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TENNYSON AND HIS PLAYS—III

I

I went down by the 10.30 train from Victoria and got to Freshwater about four o'clock. Hallam was attending a meeting of the County Council but came in about five. He and I went carefully over the suggested changes, in whose wisdom he seemed to acquiesce. We arranged provisionally royalties and such matters, as Irving had wished to acquire for a term of years the whole rights of the play for both Britain and America. We were absolutely at one on all points.

At a little before six he took me to see his father, who was lying on a sofa in his study. The study was a fine room with big windows. Tennyson was a little fretful at first, as he was ill with a really bad cold; but he was very interested in my message and cheered up at once. At the beginning I asked if he would allow Irving to alter *Becket*, so far as cutting it as he thought necessary. He answered at once:

"Irving may do whatever he pleases with it!"

"In that case, Lord Tennyson," said I, "Irving will do the play within a year!"

He seemed greatly gratified, and for a long time we sat chatting over the suggested changes, he turning the manuscript over and making a running commentary as he went along. He knew well where the cuts were; he knew every word of the play, and needed no reference to the fuller text.

When he came to the end of the scene in Northampton Castle, I put before him Irving's suggestion that he should, if he thought well of it, introduce a speech—or rather amplify the idea conveyed in the shout of the kneeling crowd: "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!" In our discussion of the play on the night of the reading we had all agreed that something was here wanting—something which would, from a dramatic point of view, strengthen Becket's position. If he could have the heart of the 147 people behind him it would manifestly give him a firmer foothold in his struggle with the King. Naturally there was an opening for an impassioned voicing of the old cry, "*Vox populi, vox Dei.*" When I ventured to suggest this he said in a doubting way:

"But where am I to get such a speech?"

As we sat we were sheltered by the Downs from the sea which thunders night and day under one of the highest cliffs in England. I pointed out towards the Downs and said:

“There it is! In the roar of the sea!” The idea was evidently already in his mind; and when he sent up to Irving a few days later the new material the mighty sound of the surge and the blast were in his words.

II

When Tennyson had run roughly through the altered play, he seemed much better and brighter. He put the play aside and talked of other things. In the course of conversation he mentioned the subject of anonymous letters from which he had suffered. He said that one man had been writing such to him for forty-two years. He also spoke of the unscrupulous or careless way in which some writers for the press had treated him. That even Sir Edwin Arnold had written an interview without his knowledge or consent, and that it was full of lies—Tennyson never hesitated to use the word when he felt it—such as: “‘Here I parted from General Gordon!’ And that I had ‘sent a man on horseback after him.’ General Gordon was never in the place!” This subject both in general and special he alluded to also at our last meeting in 1892; it seemed to have taken a hold on his memory.

He also said:

“Irving paid me a great compliment when he said that I would have made a fine actor!”

In the morning, Hallam and I walked in the garden before breakfast. Farringford is an old feudal farm, and some of the trees are magnificent—ilex, pine, cedar; primrose and wild parsley everywhere, and underneath a great cedar a wilderness of trailing ivy. The garden gave me the idea that all the wild growth had been protected by a loving hand.

After breakfast Hallam and I walked in the beautiful wood behind the house, where beyond the hedgerows and the little wood rose the great bare rolling Down, at the back of which is a great sheer cliff five hundred feet high. We sat in the summer-house where Tennyson had written nearly all of *Enoch Arden*. It had been lined with wood, which Alfred Tennyson himself had carved; but now the bare bricks were visible in places. The egregious relic hunters had whittled away piecemeal the carved wood. They had also smashed the windows, which Tennyson had painted with sea-plants and dragons; and had carried off the pieces! When we returned I was brought up to Tennyson’s room.

He was not feeling well. He sat in a great chair with the cut play on his knee, one finger between the pages as though to mark a place. He had been studying the alterations; and as he did not look happy, I feared that there might be something not satisfactory with regard to some of the cuts. Presently he said to me suddenly:

“Who is God, the Virgin?”

“Who is *what*?” I asked, bewildered as to his meaning; I feared I could not have heard aright.

“God, the Virgin! That is what I want to know too. Here it is!”

“As he spoke he opened the play where his finger marked it. He handed it to me and there to my astonishment I read:

“I do commend my soul to God, the Virgin....”

When Irving had been cutting the speech he had omitted to draw his pencil through the last two words. The speech as written ran thus:

“I do commend my soul to God, the Virgin,
St. Denis of France, and St. Alphege of England,
And all the tutelary saints of Canterbury.”

In doing the scissors-work he had been guided by the pencil-marks, and so had made the error.

The incident amused Tennyson very much, and put him in better spirits. We went downstairs into what in the house is called the “ballroom,” a great sunny room with the wall away from the light covered with a great painting by Lear of a tropical scene intended for *Enoch Arden*. Here we walked up and down for a long time, the old man leaning on my arm. He told me that he had often thought of making a collection of the hundred best stories.

“Tell me some of them?” I asked softly. Whereupon he told me quite a number, all excellent. Such as the following:

149 “A noble at the Court of Louis XVI. was extremely like the King, who on it being pointed out to him, sent for him and asked him:

“‘Was your mother ever at Court?’ Bowing low he replied:

“‘No, sire! But my father was!’”

Again:

“Colonel Jack Towers was a great crony of the Prince Regent. He was with his regiment at Portsmouth on one occasion; and was in Command of the Guard of Honour when the Prince was crossing to the Isle of Wight. The Prince had not thought of his being

there, and was surprised when he saw him. After his usual manner he began to banter:

“Why, Jack, they tell me you are the biggest blackguard in Portsmouth!’ To which the other replied, bowing low:

“I trust that your Royal Highness has not come down here to take away my character!”

Again:

“Silly Billy—the sobriquet of the Duke of Gloucester—said to a friend:

“You are as near a fool as you can be!’ He too bowed as he answered:

“Far be it from me to contradict your Royal Highness!”

III

That evening at dinner Tennyson was, though far from well in health, exceedingly bright in his talk. To me he seemed to love an argument and supported his side with an intellectual vigour and quickness which were delightful. He was full of insight into Irish character. He asked me if I had read his poem, *The Voyage of Maeldune*; and when I told him I had not yet read it he described it and repeated verses. How the Irish had sailed to island after island, finding in turn all they had longed for, from fighting to luscious fruit, but were never satisfied and came back, fewer in numbers, to their own island. In the drawing-room he said to me, as if the idea had struck him, I daresay from something I said:

“Are you Irish?” When I told him I was he said very sweetly:

“You must forgive me. If I had known that I would not have said anything that seemed to belittle Ireland.”

He went to bed early after his usual custom.

150That evening in the course of conversation the name of John Fiske the historian, and sometime a professor of Yale University, came up. To my great pleasure, for Fiske had been a close friend of mine for nearly ten years, Tennyson spoke of him in the most enthusiastic way. He asked me if I knew his work. And when I replied that I knew well not only the work but the man, he answered:

“You know him! Then when you next meet him will you tell John Fiske from me that I thank him—thank him most heartily and truly—for all the pleasure and profit his work has been to me!”

“I shall write to him to-morrow!” I said. “I know it will be a delight to him to have such a message from you!”

“No!” said Tennyson, “Don’t write! Wait till you see him, and then tell him—direct from me through you—how much I feel indebted to him!”

I did not meet John Fiske till 1895. When the message was delivered it was from the dead.

IV

On the next morning I saw Tennyson again in his bedroom after early breakfast. He looked very unwell, and was in low spirits. Indeed he seemed too dispirited to light his pipe, which he held ready in his hand. He said that he had not yet got the lines he wanted: “The Voice of the People is the Voice of God”—or: “The Voice of the People is the Voice of England!” I think that he had been over the altered text again and that some of the cutting had worried him. Before I came away after saying good-bye he said suddenly, as if he had all at once made up his mind to speak:

“I suppose he couldn’t spare me Walter Map?”

Walter Map was a favourite character of his in the original *Becket*. He it is who represents scholarly humour in the play.

When I told Irving about this he was much touched, and said that he would go over the play again, and would, if he possibly could see his way to it, retain the character. He spent many days over it; but at last came to the conclusion that it would not do.

At this last meeting—at that visit—when I asked Tennyson what composer he would wish to do the music for his play he said:

151 “Villiers Stanford!” He and Irving had independently chosen the same man. How this belief was justified is known to all who have heard the fine *Becket* music.

V

On September 25 the same year, 1892, my wife and I spent the day with Lord and Lady Tennyson at Aldworth. We were to have gone a week earlier, but as Tennyson was not well the visit was postponed. We left Waterloo by the 8.45 train. At the station we were joined by Walter Leaf, the Homer scholar, who had been at Cambridge with Hallam. We had met him at Lionel Tennyson’s years before. The day was dull but the country looked very lovely; still full of green, though the leaves were here and there beginning to turn. The Indian vines were scarlet. A carriage was waiting and we drove to Aldworth, meeting Mrs. Tennyson on her way to church. On Blackdown Common the

leaves were browner than in the valley, and there was a sense of autumn in the air; but round the house, where it was sheltered, green still reigned alone. Far below us the plain was a sea of green, with dark lines of trees and hedgerows like waves. In the distance the fields were wreathed with a dark film—a sapphire mystery.

We sat awhile with Lady Tennyson, who was in the drawing-room on a sofa away from the light. She had long been an invalid. She was perhaps the most sweet and saintly woman I ever met, and had a wonderful memory. She had been helper and secretary to her husband in early days, trying to save him all the labour she could; and she told us of the enormous correspondence of even that early time. Presently Hallam took us all up to his father, who was in his study overhead.

The room was well guarded against cold, for we had to pass from the door all along one side of it through a laneway made between the bookcases and the high manifold screen. Tennyson was sitting on a sofa with his back to the big mullioned window which looked out to the south. He had on a black skull-cap, his long thin dark hair falling from under it. He seemed very feeble, a good deal changed in that way during the five months that had elapsed since I had seen him. His fine brown nervous hands lay on his lap. Irving had the finest and most expressive hands I have ever seen; Tennyson's were something like them, only bigger. When he began to talk he brightened up. Amongst other things he spoke of the error in the alteration of *Becket*, "God the Virgin." We did not stay very long, as manifestly quietude was best for him, and no one else but ourselves was allowed to see him that day. Presently we all went for a walk, Mrs. Allingham, the painter, who was an old and close friend of the Tennysons, joining us. As we went out we had a glimpse from the terrace of Tennyson reading; part of his book and the top of his head were visible. At that time the lawn presented a peculiar appearance. There had come a sort of visitation of slugs, and the grass was all brown in patches where paraffin had been poured on it.

VI

After lunch Hallam brought Walter Leaf and me up to the study again. Tennyson had changed his place and now sat on another sofa placed in the north-west corner of the room. He was much brighter and stronger and full of intellectual fire. He talked of Homer with Walter Leaf, and in a fine deep voice recited, in the Greek, whole passages—of the sea and the dawn rising from it. He spoke of Homeric song as "the grandest sounds that can be of the human voice." He spoke very warmly of Leaf's book, and said he would have been proud to have been quoted in it. He ridiculed the idea of any one holding that there had been no such person as Homer. He thought Ilium was a "fancy" town—the invention of Homer's own imagination. Doubts of

Homer brought up doubts as to Shakespeare, and the Bacon and Shakespeare controversy which was then raging. He ridiculed the idea:

“What ridiculous stuff!” he said. “Fancy that greatest of all love-poems, *Romeo and Juliet*, written by a man who wrote: ‘Great spirits and great business do keep out this weak passion!’” (From Bacon’s Essay on *Love*.)

I told him the story which I had heard General Horace Porter—the Ambassador of the United States to France—tell long before. It may be an old story but I venture to tell it again:

“In a hotel ‘out West’ a lot of men in the bar-room were discussing the Shakespeare and Bacon question. They got greatly excited and presently a lot of them had their guns out. Some one interfered and suggested that the matter should be left to arbitration. The arbitrator selected was an Irishman, 153 who had all the time sat quiet smoking and not saying a word—which circumstance probably suggested his suitability for the office. When he had heard the arguments on both sides formally stated, he gave his decision:

“Well, Gintlemin, me decision is this: Thim plays was not wrote be Shakespeare! But they was wrote be a man iv the saame naame!”

Tennyson seemed delighted with the story.

Then he spoke of Shakespeare, commenting on *Henry VIII.*, which had been running all the year at the Lyceum. He mentioned Wolsey’s speech, speaking the lines:

“Cromwell, I charge thee, fling away ambition.”

Then he added in a very pronounced way:

“Shakespeare never wrote that! I know it! I know it! I know it!” As he spoke he smote hard upon the table beside him.

After a long chat we left Tennyson to have his afternoon nap, and smoked in the summer-house. Then we walked to the south-west edge of Blackdown. The afternoon was very clear and we could see the hills of the Isle of Wight, which Hallam said he had never before seen from there.

VII

After tea Hallam took Leaf and me again to his father. After a while we were joined there by Mrs. Tennyson and my wife. Tennyson was then very feeble, but cheerful. He

told us a lot of stories and incidents—his humour and memory were quick in him that evening.

One was of the landlord of a hotel at Stirling. He had, during a trip in Scotland, telegraphed to the hotel to have rooms kept. When he arrived he was delighted with them. They were on the first floor, airy and spacious, and in all ways desirable. He felt pleased at being treated with such consideration. After dinner he was sitting by the open window smoking his pipe when he heard a conversation going on below. One of the speakers was the landlord, the other a stranger. Said the latter:

“I hear you have Tennyson staying with you to-night?”

“Aye! That’s the man’s name. He telegraphed the day for rooms. Do ye ken him?”

154 “Know him! Why that’s Alfred Tennyson, the poet!”

“The poet! I’m wishin’ I had kent that!”

“Why?” asked the stranger. After a pause the answer came:

“He a poet! I’d ha’ seen him dommed before I had gied him ma best rooms!”

As he was reminiscant that night his anecdotes were mostly personal. Another was of a man of the lower class in the Isle of Wight, who spoke of him in early days:

“He, a great man! Why ’e only keeps one man-servant—an’ ’e don’t sleep in th’ ’ouse!”

Another was of a workman who was heard to say:

“Shakespeare an’ Tennyson! Well, I don’t think nothin’ of neither on ’em!”

Another was of a Grimsby fishmonger, who said when asked by an acquisitive autograph hunter if he happened to have any letters from Tennyson:

“No! His son writes ’em. He still keeps on the business; but he ain’t a patch on his fayther!”

Tennyson was sitting on the sofa as he had been in the morning. For all his brightness and his humour, which seemed to bubble in him, he was very feeble and seemed to be suffering a good deal. He moaned now and then with pain. Gout was flying through his knees and jaws. He had then on his black skull-cap, but he presently took it off as though it were irksome to him. In front of him was a little table with one wax candle lighted. It was of that pattern which has vertical holes through it to let the overflow of melted wax fall within, not without. When the fire of pleasant memory began to flicker, he grew feeble and low in spirits. He spoke of the coming spring and that he would not

live to see it. Somehow he grew lower in spirits as the light died away and the twilight deepened, as if the whole man was tuned to nature's key. Through the window we could note the changes as evening drew nearer. The rabbits were stealing out on the lawn, and the birds picking up grubs in the grass.

Once again Tennyson seemed troubled about the press, and was bitter against certain newspaper prying. He could not get free from it. It had been found out during his illness that the beggar-man who came daily for the broken meat was getting ten shillings a week from a local reporter to come and tell him the gossip of the kitchen. Turning to me he said:

155 "Don't let them know how ill I am, or they'll have me buried before twenty-four hours!" Then after a while he added:

"Can't they all let me alone. What did they want digging up the graves of my father and mother and my grandfather and grandmother. I sometimes wish I had never written a line!" I said:

"Ah, don't say that! Don't think it! You have given delight to too many millions, and your words have done too much good for you to wish to take them back. And the good and the pleasure are to go on for all the future." After a moment's thought he said very softly:

"Well, perhaps you're right! But can't they leave me alone!"

We were all very still and silent for a while. The lessening twilight and the moveless flame of the close-set candle showed out his noble face and splendid head in full relief. The mullioned window behind him with the darkening sky and the fading landscape made a fitting background to the dying poet. We said good-bye with full hearts.

Outside, our tears fell. We knew that we should see him no more; we had said good-bye for ever!

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XXI

TENNYSON AND HIS PLAYS—IV

I

Tennyson died on Thursday, October 6, eleven days after we had seen him. Two others only saw him after we did—with of course the exception of his own family—Mr. Craik,

of Messrs. Macmillan, his publishers, and Dr. Dabbs, of the Isle of Wight, his physician.

Before he died he spoke of May—the spring seemed to be for him a time which the Lords of Life and Death would not allow him to pass. It had too some connection in his mind with his play *The Promise of May*. He said to Dr. Dabbs, who wrote to me about it afterwards:

“I suppose I shall never see *Becket*?”

“I fear not!”

“Ah!” After a long pause he said again: “They did not do me justice with *The Promise of May*—but——” another long pause and then half fiercely:

“I can trust Irving—he will do me justice!”

Tennyson was buried in the Poet’s Corner of Westminster Abbey on October 12. There was a great crowd both in the Abbey and the streets without. All were still, hushed and solemn. The sense of great loss was over all. Very solemn and impressive was the service. There was gloom in the great Cathedral, and the lights were misty. Everywhere the strong odour of many flowers. A body of distinguished men of letters, science and art followed the coffin, coming behind his family. Amongst them Henry Irving, looking as usual, wherever he was, the most distinguished of all. On that sad day, Tennyson’s poem, *Crossing the Bar*, was sung. Then his last poem, *The Silent Voices*. The exquisite music written for this by Lady Tennyson and arranged by Sir John Frederick Bridge was heard for the first time. The noble words ringing through the great Cathedral seemed like a solemn epitome of the teaching of the poet’s life. Six years afterwards I heard Irving speak them in the crowded Senate House at Cambridge with that fervour which seemed a part of his very life. Now, from that Poet’s Corner where they both rest I seem to hear the voices of the two great souls in unison, calling to the great Humanity which each in his own way loved and which was so deep in the hearts of both:

“Call me rather, silent voices,

Forward to the starry track

Glimmering up the heights beyond me

On, and always on!”

II

Becket, having been in preparation since the end of September, was ready to take its place after the run of *King Lear*. The first dress rehearsal was held on the evening of February 3, 1893, beginning at 6.30 and lasting till one o'clock. It was an excellent rehearsal and all went well. The play was produced three nights later, February 6, 1893—Irving's fifty-fifth birthday—and was a really enormous success. The public, who had been waiting since early morning at the pit and gallery, could not contain themselves; and even the more staid portions of the house lost their reserve. It was like one huge personal triumph. No one seemed to compare the play or the character to anything seen before. Not even to *Henry VIII.* and Cardinal Wolsey, which had held the stage for eight months the previous year.

Becket was played one hundred and twelve times that season. The entire scenery was burned in the disastrous fire of 1898. There was a new production in 1904. Altogether Tennyson's play was performed three hundred and eight times, as follows:

London, 147; British Provinces, 92; America, 69.

III

In 1897 Irving gave a remarkable Reading of *Becket*. This was in the old Chapter House of Canterbury Cathedral, which had been recently restored exactly to its ancient condition. Farrar was then Dean of Canterbury, and as Irving had promised to read *Becket* for the benefit of the Cathedral Restoration Fund, he and I had three meetings on the subject for which he came specially from 158Canterbury to London on April 21 and 28 and May 5. At our first meeting the Dean suggested that the Reading should be held in the restored Chapter House, which the Prince of Wales was to open on May 29. Thus Irving's Reading of *Becket* would be on the first occasion which the restored room should be used. I well remember my host's dismay when he met me at the doorway of the Athenæum Club and apologised that there was not a single room in the club to which a member could ask a stranger. I do not know if that iron-clad rule still exists; a somewhat similar one existed at that time at the United Service Club, on the other side of Waterloo Place. There a member could ask a friend into the hall and there give him a glass of sherry. Such was the only measure of hospitality allowable at the "Senior." That rule has been since abandoned in the "Service" Club; the usual club hospitalities can now be extended to guests.

At these meetings, as I was authorised to speak for Irving on all matters, we arranged the necessary details. The Reading was to be given on Monday, May 31, at two o'clock, the tickets to be a guinea and half a guinea each. As time was then pressing and publicity with regard to the undertaking was necessary, we decided at the last meeting that Dean Farrar was to write a letter to the newspapers calling attention to the

coming event and its beneficent purpose. I undertook if he would send me the letter to have it facsimiled and sent to four hundred newspapers.

Of course every seat was sold long ahead of the time. A place like Canterbury cannot—and cannot be expected to—furnish such an audience as would be required on such an occasion. Most of them would have to come from London and other cities and towns. When I left the Dean I saw Mr. William Forbes, one of the powers of the London, Chatham and Dover Railway, who kindly undertook to arrange trains to and from Canterbury to suit the convenience of the audience, and especially to look after accommodation for Irving and his friends.

On the day of the Reading we went down by train from Victoria at 10 A.M., Ellen Terry being one of the party. Sir Henry's two sons were with him, as was also Sir John Hassard, the Secretary of the Court of Arches, and who then was the right hand of the Archbishop of Canterbury—as he had been to several of his predecessors. At Canterbury, Irving and I went to see the Chapter House. After a walk through the Cathedral we went to the County Hotel, where Irving rested for a while. A little before two 159o'clock we went to the Chapter House. At two punctually he stepped on the stage, and was introduced in the usual way by Dean Farrar. There was a fine audience. Every spot where one could stand was occupied. Irving got a great reception.

It was a remarkable occasion, and we could not but feel a certain solemnity from the place as well as from the subject. There were so many historic associations with regard to the great room that we could not dissociate them from the occasion.

Irving read magnificently. To the inspiration of the theme was to him the added force of the place and the occasion. The Reading lasted one hour and thirty-five minutes—a terrible tax on even the greatest strength. During all that time he held his audience spell-bound. At the conclusion he was, naturally, a good deal exhausted; such a *tour de force* takes all the strength one has.

We all returned to London by the 4.18 o'clock train.

The result of the Reading was an addition to the Restoration Fund of over £250.

IV

On one other historic occasion Henry Irving read *Becket*. This was at the King Alfred Millenary at Winchester in 1901. In the June of that year he had been selected by the Royal Institution to represent their body; and thinking that he might in addition give some practical aid to the cause, he told the authorities at Winchester that he would on the occasion give a Reading of *Becket* for the benefit of the Expense Fund.

Wednesday, September 18, was fixed for the event. As the Autumn tour had been arranged we would be playing in Leeds; but distance nor magnitude of effort ever came between Irving and his promise. On September 17 he played *Charles I.* and left for Winchester at the close of the play. At Winchester he was the guest of the then Mayor, Mr. Alfred Bowker. The next day he gave in the Castle Hall, to a great audience, a slightly compressed Reading of *Becket*. Winchester then thronged with strangers from all parts of the world, a large number of whom were accredited representatives of some branch or interest of the Anglo-Saxon race. Poor John Fiske was to have been one of the representatives of America. He was to have spoken, and when I had seen him last he told me that that was to be the crowning effort of his life.

160At the close of the Reading Irving received an ovation and was compelled to make a speech. In it he said:

“A thousand years of the memory of a great King, who loved his country and made her loved and respected and feared, is a mighty heritage for a nation; one of which not England alone but all Christendom may well be proud. The work which King Alfred did he did for England, but the whole world benefited by it. And most of all was there benefit for that race which he adorned. In the thousand years which have elapsed since he was laid to rest in that England in whose making he had such a part, the world has grown wiser and better, and civilisation has ever marched on with mighty strides. But through all extension and all advance the land which King Alfred consolidated and the race which peopled it, have ever been to the front in freedom and enlightenment; and to-day when England and her many children, east and west and north and south, are united by one grand aspiration of human advance, it is well that we should celebrate the memory of him to whom so large a measure of that advance is due.”

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XXII

“WATERLOO”—“KING ARTHUR”—“DON QUIXOTE”

I

One day early in March 1892, whilst we were rehearsing Tennyson’s play, *The Foresters*, which in accordance with the author’s request was produced for copyright purposes at the Lyceum, Irving came into the office in a hurry. He was a little late. He, Loveday and myself always used the same office, as we found it in all ways convenient for our perpetual consultations. As he came hurrying out to the stage, after putting on the brown soft broad-brimmed felt hat for which he usually exchanged his “topper”

during rehearsals, he stopped beside my table where I was writing, and laying a parcel on it said:

“I wish you would throw an eye over that during rehearsal. It came this morning. You can tell me what you think of it when I come off!”

I took up the packet and unrolled a number of type-written sheets a little longer than foolscap. I read it with profound interest and was touched to my very heart’s core by its humour and pathos. It was very short, and before Irving came in again from the stage I had read it a second time. When he came in he said presently in an unconcerned way:

“By the way, did you read that play?”

“Yes!”

“What do you think of it?”

“I think this,” I said, “that that play is never going to leave the Lyceum. You must own it—at any price. It is made for you.”

“So I think, too!” he said heartily. “You had better write to the author to-day and ask him what cheque we are to send. We had better buy the whole rights.”

“Who is the author?”

“Conan Doyle!”

The author answered at once and the cheque was sent in due 162course. The play was then named *A Straggler of '15*. This Irving changed to *A Story of Waterloo*, when the play was down for production. Later this was simplified to *Waterloo*.

Irving fell in love with the character, and began to study it right away. The only change in the play he made was to get Sir Arthur—then “Dr.” or “Mr.”—Conan Doyle to consolidate the matter of the first few pages into a shorter space. The rest of the MS. remained exactly as written.

It was not, however, for nearly two years that he got an opportunity of playing it. It is a difficult matter to find a place for an hour-long play in a working bill. *Henry VIII.*, *King Lear*, and *Becket* held the Lyceum stage till the middle of 1893. Then came a tour in America lasting up to end of March 1894. The short London season was taken up with a prearranged reproduction of *Faust*.

Then followed a provincial tour from September to Christmas. Here was found the opportunity. *The Bells* is a short play, and for mere length allows of an addition.

In the first week of the tour at the Princes Theatre, Bristol, on September 21, 1894, *A Story of Waterloo* was given. The matter was one of considerable importance in the dramatic world; not only was Irving to play a new piece, but that piece was Conan Doyle's first attempt at the drama. The chief newspapers of London and some of the greater provincial cities wished to be represented on the occasion; the American press also wished to send its critical contingent. Accordingly we arranged for a special train to bring the critical force. Hearing that so many of his London journalistic friends were coming an old friend of Irving's then resident in Bristol, Mr. John Saunders, arranged to give a supper in the Liberal Club, to which they were all invited, together with many persons of local importance.

The play met with a success extraordinary even for Irving. The audience followed with rapt attention and manifest emotion, swaying with the varying sentiments of the scene. The brief aid to memory in my diary of that day runs:

"New play enormous success. H. I. fine and great. All laughed and wept. Marvellous study of senility. Eight calls at end."

Unfortunately the author was not present to share the triumph, for it would have been a delightful memory for him. He was on a tour in America; "and thereby hangs a tale."

163Amongst the audience who had come specially from London was Mr. H. H. Kohlsaas, owner and editor of the *Chicago Times Herald*, a close and valued friend of Irving and myself. He was booked to leave for America the next day. When the play was over and the curtain finally down, he hurried away just in time to catch the train for Southampton, whence the American Line boat started in the morning. He got on board all right. The following Saturday he arrived in New York, just in time to catch the "flyer," as they call the fast train to Chicago on the New York Central line. On Sunday night a public dinner was given to Conan Doyle to which of course Kohlsaas had been bidden. He arrived too late for the dining part; but having dressed in the train he came on to the hotel just as dinner was finished and before the speeches began. He took a chair next to Doyle and said to him:

"I am delighted to tell you that your play at Bristol was an enormous success!"

"So I am told," said Doyle modestly. "The cables are excellent."

"They are not half enough!" answered Kohlsaas, who had been reading in the train the papers for the last week.

"Indeed! I am rejoiced to hear it!" said Conan Doyle somewhat dubiously. "May I ask if you have had any special report?"

“I didn’t need any report, I saw it!”

“Oh, come!” said Conan Doyle, who thought that he was in some way chaffing him.

“That is impossible!”

“Not to me! But I am in all human probability the only man on the American continent who was there?” Then whilst the gratified author listened he gave him a full description of the play and the scene which followed it.

To my own mind *Waterloo* as an acting play is perfect; and Irving’s playing in it was the high-water mark of histrionic art. Nothing was wanting in the whole gamut of human feeling. It was a cameo, with all the delicacy of touch of a master-hand working in the fine material of the layered shell. It seemed to touch all hearts always. When the dying veteran sprang from his chair to salute the colonel of his old regiment the whole house simultaneously burst into a wild roar of applause. This was often the effect at subsequent performances both at home and in America.

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II

In 1897, when representatives of the Indian and Colonial troops were gathered in London for the “Diamond” Jubilee of Queen Victoria, Irving gave a special performance for them. It was a *matinée* on June 25. The event was a formal one, for it was given by Royal consent, and special arrangements were made by the public officials. Some two thousand troops of all kinds and classes and costumes were massed at Chelsea Barracks. The streets were cleared by the police for their passing as they marched to the Lyceum to the quickstep of the Guards’ Fife and Drum Band, the public cheering them all the way. They represented every colour and ethnological variety of the human race, from coal black through yellow and brown up to the light type of the Anglo-Saxon reared afresh in new realms beyond the seas.

Their drill seemed to be perfect, and we had made complete arrangements for their seating. Section by section they marched into the theatre, all coming by the great entrance, without once stopping or even marking time in the street.

In the boxes and stalls sat the Indian Princes and the Colonial Premiers, and some few of the foreign guests. The house was crammed from wall to wall; from floor to ceiling; the bill was *Waterloo* and *The Bells*. No such audience could have been had for this military piece. It sounded the note of the unity of the Empire which was then in celebration; all were already tuned to it. The scene at the end was indescribable. It was a veritable ecstasy of loyal passion.

Waterloo was played by Irving eighty times in London; one hundred and seventy-seven times in the provinces; and eighty-eight times in America—in all three hundred and forty-five times, the last being at London on June 15, 1905.

III

For a long time Irving had in view of production a play on the subject of King Arthur. He broached the subject to Tennyson, but the latter could not see his way to it. He had dealt with the subject in one way and did not wish to try it in another. Then he got W. G. Willis to write a play; this he purchased from him in 1890. As, however, he did not think it would act well, he got Comyns Carr to write another some three years later.

In 1894 the production was taken in hand. Sir Edward Burne-Jones undertook to design scenes and dresses, armour and appointments. His suggestions were new lights on stage possibilities. As he was not learned in stage technique and mechanism, there were of course some seemingly insuperable difficulties; but these in the hands of artists skilled in stage work soon disappeared. To my own mind it was the first time that what must in reality be a sort of fairyland was represented as an actuality. Some of the scenes were of transcendent beauty, notably that called "The Whitethorn Wood." The scene was all green and white—the side of a hill thick with blossoming thorn through which, down a winding path, came a bevy of maidens in flowing garments of tissue which seemed to sway and undulate with every motion and every breath of air. There was a daintiness and a sense of purity about the whole scene which was very remarkable.

The armour which Burne-Jones designed was most picturesque. I fear it would hardly have done for actual combat as the adornments of shoulder and elbow were such that in the movement of the arms they took strange positions. When some virtuoso skilled in the lore of mail asked the great painter why he fixed on such a class of armour he answered:

"To puzzle the archæologists!"

For the great Fancy Ball given by the Duchess of Devonshire in Devonshire House, the armour was lent by Irving. It furnished the men of a quadrille and was a very striking episode in a gorgeous scene.

In the preparation of the scenes we had at first some difficulty, for great scene-painters like to make their own designs. But Burne-Jones' genius together with his great reputation—to both of which all artists bow—accompanied by Irving's persuasions carried the day. When it was objected that the suggested scenes were impossible to work in accordance with stage limitations, Irving pointed out that there

was in itself opportunity for the ability of the scene-painters' skill and invention. Burne-Jones suggested the effect aimed at; with them rested the carrying it out. And surely neither Hawes Craven nor Joseph Harker could have ever had any emotions except those of pleasure when the round of applause nightly welcomed each scene as the curtain went up.

The cast was a fine one; Irving as King Arthur and Johnston 166Forbes-Robertson as Sir Lancelot, Ellen Terry as Guinevere, and Geneviève Ward as Morgan Le Fay. Some of the parts were not easy to play. One had a difficulty all its own. In the scene where Elaine is brought in on her bier she had to remain for a considerable time stone-still in full view of the audience. All that season Miss Lena Ashwell, who played the part, never once sneezed or yielded to any other temporary convulsion.

King Arthur was produced on January 12, and ran that season for one hundred and five performances. It was played twelve times in the provinces and seventy-four times in America. In all one hundred and ninety-one performances. It was one of those plays cut short in its prime. The scenery and appointments were burned in the stage fire of 1898.

IV

The subject of Don Quixote for a play was matter that Irving had for a long time held in mind. In 1888, he had bought from W. G. Wills the entire rights of a play on the subject which he had suggested his writing. He was not, however, satisfied with it. Don Quixote is a great name and a picturesque figure to remember. He is also a great subject for a book, and Cervantes made him the hero and centre of many entertaining and amusing adventures. But he is not in reality a figure for prolonged stage use. He is too much in one note to make effective music. If any one ever succeeds in making a "full" play with him as hero the author will have to invent a story for it, or compile one out of the materials which Cervantes has in his immortal work bequeathed to mankind. The dramatic author or adapter can thus maintain the figure in its simplicity, keeping his personality always as a *deus ex machina*.

When he was satisfied he could not do Wills' play in its entirety Irving got another enthusiast of the subject, Mr. J. I. C. Clarke of New York, to write a fresh play on the theme. Clarke made an admirable play, of which Irving bought the entire rights in 1894. There were some very fine points in this new play, especially in illustrating the gravity of the Don's high character and his deep understanding of a noble act. But the difficulty of the subject was again apparent; the character was too simple and too fixed for the necessary variety and development of character in a long grave play.

167Recognising the limitation of the subject, Irving, being determined to essay the character, made up a one-act play from Cervantes' book, keeping as far as possible to the lines of the first act of Wills' play. There were two scenes; the first showing Don Quixote in his own house with the madness of his chivalric belief upon him. A notable figure he looked as fully armed in rusty armour and with drawn sword in hand he sat reading a great folio of *Amadis de Gaule*. His own physique—tall and lean, his fine high-bred features heightened by the resources of art to an exaggerated aquiline, all helped to the efficacy of the illusion. In his old armour, his worn leather and threadbare velvet, he was indeed the Knight of La Mancha.

When in the second scene he rode into the inn yard on his skeleton steed Rosinante the effect was heightened. The scene was beautifully lit. There was a fine, rich, soft light from the moon, hung high in the semi-tropic sky. It softened everything to the possibilities of romance. One seemed to forget the unreality in the dim, quaint beauty. The very shadows seemed to be full of possibilities, and to hold a mystery of their own. No one who saw it can ever forget that spare, quaint figure marching up and down, lance on shoulder, watching his armour laid in front of the pump—a solemn, grim travesty of the vigil of a probationary knight.

V

In the preparation of *Don Quixote* there was an incident which was not without its humorous aspect—though not to some of those who had a part in it. When it was decided that Rosinante was to be a factor in the play, Irving told the Property Master, Arnott, to get a horse as thin and ragged-looking as he could.

“I think I know the very one, sir,” said Arnott. “It belongs to a baker who comes down Exeter Street every day. I shall look out for him to-morrow and get him to bring the horse for you to see!”

In due course he saw the baker and arranged that he should on the next day bring the horse. The morrow came; but neither the baker nor the horse. Inquiries having been made, it turned out that on the morning arranged, as the baker was leading the horse down Bow Street to bring it to the Lyceum, an officer of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals saw them, and being 168dissatisfied with the appearance of the animal, “ran in” both man and beast. The sitting magistrate went out to the police yard and made inspection for himself. When he came back to court where the prisoner was waiting in the dock, he said that the case was one of the worst within his experience and gave his decision: He fined the owner of the horse ten pounds; sent the man who had been arrested whilst in charge of it to prison for a week without option of a fine; and ordered the horse *to be killed!*

XXIII

ART AND HAZARD

I

When Irving read the report of the production of *Madame Sans-Gêne* in Paris, he bought the British rights; but it was not till April 10, 1897, that the new play could be given. This was the Saturday before Holy Week; not in itself a good time, but it would get the play into swing for Easter.

The part of Napoleon in the play is not one that could appeal to any great actor on grounds of dramatic force. Its relative position in the play is not even one that appeals to that measure of self-value which is, to some degree, in all of us. True, it is the part of a great man and such is pleasurable histrionically—if there be an opportunity of excellence. An actor of character finds his own pleasure in the study and representation of strong individuality. Irving had always been interested in Napoleon. As long as I can remember he had always in his room a print and a bust of him—both beautiful. He had many books regarding him, all of which he had studied. He was always delighted to talk of him. I had long taken it for granted that he had an idea of some day playing the character; but I hardly took it seriously. The very light of history which makes the character known to the public also has made known his stature. No two men could be further apart in matter of physique and identity. Napoleon, short and stout, full-faced, aggressive, coarse. Irving, tall, thin, ascetic; with manners of exquisite gentleness; with a face of such high, thoughtful distinction that it stood out in any assemblage of clever men. I have been with Irving in many Universities—Oxford, Cambridge, Dublin, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Manchester, Harvard, Columbia, Princeton, Chicago. I have stood by him whilst he was the host of Princes, Ambassadors, Statesmen, Soldiers, Scholars. I think I have seen him under most conditions in which man may be compared with men; but I never found his appearance, bearing or manner other than the best. How then reconcile such opposites to such beguilement of his audience that the sense of personal incongruity should not mar the effect at which he aimed. It must be by some strange *tour de force* that this could be accomplished; and a special effort of the kind, though in its own way a dangerous experiment to a reputation already won, has a charm of its own. Man always wants to climb, even if the only charms of climbing be difficulty and danger. He saw at once that a chance to essay Napoleon was in *Madame Sans-Gêne*. The play was a comedy and Napoleon's part in it was a

comedy position. Matters that work against one in serious drama can be made actually to further one's purpose in comedy.

When he began to think of the part he very often spoke of it with me and took me into his confidence as to his idea of doing it.

"You see," he said to me one time, "perspective is a matter of contrast and juxtaposition. You can enlarge the appearance of anything by placing something smaller beside it, or *vice versa*. Of course you must choose for the contrasted object something which to common knowledge is of at least or at most a standard size. It would not make a man look big to put him next a doll's house—such you expect to be small and the sense of comparison does not strike one. The comparison must, on the part of the spectator, be unconscious."

Thus it was that in the play *Napoleon in his study*, when the scene opened and he made his first appearance, sat behind a huge writing-table piled with books; he sat on an exceedingly low chair so that he seemed dwarfed. The room was a vast one with pillars and pilasters which carried the eye upward from the floor. The attendants, the soldiers on guard, the generals and statesmen who surrounded him were all big, fine men. The ladies who played the Princesses, his sisters, were of good stature, and Ellen Terry is a tall woman. He applied here to himself the lesson of juxtaposition which in *Cymbeline* he had used for Ellen Terry's service in the previous year. She, a tall, fine woman, had to represent a timid young girl. Matters had therefore to be so arranged that size should be made a comparative and not an absolute matter. To this end Imogen was surrounded by the tallest and biggest women obtainable. The Queen looked, and Helena was, tall, and such miscellaneous ladies as are possible in a royal *entourage* even in the semi-mythical days of early England were simply giantesses. Amid her surroundings her timidity seemed natural to one so sweet and tender and almost frail. The towering height and girth of the trees and the architecture and stonework lent themselves to the 171 illusion. All the men too were tall and of massive build, so that the illusions of size and helplessness were perfect.

Irving was now face to face with the same difficulty, but reversed; there was still the matter of his own proportions. Long before, when we had spoken of the difficulties ahead of him in representing the part, he had said:

"I shall keep the proportions of Napoleon. After all it is only dressing a big doll instead of a little one. They have given me a big doll, whereas Napoleon had a little one. No one need notice the difference, unless the dolls are put together!"

This idea he carried out absolutely. He had made for him “fleshings” of great proportions. When these were on he looked like a Daniel Lambert for the white had no relief in variety; but this was but the doll which he had to dress. When the breeches—which were made to proportion by the best tailor in London—were drawn on, the thighs stood out as in De La Roche’s picture. When the green coat was on and buttoned high up, the shoulders, especially at the back, were so wide and tight as to make him look podgy. That dress was certainly supremely artful. It was so arranged that all the lines, either actual or suggested, were horizontal. The sloping of the front of the buttoned coat was from very high on the chest and the slope very generous. The waistcoat was short and the lower line of it wide and broadly marked. The concealment of real height was further effected by the red sash and many orders which were so artfully placed as to lead the eye in the wished-for direction. All that Irving required to satisfy the audience was the *coup d’œil*; in endeavouring to convince it does not do to start off with antagonism. So long as the first glance did not militate against him, he could depend on himself to realise their preconceived idea—which was of historical truth—by acting.

And when he did act how real it was. The little short-stepped quick run in which he moved in his restless dominance was no part of general historic record; but it fitted into the whole personality in such a way that, having seen, one cannot dissociate them. The ruthless dominance; the quick blaze of passion which recalled to our memory the whirlwind rush at Lodi or the flamelike sweep over the bridge at Arcola; the conscious acting of a part to gain his end; the typical attack on Nipperg. All these were so vivid that through the mist of their swirling memory loomed the very identity of Napoleon himself.

Strange to say the very excellence of Irving’s acting, as well as his magnitude in public esteem, injured the play, *quâ* play. To my mind it threw it in a measure out of perspective. The play is a comedy, and a comedy of a woman at that. Napoleon is in reality but an incidental character. It is true he and his time were chosen, because of his absolutism and his personal character; he is a glorified *deus ex machina*, whose word is law and is to be accepted as ruling life and death. So far Irving’s reputation and personality helped. He was on the mimic stage what Napoleon was on the real one. Still, after all *Madame Sans-Gêne* is a comedy though the authors were a little clumsy in changing it into melodrama at the end; but when Irving was present comedy, except his comedy, had to cease. Of course in the part of the scene where he and Ellen Terry played together comedy was triumphant; but here the note of comedy was the note of the scene and nothing could be finer than the double play, each artist foiling the other, and all the time developing and explaining their respective

characters. But after that Irving, as the part was written, was too big for the play. It was not in any way his fault. No modification of style or repression of action could have obviated the difficulty. It was primarily the fault of the dramatists in keeping the Emperor, who was incidental, on the stage too long.

The same reasoning applied to *Cymbeline*. Irving was too big for Iachino, and the better he played the worse the harm. Each little touch that helped to build up the individuality of the character helped—he being what he was in public esteem—to expand the sense of deliberate villainy. Iachino's purpose was not to injure; he only used wrong-doing, however base, as a means to an end: the winning of his wager.

In Ellen Terry's performance of *Madame Sans-Gêne* came an incident which I have always thought to be typically illustrative of "unconscious cerebration" in art—that "dual consciousness" which we shall by-and-by consider. The actress had steeped herself in the character; when playing the part she thought as the laundress-duchess thought. She had already played it close on a hundred times. The occasion was the first performance of the piece at Sheffield, where the audiences were enormous and the people hearty. In the scene with the dancing-master, where she is ill at ease and troubled with her unaccustomed train—"tail" she calls it—it is part of the "business" that this keeps falling or slipping from her arm. Once when she put it back its bulk seemed to attract unconsciously her troubled mind. Accordingly she began to *wring* it as she had been used to do with heavy articles in the days of her wash-tub. There was an instantaneous roar of applause. Half the women of the audience did their own washing and half the men knew the action; all throughout the house, both men and women, recognised the artistic perfection from which she utilised the impulse.

From that evening the action became an established usage.

II

In 1897 Laurence Irving completed his play on *Peter the Great* and his father purchased it from him. At that time he had in expectation a play by H. D. Traill and Robert Hichens, for which he had contracted on reading the *scenario* in July of that year. As, however, the latter play was not ready when arrangements had to be made for opening the London season early in January 1898, young Irving's play was put into preparation by his father before he went on the provincial tour. Naturally he wished to do all he possibly could for his son's play, and in the production neither pains nor expense was spared.

On July 24, the night after the closing of the season, he read the play in the Beefsteak Room to Loveday and myself and Johnston Forbes-Robertson, whom he hoped would play the part of Alexis. The reading took three hours and twenty minutes, and was a remarkable fine piece of work. Forbes-Robertson, however, did not see his way to the part, which was ultimately given to Robert Taber, a fine actor, then young and strong, who had just come from America, where he had played leading business.

Great pains were spent in the archæology of the play, so that when it was produced it was in its way a historical lesson. Irving cut off a whole week of his own work of the tour in order to come up to London to superintend the production personally. Miss Terry and the company played *Madame Sans-Gêne* at Bradford and Wolverhampton—strange to say, the last two towns he played in eight years later.

The production was certainly a very interesting one. The place and time did not allow much opportunity for beauty, but all appeared so real as to enhance the natural power of the play. The part of Peter was a terribly trying one, even to a man of Irving's "steel and whipcord" physique. I fancy it was a lesson to the 174dramatist—as yet not at his full skill—in saving the actor of his plays. On the seventh night the stage manager, before the play began, asked for the consideration of the audience for Irving, who was suffering from a partial loss of voice. Laurence Irving was having a brief holiday in Paris, so we telegraphed him to return at once. On Monday night Henry Irving was unable to play and Laurence Irving took his place. It was really a wonderful effort—especially for so young a man—to play such a part on short notice. Fortunately, as author, he knew the words well; and as he had helped his father in the stage management he was familiar with the business. That night after the performance I went to see Irving and had the pleasure of telling him of his son's success.

Unfortunately the tone of the play did not suit the public taste. It was not altogether the fault of the dramatist, but rather of the originals. History is history and has to be adhered to—in some measure at any rate; and the spectacle of a father hounding his son to death is one to make to shudder those whose instincts and sympathies are normal. The history of the time lent itself to horrors. On the first night in one scene where one of the conspirators who had been tortured—off the stage, but whose screams were heard—was brought in pale and bloody, the effect was too great for some of the audience, who rose quickly and left their seats. On the next night this part of the scene was taken out and other lesser horrors modified. Towards the end of the month it became necessary to prepare for a change of bill. On the last night of the piece the Prince and Princess of Wales were present as they wished to see the play again. The Prince had already seen it twice and had expressed his appreciation of it.

III

Robespierre was produced on April 15, 1899—the date on which the Lyceum was re-opened under the management of the Lyceum Company. Irving's reception after his dangerous illness was exceptionally warm, even for him.

The play had been in hand for some time. In May 1896, whilst in New York, Irving and I went to see Miss Elizabeth Marbury, the agent for America of the French Dramatic Author's Society. The purpose of the interview was regarding the writing by Sardou of a play on the subject. Irving suggested as a scene that in 175 Robespierre's lodgings. He had read somewhere of Robespierre shaving himself whilst listening to a matter of life and death for many people and all the time turning to spit. This was a grim streak of character which fastened on his imagination. The suggestion was well received by Sardou and the following year Irving entered into a contract whereby he was, after previous acceptance of the *scenario*, to receive the play before May 1898. On his part he undertook to produce the piece in London before June 1899. In due order the *scenario* was sent and approved, and the script of the play finally delivered and translated into English by Laurence Irving.

Robespierre was played in London one hundred and five times—of which ninety-three were the first season; in the provinces forty-three times; and in America one hundred and nine times. In all two hundred and fifty-seven times.

Charles Dickens used to say that it was a perpetual wonder to him how small the world was. Here is an instance of how the same may be said to-day:

When we were playing the piece in New England a gentleman wrote to Irving to thank him for preserving in the play the honourable character of his ancestor, Benjamin Vaughan, M.P., one of the *dramatis personæ* who has an interview with Robespierre in the first act!

Robespierre was a terrific play to stage manage. There are in it no less than sixty-nine speaking parts. The rehearsals were endless, for there were required in the play a very large number of supers—more than a hundred. In the scene of the Convention, in which Robespierre is overthrown, much of the effect depends on the rush of the deputies across the floor of the house, and the series of fights for the tribune. It was a stormy scene, and was admirably done. Everywhere the piece was played it went with uncontrollable effect.

Irving's dressing of the part and that personal preparation which is known in the actor's craft as "make-up" afforded in themselves a lesson in stage art. In the first act, where he had to strike the true note of Robespierre's character, everything was done

to create the proper effect. Here Robespierre was shown in his true light: A doctrinaire, a self-seeking politician; vain, arrogant, remorseless; something of a poet; a little of an artist; an intriguer without scruple. Irving showed in face and form, in bearing, in speech and even in inflection of the voice, the true inwardness of the man. 176The clear-cut face with prominent chin; the pronounced stillness of bearing, except for the restless eyes; the eager suspicion of one who is watched; the gaudy colour of his well-fitting clothes. All these things had their lessons for stranger eyes. He took no chance whatever that the idea of the man's dominant qualities should not be closely and deeply marked in the minds of the audience. But after that—although the man *seemed* to be the same—he was gradually and perpetually changing. And all the changes were, in addition to the acting and the spoken words, unconsciously conveyed in dress, bearing and facial appearance. When the fatherhood woke in him in Act III., it seemed natural enough, though it would not have seemed out of place in the first or second acts. In Act IV., sympathy with the mother was added to intense and overwhelming anxiety for his son—and all seemed still consistent with the original conception of the character as shown. That is, there was no jarring note as things progressed. In fact he was subtly changing in the mind of the audience the original idea of the man's nature. And all the time the face was growing refined and more marked with human kindness, till in the last act he seemed to be a saintly man full of noble and generous feelings; a patriot and martyr. In the last act all the externals were changed: wig, “make-up” of face, clothing from top to toe. The harsh colour of his first-seen coat was softened to an ineffable blue, suggestive at once of distance, refinement and delicacy. Altogether, though the personality seemed always consistent, it was a figure of harsh and ruthless scheming that walked in at one end of the play, but a noble martyr who was carried out at the other!

IV

Irving had long wished to act the part of Dante if he could get a good play on the subject. To this end he had made several efforts, including that in the direction of Tennyson. In July 1894, when *Madame Sans-Gêne* was being played in London by Rejane, Irving had a conversation regarding a play on the subject of Dante with Emile Moreau, joint author with Victorien Sardou of the French comedy. The issue of the meeting was that Sardou and Moreau were to write a play and submit it to Irving. It was not, however, till some seven years later that the idea began to materialise. There was a good deal of correspondence spread over the time, but after an 177interview at the end of May 1901 in London with Miss Marbury, who had just returned from paying a prolonged visit to Sardou, the matter rose over the horizon of practicability. It was agreed that Sardou was to submit a *scenario* before the end of that year. Irving felt

justified after the success of *Robespierre* to venture on another play by the same author. The *scenario* was sent to him in due course, and he studied it very carefully in such pauses as were in the American tour of that autumn. When we were in Chicago in December he told me that he had practically given up hope of doing *Dante* as he could not see his way to accepting the *scenario*. By his wishes I drafted a letter for him to that effect. I considered that the matter had there ended and did not have an opportunity of reading the *scenario* which was returned.

Much to my surprise, in the following spring Irving told me that he had decided to do the play and asked me to draw out a contract on the lines of that of *Robespierre*. I asked him why he had changed his mind and reminded him that from what he had told me of the original *scenario*, we had agreed that it was not likely to make for success. He did not, however, wish to talk about it then—he could be very secretive when he wished—but said he had sent word to Sardou that he would go on with the idea of the play. I knew it would upset him to argue about anything to which he was pledged; I said no more.

MM. Sardou and Moreau delivered the completed play in August, and forthwith Irving began to use his great imagination on its production. His son Laurence had taken the translation in hand.

The production was on a gigantic scale; the arrangements for it having been made in Paris, but not through me. The labour of preparation and rehearsal was endless, the expense enormous. The curtain went up on the night of production to an incurred expense of nearly thirteen thousand pounds.

On Monday, January 12, 1903, Irving read *Dante* to the actors and actresses of his company at his office in Bedford Street—the great room occupied for so many years by the Green Room Club. My contemporary note runs:

“Read it wonderfully well. Adumbrated every character!”

To me this was in one way the most interesting of all his readings to the company of a new play. Hitherto I had not read the play or even the *scenario*, and I am bound to say that as it went on my heart sank. The play was not a good one. It had too many characters and covered too wide a range. Indeed had it not been for Irving’s wonderful reading I should not have been able to follow the plot. When I saw the play on the first night, acted by a lot of people and lacking the concentration of the whole thing passing through one skilled mind, I found a real difficulty of comprehension. Strange to say this very difficulty in one way helped the play with the less cultured part of the

audience. As they could not quite understand it all they took it for granted that there was some terribly subtle meaning in everything. *Omne ignotum pro magnifico.*

The play was produced at Drury Lane Theatre on April 30, 1903—the last day, by the way, allowable for production in London by the contract—with great enthusiasm. There was an immense audience, and managerial hopes ran high. Irving was certainly superb. He did not merely look like Dante—he *was* Dante; it was like a veritable re-incarnation. His features had a natural resemblance to the great poet! The high-bred “eagle” profile; the ascetic gauntness; the deep earnest resonant voice; the general bearing of lofty gloom of the exile—these things one and all completed a representation which can never be forgotten by any one who saw it.

The play ran during the whole season at Drury Lane, eighty-two performances. On the provincial tour the following autumn it was given twenty-one times in only three towns. Then succeeded the American tour on which it was played thirty-four times—a total of one hundred and thirty-seven performances.

When we opened in New York the civic elections, which that term were conducted with even more than usual vigour, were on. As the receipts were not up to our normal we thought that the political “colieshangie” was the sole cause; we found out the difference when the *répertoire* bill was put up the third week. The experience was repeated in Philadelphia, Boston, Springfield, Hartford, New Haven, Brooklyn, and Washington. The last performance in America was given at the Federal capital to a great house—the largest the piece was played to in America. Perforce we had to accept the verdict: the public did not care for the play. Accordingly we stored it in Washington and for the rest of the tour gave the *répertoire* plays. When the tour was over we paid the expenses of sending the scenery into Canada where we gave it away. This was cheaper than paying the duty into the United States, which we should have had to do had we left it behind us.

179Altogether *Dante* as a venture was a fearful hazard. Before it was done I remonstrated with Irving about the production, he being then not really able to afford such an immense loss as was possible. As Chancellor of the Exchequer to his Absolute Monarchy I had to be content with his reply:

“My dear fellow, a play like this beats Monte Carlo as a hazard. Whatever one may do about losing, you certainly can’t win unless you play high!”

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XXIV

VANDENHOFF

Old Vandenhoff played his farewell engagement in Edinburgh, at the Queen's Theatre, in 1858. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Irving played Bassano to his Shylock; this was on Tuesday, February 16. In Act I, scene 3, where Shylock and Bassano enter, an odd thing occurred. I give it in Irving's words as he told me of it!

"Vandenhoff began: 'Three thousand'—there was a sort of odd click of something falling, and the speech dried up. I looked up at him and saw his mouth moving, but there was no sound. At the moment my eye caught the glitter of something golden on the stage. I stooped to pick it up, and as I did so saw that it was a whole set of false teeth. This I handed to Shylock, keeping my body between him and the audience so that no one might see the transaction. He turned away for an instant, putting both hands up to his face. As he turned back to the audience his words came out quite strong and clearly: 'Three thousand ducats—well!'"

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XXV

CHARLES MATHEWS

Irving had always a deep regard for Charles Mathews. Not only did he look upon him as a consummate dramatic actor—which was always in itself a sure road to his heart, but he had lively recollections of his kindness to him. The first was in his youth on the stage in Edinburgh when he played the boy in one of the plays of his *répertoire*. Irving had invented for himself a little piece of business; when the lad was placed in the militant position in the play he took out his handkerchief to mop his brow. As he pulled it out there came with it an orange which rolled along the stage and which he hastily followed and recovered. Charles Mathews seemed pleased. His kindly recognition was, however, opposed a little later by another actor who played the same part as Mathews. This gentleman strongly objected to what he delicately called the "tomfoolery" which he said interfered with the gravity of his own acting. When Mathews again visited Edinburgh, Irving omitted the incident, fearing it might be out of place. But at the end of the act Mathews sent for him to his dressing-room and in a very kind manner called his attention to a piece of business of which he had made use on the last occasion, and there and then recapitulating the incident asked why he had omitted it. Irving explained that he had been held to task for it by the other actor. To his great delight Mathews spoke quite crossly of the other actor. Said he:

"He had no right to find fault! He must have been an ignorant fellow not to see that it helped his own part. The humour of the situation in the play hangs on the contrast between the boy's bellicose attitude towards the elder man whom he considers his rival, and his own extreme youthfulness. That very incident is all that is wanted to

make the action complete; and since I saw you do it I have asked every other who plays the part to bring it in. I should have asked you, only that I took it of course for granted that you would repeat it. Never let any one shake you out of such an admirable piece of by-play!”

182The other occasion was when he had played Doricourt at his first appearance at the St. James’s Theatre in 1866. One of the first congratulations he got was from Charles Mathews, who not only sent him by hand a letter in the morning but followed it up with a visit later in the day.

Mrs. Charles Mathews was, till the day of her death, a very dear friend of Irving; and the tradition of affection was kept up till Irving’s own death by the son, Sir Charles W. Mathews, the eminent barrister.

For my own part I first knew Charles Mathews in 1873, when I had the pleasure of being introduced. From that time on I met him occasionally and was always fascinated with his delightful personality. Years afterwards I was not surprised to hear an instance of its effect from the late Henry Russell, the author of the song “*Cheer, boys, cheer*” and a host of other dramatic and popular songs. It was after supper one night in the Beefsteak Room. Russell told his story thus:

“I was at that time tenant of the Lyceum, and had let it for a short season to Charles Mathews. He did not pay my rent and, as I suppose you know, the freeholder, Arnold, was not one to let *me* off my rent on that account. The debt ran on till it grew to be quite a big one. I wrote to Mathews, but I never could get any settlement. He was always most suave and cheery; *but* no cash! At last I made up my mind that I *would* have that money; and finding that letters were of no avail, I called on him one forenoon. He was having his breakfast and asked me to join him in a cup of chocolate. I said no! that I had come on business—and pretty stern business at that; and that I would not mix it up with pleasure. I had come for cash—cash! cash! He was very pleasant, quite undisturbed by my tirade; so that presently I got a little ashamed of myself and sat down. I stayed with him an hour.”

“And did you get your money?” asked Irving quietly. Russell smiled:

“Get my money! I came away leaving him a cheque for three hundred pounds which he had borrowed from me; and I never asked him for rent again!” Then after a pause he added:

“He was certainly a great artist; and a most delightful fellow!”

XXVI

CHARLES DICKENS AND HENRY IRVING

Irving often spoke with pride of the fact that Charles Dickens had thought well of his acting, when he had seen him play at the St. James's Theatre in 1866 and the Queen's Theatre in 1868. Unhappily the two men never met then; and Dickens died in 1870. In later years he had the pleasure of the friendship of several of Dickens' children, and of his sister-in-law, Miss Georgina Hogarth, to whom he was so much attached. Charles Dickens the younger was an intimate friend and was often in the Beefsteak Room and elsewhere when Irving entertained his friends; Kate Dickens, the present Mrs. Perugini, was also a friend. But the youngest son, Henry Fielding Dickens, was the closest friend of all. Both he and his wife and their large family—who were all children, such of them as were then born, when I knew them first—were devoted to Irving. In all the years of his management no suitable gathering at the Lyceum was complete without them. Whenever Irving would leave London for any long spell some of them were sure to be on the platform to see him off; when he returned their welcome was amongst the first to greet him. Indeed he held close in his heart that whole united group, Harry Dickens and his sweet family and the dear old lady whom happily they are still able to cherish and as of old call "Aunty."

Lately I asked Henry Dickens if he remembered the occasion of his father speaking of Irving. The occasion of my asking was a gathering at which he had many social duties to fulfil, so that there was no opportunity of explaining fully. But next day he wrote me the following letter:

"2 Egerton Place, S.W.

"May 29 1906.

"My dear Bram,

"I do not remember the exact year in which *Hunted Down* was played at the St. James's. It must have been somewhere about 1866. But I have a vivid recollection of the fact owing to the impression which Irving's performance made upon me 184father. He was greatly struck by it. It seemed to appeal at once to his artistic and dramatic sense:

"Mark my words: that man will be a great actor.'

"I should not like to pledge myself to the exact words, but that is the substance of what he said after the performance.

“He also saw Irving in *The Lancashire Lass*, when he had been much impressed by his acting though not to the same extent.

“I do not suppose any man was more competent to give an opinion than my father. He was himself, as you know, a great actor. The fever of the footlights was always with him. He had a large number of friends in the dramatic profession, amongst them Macready and Fechter, the two greatest actors of his time.

“What a pity he did not live long enough to add Irving’s name to that brilliant list!

“Irving was certainly one of the most striking personalities I ever met, besides being, beyond all question, the most loyal and delightful of friends as I and those who are dear to me have good reason to know.

“We shall always hold his name in loving remembrance.

“Yours very sincerely,

Henry F. Dickens.”

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XXVII

MR. J. M. LEVY

Amongst many loving, true friends Irving had none more loving or more helpful than the late J. M. Levy, the owner and editor of the *Daily Telegraph*. From the first he was a warm and consistent friend, and his great paper, which in the early days of Irving’s success was devoting to the drama care and space unwonted in those days, did much—very much—to familiarise the public with his work and to spread his fame. As a personal friend his hospitality was unsurpassed. His house was always open, and nothing pleased him better than when Irving would drop in unasked. Up to the time of Mr. Levy’s death there were many delightful evenings spent with him. These were always on Sundays, for during working days we of the theatre had no opportunity for such pleasures. But even after his death the same hospitality was extended by his children. Some are gone, but those who happily remain, Lord Burnham, Miss Matilda Levy, Lady Faudel-Phillips, Lady Campbell Clarke, were friends up to the hour of his death; and with them all his memory is and shall be green. Lord Burnham truly held as a part of his great inheritance this friendship; and he always extended to the actor the helpfulness which had been his father’s. In a thousand delicate ways he always tried to show his love and friendship. Whenever, for instance, he had the honour of entertaining at his beautiful place, Hall Barn, Edward VII., either as Prince of Wales or King, he always included Irving in his house-party.

Such a friendship is a powerful help to any artist—and to like and cherish artists is a tradition in that family.

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XXVIII

VISITS TO AMERICA

I

Irving's first visit to America, in 1883, was a matter of considerable importance, not only to him, but to all of his craft and to all by whom he was held in regard. At that time the body of British people did not know much about America; and perhaps—strange as it may seem—did not care a great deal. Irving had played nearly five years continuously at the Lyceum, and his theatre had grown to be looked upon as an established institution. The great *clientèle* which had gathered round it, now numbering many thousands, looked on the venture with at least as much concern as he did himself. Thus the last night of the season, July 28, 1883, was a remarkable occasion. The house was jammed to suffocation and seemingly not one present but was a friend. When the curtain fell at the end of *The Belle's Stratagem*, there began a series of calls which seemed as though it would never end. Hand-clapping and stamping of feet seemed lost in the roar, for all over the house the audience were shouting—shouting with that detonating effect which is only to be found from a multitude animated with a common feeling. The sight and sound were moving. Wherever one looked were tears; and not from women or the young alone.

At the last, after a pause a little longer than usual—from which the audience evidently took it that the dramatic moment had arrived—came a marvellous silence. The curtain went up, showing on the stage the entire *personnel* of the company and staff.

Then that audience simply went crazy. All the cheers that had been for the play seemed merely a preparation for those of the parting. The air wherever one looked was a mass of waving hands and handkerchiefs, through which came wave after wave of that wild, heart-stirring detonating sound. All were overcome, before and behind the floats alike. When the curtain fell, it did so on two thousand people swept with emotion.



HENRY IRVING BETWEEN ENGLAND AND AMERICA

*From a drawing by Fred Barnard, 1883, after the picture by Sir Joshua Reynolds
"Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy"*

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II

Something of the same kind was enacted across the Atlantic. When on the evening of Monday, October 29, the curtain rose on the first scene of *The Bells*, there was the hush of expectation, prolonged till the moment when the door of the inn parlour was thrown open and Irving seemed swept in by the rushing snowstorm. The tempest of cheers seemed just as though the prolongation of that last moment in London; and for

six or seven minutes—an incredibly long time for such a matter on the stage—the cheering went on.

III

For my own part, I had a curious experience of that reception. Mr. Levy had asked me to send a cable to the *Daily Telegraph* describing Irving's reception. He knew, and I knew too, that it was a close shave for such a message to reach London in time for press. For in those days printing had not reached the extreme excellence of to-day, and the multiplication of stereos in the present form had not been accomplished. The difference of longitude seemed almost an insuperable difficulty. As I had to wait till Irving had actually appeared, I arranged with the manager of the Direct United States Cable Company to keep the wire for me. He was himself anxious to make a record, and had all in readiness. I had a man on a fleet horse waiting at the door of the theatre; and when Irving's welcome had *begun*, I ran out filling up the last words of my cable at the door. The horseman went off at once *ventre à terre*.

But my cable did not arrive in time. Another did, however, that sent to the *Daily News* by its correspondent, J. B. Bishop. I could not imagine how it was done, for the account cabled was a true one, manifestly written after the event.

Years afterwards, one night at supper with two men, J. B. Bishop and George Ward, then manager of the newly established Mackey-Bennett Cable, it was explained to me. They had come to know that I was cabling and in order not to be outdone Ward had had a wire brought all the way up from the Battery, and actually over the roof of the theatre and in by a side window.

1888 Whilst my man was galloping to Lower Broadway, Bishop was quietly wording the despatch which his friend was telegraphing to his local office as he wrote!

IV

The welcome which Irving received on that night of October 29, 1883, lasted for more than twenty years—until that night of March 25, 1904, when at the Harlem Opera House he said “Good-bye” to his American friends—for ever! Go where he would, from Maine to Louisiana, from the Eastern to the Western Sea, there was always the same story of loving greeting; of appreciative and encouraging understanding; of heartfelt *au revoirs*, in which gratitude had no little part. As Americans of the United States have no princes of their own, they make princes of whom they love. And after eight long winters spent with Henry Irving amongst them, I can say that no more golden hospitality or affectionate belief, no greater understanding of purpose or enthusiasm regarding personality or work has ever been the lot of any artist—any visitor—in any

nation. Irving was only putting into fervent words the feeling of his own true heart, when in his parting he said:

“I go with only one feeling on my lips and one thought in my heart—God bless America!”

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XXIX

WILLIAM WINTER

Amongst the many journalists who were Irving’s friends, none was closer than William Winter, the dramatic critic of the New York *Tribune*, whose work is known all over America. Winter is not only a critic, but a writer of books of especial charm and excellence, and a poet of high order. One of his little poems which he spoke at a dinner of welcome to Irving on his first arrival at New York in 1883 is so delightful that I venture to give it—especially as it had a prophetic instinct as to the love and welcome extended to the actor throughout the whole of the United States. He and Irving had been already friends for some time, and always saw a good deal of each other during Winter’s visits to London. The occasion was the dinner given by Colonel E. A. Buck, to attend which many of the friends present came from Cleveland, Buffalo, West Point, Louisville, Chicago—distances varying from fifty to a thousand miles.

HENRY IRVING.

A Word of Welcome.

November 18, 1883.

I

If we could win from Shakespeare’s river
The music of its murmuring flow,
With all the wild-bird notes that quiver
Where Avon’s scarlet meadows glow,
If we could twine with joy at meeting
Their love who lately grieved to part,
Ah, then, indeed, our word of greeting
Might find an echo in his heart.

190II

But though we cannot, in our singing,
That music and that love combine,
At least we'll set our blue-bells ringing,
And he shall hear our whispering pine;
And these shall breathe a welcome royal,
In accents tender, sweet, and kind,
From lips as fond and hearts as loyal
As any that he left behind!

William Winter.

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XXX

PERFORMANCE AT WEST POINT

The United States Military Academy at West Point on the Hudson River had from the time of his first visit to America a great charm for Irving. One of the first private friends he met on arriving at New York was Colonel Peter Michie, Professor of Applied Mathematics at the College. During the war he had been General Grant's chief officer of Engineers. Another friend made at the same time was Colonel Bass, Professor of Mathematics. With these two charming gentlemen we had become close friends. When Irving visited West Point he said that he would like to play to the cadets if it could be arranged. The matter came within hail in 1888, when he repeated the wish to Colonel Michie. The latter, as in duty bound, had the offer conveyed, through the Commandant, to the Secretary for War at Washington. To the intense astonishment of every one the War Secretary not only acquiesced at once but conveyed his appreciation of Irving's offer in most handsome and generous terms. The effect at West Point was startling. The authorities there had taken it for granted that such an exception to the iron rule of discipline which governs the Military and Naval Academies of the United States would not be permitted. The professors had a feeling that the closing his theatre in New York for a night was too great a sacrifice to make. I was made aware of this feeling by an early visit from Colonel Michie on the morning after the sanction of the War Secretary had been given. At half-past seven o'clock he came into my room at the Brunswick Hotel and was almost in a state of consternation

as to what he should do. He was vastly relieved when I told him that Irving's offer had, of course, been made in earnest and that nothing would please him so much. And so it was arranged that on the evening of Monday, March 19, Irving and Ellen Terry and the whole of the company should play *The Merchant of Venice* in the Grant Hall, the cadets' mess-room.

In the meantime an obstacle arose which covered us all with concern. On the night of Sunday, March 11, the eastern seaboard was visited by the worst blizzard on record. Between one and eight in the morning some four feet deep of snow fell, and as the wind was blowing a hundred miles an hour, as recorded by the anemometer, it was piled up in places in gigantic drifts. For some days New York and all around it was paralysed. The railways were blocked, the telegraph cut off. Even the cables had suffered. We were getting our news from Philadelphia *via* London—and even these had to come *via* Canada. West Point is sixty miles from New York and the two railways—the New York Central on the left hand and the West Shore line on the right—the West Point side—were simply obliterated with snowdrifts. The managers of these two lines and that of the New York, Ontario, and Western line—it having running powers over the West Shore—had most kindly arranged to place a special train at Irving's disposal for the West Point visit. Towards the end of the week the outlook of the journey, which had at first seemed unfavourable, grew a little brighter; it *might* be possible. Possible it was, for by superhuman exertions the line was cleared in time for our journey of March 19. Our train opened the line.

Of course it was not possible to use scenery in the space available for the performance; so it was arranged that the play should be given as in Shakespeare's time. To this end notices were fastened to the curtains at the proscenium: "Venice: A Public Place"; "Belmont: Portia's House"; "Shylock's House by a Bridge," &c. As it happens, the Venetian dress of the sixteenth century was almost the same as the British; so that the costumes now used in the piece were alike to those worn by the audience as well as on the stage at the Globe Theatre in Shakespeare's time. Thus the cadets of West Point saw the play almost identically as Shakespeare had himself seen it.

I think that we all in that hall felt proud when we saw over the proscenium of the little stage the flags of Britain and America draped together and united by a branch of palm. It thrilled us to our heart's core merely to see.

It was a wonderful audience. I suppose there never was another on all fours with it. I forget how many hundreds of cadets there are—I think four or five, or more, and they were all there. As they sat in their benches they looked, at the first glance, like a solid

mass of steel. Their uniforms of blue and grey with brass buttons; their bright young faces, clean-shaven; their flashing eyes—all lent force to the idea. As I looked at them I remembered with a thrill an anecdote that John Russell Young had told me after dinner the very night before. He had been with General Grant on his journey round the world and had heard the remark. At Gibraltar Grant had reviewed our troops with Lord Napier. When he saw them sweep by at the double he had turned to the great British General and said:

“Those men have the swing of conquest!”

The attention and understanding of the audience could not be surpassed. Many of these young men had never seen a play; and they were one and all chosen from every State in the Union, each one having been already trained or being on the way to it to command an army in the field. There was not a line of the play, not a point which did not pass for its full value. This alone seemed to inspire the actors down to the least important. At the end of each act came the ringing cheers which are so inspiring to all.

When the curtain finally fell there was a pause. And then with one impulse every one of those hundreds of young men with a thunderous cheer threw up his cap; for an instant the air was darkened with them. There was a significance in this which the ordinary layman may not understand. By the American Articles of War—which govern the Military Academy—for a cadet to throw up his cap, except at the word of command given by his superior officer, is an act of insubordination punishable with expulsion. These splendid young fellows—every one of whom justified himself later on in Cuba or the Philippines—had to find some suitable means of expressing their feelings; and they did it in a way that they and their comrades understood. Strange to say, not one of the superior officers happened to notice the fearful breach of discipline. They themselves were too much engaged in something else—possibly throwing up their own caps; for they were all old West Point men.

Right sure I am that no one who had the privilege of being present on that night can ever forget it—men, women, or children; for behind the corps of cadets sat the officers with their wives and families.

When Irving came to make the little speech inevitable on such an occasion he said at the close:

“I cannot restrain a little patriotic pride now, and I will confess it. I believe the joy-bells are ringing in London to-night, because for the first time the British have captured West Point?”

194He spoke later of that wonderful audience in terms of enthusiasm, and Ellen Terry was simply in a transport of delight. For my own part, though I had been in the theatre each of the thousand times Irving and Ellen Terry played *The Merchant of Venice*, I never knew it to go so well.

Beyond this delightful experience, which must long be a tradition in West Point, the Academy has another source of perpetual memory. In the officers' mess hangs a picture presented by Henry Irving which they hold beyond price. It is a portrait of the great Napoleon done from life by Captain Marryat when he was a midshipman on the British warship *Bellerophon* which carried the Conquered Conqueror to his prison in St. Helena.

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XXXI

AMERICAN REPORTERS

I

I can bear the highest testimony to the *bona fides* of American reporters, though they do not, either individually or collectively, require any commendation from me. I have had, in the twenty years covered by our tours in America, many hundreds of "interviews" with reporters, and I never once found one that "went back" on me. I could always speak quite openly to them individually on a subject which we wished for the present to keep dark, simply telling him or them that the matter was not for present publication. Any one who knows the inner working of a newspaper, and of the keenness which exists in the competition for the acquisition of news, will know how much was implied by the silence—the scorn and contempt that would now and then be hurled at those who "couldn't get a story." I have no doubt that sometimes the engagement on the paper was imperilled, or even cancelled. Of course I always tried to let them get *something*. It was quite impossible at times that Irving should give interviews. Such take time, and time was not always available in the midst of strenuous work; sickness and weariness are bars to intellectual undertakings; and now and again the high policy of one's business demands silence. In Irving's case his utterances had to be carefully considered. He was one of the very few men who was always reported *verbatim*. With ordinary individuals there is habitual compression and "editing" which, though it may occasionally suppress some fact or step in an argument, is protective against many errors. It is an old journalistic saying that "Parliamentary reputations are made in the Gallery!" This is almost exact; were it qualified so as to admit of exceptions it would be quite exact. In ordinary speeches, or in any form of *extempore* and unpremeditated utterance, there are evidences of

change during the process of thought—uncompleted sentences, confused metaphors, words ill chosen or slightly misapplied. In addition, as in almost every case 196 Irving spoke or was interviewed on professional subjects or matters closely allied to his own work or ideas, there was always a possibility of creating a wrong impression somewhere. Also, he stood so high amongst his own craft that an omission would now and again be treated as an affront. I have known him to receive, after some speech or interview or recorded conversation where he had given a few names of actors as illustrating some part, a dozen letters asking if there was any reason why the writer's name was omitted in that connection. Irving was always most loyal to all those of his own calling and considerate of their needs and wishes; and so in all matters where he was by common consent or by general repute vested with the responsibilities of judgment he tried to hold the scales of justice balanced. In order, therefore, to see that his real views were properly set out—and incidentally for self-protection—he always took precautions with regard to speeches and interviews. The former, he always wrote out. On occasions where he had to speak as if *impromptu*—such as on the stage after the performance on first or last nights; any time when mere pleasant commonplaces were insufficient—he learned the speech by heart. When he could have anything before him, such as at dinners, he would have ready his speech carefully corrected, printed in very large type on small pages printed on one side only and not fastened together—so that they could be moved easily and separately. This he would place before him on the table. He would not seem to read it, and of course he would be familiar with the general idea. But he read it all the same; with a glance he would take in a whole sentence of the big type and would use his acting power not only in its delivery but in the disguising of his effort. If there were not time to get the speech printed he would write it out himself in a big hand with thick strokes of a soft pen. With regard to interviews he always required that the proof should be submitted to him and that his changes, either by excisions or additions, should be respected. He would sign the proof if such were thought desirable. I never knew a case where the interviewer or the newspaper did not loyally hold to the undertaking. I am anxious to put this on record; for I have often heard and read diatribes by the inexperienced against not only the system of interviewing but the interviewers. Let me give an instance of the chagrin which must be felt by men, skilled in the work and with responsibilities to their newspapers, who are baffled in their undertakings by reasons which they do not understand or agree with.

197 In the winter of 1886 I went across to arrange a tour of *Faust* for the coming year. We especially wished the matter kept dark, for we had alternative plans in view. Therefore I went quietly and without telling any one. When I landed in New York my

coming was some way known—I suppose I had been missed at the Lyceum and some one had guessed the purpose of my absence and cabled—and I was met by a whole cloud of interviewers, nearly all of whom I had known for some years. When we were all together in my hotel I told them frankly that I would talk to them about anything they wished except the purpose of my visit. This being *their* purpose, they were naturally not satisfied. I saw this and said:

“Now, look here, boys, you know I have always tried to help you in your work in any way I was free to do. I want for a few days to keep my present purpose secret. When what I want to do is through, I shall tell you all about it. It will be only a few days at most. Won’t you trust me about the wisdom of this? All I want is silence for a while; and if you will tell me that you will say nothing till I let you go ahead, I shall tell you everything—right here and now!”

One of them said at once:

“No! Don’t tell us yet. If you are silent the difficulty will be only between you and us. But if you tell us we shall each have to fight his own crowd for not telling them what we know!” The general silence vouched this as accepted by all. We sat still for perhaps a minute, no one wishing to begin. Before us was the whisky of hospitality. At last one of my guests said:

“By the way, how do you like American as compared with Irish whisky?—*of course, not for publication!*”

There was a roar of laughter. I felt that my reticence was forgiven, and we had a pleasant chat through a delightful half-hour. Out of that they made a “story” of some kind to suit their mission.

II

In a few instances the reporter who writes from his own side without consultation has said funny things. Two cases I remember. The first was when more than twenty years ago we made a night journey from Chicago to Detroit. When we boarded our special train I found one strange young man with a gripsack who said he was coming with us. To this I demurred, telling him that we never took any stranger with us and explaining that, as all our company was divided into little family groups they would not feel so comfortable with a stranger as when, as usual, they were among friends and comrades only. He said he was a reporter, and that he was going to write a story about the incidents of the night. I cannot imagine what kind of incidents he expected! However, I was firm and would not let him come.

When we arrived in Detroit in the morning a messenger came on board with a large letter directed to me. It contained a copy of a local paper in which was marked an article on how the Irving company travelled—a long article of over a column. It described various matters, and even made mention of the appearance *en déshabille* of some members of the company. At the end was appended a note in small type to say that the paper could not vouch for the accuracy of the report as their representative had not been allowed to travel on the train. I give the whole matter from memory; but the way in which the writer dealt with myself was most amusing. It took up, perhaps, the first quarter of the article. It spoke of “an individual who *called himself* Bram Stoker.” He was thus described:

“... who seems to occupy some anomalous position between secretary and valet. Whose manifest duties are to see that there is mustard in the sandwiches and to take the dogs out for a run; and who unites in his own person every vulgarity of the English-speaking race.”

I forgave him on the spot for the whole thing on account of the last sub-sentence.

The second instance was as follows:

When on our Western tour in 1899–1900 we visited Kansas City for three nights, playing in the Opera House afterwards destroyed by fire. At that time limelight for purposes of stage effect had been largely superseded by electric light, which was beginning to be properly harnessed for the purpose. It was much easier to work with and cheaper, as every theatre had its own plant. Irving, however, preferred the limelight or calcium light, which gives softer and more varied effects; and as it was not possible to get the necessary gas-tanks in many places we took with us a whole railway waggon-load of them. These would be brought to the theatre with the other paraphernalia of our work. As we had so much stuff that 199it was not always possible to find room for it, we had to leave some of the less perishable goods on the sidewalk. This was easy in Kansas City, as the theatre occupied a block and its sidewalks were wide and not much used except on the main street. Accordingly the bulk of our gas-tanks were piled up outside. The scarlet colour of the oxygen tanks evidently arrested the attention of a local reporter and gave him ideas. On the morning after the first performance his paper came out with a sensational article to the effect that at last the treasured secret was out: Henry Irving was in reality a dying man, and was only kept alive by using great quantities of oxygen, of which a waggon-load of tanks had to be carried for the purpose. The reporter went on to explain how, in order to investigate the matter properly, he had managed to get into the theatre as a stage hand and had seen the tanks scattered about the stage. Further, he went on to tell

how difficult it was to get near Irving's dressing-room as rude servants ordered away any one seen standing close to the door. But he was not to be baffled. He had seen at the end of the act Irving hurry into his room to be reinvigorated. He added, with an inconceivable *naïveté*, that precautions were taken to prevent the escape of the life-giving oxygen—for even the keyhole was stopped up.

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XXXII

TOURS-DE-FORCE

I

Perhaps the greatest *tour de force* of Irving's life was made on the night of February 23, 1887, when at the Birkbeck Hall he read the play of *Hamlet* before a large audience for the benefit of the Institute. He had, of course, cut the play, just as he did for acting; indeed his cutting for the reading was a further slight curtailment, as on such an occasion there has to be a limit of time. But the cutting is in itself a tribute to his immense knowledge of the play, and is a lesson to students.

He read the play in two sections, with an interval of perhaps ten minutes between. The sustained effort must have been a frightful strain; for in such an undertaking there is not an instant's pause. Character follows character, each necessitating an instant change of personality; of voice; of method of speech and bearing and action. Irving was a great believer in the value of time in acting. He used to say that on certain occasions the time in which things were taken increased or marred the attention, emotion and eagerness of the audience. A play like *Hamlet* has as many and as varying times as an opera; thus the first knowledge and intention of the reader must have been complete. Strong as he was, it was a wonder how he got through that evening. When I went round to him at the end of the first part I found him sitting down and almost gasping. He had a wonderful recuperative power, however, and like a good fighter he was up at the call of "time." With unimpaired vitality, strength and passion he went on with his work right to the very end. For my own part I have never had so illuminative an experience of the play. Irving's own performance of the title *rôle* I had of course seen, and with even greater effect than then; for dress and picturesque surroundings, in addition to the significance of movement and action, can intensify speech even when aided by the expression conveyed by face and hands. But the play as a whole came into riper prominence. Imagine the play with *every part* in it done by a great actor! It was never to be forgotten. The passionate scenes were triumphant. Knowing that he had the whole thing in his own hands and that he had not to trust to

others, howsoever good they might be, he could give the reins to passion. The effect was enthralling. We of the audience sat spell-bound, hardly able to breathe.

When he ceased, almost fainting with the prolonged effort and excess of emotion, the pent-up enthusiasm burst forth like a storm.

In his dressing-room he had to sit for a while to recover himself—a rare thing indeed for him in those days. The note in my diary of that night has the following:

“Immense enthusiasm—remarkable—magnificent—every character given in masterly manner—consider it greatest *tour de force* of his life—even *he* exhausted!”

II

Eight years before, on July 25, 1879, the night of his “Benefit,” as it was called after the old-time custom, he had given another wonderful example of his power. On that occasion he had taken the great and strenuous act out of each of five plays and finished up with a comedy character. The bill was: *Richard III.*, Act I.; *Richelieu*, Act IV.; *Charles I.*, Act IV.; *Louis XI.*, Act III.; *Hamlet*, Act III. (to end of Play Scene); *Raising the Wind*.

The strain of such a bill was very great. Not only the playing and the changing to so many complete identities each in moments of wild passion, but even the dressing and preparation for each part. Throughout the whole of that even there was not a single minute—or a portion of a minute—to spare. Such a strain of mind and body and psychic faculties all at once and so prolonged does not come into the working life of any other art or calling. Small wonder is it if the wear and tear of life to great actors is exceptionally great.

But Irving up to his sixtieth year was compact of steel and whipcord. His energy and nervous power were such as only came from a great brain; and the muscular force of that lean, lithe body must have been extraordinary. The standard of animal mechanics is “foot-pounds”—the force and heart effort necessary to raise a pound weight a foot high. An actor playing a heavy part, judged by this rule, does about as much work in an evening as a hod-man carrying bricks up a ladder. For more than forty years this man did such work almost every night of his life; with the added strain and stress of high emotion—no negligible quantity in itself. I know of no other man who could have done such work in such a way and with such astounding passion as Henry Irving on great occasions.

XXXIII

CHRISTMAS

I

All through Irving's management of the Lyceum Christmas was, with regard to the working staff and supers, kept in a patriarchal way. Every man and woman had on Christmas Eve or the night before it a basket containing a goose with "trimmings"—sage and onions and apples—and a bottle of gin. The children had each a goose, and a cake instead of the gin. There were some four or five hundred altogether, and as they trailed away you could trace them through distant streets by their scent. On most Christmas Eves there was in the Green Room punch and cake for the company. The punch-bowl was a vast one, and was refilled as often as required. We would sometimes use a five-gallon keg of old whisky in that bowl, for a liberal supply was always left over for the stage hands.

II

Two years later we were all at Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. Irving arranged an "off" night Christmas and had the whole company, over a hundred persons, to dinner at the Monhongaheela House, where he was staying. We drank all the loyal and usual toasts and finished with a sing-song, wherein various members of the company and the staff exhibited hitherto unknown powers of song and dance. They did amongst them a nigger entertainment which would have passed muster anywhere.

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XXXIV

IRVING AS A SOCIAL FORCE

The history of the Lyceum Theatre was for a quarter of a century a part of the social history of London. A mere list of Irving's hospitalities would be instructive. The range of his guests was impossible to any but an artist. As he never forgot or neglected his old friends there were generally at his table some present who represented the commonplace or the unsuccessful as well as the famous or the successful sides of life. The old days and the new came together cheerily under the influence of the host's winning personality, which no amount of success had been able to spoil.

Sometimes the Beefsteak Room, which could only seat at most thirty-six people, was too small; and at such times we migrated to the stage. These occasions were interesting, sometimes even in detail. On the hundredth night of *The Merchant of Venice*, February 14, 1880, there was a supper for three hundred and fifty guests. On

March 25, 1882, ninety-two guests sat down to dinner to celebrate the hundredth night of *Romeo and Juliet*.

The Prince of Wales dined there in a party of fifty on May 7, 1883. The table was a round one, and in the centre was a glorious mass of yellow flowers with sufficient green leaves to add to its beauty. This bouquet was thirty feet across, and was in the centre only nine inches in height, so that it allowed an uninterrupted view all round the table. I remember the Prince saying that he had never seen a more lovely table. On this as on other occasions there was overhead a great tent-roof covering the entire stage. Through this hung chandeliers. On three sides were great curtains of crimson plush and painted satin ordinarily used for tableaux curtains; and on the proscenium side a forest of high palms and flowers, behind which a fine quartette band played soft music.

One charming night I remember in the Beefsteak Room when the Duke of Teck and Princess Mary and their three sons and Princess May Victoria, whose birthday it was, came to supper. In 205honour of the occasion the whole decorations of room and table were of pink and white may, with the birthday cake to suit. Before the Princess was an exquisite little set of *Shakespeare* specially bound in white vellum by Zaehnsdorf, with markers of blush-rose silk.

The ordinary hospitalities of the Beefsteak Room were simply endless. A list of the names of those who have supped with Irving there would alone fill chapters of this book. They were of all kinds and degrees. The whole social scale has been represented from the Prince to the humblest of commoners. Statesmen, travellers, explorers, ambassadors, foreign princes and potentates, poets, novelists, historians—writers of every style, shade and quality. Representatives of all the learned professions; of all the official worlds; of all the great industries. Sportsmen, landlords, agriculturists. Men and women of leisure and fashion. Scientists, thinkers, inventors, philanthropists, divines. Egotists, ranging from harmless esteemers of their own worthiness to the very ranks of Nihilism. Philosophers. Artists of all kinds. In very truth the list was endless and kaleidoscopic.

Irving never knew how many personal friends he had, for all who ever met him claimed acquaintance for ever more—and always to his great delight. Let me give an instance: In the late “eighties” when he took a house with an enormous garden in Brook Green, Hammersmith, he had the house rebuilt and beautifully furnished; but he never lived in it. However, in the summer he thought it would be a good opportunity of giving a garden party at which he might see all his friends together. He explained to me what he would like to do:

“I want to see all my friends at once; and I wish to have it so arranged that there will be no one left out. I hope my friends will bring their young people who would like to come. Perhaps you may remember our friends better than I do; would you mind making out a list for me—so that we can send the invitations. Of course I should like to ask a few of our Lyceum audience who come much to the theatre. Some of them I know, but there are others from whom I have received endless courtesies and I want them to see that I look on them as friends.”

I set to work on a list, and two days afterwards in the office he said to me:

“What about that list? We ought to be getting on with the invitations.”

206 “No use!” I said. “You can’t give that party—not as you wish it!”

“Why not?” he asked amazed; he never liked to hear that anything he wished could not be done. I held up the sheets I had been working at.

“Here is the answer,” I said. “There are too many!”

“Oh, nonsense, my dear fellow. You forget it is a huge garden.” I shook my head.

“The other is huger. I am not half through yet, and they total up already over five thousand!”

And so that party never came off.

He had many many close friends whose names I should like to mention here, but to attempt a full list would not be possible. Such must be incomplete; and those so neglected might be pained. And so I venture to give in this book only the names of those who belong to the structure of the incident which I am recounting.

But Irving’s social power was not merely in his hospitality. He was in request for all sorts and kinds of public and semi-public functions—the detailed list of them would be a serious one; of monuments that he has unveiled; of public dinners at which he has taken the chair or spoken; of foundation and memorial stones which he has laid; of flower shows, bazaars, theatres, libraries and public galleries that he has opened.

The public banquets to him have been many. The entertainments in his honour by clubs and other organisations were multitudinous.

And wherever he went on any such occasion, whatever space there was—were it even in an open square or street—was crowded to the last point.

This very popularity entailed much work, both in preparation and execution, for he had always to make a speech. With him a speech meant writing it and having it printed so that he could read it—though he never appeared to do so.

All this opened many new ways for his successes in his art, and so aided in the growth of its honour. For instance, he was the first actor asked to speak at the annual banquet of the Royal Academy; thus through him a new toast was added to the restricted list of that very conservative body.

The “First Night” gatherings on the stage of the Lyceum after the play became almost historic; the list of the guests would form an index to those of note of the time.

207 There were similar gatherings of a certain national, and even international, importance; such as when the members of the Colonial Conference came *en masse*; when the Conference of Librarians attended the theatre; when ships of war of foreign nations sent glad contingents to the theatre; when the Guests of the Nation were made welcome.

Some of the latter groups are, I think, worthy to be told of in detail.

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XXXV

VISITS OF FOREIGN WARSHIPS

I

When, in May 1894, the United States cruiser *Chicago* came to London whilst making her cruise of friendly intent, there was of course a warm-hearted greeting. Admiral Erben was the very soul of geniality and Captain Mahan was, through his great work on *The Sea Power of England*, himself a maker of history. At the banquet to them in St. James’s Hall, Irving, though he was unable to attend as he had to play at the Lyceum, was nominally present. He felt that all that could possibly be done to cement the good feeling between Great Britain and America was the duty of every Englishman.

At the banquet, on the end of the hall was the legend in gigantic letters:

“BLOOD IS THICKER THAN WATER”

—the phrase that became historic when Admiral Erben was in China. It will be remembered that whilst a flotilla of British boats were attacking a fort on the river and had met a reverse they were aided by the crew of the American ship of war. They were on a mud flat at the mercy of the Chinese, who were wiping them out. But the crew of the neutral vessel—unaided by their officers, who had of course to show an

appearance of neutrality in accord with the wisdom of international law—put off their boats and took them off. On protest being made, the answer was given in the above phrase.

Through me—I was one of the diners—Irving conveyed a warm invitation to all the officers to come to the Lyceum to see the play and stop for supper in the Beefsteak Room. A night was fixed and they all came except Captain Mahan, who had to be away at an engagement out of London. It was a delightful evening for us all and many a new friendship began.

In addition to the officers, Irving had asked the whole crew of 209 the *Chicago* to come to the play in such numbers and on such nights as might be possible. They came on three different nights. Each party came round to the office to have a drink—and a very remarkable thing it was considering that, except the petty officers, they were all ordinary seamen, marines and stokers, though they had everything that was drinkable to choose from—for Irving wished them to have full choice of the best—no man would take a second drink! They had evidently made some rule of good manners amongst themselves. A fine and hearty body of men they were—and with good memories one and all. For ten years afterwards—right up to the end of our last tour—there was hardly a week during our American touring that some of that crew did not come to make his greeting.

The return visit to the ship came on Sunday, June 3, when we went to lunch on board the *Chicago*. Irving took with him J. L. Toole and Thomas Nast, the American cartoonist, who had been at the supper at the Lyceum. We went down to Gravesend, where the vessel lay, and were met by the younger officers who brought us on board. There welcome reigned. It shone in the eyes of every man on the ship, from the Admiral down. The men on parade looked as if only the hold of discipline restrained them as Irving passed by with words of kindly greeting. We had a delightful time.

When late in the afternoon we were returning on shore, the whole crew were on deck. I do not believe there was a man on board who was not there. If the greeting was hearty, the farewell was touching. We had got into the boat and were just clearing the vessel, we waving our hats to those behind, when there burst out a mighty cheer, which seemed to rend the air like thunder. It pealed over the water that still Sabbath afternoon and startled the quiet folk on the frontages at Gravesend. Cheer after cheer came ringing and resonant with a heartiness that made one's blood leap. For there is no such sound in the world as that full-throated Anglo-Saxon cheer which begins at the heart—that inspiring, resolute, intentional cheer which has through the memory of

ten thousand victories and endless moments of stress and daring become the heritage of the race.

Before the *Chicago* left London, a little deputation came one evening to the Lyceum from the crew. To Irving they presented a fine drawing in water-colour of their ship, together with a silver box with an Address written and illuminated by themselves. 210It was a hearty document, redolent of the memories of crossing the Line and such quaint conceits as the deep water seaman loves.

I value dearly their gift to myself; a beautiful walking-stick of zebra-wood and silver, of which the inscription runs:

“Presented to Bram Stoker, Esq.,

By the crew of U.S. *Chicago*, 1894.”

II

Three years after the visit of the *Chicago*—1897—another warship came on a similar friendly mission.

This was the battleship *Fuji*, of the Japanese Navy. In those days Japan was just beginning to step from her sun-lit shores down into the great world. She had awakened to the need for self-protection and had manifested her fighting power with modern weapons in the capture of Port Arthur. Captain Mimra, who commanded the *Fuji*, had been appointed Commandant of the fortress-city after the capture.

Irving thought it would be hospitable to ask the visitors to the play. On the night of April 2, Captain Mimra and his officers came. The play then running, *Richard III.*, was one that took up Irving’s time from first to last during the evening so that it was not possible for him to have the privilege of meeting his guests personally. So I had to be deputy host. The party sat in the Royal box and the one next to it, the two boxes having been made into one for the occasion. After the third act of the play we all went into the “Prince of Wales’s Room”—the drawing-room attached to the Royal box—and drank a glass of wine together to a toast which was prophetic:

“England and Japan!”

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XXXVI

IRVING’S LAST RECEPTION AT THE LYCEUM

I

At the time of the Queen's Jubilee in 1887, Irving had something to do in the celebration in a histrionic way. He was able to make welcome at the Lyceum and to entertain individually many of those who came from over seas to do honour to the occasion. The only act of general service which came within his power was to lend the bells which were played in Hyde Park on the occasion of the Children's Jubilee. These were the "hemispherical" bells which had been founded for the production of *Faust*, and were the largest of the kind that had ever been made. On that day it seemed as though the carillon sounded all over London.

II

Ten years later, when the "Diamond" Jubilee was kept, much more attention was paid to the Colonial and Indian guests than had ever been done before. The Nation had waked up to the importance of the "Dependencies," and the representatives of these were treated with all due honour. Irving, thinking like many others that it would be well that private hospitalities given in general form might supplement the public functions, gave a special *matinée* performance on June 25 for the troops of all kinds which had been sent to represent the various parts of the Empire. The authorities fell in with the plan so thoroughly that he was encouraged to add to his service of hospitality a reception on the stage after the play on the night of June 28. To this came all the Colonial Premiers, and all those Indian Princes and such persons of local distinction throughout the world as had been named on the official lists, and all the officers taking a part in the proceedings. Besides these were a host of others, amongst whom were a large number of representatives of literature and the various arts.

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III

When, in 1902, the time of the Coronation was approaching and matters were being organised for a fitting welcome to the guests of the nation, Irving, remembering the success of his little effort of five years before and the official approval of it, wrote to the Lord Chamberlain to ask if it would be in accordance with the King's wishes that the stage reception should be repeated. His Majesty not only approved of the idea, but commanded that the matter should be taken up by the India and the Colonial Offices, so that those high officials in charge of the public arrangements might have the date of the reception placed on the official list of "informal formalities." This meant that a special date was to be made certain for the occasion and that the nation's guests would attend in force. There were so many events of social importance close to the time fixed for the Coronation that there was a certain struggle for dates. Those hosts

were supposed to be happy who secured that which they wished. Our date was fixed for the night of Thursday, July 3.

When, on June 26, the ceremony of the Coronation was postponed on account of the dangerous illness of the King, it was made known formally that it was His Majesty's expressed wish that all the functions of hospitality to the guests should go on as arranged. In Irving's case much pains had been taken officially. Sir William Curzon Wyllie, of the Political Department of the India Office, and Sir William Baillie-Hamilton, at the Colonial Office, arranged matters.

When the night of July 3 arrived all possible preparations had been made at the Lyceum. As the function was to take place after the audience had gone there would be little time to spare, and we had to provide against accidents and hitches of all kinds.

The play began at eight o'clock and there was an immense audience. At ten minutes to eleven the curtain fell; and then began one of the finest pieces of carefully organised work I have ever seen. Everything had been planned out, every man was in his place, and throughout there was no scrambling or interfering with each other although the haste was positively terrific. All was done in silence, and each gang knew how to wait till their moment for exertion came.

As the audience filed out of the stalls and pit a host of 213 carpenters edged in behind them and began to unscrew the chairs and benches. So fast did they work that as the audience left the proscenium the blocks of seats followed close behind them to the waiting carts. Following the carpenters came an array of sturdy women cleaners, who used broom and duster with an almost frantic energy, moving in a nimbus of dust of their own making. All the windows of the house had been opened the instant the curtain fell, so that the place was being aired whilst the work was going on. Behind the cleaners came a force of upholsterers with great bales of red cloth, which had already been prepared and fitted, so that an incredibly short time saw the floor of the house looking twice its usual size in its splendour of crimson. By this time the curtain had gone up showing the stage clear from front to back and from side to side. A train of carts had been waiting, and as there was a great force of men on the stage the scenes and properties seemed to move of their own accord out of the great doors at the back of the stage. On the walls right and left of the stage and at the back hung great curtains of crimson velvet and painted satin which we used in various plays. The stage was covered with crimson cloth. At each side of the orchestra was lifted in a staircase ready prepared, some six feet wide, carpeted with crimson and with handrails covered with crimson velvet. A rail covered with velvet of the same colour protected unthinking guests from walking into the orchestra. Then came the florists. An endless train of

palms and shrubs and flowers in pots seemed to move in and disperse themselves about the theatre. The boxes were filled with them and all along the front of the circles they stood in serried lines till the whole place was in waves of greenery and flowers. The orchestra was filled with palms which rose a foot or two over the place of the footlights. In the meantime the caterer's little army had brought in tables which they placed in the back of the pit, the wall of which had during the time been covered in Turkey red.

All the while another army of electricians had been at work. They had fixed some great chandeliers over the stage and had put up the "set pieces" arranged for the proscenium. These were a vast Union Jack composed of thousands of coloured lights which hung over the dress circle, and an enormous Crown placed over the upper circle. I never in my life saw anything so magnificently effective as these lights. They seemed to blaze like titanic jewels, and filled the place with a glory of light.

While all this was going on, we had the whole house searched from roof to cellar by our own servants and a force of detectives sent for the purpose. It did not do to neglect precautions on such an occasion when the spirit of anarchy stalked abroad. When this was done the detectives took their places all round the theatre, and the coming guests had to pass through a line of them. This was necessary to avoid the possibility of expert thieves gaining admission. Some of these guests were known to wear, when in State costume, jewels of great value. In fact one of the Indian Princes who was present that night wore jewels of the value of half a million sterling.

All this preparation had been made within the space of *forty minutes*. When the guests began to arrive a few minutes before half-past eleven, for which hour they had been bidden, all was in order. Some of them, who had been present at the play and had waited in the vestibule, could hardly believe their eyes when they saw the change.

Irving stood in the centre of the stage, for there were three doors of entry, one at the back of the stage, the private door O.P., and the stage door which was on the prompt side. Only one door, that at the back of the stage, had been arranged, but the guests came so fast—and so many of them were of a class so distinguished as not to be accustomed to wait—that we found it necessary to open the others as well. Servants trained to announce the names of guests had been put on duty, but their task was no easy one, and there were some strange mispronunciations. I give some of the names of the thousand guests, from which the difficulty may be inferred:

His Highness Maharaj Adhiraj Sir Madho Rao Scindia, Maharaja of Gwalior.

His Highness Maharaja Sir Ganga Singh, Maharaja of Bikaner.

His Highness Sir Pertab Singh, Maharaja of Idar.

His Highness Maharaj Adhiraj Sawai Sir Mahdo Singh, Maharaja of Jeypore.

His Highness the Maharaja of Kohlapur.

Maharaja Kunwar Dolat Singh.

His Highness the Maharaja of Kooch Bahar.

Maharaj Kunwar Prodyot Kumar Tagore.

Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhai.

Raja Sir Savalai Ramaswami Mudaliyar.

Maharaja Sri Rao the Hon. Sir Venkalasvetachalapati Ranga Ras Bahadur, Raja of Bobbili.

215 Meherban Ganpatrao Madhavrao Vinchwikar.

The Hon. Asif Kadr Saiyid Wasif Ali Mirza, of Murshidabad.

The Hon. Nawab Mumtaz-ud-daula Muhamad Faiyaz Ali Khan, of Pahasu Bulandshahr.

Nawab Fateh Ali Khan, Kizilbash.

Gangadhar Madho Chitnavis.

Rai Jagannath Barua Bahadur.

Maung On Gaing.

Lieut.-Colonel Nawab Mahomed Aslam Khan, Khan Bahadur.

The Sultan of Perak.

King Lewanika.

H.R.H. The Crown Prince of Siam.

The Datoh Panglima Kinta.

The Datoh Sedelia Rab.

Sri Baba Khem Singh, Bedi of Kullar.

They were from every part of the world and of every race under the sun. In type and colour they would have illustrated a discourse on ethnology, or craniology. Some were

from the centre of wildest Africa, not long come under the dominion of Britain. Of one of them, a king whose blackness of skin was beyond belief, I was told an anecdote. Just after his arrival in London, he had been driving out with the nobleman to whose tutelage he had been trusted. In one of the suburban squares a toxophilite society was meeting. The king stopped the carriage and turning to his companion said:

“Bows and arrows here in the heart of London! And I assure you that for more than a year I have prohibited them in my dominions.”

The Premiers of all the great Colonies were present, and a host of lesser representatives of King Edward’s dominions. Also a vast number of peers and peeresses and other representatives of the nation—statesmen, ecclesiastics, soldiers, authors, artists, men of science and commerce.

The most gorgeous of all the guests were of course the Indian Princes. Each was dressed in the fullest dress of his nationality, state and creed. The amount of jewels they wore, cut and uncut, was perfectly astonishing.

It was very hard to keep Irving in the spot which he had chosen for himself; for as the great crowd streamed in on three sides he kept shifting a little every moment to greet some old friend, and had to be brought back to the point where he could meet all. In 216 such cases he was always amenable to a delightful degree. Seeing the difficulty to himself he asked me to get two or three important friends to stand with him. He named Lord Aberdeen and the late Right Hon. Richard Seddon, the Premier of New Zealand. These came and stood with him, and the nucleus protected him from movement.

Lord Aberdeen was an old friend and had, when he was Governor-General of Canada, shown Irving the most conspicuous courtesy. I remember well the evening when we were leaving Toronto for Montreal after the *matinée*, February 21, 1894. We had got into the train and the workmen were loading up the scenery and luggage when there was a great clatter of horsemen coming at the gallop; and up rode the Governor-General with his escort. His courtesy to the distinguished guest was very pleasing to the warm-hearted Canadians.

Irving had met “Dick” Seddon five years before at the great party which Lord Northcliff—then Mr. Alfred Harmsworth—had given in his new house in Berkeley Square on the night before the Diamond Jubilee—June 21, 1897. When Irving and I arrived we followed immediately after the Colonial Premiers—I think there were eight of them—who had that day received the honour of Privy Councillorship and wore their Court dress. Mr. Seddon asked to be introduced to Irving, and at once took him away

to the corner of a room where they could talk freely. I was afterwards told that when he had gone to the Opera in Covent Garden a few days before—where with his family he was given the Royal box—he asked when the opera had gone on for a good while:

“But where is Irving? He is the man I want to see most!”

That Coronation reception was certainly a most magnificent sight. Many who were at both functions said that it was even finer than the reception at the India Office, which was a spectacle to remember. But of course the theatre had an advantage in shape and its rising tiers. When one entered at the back of the stage the *coup d’œil* was magnificent. The place looked of vast size; the many lights and the red seats of the tiers making for infinite distance as they gleamed through the banks of foliage. The great Crown and Union Jack seeming to flame over all; the moving mass of men and women, nearly all the men in gorgeous raiment, in uniform or Court dress, the women all brilliantly dressed and flashing with gems; with here and there many of the Ranees and others of various nationalities in their beautiful robes. Everywhere 217 ribbons and orders, each of which meant some lofty distinction of some kind. Everywhere a sense of the unity and the glory of Empire. Dominating it all, as though it was floating on light and sound and form and colour, the thrilling sense that there, in all its bewildering myriad beauty, was the spirit mastering the heart-beat of that great Empire on which the sun never sets.

That night was the swan-song of the old Lyceum, and was a fitting one; for such a wonderful spectacle none of our generation shall ever see again. As a function it crowned Irving’s reign as Master and Host.

Two weeks later the old Lyceum as a dramatic theatre closed its doors—for ever.

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XXXVII

THE VOICE OF ENGLAND

In August 1880, Irving and I went on a short holiday to the Isle of Wight, where later Loveday joined us. One evening at Shanklin we went out for a stroll after dinner. It was late when we returned; but the night was so lovely that we sat for a while under a big tree at the entrance to the Chine. It was a dark night and under the tree it was inky black; only the red tips of our cigars were to be seen. Those were early days in the Home Rule movement, and as I was a believer in it Irving was always chaffing me about it. It was not that he had any politics himself—certainly in a party sense; the nearest point to politics he ever got, so far as I know, was when he accepted his election to the Reform Club. But he loved to “draw out” any one about anything, and

would at times go quite a long way about to do it. We had been talking Home Rule and he had, of course for his purpose, taken the violently opposite side to me. Presently we heard the slow, regular, heavy tramp of a policeman coming down the road; there is no mistaking the sound to any one who has ever lived in a city. Irving turned to me—I could tell the movement by his cigar—and said with an affected intensity which I had come to identify and understand:

“How calm and silent all this is! Very different, my boy, from the hideous strife of politics. It ought to be a lesson to you! Here in this quiet place, away from the roar of cities and on the very edge of the peaceful sea, there is opportunity for thought! You will not find here men galling their tempers and shortening their lives by bitter thoughts and violent deeds. Believe me, here in rural England is to be found the true inwardness of British opinion!”

I said nothing; I knew the game. Then the heavy, placid step drew closer. Irving went on:

“Here comes the Voice of England. Just listen to it and learn!” Then in a cheery, friendly voice he said to the invisible policeman:

“Tell me, officer, what is your opinion as to this trouble in 219Ireland?” The answer came at once, stern and full of pent-up feeling, and in an accent there was no possibility of mistaking:

“Ah, begob, it’s all the fault iv the dirty Gover’mint!” His brogue might have been cut with a hatchet. From his later conversation—for of course after that little utterance Irving led him on—one might have thought that the actor was an ardent and remorseless rebel. I came to the conclusion that Home Rule was of little moment to that guardian of the law; he was an out and out Fenian.

For many a day afterwards I managed to bring in the “Voice of England” whenever Irving began to chaff about Home Rule.

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XXXVIII

RIVAL TOWNS

In the course of our tour in the Far West of America in 1893–4 we had an experience which Irving now and again told with great enjoyment to his friends. From San Francisco we went to Tacoma and Seattle, two towns on Puget Sound between which is a mighty rivalry. In Seattle we were walking along the main street when we saw a crowd outside the window of a drug store and went over to see the cause. The whole

window-space was cleared and covered with sheets of white paper. In the centre, raised on a little platform, was an immense Tropical American horned beetle quite three inches from feelers to tail. Behind it was propped a huge card on which was printed in ink with a brush in large letters:

“ORDINARY BED-BUG CAPTURED IN TACOMA.”

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XXXIX

TWO STORIES

I

Naturally the form of humour that appealed most to Irving was that based on human character. This feeling he shared with Tennyson—indeed with all in whom a deep knowledge of the “essential difference” of character is a necessity of their art. Perhaps the two following stories, of which he was exceedingly fond, will illustrate the bent of his mind. The first, having heard from some one else, he told me; the second I told him. I have heard him tell them both several times in his own peculiar way.

II

An English excursionist was up near Balmoral in the later days of Queen Victoria. The day being hot, he went into a cottage to get a glass of water. He sat mopping his forehead, whilst the guidwife was polishing the glass and getting fresh water from the well. He commenced to talk cheerfully:

“So the Queen is a neighbour of yours!”

“Ooh, aye!”

“And she is quite neighbourly, isn’t she? And comes to visit you here in your own cottages?”

“Ooh, aye! She’s weel eneuch!”

“And she asks you to tea sometimes at Balmoral?”

“Ooh, aye! She’s nae that bad!” The tourist was rather struck with the want of enthusiasm shown and ventured to comment on it inquiringly:

“Look here, ma’am; you don’t seem very satisfied with Her Majesty! May I ask you why?”

“Weel, I’ll tell ye if ye wish. The fac’ is we don’t leik the gangin’s on at the Caastle.”

222“Oh, indeed, ma’am! How is that? What is it that displeases you?”

“We don’t leik the way they keep—or don’t keep—the Sawbath. Goin’ oot in bo-ats an’ rowin’ on the Sawbath day!” The tourist tried to appease her and suggested:

“Oh, well! after all, ma’am, you know there is a precedent for that. You remember Our Lord, too, went out on the Sabbath——” She interrupted him:

“Ooh, aye! I ken it weel eneuch. Ye canna’ tell me aught aboot Hem that I dinna ken a’ready. An’ I can tell ye this: we don’t think any moor o’ Hem for it either!”

III

There was a funeral in Dublin of a young married woman. The undertaker, after the wont of his craft, was arranging the whole affair according to the completest local rules of mortuary etiquette. He bustled up to the widower saying:

“You, sir, will of course go in the carriage with the mother of the deceased.”

“What! Me go in the carriage with my mother-in-law! Not likely!”

“Oh, sir, but I assure you it is necessary. The rule is an inviolable one, established by precedents beyond all cavil!” expostulated the horrified undertaker. But the widower was obdurate.

“I won’t go. That’s flat!”

“Oh, but, my good sir, remember the gravity of the occasion—the publicity—the—the—possibility—scandal.” His voice faded into a gasp. The widower stuck to his resolution and so the undertaker laid the matter before some of his intimate friends who were waiting instructions. They surrounded the chief mourner and began to remonstrate with him:

“You really must, old chap; it is necessary.”

“I’ll not! Go with me mother-in-law!—Rot!”

“But look here, old chap——”

“I’ll not I tell ye—I’ll go in any other carriage that ye wish; but not in that.”

“Oh, of course, if ye won’t, ye won’t. But remember it beforehand that afterwards when it’ll be thrown up against ye, that it’ll 223be construed into an affront on the poor girl that’s gone. Ye loved her, Jack, we all know, an’ ye wouldn’t like *that!*”

This argument prevailed. He signed to the undertaker and began to pull on his black gloves. As he began to move towards the carriage he turned to his friends and said in a low voice:

“I’m doin’ it because ye say I ought to, and for the poor girl that’s gone. But ye’ll spoil me day!”

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XL

SIR RICHARD BURTON

I

When in the early morning of August 13, 1878, Irving arrived at Dublin, on his way to Belfast to give a Reading for the Samaritan Hospital, I met him at Westland Row Station. He had arranged to stay for a couple of days with my brother before going north. When the train drew up, hastening to greet him I entered the carriage. There were two other people in the compartment, a lady and a gentleman. When we had shaken hands, Irving said to his *compagnons de voyage*:

“Oh, let me introduce my friend Bram Stoker!” They both shook hands with me very cordially. I could not but be struck by the strangers. The lady was a big, handsome blonde woman, clever-looking and capable. But the man riveted my attention. He was dark, and forceful, and masterful, and ruthless. I have never seen so iron a countenance. I did not have much time to analyse the face; the bustle of arrival prevented that. But an instant was enough to make up my mind about him. We separated in the carriage after cordial wishes that we might meet again. When we were on the platform, I asked Irving:

“Who is that man?”

“Why,” he said, “I thought I introduced you!”

“So you did, but you did not mention the names of the others!” He looked at me for an instant and said inquiringly as though something had struck him:

“Tell me, why do you want to know?”

“Because,” I answered, “I never saw any one like him. He is steel! He would go through you like a sword!”

“You are right!” he said. “But I thought you knew him. That is Burton—Captain Burton who went to Mecca!”

The Burtons were then paying a short visit to Lord Talbot de Malahide. After Irving went back to London, I was very busy and did not ever come across either of them. That autumn I joined Irving and went to live in London.

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II

In January of next year, 1879, I met the Burtons again. They had come to London for a holiday.

The first meeting I had then with Burton was at supper with Irving in the Green Room Club—these were occasional suppers where a sort of smoking-concert followed the removal of the dishes. I sat between Burton and James Knowles, who was also Irving's guest. It was a great pleasure to me to meet Burton familiarly, for I had been hearing about him and his wonderful exploits as long as I could remember. He talked very freely and very frankly about all sorts of things, but that night there was nothing on the *tapis* of an exceptionally interesting nature.

That night, by the way, I heard Irving recite *The Captive* for the first time. He also did *Gemini and Virgo*; but that I had heard him do in Trinity College, Dublin.

The Burtons remained in London till the end of February, in which month we met at supper several times. The first supper was at Irving's rooms in Grafton Street, on the night of Saturday, February 8, the other member of the party being Mr. Aubertin. The subdued light and the quietude gave me a better opportunity of studying Burton's face; in addition to the fact that this time I sat opposite to him and not beside him. The predominant characteristics were the darkness of the face—the desert burning; the strong mouth and nose, and jaw and forehead—the latter somewhat bold—and the strong, deep, resonant voice. My first impression of the man as of steel was consolidated and enhanced. He told us, amongst other things, of the work he had in hand. Three great books were partially done. The translation of the *Arabian Nights*, the metrical translation of Camoëns, and the *Book of the Sword*. These were all works of vast magnitude and requiring endless research. But he lived to complete them all.

Our next meeting was just a week later, Saturday, February 15. This time Mr. Aubertin was host and there was a new member of the party, Lord Houghton, whom I then met for the first time. I remembered that amongst other good things which we had that night was some exceedingly fine old white port, to which I think we all did justice—in a decorous way. The talk that evening kept on three subjects: fencing, the life of Lord Byron, and Shakespeare. Burton was an expert and an authority on all connected with the 226sword; Lord Houghton was then the only man living—I think that Trelawny, who

had been the only other within years, had just died—who knew Byron in his youth, so that the subject was at once an interesting one. They all knew and had ideas of Shakespeare and there was no lack of variety of opinion. Amongst other things, Burton told us that night of his life on the West Coast of Africa—“the Gold Coast”—where he was Consul and where he kept himself alive and in good health for a whole year by never going out in the midday sun if he could help it, and by drinking a whole flask of brandy every day! He also spoke of his life in South America and of the endurance based on self-control which it required.

The third supper was one given on February 21, at Bailey’s Hotel, South Kensington, by Mr. Mullen the publisher. Arthur Sketchley was this time added to the party. The occasion was to celebrate the birthday of Mrs. Burton’s book of travel, *A.E.I.* (Arabia, Egypt, India), a big book of some five hundred pages. We were each presented with a copy laid before us on the table. I sat between Lord Houghton and Burton. They were old friends—had been since boyhood. Each called the other Richard. Houghton, be it remembered, was Richard Monckton Milnes before he got his peerage in 1863. The conversation was very interesting especially when Burton was mentioning experiences, or expounding some matters of his knowledge, or giving grounds for some theory which he held. The following fragment of conversation will explain something of his intellectual attitude:

Burton had been mentioning some of his explorations amongst old tombs and Houghton asked him if he knew the tomb of Moses. He replied that he did not know it though of course he knew its whereabouts.

“It must be found if sought for within a few years!” he added. “We know that he was buried at Shekem.” (I do not vouch for names or details—such do not matter here. I take it that Burton knew his subject and was correct in what he did say.) “The valley is narrow, and only at one side and in one place would a tomb be possible. It wouldn’t take long to explore that entire place if one went at it earnestly.” Again Houghton asked him:

“Do you know exactly where any of the Patriarchs are buried?”

“Not exactly! But I could come near some of them.”

“Do you think you could undertake to find any one of them?” 227 Burton answered slowly and thoughtfully—to this day I can seem to hear the deep vibration of his voice:

“Well, of course I am not quite certain; and I should not like to promise anything in a matter which is, and must be, purely problematical. But I think—yes! I think I could put

my hand on Joseph!" As he stopped there and did not seem as though he was going to enlarge on the subject, I said quietly as though to myself:

"There's nothing new or odd in that!" Burton turned to me quickly:

"Do you know of any one attempting it? Has it been tried before? Do you know the explorer?"

"Yes!" I said, feeling that I was in for it, "but only by name. I cannot claim a personal acquaintance."

"Who was it?"—this spoken eagerly.

"Mrs. Potiphar!"

The two cynics laughed heartily. The laughter of each was very characteristic. Lord Houghton's face broadened as though he had suddenly grown fatter. On the other hand Burton's face seemed to lengthen when he laughed; the upper lip rising instinctively and showing the right canine tooth. This was always a characteristic of his enjoyment. As he loved fighting, I can fancy that in the midst of such stress it would be even more marked than under more peaceful conditions.

The last time we met Captain Burton during that visit was on the next night, February 22, 1879, at supper with Mrs. Burton's sister, Mrs. Van Tellen.

He was going back almost immediately to Trieste, of which he held the consulship. In those days this consulship was a pleasant sinecure—an easy berth with a fairly good salary. It was looked on as a resting-place for men of letters. Charles Lever held it before Burton. In the old days of Austrian domination Trieste was an important place and the consulship a valuable one. But its commercial prosperity began to wane after the cry *Italia irredenta* had been efficacious. The only thing of importance regarding the office that remained was the salary.

III

Six years elapsed before we met again. This was on June 27, 1885. The Burtons had just come to London and had asked Irving and me to take supper with them at the Café Royal after the play, *Olivia*. That night was something of a disappointment. All of our little *partie carrée* had made up our minds for a long and interesting—and thus an enjoyable—evening.

Chiefest amongst the things which Irving was longing to hear him speak of was that of the death of Edmund Henry Palmer three years earlier. Palmer had been a friend of Irving's long before, the two men having been made known to each other by Palmer's

cousin, Edward Russell, then in Irving's service. When Arabi's revolt broke out in Egypt, Palmer was sent by the British Government on a special service to gather the friendly tribes and persuade them to protect the Canal. This, by extraordinary daring and with heroic devotion, he accomplished; but he was slain treacherously by some marauders. Burton was then sent out to bring back his body and to mete out justice to the murderers—so far as such could be done.

Just before that time Burton had in hand a work from which he expected to win great fortune both for himself and his employer, the Khedive. This was to re-open the old Midian gold mines. He had long before, with endless research, discovered their locality, which had been lost and forgotten. He had been already organising an expedition, and I had asked him to take with him my younger brother George, who wished for further adventure. He had met my suggestion very favourably, and having examined my brother's record was keen on his joining him. He wanted a doctor for his party; and a doctor who was adventurous and skilled in resource at once appealed to him. Arabi's revolt postponed such an undertaking; in Burton's case the postponement was for ever.

Our new civic brooms had been at work in London and new ordinances had been established. Punctually at midnight we were inexorably turned out. Protests, cajoleries, or bribes were of no avail. Out we had to go! I had a sort of feeling that Burton's annoyance was only restrained from adequate expression by his sense of humour. He certainly could be "adequate"—and in many languages which naturally lend themselves to invective—when he laid himself out for it. The Fates were more propitious a few months later, when Irving had a supper at the Continental Hotel, on July 30—the last night of the season and Benefit of Ellen Terry. By this time we understood the licensing law and knew what to do. Irving took a bed at the hotel and his guests were allowed to remain; this was the merit of a hotel as distinguished from a restaurant. There was plenty of material for pleasant talk in addition to Captain and Mrs. Burton, for amongst the guests was James McHenry, J. L. Toole, Beatty Kingston (the war correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*), Willie Winter, Mr. Marquand of New York, and Richard Mansfield. All was very pleasant, but there was not the charm of personal reminiscence, which could not be in so large a gathering.

IV

The following year, 1886, however, whilst the Burtons were again in London, we had two other delightful meetings. On July 9, 1886, Irving had Sir Richard and Lady Burton—he had been knighted in the meantime—to supper in the Beefsteak Room

after the play, *Faust*. This was another *partie carrée*; just Sir Richard and Lady Burton, Irving and myself. That night we talked of many things, chiefly of home interest. Burton was looking forward to his retirement and was anxious that there should not be any hitch. He knew well that there were many hands against him and that if opportunity served he would not be spared. There were passages in his life which set many people against him. I remember when a lad hearing of how at a London dinner-party he told of his journey to Mecca. It was a wonderful feat, for he had to pass as a Muhammedan; the slightest breach of the multitudinous observances of that creed would call attention, and suspicion at such a time and place would be instant death. In a moment of forgetfulness, or rather inattention, he made some small breach of rule. He saw that a lad had noticed him and was quietly stealing away. He faced the situation at once, and coming after the lad in such a way as not to arouse his suspicion suddenly stuck his knife into his heart. When at the dinner he told this, some got up from the table and left the room. It was never forgotten. I asked him once about the circumstance—not the dinner-party, but the killing. He said it was quite true, and that it had never troubled him from that day to the moment at which he was speaking. Said he:

“The desert has its own laws, and there—supremely of all the East—to kill a man is a small offence. In any case what could I do? It had to be his life or mine!”

As he spoke the upper lip rose and his canine tooth showed its full length like the gleam of a dagger. Then he went on to say that such explorations as he had undertaken were not to be entered lightly if one had qualms as to taking life. That the explorer in savage places holds, day and night, his life in his hand; and if he is not prepared for every emergency, he should not attempt such adventures.

Though he had no fear in the ordinary sense of the word, he was afraid that if any attack were made on him *apropos* of this it might militate against his getting the pension for which he was then looking and on which he largely depended. We spoke of the matter quite freely that evening. At that time he was not well off. For years he had lived on his earnings and had not been able to put by much. The *Arabian Nights* brought out the year before, 1885, produced ten thousand pounds. There were only a thousand copies issued at a cost of ten guineas each. The entire edition was subscribed, the amounts being paid in full and direct to Coutts and Co., so that there were no fees or discounts. The only charge against the receipts was that of manufacturing the book. This could not have amounted to any considerable sum, for the paper was poor, the ink inferior, and the binding cheap. Burton had then in hand another set of five volumes of *Persian Tales* to be subscribed in the same way. Neither of the sets of books were “published” in the literal way. The issue was absolutely a

private one. All Burton's friends, myself included, thought it necessary to subscribe. Irving had two sets. The net profits of these fifteen volumes could hardly have exceeded thirteen thousand pounds.

V

Our next meeting was on September 18, 1886, when we were all Irving's guests at the Continental once again—another *partie carrée*.

On this occasion the conversation was chiefly of plays. Both Sir Richard and Lady Burton impressed on Irving how much might be done with a play taken from some story, or group of stories, in the *Arabian Nights*. Burton had a most vivid way of putting things—especially of the East. He had both a fine imaginative power and a memory richly stored not only from study but from personal experience. As he talked, fancy seemed to run riot in its alluring power; and the whole world of thought seemed to flame with gorgeous colour. Burton *knew* the East. Its brilliant dawns and sunsets; its rich tropic vegetation, and its arid fiery deserts; its 231 cool, dark mosques and temples; its crowded bazaars; its narrow streets; its windows guarded for out-looking and from in-looking eyes; the pride and swagger of its passionate men, and the mysteries of its veiled women; its romances; its beauty; its horrors. Irving grew fired as the night wore on and it became evident that he had it in his mind from that time to produce some such play as the Burtons suggested, should occasion serve. It was probably the recollection of that night that brought back to him, so closely as to be an incentive to possibility, his own glimpse of the East as seen in Morocco and the Levant seven years before. When De Bornier published his *Mahomet* in Paris some few years later he was in the receptive mood to consider it as a production.

I asked Lady Burton to get me a picture of her husband. She said he had a rooted dislike to letting any one have his picture, but said she would ask him. Presently she sent me one, and with it a kindly word: "Dick said he would give it you, because it was you; but that he wouldn't have given it to any one else!"

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XLI

SIR HENRY MORTON STANLEY

I

On October 22, 1882, Irving gave a little dinner to H. M. Stanley in the small private dining-room of the Garrick Club. The other guests were George Augustus Sala, Edmund Yates, Col. E. A. Buck of New York, Mr. Bigelow (then British agent of the U.S.

Treasury), H. D. Traill, Clement Scott, Joseph Hatton, T. H. S. Escott, Frank C. Burnand, W. A. Burdett-Coutts, J. L. Toole, and myself—fourteen in all.

The time was after Stanley had made his expedition in Africa, which he afterwards chronicled under the name of *Through the Dark Continent*, and had gone out again to explore the region of the Congo for the Brussels African International Association. He had returned for a short visit to Brussels and London. He had been much in Belgium in consultation with the King regarding the foundation of the Congo Free State. Every one present was anxious to hear what he had to say; and Irving, who, when he chose, was most excellent in drawing any one out, took care that he had a good leading. Indeed it was a notable evening, for we sat there after dinner till four o'clock in the morning and for most of the time he held the floor. He was always interesting and at times kept us all enthralled. He had a peculiar manner, though less marked then than it became in later years. He was slow and deliberate of speech; the habit of watchful self-control seemed even then to have eaten into the very marrow of his bones. His dark face, through which the eyes seemed by contrast to shine like jewels, emphasised his slow speech and measured accents. His eyes were comprehensive, and, in a quiet way, without appearing to rove, took in everything. He seemed to have that faculty of sight which my father had described to me of Robert Houdin, the great conjurer. At a single glance Stanley took in everything, received facts and assimilated them, gauged character in its height, and breadth, and depth, and specific gravity; formed opinion so quickly and so unerringly to the full extent of his capacity that intention based on what he saw seemed not to follow receptivity but to go hand in hand with it. Let me give an instance:

At least two of those present did not seem prepared to accept his statements in simple faith. Of course not a word was said by either to jar the harmony of the occasion or to convey doubt. But doubt at least there was; one felt it without evidence. I knew both men well and felt that it was only the consistent expression of their attitude towards the unknown. Both, so far as I knew—or know now—were strangers to him, though of course their names were familiar. I knew from Irving's glance at me where I sat across the table from him that he understood. Irving and I were so much together that after a few years we could almost read a thought of the other; we could certainly read a glance or an expression. I have sometimes seen the same capacity in a husband and wife who have lived together for long and who are good friends, accustomed to work together and to understand each other. He had a quiet sardonic humour, and this combined with an intuitive faculty of reasoning out *data* before their issue was declared—together with his glance to my right where the two men sat—seemed to say:

“Look at Yates and Burnand. Stanley will be on to them presently!”

And surely enough he was on to them, and in a remarkable way. He was describing some meeting with the King of the Belgians regarding the finances of the new State, and how of those present a small section of the financiers were making negative difficulties. The way he spoke was thus:

“Amongst them two ‘doubting Thomases’—as it might be you and you”—making as he spoke a casual wave of his hand without looking at either, as though choosing at random; but so manifestly meaning it that all the other men laughed in an instantaneous chorus.

Somehow that seemed to clear the air for him; and having established a position which was manifestly accepted by all, he went on to speak more earnestly.

I shall never forget that description which he gave us of the reaching that furthest point on Lake Leopold II. that white men had ever reached. He wrote of it all afterwards in his book on the Congo, though the incident which he then described differed slightly from the account in his book produced three years afterwards. No written words could convey the picturesque convincing force of that quiet utterance, with the searching still eyes to add to its power. How as the little steamer drew in shore the natives had rushed in clustering masses ready to do battle. How one nimble giant had leaped far out on an isolated rock that just showed its top above the still water, and poised thereon for an instant had hurled a spear with such force and skill that it passed the limit they had fixed as the furthest that a missile could reach them and where they held the boat in safety. How he himself had peremptorily checked in a whisper one beside him who was preparing to shoot, and he himself took a gun and fired high in the air just to show the savages that he too had power and greater power than their own should they choose to use it. How, awed by the sound and by the steamer, the natives made signs of obeisance, whereupon he brought the boat close to the rock whence the warrior had launched his spear and laid thereon offerings of beads and coloured stuffs and implements of steel, saying as he prepared to move away:

“We shall come again!”

Then he told of the wonder of the savages; their reverence; their complete submission! How the canoe moved away in that glory of wonder which would in time grow to a legend, and then to a belief that some day white Gods who brought gifts would come to them bringing unknown good.

It was an idyll of peace; a lesson in beneficent pioneering; a page of the great book of England's wise kindness in the civilisation of the savage which has yet been written but in part. We all sat spell-bound. There was no "doubting Thomas" then. I think, one and all, we held high regard and affection for the man who spoke.

Then encouraged by the reception of his words—and after all it was a noble audience, in kind if not in quantity, for any man to speak to—he went on at Irving's request to re-tell to us the story of his finding Livingstone. Here he did not object to any direct questioning, even when one man asked him if the report was exact of his taking off his helmet and bowing when he met the lost explorer with the memorable address:

"Dr. Livingstone, I believe?"

He laughed quietly as he answered affirmatively—a strange thing to see in that dark, still face, where toil and danger and 235 horror had set their seals. But it seemed to light up the man from within and show a new and quite different side to his character.

Somehow there is, I suppose—indeed must be—some subtle emanation from both character and experience. The propulsive power of the individuality takes something from the storage of the mind. Certainly some persons who have been down in deep waters of any kind convey to those who see or hear them something of the dominating note of their experience. Stanley had not only the traveller's look—the explorer's look; he seemed one whose goings had been under shadow. It may of course have been that the dark face and the still eyes and that irregular white of the hair which speaks of premature stress on vitality conveyed by inference their own lesson; but most assuredly Henry Stanley had a look of the forest gloom as marked as Dante's contemporaries described of him: that of one who had traversed Heaven and Hell.

After a long time we broke up the set formation of the dinner table, and one by one in informal turn we each had a chat with the great explorer. He told us that he wanted some strong, brave, young men to go with him to Africa, and offered to accept any one whom I could recommend.

II

The next year, on September 14, we met again when Irving had a large dinner-party—sixty-four people—at the Continental Hotel. Of course in so large a party there was little opportunity of general conversation. All that any one—except a very favoured few who sat close at hand—could speak or hear was of the commonplace of life—parting and meeting.

I did not meet Stanley again for six years, but Irving met him several times, and at one of their meetings there was a little matter which gave me much pleasure:

When we had gone to America in 1883 I had found myself so absolutely ignorant of everything regarding that great country that I took some pains to post myself up in things exclusively and characteristically American. Our tour of 1883–4 was followed by another in 1884–5, so that in the space of more than a year which the two visits covered I had fine opportunities of study. In those days Professor James Bryce's book on *The American Commonwealth* had not been written—published at all events. And there was no standard source from which an absolutely ignorant stranger could draw information. I found some difficulty then in buying a copy of an Act of Congress so that I might study its form; and it was many months before I could get a copy of the Sessional Orders of Congress. However, before we left at the conclusion of our second visit I had accumulated a lot of books—histories, works on the constitution, statistics, census, school books, books of etiquette for a number of years back, Congressional reports on various subjects—all the means of reference and of more elaborate study. When I had studied sufficiently—having all through the tour consulted all sorts of persons—professors, statesmen, bankers, &c.—I wrote a lecture, which I gave at the Birkbeck Institute in 1885 and elsewhere. This I published as a pamphlet in 1886, as *A Glimpse of America*. Stanley had evidently got hold of it, for one night when we were in Manchester, June 4, 1890, I had supper alone with Irving and he told me that the last time he had met him, Stanley had mentioned my little book on America as admirable. He had said that I had mistaken my vocation—that I should be a literary man! Of course such praise from such a man gave me a great pleasure.

Strangely enough I had a ratification of this a year later. On March 30, 1891, I met at luncheon, in the house of the Duchess of St. Albans, Dr. Parke, who had been with Stanley on his journey *In Darkest Africa*; I had met him before at Edward Marston's dinner, but we had not had much opportunity of talking together. He told me that it was one of the very few books that Stanley had brought with him in his perilous journey across Africa, and that he had told him that it “had in it more information about America than any other book that had ever been written.”

III

The dinner given to Stanley by Edward Marston, the publisher, on the eve of bringing out Stanley's great book, *In Darkest Africa*—June 26, 1890—was a memorable affair. Marston had then published two books of mine, *Under the Sunset*, and the little book on America, and as “one of his authors” I was a guest at the dinner. Irving was asked,

but he could not go as he was then out of town on a short holiday, previous to commencing an engagement of two weeks at the Grand Theatre, Islington, whilst the Lyceum was occupied by Mr. Augustin Daly's company from New York. At the dinner I sat at an inside corner close to Sir Harry (then Mr.) Johnston, the explorer and administrator, and to Paul B. du Chaillu, the African explorer who had discovered gorillas. I had met both these gentlemen before; the first in London several times; the latter in New York, in December 1884, in the house of Mr. and Mrs. Tailer, who that night were entertaining Irving and Ellen Terry. There we had sat together at supper and he had told me much of his African experience and of his adventures with gorillas. I had of course read his books, but it was interesting to hear the stories under the magic of the adventurer's own voice and in his characteristic semi-French intonation. In the course of conversation he had said to me something which I never have forgotten—it spoke volumes:

“When I was young nothing would keep me out of Africa. Now nothing would make me go there!”

In reply to the toast of his health, Stanley spoke well and said some very interesting things:

“In my book that is coming out I have said as little as possible about Emin Pasha. He was to me a study of character. I never met the same kind of character.” Again:

“I have not gone into details of the forest march and return to the sea. It was too dreary and too horrible. It will require years of time to be able to think of its picturesque side.”

At that time Stanley looked dreadfully worn, and much older than when I had seen him last. The six years had more than their tally of wear for him, and had multiplied themselves. He was darker of skin than ever; and this was emphasised by the whitening of his hair. He was then under fifty years of age, but he looked nearer to eighty than fifty. His face had become more set and drawn—had more of that look of slight distortion which comes with suffering and over-long anxiety.

There were times when he looked more like a dead man than a living one. Truly the wilderness had revenged upon him the exposure of its mysteries.