was careful of his rights. Every one ought to be careful in such a matter, and to him there was special need. His manuscript was so valuable that it was never safe; and in other ways he had to be suspicious. Years

afterwards he told me that one of his poems had been sold by a critic in America with errors in it which had been corrected.

“I hate the creature! He said he was owner of the proof!”

Perhaps it was for this reason he was so careful when a play was being printed for stage use. He always wished his own copy returned with the proof.

In his agreements he had a clause that the licensee should not without his consent make any alteration in the play. This was 132absolutely right and wise; it is the protection of the author. The time for arranging changes is *before* the agreement; then both parties to the contract know what they are doing. In no case did Tennyson hesitate to give Irving permission to make changes. Like the good workman that he was, he was only too anxious to have his work at its best and highest suitability.

Tennyson had in him all the elements of a great dramatist; but unhappily he had little if any technical knowledge of the stage. Each art and each branch of art has its own technique. Though a play, like any other poem, has its birth, the means of its expression is different. A poem for reading conveys thoughts by words alone. A poem for the stage requires suitable opportunity for action and movement—both of individuals and numbers. Sound and light and scene; music, colour and form; the vibration of passion, the winning sweetness of tremulous desire, and the overwhelming obliteration that follows in the wake of fear have all their purpose and effect on the stage. Inasmuch as on the one hand there is only thought, whilst on the other there is a superadded mechanism, the two fields of poetry may be fairly taken to deal in different media. In his later years when Tennyson began to realise in his own work the power of glamour and stress and difficulty of the stage, he was willing to enlist into his service the skill and experience of others. Had he begun practical play-writing younger, or had he had any kind of apprenticeship to or experience of stage use, he would have been a great dramatist.

In the draft agreement was an interesting clause which Mr. (afterwards Sir) Arnold White, Tennyson’s solicitor, and I worked out very carefully, having regard to the rights of both parties. This was concerning the definition of the “first run” of a play. We were quite at one in intention and only wished to make the purpose textually correct. Finally we made it to read as thus:

“... first run of the said play (that is to say) during such time as the said play shall remain in the Bills of the Theatre where it is first produced announcing its continuance either nightly or at fixed periods without a break in such announcements.”

III

Irving was determined to do all in his power to put *The Cup* worthily on the stage. Accordingly much study and research in 133the matter began. Galatia has ceased to exist on the map, and the period of the play is semi-mythical. The tragedy stands midway between East and West; at a period when the belief in the old gods was a vital force. For the work which Tennyson and Irving undertook, learning and experience lent their aid. James Knowles reconstructed a Temple of Artemis on the ground plan of the great Temple of Diana. The late Alexander Murray, then Assistant Keeper—afterwards Keeper—of the Greek section of the British Museum, made researches amongst the older Etruscan designs. Capable artists made drawings from vases, which were reproduced on the great amphoræ used in the Temple service. The existing base and drum of a column from Ephesus was remodelled for use, and lent its sculptured beauty to the general effect. William Telbin painted some scenes worthy of Turner; and Hawes Craven and Cuthbert made such an interior scene of the Great Temple as was surely never seen on any stage.

By the way, regarding this there was another experience of super-criticism. In judging the scene, and with considerable admiration *The Architect*, I think, found fault with the proportions of the columns supporting the Temple roof. They should have been of so many diameters more than were given. The critic quite overlooked the difficulty—in extremes the impossibility—of adhering to fact in fiction. For the mechanism of the stage and for purposes of lighting it is necessary that every stage interior have a roof of some sort. Now in this case there was a dilemma. If the columns were of exact proportion they would have looked skimpy in that vast edifice; and the general architecture would have been blamed instead of the detail. As it was the stage perspective allowed of the massive columns close to the proscenium appearing to tower aloft in unimaginable strength, and at once conveyed the spirit of the scene. Just as the colossal figure of Artemis far up the stage—an image of fierce majesty wrought in green bronze—was intended to impress all with the relentless power of the goddess.

But it was to Irving that the scene owed most of its beauty and grandeur. Hitherto, in all pagan ceremonials on the stage—and, indeed, in art generally—priestesses and votaries were clothed in white. But he, not finding that there was any authority for the belief, used colours and embroideries—Indian, Persian, Greek—all that might add conviction and picturesque effect. Something like a hundred beautiful young women were chosen for Vestals; and as 134the number of persons already employed in *The Corsican Brothers* was very great, the stage force available for scenic display was immense. Irving himself devised the processions and the ceremonies; in fact he invented a ritual. One of the strange things about the audience all through the run of

the play was the large number of High Church clergy who attended. The effect of the entry into the Temple of the gorgeously armoured Roman officers was peculiarly strong.

IV

It is seldom given to man, however, to achieve full perfection. When *The Cup* had been running for a considerable time, Dr. Alexander Murray, whom at first we had in vain tried to persuade, came to see it. We were all anxious to know how the Greek-Eastern effect impressed him, and I made it a point to see him at the end of the play. When I asked him how he liked it he said:

"Oh, I liked it well enough at first; but when the Temple scene came it was different. At the beginning two girls came on bearing a great amphora; but you will hardly believe me when I tell you it had red figures on a black ground, instead of black figures on a red ground. I need not say that after that I could enjoy nothing!"

Both forms of using the colours were practised in the history of Etruscan art, and our people, since the time of the play was somewhat indeterminate, used the older one.

The dress of Ellen Terry as Camma in this scene was a difficult matter. It had for stage purposes to be one which would stand out distinct and apart from the rest. Dress after dress was tried, stuff after stuff was chosen; but all without satisfaction. At length, as the opening night drew near, she began to get seriously anxious. Finally, as a last resource, she asked me to try and find her something. I had been peculiarly lucky in coming across just such stuffs for dresses as she had seemed to want. Now I went off, hot-foot, and was fortunate enough to find, through turning over a whole stock of material at Liberty's, an Indian tissue of a sort of loosely woven cloth of gold, the *wrong* side of which produced the exact effect sought for. I may here say that a good many of the special effects on the Lyceum stage were got by using the inside instead 135of the outside of stuffs. Among them was the basis of Irving's dress as Shylock.

The Cup was produced on the evening of January 3, 1881. It was an immense success, and was played one hundred and twenty-seven times that season. It was burned in the great scenery fire in 1898.

Tennyson came himself to see it for the first time on February 26, 1881.

XIX
TENNYSON AND HIS PLAYS—II

I

In their conversations, after *Queen Mary* and before *The Cup*, Irving and Tennyson had talked of the possibility of putting on the stage some other play of the Laureate's. After the success of *The Cup* had been assured Irving was more fixed on the matter; and later on, in 1884, when *Becket* had been published, he considered it then and thereafter as a possibility. He was anxious to do it if he could see his way to it. Like Tennyson, he had a conviction that there was a play in it; but he could not see its outline. In fact *Becket* was not written for the stage; and, that being so, it was for stage purposes much in the position of a block of Carrara marble from which the statue has to be patiently hewn. As it was first given to the world it was entirely too long for the stage. For instance, *Hamlet* is a play so long that it must be cut for acting, but *Becket* is longer still. For many reasons he was anxious to do another play of Tennyson's. The first had added much to his reputation, and now the second was a huge success. He loved Tennyson—really loved the man as well as his work—and if for this reason alone exerted all his power to please him. Moreover as a manager he saw the wisdom of such a move. Tennyson's was a great name and there had been a lot of foolish argument in journals and magazines regarding "literature" in plays, and also concerning the national need of encouraging contemporary dramatic literature. Rightly or wrongly the public interest has to be considered, and Tennyson's name was one to conjure with. Moreover he came to depend on the picturesque possibilities of Tennyson's work. *The Cup* had allowed of a splendid setting, and in *Becket* its picturesque aspect of the struggle between Court and Church might be very attractive. Beyond this again there were two episodes of the period which so belonged to the history of the nation that every school child had them in memory: the martyrdom of Becket and the romantic story of Fair Rosamund and her secret bower.

137Irving took the main idea of the play into his heart and tried to work it out. He kept it by him for more than a year. He took it with him to America in the tour of 1884–5; and in the long hours of loneliness, consequent on such work as his, made it a part of his mental labour. But it was all without avail; he could not see his way to a successful issue. Again he took it in hand when going to America in 1887–8; for the conviction was still with him that the play he wanted was there, if he could only unearth it. Again long months of effort; and again failure. This time he practically gave up hope. He had often tried to get Tennyson to think of other subjects, but without avail. Tennyson would not take any subject in hand unless he felt it and could see his way to it. Now Irving tried to interest him afresh in some of his other themes. He wished him to undertake a play on the subject of Dante. Tennyson considered the matter a while and then made a memorable reply:

“A fine subject! But where is the Dante to write it?”

Again Irving asked him to do Enoch Arden; but he said that having written the poem he would rather not deal with the same subject a second time in a different way.

Then he tried King Arthur; but again Tennyson applied the same reasoning with the same result.

At last he suggested as a subject, Robin Hood. Tennyson did not acquiesce, but he said he would think it over. I remember that Irving, hoping to interest him further in the matter, got all the books treating of the subject; all the stories and plays which he could hear of. He had hopes that the romantic side of the outlaw’s life would touch the poet. In fact Tennyson did write a play, *The Foresters*, which has been successful in America.

II

In the autumn of 1890, in response to a kindly invitation, Irving visited Aldworth, the lovely home which Tennyson made for himself under the brow of Blackdown. It was nine years since the two men had had opportunity for a real talk. Sunday, October 19, was fixed for the visit. I was invited to lunch also, and needless to say I looked forward to the visit, for it was to be the first opportunity I should have of seeing Tennyson in his own home.

On the Sunday morning Irving and I made an early start, 138leaving Victoria Station by the train at 8.45 and arriving at Haslemere a little after half-past ten. Blackdown is just under mountain height—one thousand feet; but it is high enough and steep enough to test the lungs and muscles of man or beast. It was a typically fine day in autumn. The air was dry and cold and bracing, after a slight frost whose traces the bright sun had not yet obliterated. All was bright and clear around us, but the hills in the distance were misty.

Aldworth is a wonderful spot. Tennyson chose it himself with a rare discretion. It is, I suppose, the most naturally isolated place within a hundred miles of London. Doubtless this was an element in his choice, for he is said to have had a sickening of publicity at his other home, “Farringford,” at Freshwater in the Isle of Wight. The house lies just under the brow of the hill to the east and faces south. This side of the hill is very steep, and now that the trees which he planted have grown tall the house cannot be seen from anywhere above. It is necessary to go miles away to get a glimpse of it from below. When he bought the ground it was all mountain moorland and he had to make his own roads. The house is of stone with fine mullioned windows, and the spaces everywhere are gracious. In front, which faces south, is a small lawn bounded

by a stone parapet with a quickset hedge below and just showing above the top of the stonework. From here you look over Sussex right away to Goodwood and the bare Downs above Brighton. A glorious expanse of country articulated with river and wood and field of seeming toy dimensions. It would, I think, be impossible to find a more ideal place for quiet work. From it the howling, pushing, strenuous world is absolutely shut out; the mind can work untrammelled, fancy free. To the west lies a beautiful garden fashioned into pleasant nooks and winding alleys, with flower-starred walks, and bowers of roses, and spreading shrubs. Behind it rise some fine forest trees. The garden trends some way down the hillside, opening to seas of bracken and the dim shelter of pine woods. In the fringes these woods in due season are filled with a natural growth of purple foxglove, the finest I have ever seen. Just below where the garden ends is a level nook, a corner between shelving lines of tree-clad hill where a tiny stream flows from a vigorous bubbling well. Just such a nook as Old Crome or Nasmyth would have loved to paint.

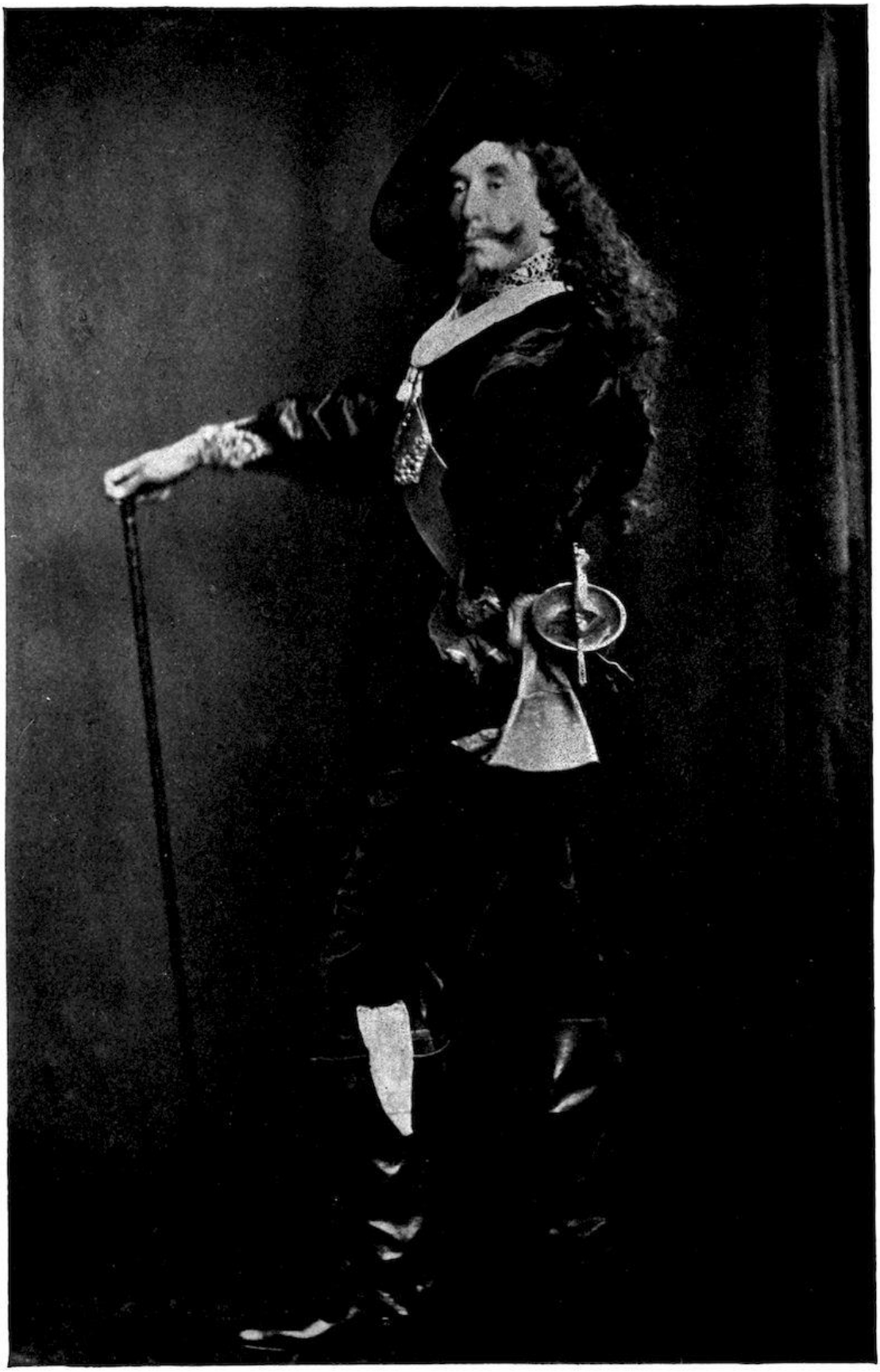

Photo Dickinsons

HENRY IRVING AS CHARLES I.

139Hallam Tennyson met us at the door. When we entered the wide hall, one of the noticeable things was quite a number of the picturesque wide-brimmed felt hats which Tennyson always wore. I could not but notice them, for a certain similarity struck me. In the house of Walt Whitman at Camden, New Jersey, was just such a collection of hats; except that Walt Whitman's hats—he being paralysed and not naturally careful of his appearance at that time of life—were worn out. Walt only got a new hat when the old one was badly worn. But he did not part with the old ones even then.

After a short visit to Lady Tennyson in the drawing-room we were brought upstairs to Tennyson's study, a great room over the drawing-room, with mullioned windows facing south and west. We entered from behind a great eight-fold screen some seven or eight feet high. In the room were many tall bookcases. The mullioned windows let in a flood of light. Tennyson was sitting at a table in the western window writing in a book of copybook size with black cover. His writing was very firm. He had on a black skull-cap. As we entered he held up his hand saying:

"Just one minute if you don't mind. I am almost finished!" When he had done he threw down his pen and rising quickly came towards us with open-handed welcome.

I went with Hallam to his own study, leaving Irving alone with Tennyson. Half an hour later we joined them and we all went out for a walk. In the garden Tennyson pointed out to us some blue flowering pea which had been reared from seed found in the hand of a mummy. He stooped a little as he walked; he was then eighty-two, but seemed strong and was very cheerful—sometimes even merry. With us came his great Russian wolf-hound which seemed devoted to him. We walked through the grounds and woods for some three miles altogether, Hallam and Irving walking in front. As I walked with Tennyson we had much conversation, every word of which comes back to me. I was so fond of him and admired him so much that I could not, I think, forget if I tried anything which he said. Amongst other things he mentioned a little incident at Farringford, when in his own grounds an effusive lady, a stranger, said at rather than to him, of course alluding to the berries of the wild rose, then in profusion:

"What beautiful hips!"

“I’m so glad you admire ’em, ma’am!” he had answered, and he laughed heartily at the memory. I mention this as an instance of his love of humour. He had intense enjoyment of it.

140He also mentioned an error made by the writer of *Tennyson Land* of a dog which in Demet Vale saved the child of an old local farmer.

“It’s a lie,” he said, “I invented it all; though there was such a character when I was a boy. When he was dying he said:

“‘Th’ A’mighty couldn’t be so hard. An’ Squire would be so mad an’ a’!’” He said it in broad Lincolnshire dialect such as he used in *The Northern Farmer*. Tennyson was a natural character-actor; when he read or spoke in dialect he conveyed in voice and manner a distinct impression of an individual other than himself.

Then he told me some Irish anecdotes generally bearing on that quality in the Irish nature which renders them unsatisfied. He suggested a parody of a double row of shillelaghs working automatically on each side “and then they would be unsatisfied!” At another time he spoke to me in the same vein.

Then I told him some Irish dialect stories which were new to him and which really seemed to give him pleasure. I told him also some of the extravagant Orange toasts of former days whereat he laughed much. Then turning to me he said:

“When we go in I want to read you something which I have just finished; but you must not say anything about it yet!”

“All right!” I said, “of course I shall not. But why, may I ask, do you wish it so?”

“Well, you see,” he said, “I have to be careful. If it is known that I am writing on a particular subject I get a dozen poems on it the next day. And then when mine comes out they say I plagiarised them!”

In the course of our conversation something cropped up which suggested a line of one of his poems, *The Golden Year*, and I quoted it. “Go on!” said Tennyson, who seemed to like to know that any one quoting him knew more than the bare quotation. I happened to know that poem and went on to the end of the lyrical portion. There I stopped:

“Go on!” he said again; so I spoke the narrative bit at the end, supposed to be spoken by the writer:

“He spoke; and, high above, I heard them blast

The steep slate-quarry, and the great echo flap

And buffet round the hills, from bluff to bluff."

141Tennyson listened attentively. When I spoke the last line he shook his head and said:

"No!"

"Surely that is correct?" I said.

"No!" There was in this something which I did not understand, for I was certain that I had given the words correctly. So I ventured to say:

"Of course one must not contradict an author about his own work; but I am certain those are the words in my edition of the poem." He answered quickly:

"Oh, the words are all right—quite correct!"

"Then what is wrong?" For answer he said:

"Have you ever been on a Welsh mountain?"

"Yes! on Snowdon!"

"Did you hear them blast a slate-quarry?"

"Yes. In Wales, and also on Coniston in Lancashire."

"And did you notice the sound?" I was altogether at fault and said:

"Won't you tell me—explain to me. I really want to understand?" Accordingly he spoke the last line; and further explanation was unnecessary. The whole gist was in his pronunciation of the word "bluff" twice repeated. He spoke the word with a sort of quick propulsive effort as though throwing the word from his mouth.

"I thought any one would understand that!" he added.

It was the exact muffled sound which the exploding charge makes in the curves of the steep valleys.

This is a good instance of Tennyson's wonderful power of onomatopœia. To him the sound had a sense of its own. I had another instance of it before the day was over.

That talk was full of very interesting memories. Perhaps it was apropos of the peas grown from the seed in the mummy hand, but Lazarus in his tomb came on the *tapis*.

This stanza of *In Memoriam* had always been a favourite of mine, and when I told him so, he said:

“Repeat it!” I did so, again feeling as if I were being weighed up. When I had finished:

“He told it not; or something seal’d

The lips of that Evangelist:”

he turned to me and said:

142“Do you know that when that was published they said I was scoffing. But”—here both face and voice grew very very grave—“I did not mean to scoff!”

When I told him of my wonder as to how any sane person could have taken such an idea from such a faithful, tender, understanding poem he went on to speak of faith and the need of faith. There was, speaking generally, nothing strange or original to rest in my mind. But his finishing sentence I shall never forget. Indeed had I forgotten for the time I should have remembered it from what he said the last interview I had with him just before his death:

“You know I don’t believe in an eternal hell, with an All-merciful God. I believe in the All-merciful God! It would be better otherwise that men should believe they are only ephemera!”

When we returned to the house we lunched, Lady Tennyson and Mrs. Hallam Tennyson having joined us. Then we went up again to the study, and Tennyson, taking from the table the book in which he had been writing, read us the last-written poem, *The Churchwarden and the Curate*. He read it in the Lincolnshire dialect, which is much simpler when heard than read. The broadness of the vowels and their rustic prolongation, rather than drawl, adds force and also humour. I shall never forget the intense effect of the last lines of the tenth stanza. The shrewd worldly wisdom—which was plain sincerity of understanding without cynicism:

“But niver not speäk plaain out, if tha wants to git forrards a bit,

But creeäp along the hedge-bottoms, an’ thou’ll be a Bishop yit.”

Tennyson was a strangely good reader. His voice was powerful and vibrant, and had that quality of individualism which is so convincing. You could not possibly mistake it for the voice of any one else. It was a potent part of the man’s identity. In his reading there was a wonderful sense of time. The lines seem to swing with an elastic step—like a regiment marching.

In a little time after came his hour for midday rest; so we said good-bye and left him. Irving and I went for a smoke to Hallam's study, where he produced his phonograph and adjusted a cylinder containing a reading of his father's. Colonel Gouraud had taken special pains to have for the reception of Tennyson's voice the 143most perfect appliance possible, and the phonograph was one of peculiar excellence, without any of that tinny sharpness which so often changes the intentioned sound.

The reading was that of Tennyson's own poem, *The Charge of the Heavy Brigade*. It was strange to hear the mechanical repetition whilst the sound of the real voice, which we had so lately heard, was still ringing in our ears. It was hard to believe that we were not listening to the poet once again. The poem of Scarlett's charge is one of special excellence for phonographic recital, and also as an illustration of Tennyson's remarkable sense of time. One seems to hear the rhythmic thunder of the horses' hoofs as they ride to the attack. The ground seems to shake, and the virile voice of the reader conveys in added volume the desperate valour of the charge.

With Hallam we sat awhile and talked. Then we came away and drove to Godalming, there to catch our train for London. The afternoon sun was bright and warm, though the air was bracing; and even as we drove through the beautiful scene Irving's eyes closed and he took his afternoon doze after his usual fashion.

I think this visit fanned afresh Irving's wish to play *Becket*. I do not know what he and Tennyson spoke of—he never happened to mention it to me; but he began from thence to speak of the play at odd times.

III

That season was a busy one, as we had taken off *Ravenswood* and played *répertoire*. That autumn there was a provincial tour. The 1891 season saw *Henry VIII*. run from the beginning of the year. The long run, with only six performances a week, gave some leisure for study; and Irving once more took *Becket* in hand. I think that again the character he was playing had its influence on him. He was tuned to sacerdotalism; and the robes of a churchman sat easy on him. There was a sufficient difference between Wolsey—the chancellor who happened to be a cleric, and Becket—who was cleric before all things—to obviate the danger of too exact a repetition of character and situation. At all events Irving reasoned it out in his usual quiet way, and did not speak till he was ready. It was during the customary holiday in Holy Week in 1892 that he finally made up his mind. I had been spending the vacation in 144Cornwall, at Boscastle, a lovely spot which I had hit upon by accident. Incidentally I so fell in love with the place and gave such a glowing account of it that Irving, later on, spent two vacations at it. I came up to London on the night of Good Friday in a blinding

snowstorm, the ground white from the Cornish sea to London. Irving had evidently been waiting, for as soon as we met in the theatre about noon on Saturday he asked me if I could stop and take supper in the theatre. I said I could, and he made the same request to Loveday. After the play we had supper in the Beefsteak Room; and when we had lit our cigars, he opened a great packet of foolscap and took out *Becket* as he had arranged it. He had taken two copies of the book, and when he had marked the cuts in duplicate he had cut out neatly all the deleted scenes and passages. He had used two copies as he had to paste down the leaves on the sheets of foolscap. He had prepared the play in this way so that any one reading it would not see as he went along what had been cut out. Thus such a reader would be better able to follow the action as it had been arranged, unprejudiced by obvious alteration, and with a mind single of thought—for it would not be following the deleted matter as well as that remaining. He knew also that it would be more pleasant to Tennyson to read what he had written without seeing a great mass cut out. *Becket* as written is enormously long; the adapted play is only about five-sevenths of the original length. Before he began to read he said:

"I think I have got it at last!"

His reading was of its usual fine and enlightening quality; as he read it the story became a fascination. There was no doubting how the part of Becket appealed to him. He was greatly moved at some of the passages, especially in the last act.

Loveday and I were delighted with the play. And when the reading was finished, we, then and there, agreed that it should be the next play produced after *King Lear*, which was then in hand, and which had been arranged to come on in the autumn of that year.

We sat that night until four o'clock, talking over the play and the music for it. Irving thought that Charles Villiers Stanford would be the best man to do it. We quite agreed with him. When he saw that we were taken with it, equally as himself, he became more expansive regarding the play. He said it was a true "miracle" play—a holy theme; and that he had felt already in studying it that it made him a better man.

145Before we parted I had by his wish written to Hallam Tennyson at Freshwater asking him if he could see me on business if I came down to the Isle of Wight. I mentioned also Irving's wish that it might be as soon as possible.

Hallam Tennyson telegraphed up on Monday, after he had received my letter, saying that I would be expected the next day, April 19—Easter Tuesday, 1892.

In the meantime, I had read both the original play and the acting version, and was fairly familiar with the latter.

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