My Memoirs

Sir Frank Benson

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Sir Frank Benson

My Memoirs

by

Sir Frank Benson
D.L., Croix de Guerre

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DEDICATION

Would-be writers like myself generally add to their crime by dedicating their efforts to their innocent friends: in order to complete my villainy I dedicate this screed to my boys and girls, the Bensonians, for many years the loyalest, kindest comrades in work and play that any man could hope to have; to the profession to which I am proud to belong, with specially grateful thoughts of Ellen Terry and George Alexander—who were in a sense my godparents when I started at the Lyceum—of my wife, and of my friend and sometime partner, Otho Stuart; to the audiences from whose sympathy, support, contempt, indifference, anger, patient tolerance or enthusiastic applause I have derived invaluable lessons. Such a list would include too many to enumerate, and I am aware that in these pages I have omitted many outstanding benefactors. The debts I owe are too heavy to set down or attempt adequately to acknowledge. Many of these personalities are so interesting that it would have been a pleasanter task to have attempted to portray them rather than indulge in these egotistical ramblings of a thought-choked pen. I have to acknowledge my indebtedness to the kind courtesy of Mr John Murray, Mr Lewis Melville, Mr Keon Hughes, and my long-suffering publishers, Messrs Ernest Benn, Limited.

I might possibly, may perhaps still, tell a more interesting story of journeys in America and Africa, stories of the Western Front in the Great War, and various changing fortunes by fire and flood, the story of undertakings with my friends Mr Arthur Phillips and Mr Gerald Lawrence, but I have taken the advice of my publishers and contented myself with trying to draw a picture of stage-life and stage-artistry as I have known them for fifty years. It is true that many of the old theatres administered by actor-managers with special companies, specific purpose and ideals, and a permanent clientele, have, to a certain extent, temporarily disappeared. The signs of the times lead one to believe that the older system has already commenced to return, so that when one is asked, "Is all well with the Stage?" one gives an answer full of hope as to the future outlook of drama. One counters the questioner with: "Of what human activity can it ever be said that all is well?" It is sufficient to believe that while our people remain of the same virile fibre that they have hitherto maintained, the theatre will reflect their spirit in a continuous progress towards the Best.

Whatever be the shortcomings of this screed, in time the winds will dry the ink, the sun will dim the writing and the rains of heaven blot out all offence, and so I lay my scroll on a humble altar of green turves pied with daisies in a

distant downland near a clear chalk-stream, like to a leaf that, whether brown or green, at one time carried by the wind, at another resting on the bosom of Mother Earth, somehow, however humbly—perhaps only for a second—catches a vibration from the spirit of Universal Life that radiates through land and sea, through sun and moon and stars.

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CHAPTER I

CHILDHOOD

My experiences, on the stage and off, cover a considerable and interesting period of English history, stretching as they do from 1880 until to-day.

Those experiences, as hereinafter set down, may possibly help the reader to while away an idle hour.

The Bensons come of an old Viking family in the North of England. They claim distant cousinly connection with such representative strains as Stewart, Bruce, Cromwell, Gordon, Lloyd, Wilson, Rathbone, Forster, Dockray, Braithwaite, etc. The original Scandinavian pirate, apparently about the time of Hereward the Wake, flourished as a Jarl, of some importance and large landed property, in the East Riding of Yorkshire.

The only one of his successors to attain eminence was a poacher of the Norman king's deer. For piratical invasions of Henry I.'s forest he was promoted by that monarch to an exalted position above his fellows, on a gallows-tree near Whitby, in his own district of Ruywaerp.

His descendants took the hint, and for many generations dwelt in discreet obscurity, occupied for the most part with the cultivation of land round Bramham Moor and the neighbourhood, though now and again we find a Benson blossoming out as a Dean, or a Member of Parliament, or a Diplomat. Much of that holding has now passed into the hands of the Lane-Fox family, one of whom married the daughter and sole heiress of Robert Benson, Lord Bingley. About A.D. 1500 they migrated to the Ulverstone district, and began, in addition to farming, to bestir themselves in trade and commerce, filling also occasionally useful, if not illustrious, positions in the public service, military and civil. In the early part of last century we find them engaged in the cotton industry and railway development of England and America. They were, in conjunction with James Cropper, the first to carry cotton in steamships across the Atlantic to Liverpool. Though our records and traditions for two centuries were interwoven with the family histories of most of the prominent Quakers of England, I am especially proud of my descent from the aforementioned poacher who was hung, of the ancestor who helped one William Wordsworth to build a Roman Catholic Chapel in the Lake District, and of the athletic records of the family in every kind of sport.

I have had many divergent sympathies or inherited memories: I have spread myself in so many directions—"sprawled so much over my work," as my tutor told me—that I have been something of a conundrum to myself and my friends. At one moment a skald of the Sagas, at the next an Oxford student, an athlete contending with professionals, a rough-rider, or an amateur soldier, I became at length that chameleon personality, an actor-manager. The fact that my race counted its descent from eldest son to eldest son since the time of Stephen argues a prudent, if selfish, resolve to prosper unseen, a certain readiness to accept the conventional standards of the day, a great vitality of constitution, and a firm determination to do nothing that could possibly again attract the attention of the public executioner. In spite, however, of my traditional submissiveness to law, order and respectability, at an early age I had elevated my pirate great-grandfather to the chief position in my shrine of ancestor-worship. To this shrine I brought my offerings of sin, shortcoming and occasional success. Hereto, in the spirit, I recorded my penitence, my prayers for pardon and my oft-broken vows of amendment.

I was wont to say that my kaleidoscopic failures and lapses of faithfulness to the highest ideal were due in part to the fact that the mixtures in my blood of Viking, gleeman, Quaker, artist, wrestler, runner, yeoman, berserker, begging-friar, etc., neutralized and contradicted each other, the result being rather minus than plus. If I had been more of a fool I should have come nearer to being a wise man.

In my memory are dim recollections of my birthplace at Tunbridge Wells—of the Pantiles, and the scent of pinewoods, heather and bracken inhaled at the beautiful country home of my mother's family, Colebrook Park, in Kent.

The next impression comes from the sea at Hastings, the beach and the story of Battle; a nursemaid from whom I was always endeavouring to escape; a hill that I laboriously climbed for the sole purpose of rolling down again, at great expense to my clothes and my skin—a method of hill-climbing typical of much of our human progress.

Then came a great event for me and the three elder children—William, Margaret, Cecil—the birth of a fifth member of the nursery, Agnes.[1] No one ever entirely gets away from the idea of feminism that the little sister brings with her. Once and for all enters into the mind of the child the partnership in the great mystery of life of man and woman. At first, like other boys, I objected to my nose being put out of joint. I had to learn to give up the centre of the stage, to tread softly when I wanted to jump or run, to modulate my lung power when I wished to shout, or cry, or laugh; and if I did not conform to this necessary discipline the nurse or nursemaid shook me, and my elder brothers and sister cuffed and sat on me. This has been the comradeship of the man-pack and the wolf-pack, the discipline of the school of the woods, long before

the days of Froebel and Montessori.

Gradually, in the companionship of the sisters, some of the meaning of Eve, Astarte, Ruth, Athena, Mary and Joan, and the fashioning of the world's chivalry, stood revealed.

I next recollect being transported by a coach and four horses, for the railway had not then penetrated so far, to an upland valley in the midst of the woods, chalk lanes and turfy downs of Hampshire.

It may be true, as biologists tell us, that modern man in his short span of life lives a million years of the accumulated experience of his ancestors; that in spite of his discoveries and the wonders of modern science, in spite of the great song-words of the god-men and the heroes, he is still little more than the cave-man or the Cro-Magnon in a top-hat. So we are not surprised to find ourselves in the position of Wordsworth's child of *Immortality*, full of

> "Delight and liberty, the simple creed of childhood,
> With new fledged hope still fluttering in his breast."

Full too

> "Of obstinate questionings,
> Of sense and outward things. . . .
> Those shadowy recollections,
> Which, be they what they may,
> Are yet the fountain-light of all our day,
> Are yet a master-light of all our seeing."

Thanks to my parents, I had the opportunity, however little use I made of it, of collecting my first early blank misgivings under the happiest conditions. My father had graduated at Cambridge, eaten his dinners at the Temple, and at a comparatively early age married, with the idea of settling down and bringing up his family in the manner of a quiet English gentleman. Though this class seem to be in danger of dying out under the pressure of new conditions, new needs, new growths, the best of their traditions will never die. They are the descendants of the men who always rallied to the call of the commonweal: Armiger the centurion, with horse and lance, and sword and shield; Freemen, Statesmen, leaders and companions of the Brotherhood, the esquires of the Island race, from whose ranks have been recruited so many great captains, in close touch with the life of yeoman, shepherd, herdman and hind—all that our American cousins used to admire most in patriarchal England. Though in 1926 there were only a million workers on the land instead of the three million of a few years back, though, of course, our land tenure may change, the influence

of the country gentleman and his ideals will be the main force in the self-supporting re-establishment of “back to the land” and the garden-city. My father and mother were among those numerous landholders who laid more stress on duties than on rights and privileges. They, and those like them, have prepared the way for the reconstruction of a “Merrie England,” with increased opportunities for all in life’s great adventure.

My mother was one of the most beautiful women of her day; my father was accounted very good-looking, and though small, like his brother, was exceedingly strong and active. Years later, in a Liverpool water-polo match, I was reminded by an old attendant of how my Uncle Robert could swim three times the length of the bath under water. Quite unlike myself, my father was something of a dandy in the cut of his coat and the fashion of his hat. When in London, my parents’ well-appointed household, on the moderate but comfortable scale of the average well-to-do Englishman, the showy bay horses and smart carriage, gave that note of completeness and quality so often found in Quaker households.

Under their loving care, in the large rambling country home on the banks of a clear trout-stream flowing through the little market-town of Alresford, I assimilated the rhythms of young life—from the lake formed by the monks centuries ago, full of giant carp and pike; from meadows and lush grass-lands grazed by lowing herds; from sheep-bestudded downs rolling up towards the clear blue sky; from white Roman roads, shining in the sun, marching straight with resistless purpose to their appointed end. For the family the road led to the old British and Roman fort, the West Saxon burgh of Winchester, with its barrows, bridges, churches, red-tiled roofs, grey walls and royal tombs, its Castle and Table Round, the Buttercross, Cathedral and College, the Jacobean barrack-square and the Norman hostel of St Cross. Here in the heart of Wessex, eight miles from its ancient capital, I learned something of the real greatness of the Island story.

At an early age I became acquainted with Arthur, Egbert, Alfred, St Swithin, Dunstan, Canute, Godwin and Harold, with Garth and the monks, with Rufus, Henry and Maude, and William of Wykeham. A goodly company, they often rode with me when from the surrounding hilltops I caught the shimmer of the Solent in the sun, or viewed in blue distance the cliffs of Wight; then would my small Viking soul vibrate sympathetically with the deathless story of Nelson, or bow in silent worship before the ark of our Empire’s covenant, the good ship *Victory*. I have never got over the impression made on me on first seeing the *Victory*. I felt this also is one of our great cathedrals.

What a setting for the growth of a human soul! What a privilege! What an opportunity! Only half used, only half appreciated, at the time; but better

understood when the spirit of the shires was splendidly made manifest in the test of the Great War. Even clearer shall it stand forth when, after the catharsis by fire and by blood, the victors in that struggle shall begin to write the second volume of our Empire's annals, and shall commence the redemption of our industry from mechanical materialism and the tyranny of soulless dividend.

Early in my diary comes my first complete conception of home, visualized by a small boy of three and a half alternately dragging or being dragged round the garden on the ancestral model of a toy horse. Real horsehair, mark you! For its switch of a tail real horse hairs—where there were any; for its mane real horse hairs, left in patches on its moth-eaten carcass. Forty years before the little horse had lost an eye in father's nursery. Its four legs were groggy and its ears were incomplete, but that summer afternoon it carried two small boys into a land of limitless enchantment and adventure. Over the sweet-smelling, close-mown lawn, with the starland of the daisies at their feet, they crawled and ran and tumbled into an eternal acquaintance with flower-beds, greenhouses, copper-beech, cedar, ilex, and old-fashioned walled-in kitchen garden. They had just got as far as the iron railings with the mysterious two-flanged iron gate, which only real grown-ups could open, when they were pounced upon by an athletic young nursemaid, and carried off, protesting and struggling, to be bathed and bedded—I first, by ten minutes, being twelve months younger than Cecil, my inseparable companion in the unforgettable exploration of life's young mystery. Horse-exercise on the hairless steed and the wonders of the enchanted garden left me hardly time to meditate fretfully upon the injustice of nursery precedence before I fell asleep. In my more wakeful moments, like all youngsters, I brooded, sometimes with tears, over the tyranny of the Medes and Persians.

Why should my cot have four barriers, whereas Cecil's had only three? Certainly I, for some reason or other, was even in those days prone to fall, but I generally fell on my feet or picked myself up and went on without much damage, whatever the result may have been to my friends and neighbours. Why should I be fenced in in this insulting manner? Let the world wait till I was four, then I'd show them what was what. Surely it was a real grievance that Margaret, who was only two and a half years older, should be allowed to butter her own bread and peel her own egg; that she should have been promoted to a cup and saucer, whereas Cecil and I, especially I, had to spill our little mugs of milk on our pinafores when we failed to make a good shot at our mouths. Why? The tireless, watchful nurse from the Midlands was not a believer in "Why," and after a huge effigy of that letter had been posted on the wall by my bedside I became less outspoken in my protests.

All childish heartburnings were forgotten when the starlings and the sparrows in the eaves and the ivy woke us to the loveliness of the lilac and the

laburnum, the horse-chestnut and the maythorn, red and white and pink and yellow, faint and sweet, strong and intoxicating. Rhythms of colour, and scent of land and sea, drew us with our beloved Rosinante at an early hour to continue our great quest—the search for the Beyond. In after years, in later chapters of the quest, I was told in the sister Isle, "if I would lean my right shoulder against the mountain, grasp the mist with my left hand, keep my head upright in the clouds and tread with untired foot the rock-strewn path upwards, eventually I should arrive somewhere at the back of God-speed among the islands of the Blest."

Come that moment when it will, for a start that morning we little boys and our steed proceeded to enlarge our experience by gravel path, trim boxwood border and turfed edging down the flower walk to the farmyard. We two knight-errants passed in our triumphal progress by shrubberies and shady trees, peonies, geraniums, snapdragon, wallflower, pinks, larkspur, love-in-a-mist (or devil-in-a-bush), roses, lilies, and all the flowery wealth of May. Around us sang the thrush and the blackbird, the linnet and the lark; the greenfinch piped lazily; *pink pink*! chirruped the chaffinch; while tomtits, large and small and long-tailed, peered inquisitively at the little pioneers. We had hardly time to look at the blaze of colour, or to listen to the sons of the morning shouting for joy; the Mecca of our bold pilgrimage was the farmyard. Past the yew-trees and the red cedars and the junipers we toddled.

Delight and dismay filled our hearts when the gamecock challenged us from his perch on the big black gate, newly tarred, and alas! the latch high above our heads. With blackened nose and fingers I raised the latch as I stood on the palfrey supported by the stocky shoulders of Cecil. The gate swung open and Paradise was revealed—at least it was when the pyramid had picked itself up, for the opening of the gate had not been achieved without stains of blood, tears and tar, and apprehension of smackings in the nursery hereafter. What matter! The threshold had been won; and, in their morning glory, behold the byre, the pigsties, the cow-houses, the rickyard, the sweet-breathed kine and, wonder of wonders, two small calves! Still more interesting, though not so aromatic, were the pigsties, containing real Hampshires, obstinate, aggressive, self-assertive; the older and larger swine distinctly fierce. Were there not stories in the farmyard chronicle of their own young devoured? of the cowman being bitten? of the small child torn to pieces? It was with some relief, therefore, that we knights found the monstrous Hampshire hog responding with a friendly grunt when his back was scratched with the butt-end of our lance, a goodly hazel wand stolen from the potting-shed. Perhaps, however, 'twere more prudent sport to chase the poultry out of the melon-frames, and to be introduced to the fleas of the fowl-house by the hen-wife —"Why has that hen got the gapes?" "Lawk-a-mussy, just to aggerawate a

body, I specks. I ducked her in the cow-trough and gave her two dozen peppercorns last night, and please God she'll lay now." She didn't; she died instead, and thus made half the summer day sad for us little people, who had been introduced to a whole brood of her relations just hatched in an old top-hat placed handy near the hen-wife's oven. On that wonderful morning too we were allowed to feed the cocks and hens, and bathe our little arms in a sea of golden grain. Perhaps the thing that made us late for lunch in spite of the booming of the one-o'clock bell was the attraction of the duck-pond, and its little furry yellow and black inhabitants. Solemnly Cecil was presented with one duckling and I with another. This proprietorship, we afterwards found to our distress, was merely make-believe. Though beloved quackums were promptly called by sacred or family names, we juvenile owners were not allowed on our own initiative to sell them, or even to carry them off to bed; and though blood-brotherhood had been established, by the sacred ceremony of the chewed-off boot-button, alas! we feudal lords could raise no effectual outcry when in the course of time Elizabeth and Nebuchadnezzar were fattened and killed.

After due punishment for lateness at meals and tar on the clothes, the next days were crowded with stirring incident—haymaking: the swish of the scythe, the music of the whetstone, the rhythm of the swathe, the song of the men and the women with their forks and rakes tossing the new-mown hay to dry in the sun and summer breeze, the small wooden forks for the children, the labour of gathering a sufficient crop to make a nest or a house, or a haystack. Why should my eldest brother, aged nine, be allowed an iron fork? More injustice to the nursery, quickly forgotten in the delight of tea on a haycock.

Even when the hay had vanished from the landscape there was still some consolation in the return of the cows to the Home Park—the cry of the cowherd, "Coup, coup, come along"; the milking of Blossom, Daisy, Lily, Rose, Polly and Beauty; the long narrow path for single file from the far field, the leadership and precedence in the ranks—first Rose, then Polly—varying in favour of the last proud mother in haste to reach her calf. Then the climbing of the big beech, the excitement of a wild duck under the deodar, a wood-pigeon in the tall Scotch pine. Oh, the smell of the walnut leaves! and oh, the new-found friends! the swans on the river, the rushes and the reeds, the coots, waterhens, corncrakes, the trout and the lilies, the duckweed and the millrace, and, mystery of all mysteries, the glimpse of grinding corn! Alas, cruel fate! all efforts to become white like the miller were forestalled by my watchful nurse, who knew it was a habit of mine to get mixed up in the machinery of things.

Then came the reed harvest, long reeds, reeds with a flowery tuft at the end, used for thatching and screens from the sun and wind, but of course really designed by Providence for lances and bows and arrows in mimic warfare.

Armed with a light lance eight feet long I watched the herons as they winged their tireless, graceful flight across the meadows to the lake, or stood silent, stately sentinels till the quick, stabbing dart of a razor-like bill accounted for a minnow, a gudgeon, a roach or a frog. The Chinese geese and waterfowl from foreign lands; that fearful joy the turkey gobbler; the wonder of the robin, wren and swallow in their nests; the continual conversation of the sparrows and the starlings; the parliament of the rooks; the occasional swoop of the sparrow-hawk, carried the five little English folk on to the red-letter day called in the chronicles the "Coming of the Ponies." Henceforth, blacksmiths with bellows, tongs and pincers, hissing red-hot horseshoes, hammers and musical anvils, and saddler, coachman and groom became for the boys the pillars of society.

I had been prepared for giving Taffy a proper reception by frequent contemplation of Punch, Judy and Tommy in the carriage and the stable, and by offerings of sugar to the grey cob that my father rode. Sometimes I was permitted to ride astride her broad back in front of my father. Great, then, was the day when, accompanied by Rover, the fighting terrier, and Leo, the mastiff, I was placed carefully on the padded saddle. Not long did I stay there! Having surreptitiously smitten Taffy with a precious little apple-wand, in spite of leading-rein and gripped knee I soon found myself dislodged from my proud position, safe but disconsolate in the arms of my nurse; whilst Taffy plunged, bucking, kicking and squealing, down the carriage-drive, dragging the groom after him. Taffy had neither mouth nor manners, but he was a first-rate pony whereon to learn to ride—if he didn't break the neck of his rider.

Then came the days of the governess. Of course it was promotion to be taught with the elder children; but the adventures of the green rabbit and the black cat with pink eyes lost their savour when put before you in French. There was no reason why the learning of A B C should call forth tears and temper, but it usually did.

Reverting to the manners and customs of the Stone Age, Cecil bit my mother's watch-chain in two, while I gnawed chunks off the table. I soon discovered the truth of the Hellenic axiom that progress generally comes through pain. On the whole, I was neither quicker nor slower than my fellows in the early trials of scholarship. Like other little boys, I fell in love with the governess. I asked her if she would cry or sigh if I prised open my main artery with a pen on the schoolroom table, and was somewhat surprised when this magnanimous offer was answered by a box on the ear.

These details that have been sketched indicate some of the characteristics that count for good and evil in my career. From the first I must have been rather a theatrical child. I was always being turned on to recite for the amusement of a nursery audience. My repertoire included "Friends, Romans, countrymen," "The quality of mercy," and a little poem from a red-cotton

handkerchief, which ended with: “Says Farmer Gruff, I’ve had enough, I’ll det a tat and till ’em.” This poem appealed to me because it earned me threepenny-bits, and dealt with mice, whose thieving incursions ranked high among life’s entertainments for us children.

Theatrical, too, was my conduct when quarrelling with my sister Margaret on the croquet-lawn. Puffing out my chest and folding my arms I uttered the memorable words: “Strike me, you are a woman!” I thought this was fine and bold and knightly—also prudent, as my sister was bigger and stronger, and would probably knock the stuffing out of me if it came to a serious struggle.

Thus it will be seen that I was of a somewhat complex mentality, rather baffling to my family, except to my elder sister, who all through my life has remained a beloved guide, philosopher and friend. The child’s pastime often becomes the man’s profession. In me there were distinct signs—though not recognized as such—of a certain trend in the direction of the stage. I was a curious mixture of the dramatic and theatrical. At an early age I developed a detached view on life in general; a self-confidence that bordered on conceit; a servile desire to excel and obtain recognition in the centre of the stage and the full glare of the limelight. When we children had whooping-cough I was filled with pride that my whoop was the loudest. When we had measles I took comfort in the thought that I had more measles than the others. There was no moderation in me. But I had not the fine courage that enabled my sister to express her disbelief in fairies even at the price of an empty Christmas stocking. Along the line of least resistance I unquestioningly accepted the Athanasian Creed and the Ten Commandments, and the prospect of hell for the little boy who did not wash his hands or forgot to say his prayers.

An intense desire to do things and achieve something worth while was often rendered nugatory by the desire to be first and a cowardly fear of defeat. Technically, my recitals of poetry and the like were remarkable for their dramatic expression, and though I never took the trouble to learn my schoolroom repetition properly I could without effort or conscious purpose memorize conversations, and reproduce the whole of a performance of the village mummers or the Christy Minstrels.

A curious and rather unpleasant staginess is sometimes observable among Quakers and Methodists. Perhaps it is the repression in theory of the due value of instinct, impulse and emotion that leads them to express their pent-up feelings and vague imaginings in mimicry and drama. When one comes to think of it, all living organisms in their struggle upwards make use of this instinct. The cosmic conscience bids the plant enact the part of a raw beefsteak in order to attract the fertilizing fly. The human efforts at camouflage so much used in the Great War were crude when compared with Nature’s efforts in the same direction. The snake, the tiger, the rabbit and the hare far surpass the

scene-painter in their efforts to escape observation. The fluttering plover distracts attention from her nest. The partridge, with maternal love, and the fox, with an appetite for lunch, sham death with the skill that a Conquest or a Corri might envy in their pantomime. Primitive people love to play the priest, the hero, the king, the god or devil that they worship. At its highest, this results in our becoming, like Thomas à Kempis, by imitation, something nobler than ourselves. In practical everyday life it tended to develop a certain egoistic detachment that made me less amiable than my brothers and sisters. The nurse used to say of me that I was the least affectionate of her small charges. At that time I was, of course, unconscious of this drawback. I have often lamented it since. Apparently this is the mark of a second-rate intelligence, that in its desire to understand things cosmic and universal beyond its reach continually breaks its shins over concrete objects at its feet.

So far, at the age of seven, when the conscious and the intellectual processes were beginning to supplement intuition and sense impression, I was undemonstrative, but hungry for affection; somewhat selfish, very obstinate, and with an intense capacity for the mere joy of living; in fact, a very live little wire. The narrowing influences indicated above, which somewhat obscured my instinctive distinction between “I will” and “I want,” were counterbalanced by the common sense and healthy activity of the home and village life around me. Discipline was enforced with a stern hand by an energetic, if somewhat old-fashioned, nurse. “Wills and won’ts must be put in a bag,” “shall and shan’t” ran a small chance of success against shake and slap. If you wanted to be a hero and attract attention, and therefore lost yourself in the shrubbery nearest to the house, it knocked one off the pinnacle one had been sharing with Wellington and Elijah to be collared by the ear, called naughty and, what was worse, silly, and sent supperless to bed. The same fate attended many an heroic escapade: the falling into duck-ponds and brooks, or through the ice—seeing how thin it would bear, and how near the edge I could slide—and the suffocation following concealment in the straw-rick. These efforts savoured rather of the spirit theatrical than the soul greatly adventurous.

This fancy for mock-heroics was a singular trait in my character. When chastised I regarded myself as a martyr at the stake. I was told once in a dispute that I often posed as the hero of the last chapter I had read in history or fiction, whether John the Baptist, Oliver Cromwell or Judas Iscariot—my critic on that occasion informing me that the last-named rôle was the most suitable for me. The desire to be a martyr, to frizzle and scorch for the sake of the limelight rather than the cause, is a common characteristic in the modern fever for publicity. I had yet to learn that the true hero takes no thought for himself; that he simply lives intensely and does his best, and does not care overmuch whether the result is a peerage or the poorhouse. “Do things for keeps and take

your medicine smiling."

Later I learned to differentiate between the bare, hard facts of the gutter and the conventional ideas of the average drawing-room or "Ivy Castle." A child carefully nurtured, strictly guarded, wrapped in cotton-wool, trained to contemplate the high lights of so-called ideals, finds it difficult to interpret the shadows of reality; sometimes misses his path in the dark; sometimes, like the man in the German legend, loses his own shadow. On the other hand, in the grimness of a slum struggle for existence the striver upward weighs everything, values everything, in relation to the real. At times he too falters, perplexed by "which is which." Only he who wins through discovers they are one and the same.

In describing my early life I have hardly as yet done justice to the beauty of the country surroundings, the tender loving care of father and mother, the delightful comradeship of brothers and sisters, relations, friends and neighbours, or to the watchful, and often unwelcome, discipline of the family nurse. Nanna was a careful, affectionate guardian, but also a ubiquitous upholder of the conventional respectability which was supposed to be the hall-mark of the "best families and the quality." She accepted the definition, so deplored by Cecil Rhodes, that a gentleman was one who need not work for his living. "He does nothing: he's a gentleman born, he is," was often heard in the sixties.

This standard of high life below-stairs, and the extreme care—not to say coddling—bestowed on me gave me a rather exaggerated idea of my own importance. Fortunately, I was continually having drilled into me by my mother's old nurse, a shrewd North Country woman and frequent visitor to Langtons, the Chaucerian maxim: "Gentleman is as gentleman does"—an effective counterpoise to the Southerner's "Gentleman is as gentleman born." "Come down from that tree, or you'll break your neck." "Sit still, or I'll tie you in your chair, you fidgety phil, you!" "Don't wet your feet. Come out of that puddle directly s'minute!" "Don't get yer 'ands dirty." "Don't tear your clothes." "Keep your curls tidy, you figure of fun, you!" "I don't know what you are doing, but don't do it, you naughty boy." "Come off that branch! You'll kill yourself, as sure as eggs is eggs, or ever you've 'ad your tea." "You're more bother to me than all my money; drat the boy, he does worrit so!" "There you go again. Mr Abbott, the grocer, is quite ashamed of you. Look at your little sister, look how good she is." These and similar categorical imperatives from Nanna suggested a pervading atmosphere of naughtiness and original sin, and exaggerated in my mind the dangers of life in general and disobedience in particular.

I was rather an imaginative boy, and the doom of being struck so when I made a face, or being whisked off by a black man coming down the chimney,

or being killed before tea-time—I loved my tea, my mother, and my silver mug—might have made me cowardly, had it not been for the example of my more courageous and common-sense brothers, and the arrival, when I was six years old, of the youngest and last of the Bensons.

Poor Godfrey! His advent distracted the attention of the nurses from the other children to the youngest darling. He became the pet and the plaything—and the victim—of the entire household; to be bullied, cherished, educated or played with as occasion required or whim suggested. Being a healthy and exceptionally clever boy, Godfrey stood up against these manifold inconveniences with great success, and has remained a very kind and enduring influence in the life of the brethren. A new interest having thus arisen for the parents and guardians, from this moment I was more free to fill up the measure of my iniquity; to fling stones in the air, careless as to whether they fell on my own nose or other people's; to put a pat of butter down my eldest brother's neck, if the elder brother did not bestow on me, as on the others, the halfpenny bun periodically acquired at the rate of seven for threepence; to upset plates and mugs, cut myself with broken bottles, break my knees so often that kneecaps were fastened to my knickerbockers, climb walls forbidden, and trees that broke; in short, realize to the full the joy of existence. Racing round the lawn like dogs let loose, tearing over the meadows like colts turned out to grass, always playing at cattle-drovers, Red Indians, or horses, we learned to run almost before we could walk. Bricks, rocking-boat, rocking-horse, ball play, skipping-ropes, spinning-tops and stables finished up the day's delights.

We fell in love indiscriminately with widows of forty and belles of fifteen. I kissed the beauty of the dancing-class in the Assembly Rooms, while I learned to polka, in the presence of Mrs Siddons as Lady Macbeth, and Kemble as Hamlet holding the skull. Alas, poor Yorick, only pictures!

This exuberant joy of life counteracted my somewhat egotistical selfish tendencies and theatrical artificiality. Cecil, however, God bless him! never suffered from these weaknesses.

Godfrey Benson, now Lord Charnwood

Prominent among our many friends stood out the admirable cowman, the strong man of the little country town, Angless by name, and true Angle in his staunch courage and active strength. From Angless I learned the poetry of pump and well, from the bottom of which I could see the stars at noonday, and from which gushed laughing, clear, cool water—constant source of much

pleasure and more punishment.

We young Bensons had Angless to thank for our never-to-be-forgotten rescue from a savage bull. The moment was critical. The nurse had hoisted her umbrella, and formed herself into a square, with a perambulator as an outwork, in defence of Agnes and the baby. Cecil and I were in an advanced position as skirmishers; I stood wide-eyed and gaping; Cecil, more angry at his own helplessness than afraid of the result, threw stones, uttered threats and brandished his threepenny whip. This demonstration affected the monster not a jot. Fortunately, the bull was fully occupied with the faithful Rover, who was yapping and snapping, now at his heels, now at his nose. Still I gaped and wondered, excited at the heroic prospect of actually being tossed by a bull; dreading the experience, but keenly alive to the undying fame to be gained at the nursery tea-table by the survivors.

The odds seemed at the moment hopelessly against there being any survivors. The great beast, a prize Shorthorn, was seeing red, bellowing and tearing up the ground with hoof and horn. Just as he raised his head and prepared for a final charge, Angless, like Theseus of old, appeared on the scene. The bull paused to take stock of this new champion. Angless walked straight up to him, and with oaken staff and rope smote him on muzzle and horn, dodged the answering savage lunge, and in a moment had him captive, roped and helpless. I observed with amazement how quickly the bull surrendered. To what? It was not a question of individual strength, it was not altogether the cleverness of the cowboy or the bullfighter. That, I realized by comparison with picture-book and story, was not the determining factor in the case. It was my first lesson of what the power of resolute will can accomplish. The bull had just broken through a brick wall with little apparent effort; he weighed considerably over fifteen hundred pounds, the man little more than one hundred and fifty; but the animal gave in and was led submissively off the field, while the man returned to the milking-stool and went on with his job, as if this encounter were all in the day's work. So it was to him. And so I learned a Wessex lesson: not to make a fuss in the face of an emergency but swiftly, silently, strongly to do the right thing, if possible—or, if not that, the best you can.

Shortly after this we—"the two little boys," as we were now called in the neighbourhood—passed on to one of the annual landmarks in our life, the Alresford Sheep Fair. The theory of "You'll be killed before tea-time, certain sure!" condemned us youngsters to view this stirring scene from the sacred precincts of "Ivy Castle."

"Ivy Castle" was a mound in the corner of the garden, shut in by two brick walls from a chalk lane that wandered off towards the Downs. It overlooked part of the paternal property—a patch of allotments, a sheep-fair ground and a

large field devoted to the sports and entertainments of the town—and was impregnable to the assaults of the fiercest bull or the maddest of mad dogs (the nurse had taught us to regard the canine species as a hot-bed for hydrophobia and fleas); with a thick growth of ivy to conceal ourselves from robbers and Red Indians, or our lawful keepers and attendants, with a yew-tree for an outlook turret, and its artillery of red berries in case of war.

This was the Royal Box from which we surveyed thousands of sheep: Hampshire Downs, South Downs, Dorsets and Leicesters, with Africans and a goat or two as star attractions. A few cattle and rough van-horses and ponies added interest and a deeper bass note or shrill trumpet neigh to the never-ending chorus of bleats and baas. Shepherds and peasants in smock-frocks had caps or hats of straw, fur, or battered felt; some, bareheaded and bare-armed, waved crooks, sticks or large cotton umbrellas; gipsies, handsome, dark-skinned Romany Rye, with their picturesque caravans, gaudy-coloured handkerchiefs and roguish eyes; well-to-do farmers in breeches and gaiters or top-boots; gamekeepers clad in velveteens; a surging *mêlée* of barking dogs of every size and shape—old English sheepdogs, bobtails, collies, terriers, mastiffs, bulldogs, foxhounds, setters, retrievers, spaniels, greyhounds—appeared determined by their incoherent noise to drive their owners and the flocks distracted, into chaos and confusion. Here and there stood ale-tents, cheese-tents and luncheon-tents, where an occasional conjurer and a few hawkers—waifs and strays from the more legitimate wake—cozened the unwary. Butchers and buyers, carters and bailiffs, drovers, tramps and beggars, jostled, bargained, yelled and shouted. Doctors, farmers, lawyers, squires, all the countryside, prodded sheep, handled wool, killed ticks or quenched thirsts. What an excitement! The various sticks, whips, crooks, wands and staves were of sufficiently enthralling interest by themselves. When applied to the savage beast, or the naughty sheep that wouldn't go the right way—or in extreme cases to a welsher or a pickpocket—they transported the children to the threshold of heaven.

Saints and angels, cherubs, David, sheep, lambs and dogs, what could children want more—unless, perhaps, a touch of their old friend the Devil. This was supplied by the dogs. "Nipper's got Jock by the throat; he'll kill 'un." "Ger hout, yer brute!" They are separated in time to join forces and forget their animosity in a united attack on a Hampshire ram as big as a donkey, who is busily engaged butting a young pig out of the sheepfold into the coffee-stall. How his cousins and his aunts and his uncles squealed, how the rings in their noses glittered, surely they had bells on their toes!—if the children might only go and see for themselves. "Where's William? Why is he late to man the castle wall? Oh, traitor! Look! No, it cannot be! It is! There's William in the fair with father!" This is against all family usage. Let us be careful, though—William is

the eldest, four years older than I, very quick and clever, the designer of darts, and bows and arrows, ships, steam-engines and weapons of war. We will confine our attack to accidental dropping of earwigs and bits of mortar on his head as he passes, condemn him not to the ordeal of being spat on from the staircase and sent to Coventry in the morning—just punishment though it be, and pronounced against the sister who had been promoted to take her place at dessert at last night's dinner-party:

> "Tell-tale-tit, your tongue shall be split,
> And all the dogs in the town shall have a little bit."

Just sentence, only commuted by a fine of sweetmeats annexed from the banquet.

"Hi, hi, hi!" The talk of Gaffer this and Gammer that, the haggling of Farmer Jones and Farmer Smith, has stopped. "Hi, hi, hi!" A bare-backed pony carries two strong lads over a sheep-hurdle. O glorious achievement! My brothers and I never rested till many moons subsequently we indulged in a similar performance.

The sheep ceased bleating, the cattle and the swine stopped to stare, the jumping pony repeated its performance, and was straightway purchased by the family coachman. The glories of the fair paled after this. Another pony, a real "lepper," added to the stable! Naught it mattered that the din revived, that the tegs rushed more tumultuously than ever from the pen, paused in the middle of the road, and then leaped over airy nothings, four feet high, followed by their comrades, each repeating the purposeless jump, and then tore madly down the lane towards the beckoning Downs. The bell-wether leading the multitude along the broad road escaped notice at the time, but was remembered by me in after years when I strayed sadly from the fold. It only called forth a shrill blast from Cecil's penny whistle (I had broken mine) when Leo, the mastiff, averted the renewal of Jock's and Nipper's quarrel by chivying both combatants into the goose-pond.

Henceforth the lepper becomes the associate of Dick and Gallop, the stable cats. "Of the children is the Kingdom." All unwitting, kings of the days that are to be, once more we find them in the Royal Box of the "Ivy Castle," with the pretty daughter of the parson, to be kissed surreptitiously by me behind the yew-tree when not observed by nurse or the brethren. The spectacle on this occasion is the arrival of Sanger's Circus—big drums, golden cars, piebald horses, forty cream-coloured ponies, Britannia with a real lion at her feet, clowns, donkeys, mules, and, oh, joy of Eastern Empire! elephants, camels, dromedaries, zebras and black men. It was worth hours of waiting to see the putting up of the tents, the starting of the procession, to see the profound bow

bestowed on the children of the Justice of the Peace by the laughing King of Ethiopia, though, in doing homage, he certainly ought not to have winked at the pretty nursemaid. “What next h’indeed, well I never!” Tragic prohibition that we may see only the “ ’oofs of the ’orses,” from outside the circus. On the outside only may my attention be focussed—on the brass band, the pink tights, the great muscles, the loud-mouthed announcement of the cheap prices, the crier and his bell. All the inner meaning of the horsemanship and the double-somersault, the quips of the quick-witted clown, must remain as yet unknown. The Puritan and Quaker objection stands in the way. Circus, theatre and menagerie are labelled naughty: that is enough. It does not matter that we children think it is very nice, and wish to see for ourselves.

This interdict, however, did not extend to penny-readings, charades in the drawing-room or nursery, or to the beloved mummers, waits and handbell-ringers. At Christmas and the New Year, in the hall or the servants’ room, the successors of mystery, miracle and morality players; and Anglo-Celtic gleemen, in high-peaked caps, with a profusion of paper ribbons, and armed with cutlasses, were wont to delight the household. King Garge, or Saint Garge, and his merry men were opposed in Messopotamee by a Turkish knight—presumably some remote reference to Saladin. The heroes, and there were many, including Napoleon, Cardinal Wiseman, Cetewayo and other chieftains from Zululand and New Zealand, walked to and fro, reciting as much of their part as they could remember, improvising the rest. Sometimes they clashed their weapons as they passed each other. Sometimes their debate was for the release and welfare of a hobbledehoy with a reed voice, who was alternately a Princess of Babylon and the King of Spain and Egypt’s darter (daughter). Her history was obscure, but, ultimately, the darter had to be sent across the warter (water). The climax came when Garge, big and bold, had a set-to with Saladin. After a desperate “bloody” fight, overcome by Garge’s might, Saladin knelt down on one knee and died in that position. Straightway, to our bewilderment and our delight, Father Christmas came in as a doctor. After a lament—beginning, “God damn thy wicked soul, what hast thou been and gone and done; lord lovey, thou hast slain mine only son”—there followed a long recitation of popular local quack medicines for the destruction of insect life, remedies for foot-and-mouth disease, and “physic for tissick.” Rejecting all remedies but his own wonderful balsam, he applied his own “Hell-licks-yer” (elixir). The magic balsam instantly had the desired effect. The Princess was married to her own true love; a treaty of peace was solemnly ratified; and the united company sang lustily: “God bless the lady of this house with the gold chain round her neck.” It is but fair to add that sometimes the characters were not doubled and trebled in the confusing manner described. When Tom was not sweeping a path through the snow, or Dick sitting up with a sick cow,

some differentiation was attempted between the princesses, the doctor, Father Christmas and the Turkish knight's father. In later years I came across similar performances in Sussex, Berkshire, Inverness and elsewhere.

The waits and bell-ringers exercised an abiding but more placid influence on the minds of us boys. The hand-bell!—what a friend it became to me throughout my life, that and all the bells!—muffled bells, passing bells, joy bells, the big alarm bell on the top of the house, the dressing bell on the wooden wheel in the western gable, the front-door bell, the luncheon bell, the gong for dinner, the town-crier's bell, sheep's bells, cow's bells, and the bells that jingled so merrily on the proud necks of four bay cart-horses from Stubbs's farm, mother's little hand-bell, marriage bells, New Year and Christmas bells; and, later, the warning bell of danger from the aeroplane, the bell of the fire-engine, and the varied calls, exhortations and prohibitions of school and college bells:

"Bells go double, all right. Bells go single, run like blazes."

Perhaps for me in my early youth the best remembered of all were that brandished by the bellman in blind-man's-buff and the curfew, with its sleep song to the dying embers of the day.

Does anyone ever get away from the Christmas carols, immortalized by Dickens? Years afterwards, on the battlefield, I heard their message of peace displace the Hymn of Hate.

"What is the good of this long list of influences," I once asked, "when they have resulted in so little?"

"Be content, my friend; these experiences in your life interest, not because they are specially yours, but because they are common to so many. If, in your case, the bells have jangled you to fates out of tune and harsh, remember that the Lady of Banbury Cross still rides her white horse triumphantly. . . . She shall have music wherever she goes."

"All right; let them gallop, then: white horse of the Gael, white horse of the Legion, white horse of Hanover, white horse of the nursery, the Godolphin Arabian, Flying Childers, Eclipse, Ormonde; keep 'em going! Let the merry bells sound on in the clumsy chronicle, even if they be the camel bells tinkling across the desert as the camel-driver leads his team through the wilderness to the oasis just the other side beyond. But don't forget the windows."

Then I went on to relate how many people of my acquaintance remember things by panes of glass in their different rooms. One old friend I described as doing his work at the windows of the world—panes of history, industry, medicine, science, religion and art. Then I referred to the windows of my home and the outlook they gave me on life—past, present and to come.

To the dining-room just after family prayers, sometimes during their celebration, the sloping green lawn unfolded itself as a parade-ground for the

birds, surrounded by shrubberies and trees, beeches brown and green, elm, cedar, walnut, ash, yew, boxwood, juniper, cypress, sycamore and lime. In the foreground were birds of many varieties, while the jays screamed, the magpies laughed and the cuckoo called *cuckoo, cuckoo*! Sometimes a great green woodpecker or redstart would visit its friends; while at night-time a night-jar or an owl murmured its greeting to the sleeping house, and chased the bats as they fluttered across the rays of the moon. On this little green stage the nymphs of snow and hoar-frost, of dew and mist and rain, first revealed their beauty. Each nymph brought with her a flower that she loved—snowdrop, daffodil and rose. Generally the three cats of the establishment basked in the sun. Sometimes a hare would shyly join in the Amen of family prayers, and bound off with the grace of God and the fellowship that is in us all. Then there were the windows of the hall, with a raised bank and railing hiding the roadway along which periodically marched the regiments, the race-horses or the hunt, leading the eye through a vista of tall elms, beech and walnut, down across the sloping meadows, where cattle, red and black and white, foraged and grew fat, to the enchanted land of the lake, bordered by rushes, to the swan's nest on the island, happy hunting-ground for wild-duck, dabchick and grebe. Once a pair of storks deigned to visit the pond. Needless to say they were immediately shot by a "celebrated lover of birds."

"Was this the happiest time in your life?" I have been asked.

"In a way, yes; it was the most complete, the most self-sufficing and satisfying, yet haunted, as all beginnings must be, with the mortal yearning for 'What comes next?' "

In autumn, when the red and green of the tall rushes had turned to golden brown, the starlings in their manœuvring took the place of the white-winged plovers. Ranked in tens of thousands, with a whirl and a rush and a sound of the sea, and a great cry of evensong, they circled round the lake and round the house, and in their mass bent down acres of reeds and willows, broke branches from the trees on the lawn, chattering incessantly. Wheeling for hours in strange evolutions, divided into squadrons, they darkened the setting sun like a cloud, travelling all the time at a terrific pace, literally in millions, in ever-changing ranks and form of flight, without the least disorder, without ever a collision or harm to their uniform of green and gold. Was there one brain controlling, was there one thought-wave common to the flock? In the opinion of the nursery they had captains and sergeants. What is more, the sergeant-major and his family dwelt in the rain-spout by the tiled roof of the servants' hall. We children ought to have known, because his nest provided us with pale blue eggs for our collection.

He often sat on the nursery window-sill tapping at the pane—a signal that he wanted bread-and-milk; also, year by year, he and his mate solemnly

introduced their young recruits for the starling army to the window-ledge, whence they learned to fly and join the winged companies in their autumn drill —training, doubtless, for migration or for war. No hawk, nor even an eagle, could have stood up against the force of those million tiny wings. Anyhow, one thing they did was to help to wing the souls of children for a still wider flight than their own.

Then there was the eastern window in the governess's room, where the delinquents of the schoolroom were often confined, with hands tied behind their backs. Revenge is sweet, and their bonds were not so tightly fastened but that they could insert a torpid wasp in the slippers of their gaoler. When not revengeful or lachrymose, the prisoners had plenty to do surveying the course of the little river, the Arle, as it wandered down from Bishops-Sutton, ancient hamlet of flint and clay walls, tiles, timber and red brickwork, grinding corn, and watering flocks and herds on its way to the sea. Beyond the old church and the pigeon-loft over the racing-stable could be dimly seen three sets of kennels. First, at Sutton a pack of harriers were wont at sundown to sit in a row on their benches and chant anthems to the rising moon. Farther on, at Ropley, the H.H. foxhounds could be dimly seen and heard. Across the corn-lands and the bleak heights of Medstead an old-fashioned breed of St Huberts, black and tan, "with ears that swept away the morning dew, made musical discord and sweet thunder" in pursuit of hare or stag. Additional interest in this old-time pack was taken by the children in that their owner, rejoicing in the historic name of Neville, was deformed in legs and arms, yet hunted the St Hubert dogs himself. Strapped to the saddle, this quaint, courageous figure somehow linked up with the traditions of William Rufus and the Normans and the neighbouring New Forest.

> "Eastward though the sun rise slow,
> How slowly;
> Westward look! the land is bright."

So it was with the window on the stairs overlooking the stableyard, thatched barns, black-timbered cottages and back gardens, till the eye rested on the gilt weathercock of the old church tower. Four-square to the winds of heaven erect stood the tower, like an ancient warrior, encircled by a bodyguard of tombstones and nameless graves—the warder of the town, watchman of the living and the dead! Whether at high festival, christening, marriage or funeral, our old friend looked down, always sympathetic and serene. Round this window the swallows marshalled before they winged their journey south. On the broad shelf inside, sleepy little figures, dragged from their beds, watched the meteoric showers in the sky, or on national joy-days blinked at the rockets

soaring up from the market-place to greet the falling stars. There, too, we children paused on the stairway leading to the dormitory to gaze at a purple storm-cloud licked by the lightning's flame, to hear the thunder booming or see the heavy raindrops slake the thirst of the trees and the dust-dried earth, or yawn good-night to the great red sun as he sank to rest behind St Catherine's Hill. And all night long the church tower smiled and blessed our infant sleep.

"Get your gloves, Master Frankie." "I don't know where they are. There's a button off my boot." "Drat the child! A pretty figure of fun you'll look in church this morning! Call yourself a Christian! You're a regular limb. There, keep yer 'at on yer 'ead for mercy's sake!" Then followed a vicious snap of elastic under the chin. A hot little hand was forced into an irritating brown-cotton glove, stained and dirty and buttonless, with stiff, broad finger-tips. Oh, those cotton gloves! Perhaps they were the greatest grievance of the nursery days, especially as Cecil had a pair of purple kid. Neat, tidy boy, an aunt had sent them in a letter addressed to his very own self. At that stage of my development the whole fabric of the Christian Church seemed in my small mind to depend mainly on brown-cotton gloves—not white, for they would have become a drab grey in ten minutes on my fingers. Brown-cotton gloves were not among the verities, I knew that: they were among the false shibboleths that added to the obstacles in the straight and narrow path.

It must have been the birds that told me to turn from the formalities of the Creed to the symbolism of the willow blossom that was handed to us on Palm Sunday. Soft, furry little buds, like ducklings; a fragrant branch, tender brown and green, so strong, so supple; and such an admirable whip wherewith to play horses on Monday. I remember vividly, even in old age, the pleasure of Palm Sunday, worshipping like my ancestors the tree-token of the Infinite.

Side by side with this remembrance ranks the little prayer, first lisped, kneeling on a bath-towel, upon the knees of mother, nurse or aunt. The little head leaned on the altar of Madonna's breast. Thought of all the world, finding its best expression in the art of Spain and Italy, and thenceforth a permanent place in European civilization. The prayer and the palm, to meet me again years after on the battlefields of the Great War.

"God bless the family and, of course, Nanna," with a long list of my acquaintances with whom I might happen not to be at variance, including Taffy the pony, but not the miller's bull-terrier, who had cruelly bitten Rover in their last fight. "And make me a good boy, for Christ's sake, Amen." Fortified with these two amulets I endured, without undue suffering, the dull respectability of the Sabbath. The day started all right. It was one of the days in the week when we children had eggs for breakfast, always laid, according to the pious fiction of the time, by our particular pet hen—dorking, game fowl, brown granny, Cochin-China, or gold-and-silver-speckled Hamburg. "Nanna,

mayn't I peel my own egg myself? Need I eat it with strips? Cecil and Margaret have not got to." "Cecil and Margaret know how to behave, and you don't." This was quite true. Possibly I never did. Certainly I allowed my appetite to triumph over principle and swallowed my egg in any form in which it was presented to me, with unruffled equanimity. The result in later life may have been an unfortunate predisposition to count my chickens before they were hatched!

After breakfast all joy in the Sabbath disappeared until evening. Church in the morning, church in the afternoon. Church and brown-cotton gloves, and the ignominy of having one's place found in hymn-book and prayer-book. A service of two hours. Think of having to sit still for two hours! A gleam of good cheer was introduced by old-fashioned roast beef and apple-pie, with fruit for dessert, in the dining-room, and the use of one's own silver mug and knife and fork. More Church in the afternoon; this time under the charge of the nurse. A mile walk to Old Alresford—the rich living, with huge rectory and picturesque brick church, wherein the son of a prince-bishop ministered. This was the last word in odour of sanctity for the servants' hall. Here we little boys wrestled with sleep and our gloves in an old-fashioned square pew like a horse-box. In this church we were in deadly fear that the beadle with the long stick might tap us on the head if our dirty boots, by accident, should trample on our little black hats of soft felt with blue ribbon. Small stones, bits of stick or marbles, and other little treasures, could be fingered lovingly or brought out by stealth only when nurse stood erect to repeat the Creed or catch the eye of the rector's butler. The memories of these efforts at worship hardly affected our theology at that time. One of the few sentences of a sermon that I remember was the announcement by a locum-tenens, or guinea-pig, that "the delights of heaven included the presence among the angels of little dogs in their coats of gold; all glorious within and resplendent without." This to us little boys was sound, wholesome doctrine. The buildings of jasper, and the streets of onyx and topaz, and the gates of pearl, so often hymned, dazzled, but failed to attract. The promise that we would again meet the beloved Leo, lately laid to rest with much lamentation in the wood walk, or the pugnacious Rover, who could at that moment be heard chasing cats round the church-yard, stamped the Rev. Guinea-pig as infallibly the co-equal of Elisha. Favourite prophet this last! Did he not, like Wombwell and Noah, keep bears in his menagerie? The man who said that he'd be damned if he would go to heaven if the ducks didn't, would have agreed on this point.

All things come to an end; and that day ended in songs and hymns, including *Kathleen Mavourneen* and *Annie Laurie*, with mother and father, round the piano, with intervals of *Oft in the Stilly Night* and *Woodman, spare that Tree*, on the music-box. Rat-tat at the door, soap in the eyes, sponge in the

mouth, early to bed; to-morrow it will be Monday.

This was Sunday when fine. Sunday when wet meant a box of animals set out on the nursery table, reinforced later by Godfrey with Noah and his family, with ark, animals, trees and cattle-pen complete—generous gift of a truly Christian godmother; *Line-upon-Line*; Watts's hymns; a smattering of *Pilgrim's Progress*; a chapter or two from A.L.O.E., and *The Sunday at Home —The Leisure Hour*, which nurse read, was too secular and sensational—the Collect and the Catechism; prolonged meals and continuous eating; till evening came, when we fancied we had arrived nearer the New Jerusalem and a day's march farther from the bottomless pit.

On the whole, we rejoiced that religious observances were chiefly a matter for Sunday. Angels and giraffes, Adam and Eve, the Flood, a friendly dove, a branch of olive, a devil and serpents, ducks, Mount Ararat, a rainbow and a lion, left varied impressions on our infant minds, doubtless in time assimilated in their proper proportion, with help from their parody form: "Why doth the little busy bee delight to bark and bite?"

In answer to the heartfelt prayer of "O that it were Monday!" the children found themselves again in that little Capitol of their lives, "Ivy Castle," viewing the match between Married and Single. A faint tradition of the neighbouring Hambledon district, one of the cradles of modern cricket, still obtained round Langtons. Smock-frocks with a top-hat and black trousers were still to be seen among the older cricketers. The dispute as to whether "H'over-h'arm" or "Round-h'arm" were fair; as to whether the legitimate underhand trundler should be allowed to indulge in "daisy cutters," or "sneaks," and "grubs," as they were called; whether you were out if bowled by a full-pitch, were still rife. "H'out, h'out! 'Ow's that, h'umpire?" shouts the bowler. "H'out!" cries the umpire. "H'out?" says the batsman; "danged if I be, trowler never grounded 'im." But he had to go, and to discuss his grievances with the sympathetic crowd of benedicts over a mug of ale. How swiftly the sporting lawyer[2] "trowled 'em in round h'arm." He was the fast bowler of the county and a terror on a bumpy pitch. "Chuck 'er h'up, Butcher's h'out." Straightway, Sparry the blacksmith jerked the ball high in the air behind his back. Would it never come down again? Mightn't it be dangerous for the rooks' nests? But it did come down, and, what is more, Angless the cowman caught it in his horny palm.

Next day, bows and arrows and darts are laid aside, and William, who was shortly going to school, and was equipped with bats and other implements of war, instructed us in the mysteries of the game. The chief point seemed to be that William should bat, and the small fry should field, bowl and back-stop. Still, it was very grand and grown-up, even if the girls did join in, and certainly brought one within measurable distance of being a schoolboy. I always

favoured vocal exercises. I was particularly ambitious to shout "Hooray!" as real grown-up men always do on desert islands, at shipwrecks, and other catastrophes. Therefore when my brother William set out, with book-box, portmanteau, etc., for his first term at school, for the honour of the nursery, for good luck and the speeding of the parting guest, I began to yell "Hooray!" till the nursemaid called me an unfeeling little heathen and proceeded to suffocate me on the coat-rack in the hall.

One day about the time when the mouse that gnawed Margaret's slippers was discovered in a trap, or as I thought it was when Cecil's dormouse had just awakened from its winter sleep, Alresford and the neighbourhood awoke to the stupendous fact that Sir Roger Tichborne had returned from Australia to claim his own—an easy task if it depended only on recognition by his mother and the family solicitor, the perjury of his black servant, Bogle, or the welcome at various dinners throughout the county, including Langtons. More difficult, however, when lawyers bearing the names of Hawkins, Ballantyne and Coleridge asked for proof. To the nursery the case was proved at once when the wife of a neighbour stopped her carriage in the market-place, stepped up to a rather common-looking individual of some twenty stone, and exclaimed, in a voice that could be heard all over the town: "How do you do, Sir Roger? Welcome back to your native land." She then beckoned to us little boys, and asked if we might have the honour of saying how do you do to the Claimant. Off went two little black hats, out went two little hands, one black and one brown, and two little voices piped up the refrain of the countryside, "Welcome back, Sir Roger Tichborne."

I have always remembered the singularly dull, uninteresting and plebeian appearance of this pretended baronet. Years afterwards I received a request in a distant town, where I was acting, to advance a sovereign for the Claimant's drinks, on the strength of that meeting in the market-place. Straightway all unkindness was drunk down. So too, as far as I was concerned, was any lingering doubt I may have had as to the rightfulness of the claim.

One morning strange sounds awakened the children all along the valley. The railway had come. With it came felling of woods, delving and digging in fields, building of white-chalk embankments, and complete alteration in the course usually taken by hunted foxes from cover to cover. Timidly gazed we children down the deepest cutting in Hampshire, which bisected the Fair field, and after endless labour of big-muscled navvies did something to widen the outlook of Alresford and us little Bensons.

The Victorian mould in which we little boys were cast was emphasized by such literature as *The Penny Magazine*, *Peter Parley*, missionary tales, *Cherry Stones*, and *Sandford and Merton*, varied by the fairy stories of Grimm and Andersen, the valour of the little Duke and the Lances of Lynwood, and the

Chronicles of Robin Hood. Life-long trails were blazed for us also by *Alice in Wonderland*, Lear's *Book of Nonsense*, *Shockheaded Peter*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *The Swiss Family Robinson*.

Here endeth the first chapter of "the little boys." Nursery days are nearly done; school is soon to take its place. Somewhat artificial, formal and conventional, with an over-emphasis on respectability and what ought to be; somewhat sentimental and unreal, for me at any rate, was this early upbringing; but it implanted firmly on the household a reverence for holy, tender things, and the gentle lovingkindness of family life. Into my conventional consciousness, during a visit to the seaside at Hayling Island, came the vision of the first ironclads, the *Captain* and the *Warrior*, the *Minotaur*, the *Resolution* and the *Himalaya*, and the *Serapis*, with funnels scarcely visible amid the forests of towering masts and the network of sails, rigging, spars, yardarms and ropes. With them came, too, stirring stories of the Crimea and the Indian Mutiny, the Six Hundred, Lord Raglan, Havelock, Colin Campbell, Outram, the Lawrences and Nicholson; with a still earlier whisper of Wellington and Waterloo. Fireworks closed the chapter, ringing bells, cheering crowds, bonfires and booming guns welcoming the beautiful daughter of Denmark to the steps of the throne.

Mutterings from Solferino, enthusiasm for Garibaldi and Victor Emmanuel affected the nursery wardrobe and the nursery outlook on mankind. The tragedy of Maximilian in Mexico, the war of North and South, stories of Lincoln, Lee, Stonewall Jackson, Sherman and Grant stand out vividly in my memory. To a less degree, in the background float Cardinal Wiseman, Bismarck, Louis Napoleon, Robert Peel, Grey, Russell, Palmerston, the Chartists and Peterloo.

And still, in my fancy, above this medley of sounds, by the fireside or in the watches of the night, the old starling taps against the nursery window, and the skylark sings triumphant as he soars above the Downs.

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[1] The Benson family consisted of (1) William (Willy), who married Venice, daughter of Alfred Hunt and sister of Miss Violet Hunt; (2) Margaret, who married Captain Algernon Drummond; (3) Cecil, who married Constance, daughter of G. B. O'Neill; (4) Frank, who married Miss Morshead Samwell; (5) Agnes, who married Heywood Sumner, son of the Bishop of Guildford; and (6) Godfrey (Lord Charnwood), who married Miss Roby Thorpe, a granddaughter of the Right Hon. Anthony John Mundella.

[2] Edward Blackmore, of Beauworth and Alresford.

CHAPTER II

SCHOOLDAYS AT BRIGHTON

At last the great day arrived: I was going to school with my brother Cecil. Under the care of William and our father we two little boys started for Brighton, following somewhat the same road that had been taken by a certain Charles Dickens, once a clerk in old Mr Blackmore's office, just outside the front gate of Langtons. Great day of emancipation! A hot lunch in the refreshment-room at Portsmouth, choice of the menu—mustard and pepper if you liked; no nurse to say you nay; and you helped yourself to salt and bread, vegetables and pudding, at your own sweet will.

On arrival small beds were allotted. A portmanteau, shared by the two, and the book-box, containing jam and a small library, also between the two, got unpacked. Their contents having been placed on the shelf appointed, the boxes were relegated to the box-room until the joyful day of packing up for the holidays should arrive. Then came tea, where the jam and cake were distributed, the original owner reserving two slices for himself or any special friends. Afterwards two or three boys—new boys like ourselves—sat huddled together in the corner of the schoolroom, undergoing the ordeal by question. "What's your name?" "How old are you?" "Have you any sisters?" "Are they pretty?" "Where do you live?" "Do you know anything?" "Are you clever?" "Can you play cricket and football?" The presence of my brother William made this ordeal as light as might be for his little brothers. A sudden inrush of late-comers; then supper—a slice of dry bread and a small glass of beer in the long dining-room—and a locking up of treasures, by Cecil in his desk, by me in a brown box which served the same purpose—I was considered too destructive to have a desk. Desks at that period of the schoolboy's career were the treasured talisman of his existence. Therein you kept your mother's last letter and your ready cash (having entrusted the capital sum to the headmaster), the revenue accruing from chance tips or your allowance of sixpence a week, stamps, forbidden sweetmeats, photographs of the pretty sister, cousin or sweetheart, if any.

The school list contained some of the most representative names of England: Lowther, Bouverie, Hanbury, Harvey, Hervey, Archdale, Ponsonby, Banks, Peel, Astley, Mitford, Gore-Langton, Hatton, Wrottesley, De Grey,

Mellor, Tracey, Stanhope, Mills, Allen, Wingate, Anstruther, Payne, Wingfield, Lee-Warner, Drummond, Newton, Barrett-Lennard, Birkbeck, Gurney—and a curious little figure in yellow stockings, blue coat with brass buttons, knickerbockers, and a broad, white collar—and an enormous stutter—a cheery, good-natured little Dutchman, Bentinck, whom everybody liked and everybody tormented and chaffed, who in after years became the host of the Kaiser, William II., at the end of the Great War.

Many of the above have since become illustrious in the service of their country, notably the big, burly Lowther. A well-grown lad, with an able body and excellent brains, good-natured and bright, he had a pleasant way of enforcing authority—generally with a kindly word, but if need be with a hefty blow of his fist. Years after I met him again, when he was Speaker of the House of Commons, contributing by his humour, quick wit and firm authority, and genius for common sense, more perhaps to our success in the Great War than any other Member of the House.

I have always said that the boys taught me much more than the masters, and this part of my education began with a bolster fight that very night. I also learned to stand on my head, and jump over a chair on all-fours like a horse, landing on my hands, at the imminent risk of breaking my wrists; then a sleepy little prayer, a fit of homesickness, a longing that mother might kiss me good-night and nurse tuck me up—without thereby forfeiting the right to be a schoolboy—and sleep touched my eyelids, and a vision stretched out before me of life's infinite adventure, leading on into the land of dreams.

The headmaster's family consisted of his wife, two pretty daughters and two sons. With the elder daughter, needless to say, we were all hopelessly in love. She was tall and fair; she had a beautiful voice, and sang to the boys German trills of an English nightingale as a Sunday treat. Some of them offered their homage to the younger sister, bright-eyed, with a perpetual friendly smile and black fuzzy hair. She really was the prettier, but it was to the taller lady that I, being the smallest boy in the school, made the offer of my devotion. I summoned up courage at a game of spelling to hand her, with a deep sigh, the word "lovely." The letters were rapidly arranged by the lady in their proper order and spelt aloud. I murmured: "You know of whom I am thinking?" "I cannot guess." "You, of course!" "Oh, that's a very pretty compliment, but little boys never know their own minds." So saying the beautiful one passed on, to smilingly converse with an older and bigger boy, my hated rival. O fickle feminine! O haughty fair! Little boy, indeed! Cruel want of sympathy and understanding! After this rebuff I at once sought consolation—and found it in chocolate blancmange.

For its popularity with parents the school did not depend so much on its scholarship and athletics as on the care bestowed on the cleanliness and health

of the boys. In the morning hands were held out to show that they were clean, while you grinned like a dog to show that your teeth were white and in good condition. If proper use had not been made of the toothbrush, ears were promptly pulled; if hands were dirty they were soundly slapped by Mrs Starch. Part of the health insurance system depended on the window of Mrs Starch's bedroom. Here, in all stages of attire, apparently engaged in all stages of interminable toilet, she lurked in ambush to spy out misdeeds. Nothing escaped her, for she had a microscopic eye and a suspicious Prussian mind. Sometimes she would bound into the schoolroom in a dressing-jacket and haul the delinquent before the headmaster. Sometimes she would pounce upon the hapless victim in her evening dress, and herself administer condign punishment. Regularly, once a week, the boys had brimstone-and-treacle—oftener, if measles and whooping-cough were in the neighbourhood. Certainly the health of the school was first-rate—whether it was the brimstone, the Brighton air, or both, it is impossible to tell.

The head was a scholar, kindly and clever, but somewhat tired and impatient of teaching little boys. Consequently their noses were tweaked, their knuckles were rapped, their ears were boxed, as they were mildly shaken or kicked into acquaintance with dactyls and spondees. If these encouragements had not the desired result the dullard was told off to go to the cupboard and fetch the cane. The cane had a life and personality of its own, brown or yellow, slender and supple, it really did little damage, and hardly deserved the fate that sometimes befell it of being split by a hair craftily inserted in its fibre by a prospective victim more fearless than his fellows. Its use was not much abused, except on rare occasions when Starch completely lost his temper.

The school endowed the scholars with sound health and an excellent grounding in the rudiments of education. The specialities of Starch were Greek and Latin grammar and the making of Latin verse. Thereby hangs a tale. As the boys trooped off to bed they shook hands with the headmaster, who asked them how many verses they had made. I, with the fear of the cane before my eyes, said "Three," the required complement. Alas I had done only two-and-threequarters of a third! All night I wept and lay awake, thinking that I had been a liar—also that I should be licked. Rising early in the morning I completed the hexameter and handed it in. But my guilty conscience would not let me rest. Approaching the head, in tearful accents I confessed my iniquity: "I told a lie last night. I had only done two." I expected to be caned, but was patted on the shoulder and forgiven. This little incident is noted because it shows a certain instability of character towards truth: a readiness to lie, coupled with an innate inclination to own up.

Besides the games in the playing-fields, with out-of-bounds excursions to the little cottage where ginger-beer and lemonade were sold, there were the

walks and runs over the Downs by the race-course, past the piggeries to the sheep-run and the fascinating dew-ponds; and every week two hours in the gymnasium, and two hours at the baths or in the sea. There was, too, the example of the professional cricketers, whom we watched practising in a neighbouring field, Lillywhite, Wisden and Southerton. There, too, we saw the athletes throwing the hammer, putting the shot, running, jumping and hurdling. When the playing-fields were too wet we had recourse to prisoner's base, high-cockalorum, leap-frog and hopscotch. If confined to the school we set to work at chess, swapping stamp collections, knucklebones, marbles, fives, or a swing in the backyard. Sometimes we took long walks along the parade, where we passed boys' schools, and, of course, charged into them; or girls' schools, whom we addressed with impertinent affection.

Then there were the walks on the beach, the learning to swim from the one-legged man at Brills' Baths, headers and diving as one got proficient, and the never-to-be-forgotten danger of being drowned—for incurring which danger I was severely punished. Unjustly, I thought. Why not remain at the bottom of the sea if you were caned when you came to the surface? Also there were Winans' Russian horses and American trotters. Cecil and I knew every horse and every carriage that appeared on the front, also every dog. It was a breathless adventure to steal out of the ranks, during a walk, to buy chocolates at Ralf's, Mutton's, Booth's or Bastick's, with a borrowed penny.

In some mysterious way Brighton Pavilion, the old Chain Pier and the Aquarium, the boatmen and the fish-market, the German bands, the street-organs with their monkeys, dancing bears, tumblers, Punch and Judy, the niggers and the sea, with its eternal constancy and eternal change, seemed connected with the British Constitution and George IV. and Julius Cæsar. One half-expected to meet that monarch and Beau Brummell, drawn by a pair of goats, driving triumphantly in and out among the donkeys. Surely he it was who ordained that the little boys should go periodically to hear Madame Christine Nilsson and Madame Sainton Dolby sing, and Charles Dickens recite at the concert-room.

One occasion I remember with priggish satisfaction. The boys were all asked to walk from their position in the numbered ranks once round the gymnasium and back to their place. My number was thirty-five on a muster-roll of thirty-five. All my seniors had failed to satisfy the instructor—they giggled, blushed, stumbled, ran nervously, fidgeted or were self-conscious. The Instructor was an old sergeant-major who had served with the Guards in the Crimea. When it came to my turn, to the intense amusement of the class, I gravely paraded round the building, silently, solemnly, steadily, without shyness. On my return to my humble position for that day I was promoted to the top of the class, as being the only boy who had carried out the orders

correctly. Long afterwards I remembered my embarrassment when the big Guardsman led me out and prophesied to my class-mates that one day that little boy would march ahead of them all towards some definite and important goal, and that many would follow him.

On Sundays interminable sermons from a benevolent white-haired clergyman of the old school were calculated to drone any little boy to sleep, if their interests had not been occupied by the bonnets of Leila and Tilly and their mother. Here I noted a curious habit of self-mesmerism—or Somadi, as the Indians call it—induced by gazing with half-shut eyes on a strong light, or fixing them on one straight endless line leading through the coloured Eastern window. I remembered this trick in after years—fits of abstraction or, as my friends termed it, a zany detachment, not altogether healthy, but restful, soothing, and a relief from the puerilities of a very tall and emphatic curate. I have a theory that many people, especially in church, withdraw into this trance-like abstraction. I used to call it *forming one's soul into a square to resist the onrush of the Thirty-nine Articles*. This is the attitude I invariably adopted towards my clergy and my tutors after I had attended to them sufficiently to be able to give a life-like representation of their peculiarities to my schoolfellows.

From church it seems but a step to the pugilistic encounters which always took place as a sort of introduction to Morning Prayer. The formula of the challenge was: "Will you meet me before prayers in order that I may punch your head?" I admit that at the time I saw no incongruity in the arrangement. I confess that I had a mania for fighting boys bigger than myself and a cowardly abhorrence of getting licked by a boy of my own size and weight. This point is stressed, as it bears out what was said in a former paragraph regarding my bias in the direction of the theatrical. It was a cause of much trouble in after years, and it was at a somewhat advanced stage of my manhood that this cowardly characteristic was overcome and disappeared. I did not mind hard knocks and defeat at the hands of one that I was not expected to conquer; I did mind them, and shunned getting them, from those I might be expected to excel. I was sufficiently honest with myself to realize that this was no noble championing of the weak against the strong, but rather vanity of the strong disliking to be overcome by the weak. Further, I think there is no better corrective for this form of egoism than the ordinary curriculum of our English games. Later in life I also noticed that this form of self-conceit affects gamecocks, race-horses and lawn-tennis players, who often succumb to surprise at an unexpectedly strenuous opposition.

I was still blessed, however, by the steady and protective influence that Cecil always exercised over me. This brother had a sturdy common sense that sought for real values, looked things in the face as they were, and had no use

for the vanity and devotion to limelight shown by me. My clothes were always torn, my collar and hands always dirty, my tie frayed at the edges, and my allowance had always been squandered long before the end of the term. Needless to say, the good-natured Cecil made up to the best of his ability all these deficiencies—on loan, of course, but a loan that was seldom repaid.

For two years I was top boy of the school; during one year at least I was kept down to the same work I had done the previous year in order that I might not outstrip my brother at books. For three years Cecil was my inseparable companion, a companionship to be resumed when, after a year's interval, I followed him to William of Wykeham's College of St Mary Winton.

It was at Brighton that I made my debut as an actor—what we play at we often profess—at a school performance of *The Merchant of Venice*, given by the boys at the end of the term. To this day I remember the Trial Scene; how my elder brother bared his chest, and how Shylock sharpened his knife in the approved fashion on the sole of his boot. The Jew was played by Sir Thomas Barrett-Lennard, whose mother had, it was understood—rightly or wrongly—once been on the stage. In after years, as is well known, Lennard became a noted breeder of hunters.

I had realized that in the school readings I was kept on reading longer than other boys because, I understood, I had the cheek to speak up and throw myself into the part. I did not realize that I had any remarkable gifts in that direction; I did realize that I enjoyed doing it. I was therefore not averse from taking part in an old-fashioned comedy called *The Rendezvous*, followed, as an after-piece, by an impromptu performance on the part of Cecil and myself purporting to be an imitation of the Christy Minstrels. We, with our faces blacked and our jackets turned inside out, carried this through with such vigour, such thumpings and knockabout turns, that it became one of the standard entertainments of the school.

Here endeth the second chapter of my education.

CHAPTER III

AT WINCHESTER: THE ETON-JACKET PERIOD

I was by now a healthy, wiry little boy, above the average at running, jumping and wrestling, rather quicker in the uptake but less grounded in scholarship than most of my age, inclined to be priggish, perhaps a little artificial and self-centred, but capable of great enthusiasms and some self-sacrifice. In after years I reckoned that the product must have cost some three hundred pounds a year, and wondered if it were worth the expense to myself, my parents, or the State.

About the age of ten I began to develop a singular capacity for running. One evening I started to see how far I could go. Around the park I ran, raced at intervals in my course by gardeners, grooms or footmen. They all gave up in turn, and left me to go on alone in my glory. That evening I ran eight miles without stopping. I wanted to see if I could do it, and I did. But, by the living jingo! I was in a muck of sweat at the end, and nurse gave me "what for" with the chill off.

Under the kindly guidance of a sporting neighbour we little boys were introduced to the hunting field and the mysterious rites of being blooded when in at the death for the first time. Now it was we learned the delight of jumping over fallen trees and wattles—an interminable steeplechase. Sometimes we landed on the pony, sometimes before or after; sometimes the right side of the fence, sometimes the wrong; but in this way we learned to ride a refuser, thanks to Dicker, the head-groom, afterwards coachman, always a friend. In fact, afterwards, Cecil became one of the best judges of pace, and one of the hardest riders in the country. Our father early in life was crippled with gout, and, bless his kindly soul! rode vicariously, so to speak, through his family. Always at starting the cavalcade was expected to parade in front of the house. Always at the doorstep or his study window stood the Squire, sugar in hand for the ponies, biscuit for the dogs—kindest, gentlest, most generous of fathers.

And now for Winchester, "where the boys are all men," and you have each one a large upright desk and cupboard, called "toys," and you must not do anything or say anything that savours of "t'other school."

How big these "men" were! One was six foot two, the second captain of the eleven—"Lords," as it was called—afterwards chosen for Oxford,

Yorkshire and Gentlemen of England; a good specimen of the supple whalebone muscle developed in the course of school games—Rawdon Briggs, afterwards Vicar of Bradford. Some had moustaches and side-whiskers, and I, though I had neither, and was only four foot ten, proudly realized I was a Winchester "man," an inmate of "Beetles," the oldest house in the school. Beetle was the time-honoured nickname of the house-master, the Rev. H. J. Wickham. Kinder friends than he and his wife (called "the Doe") no boy ever had. Little more than five feet in height, like most of the Founder's kin he was active and athletic and absolutely fearless; a gentleman to the backbone, somewhat strict and severe, rather old-fashioned maybe in his ideas, true as steel, staunch to the end for what he held was right.

It took me some time, and many an imposition, many a punishment, before I found out what a brick "the Beetle" was. I am afraid I gassed a little at first about being head of my school, and as my brother Willie was a prefect in the "Sixth Book" (form), and had won an Exhibition, I hardly felt I had distinguished myself when I was started in the lowest division but one. However, I was first or second in my class, and got my remove regularly, for four terms, and nearly won an Exhibition. But at the end of two years I grew shockingly lazy, took to "thoking" (θωκειν) instead of mugging (working), and began to sprawl over my books, while I devoted all my energy to games. I do not think anyone was to blame but myself. I have thought that many of the masters had their hearts broken when, fresh from University honours, full of scholarship and enthusiasm, they were set down to teach small boys the rudiments of Latin and Greek.

It certainly seemed to some of us that few of the staff—the headmaster and his second-in-command being notable exceptions—took much interest in the subjects they were supposed to teach. Having been idle, we may not be fair judges on this topic. But we did notice how all the masters kept up their enthusiasm for the more important pursuits—athletics, cricket, football, rowing, riding, racquets, fives, mountaineering, running, and other useful accomplishments. How was it? One reason was that in those days the idea of an usher as a pedant, something apart from the general current of social life, was still too prevalent in England. In Scotland the teacher and the dominie have always been among the central pillars of the State. In England we are only just beginning to take our general education seriously.

Again, those were "the competition walla" times. Everything was made subservient to winning a scholarship, or taking a good degree at the university. Real culture was sacrificed to examinations. Teaching at the public schools tended rather to impart cunning wherewith to floor the examiner than to build up character and understanding. Canon Lyttelton, always the champion of the dull boy backward at games and books, very rightly said that at the end of fifty

years of teaching classics he wondered whether Greek literature was read to teach the language or the language taught in order to read the literature and understand Greek life and thought. Thirdly, to be a "mugster"—*i.e.* to work hard at books—was regarded as fashionable only for College boys. Personally, I always felt it was a mistake to keep the clever boys on the Foundation so much to themselves. It was hard on them, and hard on the rest. The College men would have stimulated the intellectual interests of the Commoners. Fusion with the Commoners would have given the Collegers readiness for prompt action and a wider knowledge of their fellow-men and general affairs. What I am saying does not apply so much to the numerous headmasters, wardens, provosts, bishops and deans that the school turned out; but it was rather pathetic to see a short-sighted senior wrangler teaching healthy, rowdy boys their multiplication table. Many of us were wont to walk in at the door and out of the window on to the roof, thence down a rain-pipe on to a wall, and so to the shops or the playing-fields for the rest of the hour.

Years of teaching lower boys to pass exams, would, I fancy, deaden the livest wire. Certainly many a fine instrument got blunted; many a poet and scholar lost some of his vision in the process. All too soon I adopted this view, and made it my pride to maintain my place in the school and yet do less than anyone else. When I had drifted up into the Senior Sixth Book I awoke, too late, to the fact that I had become a slow-minded dunce, instead of the quick, intelligent boy I had been at starting. When I came in contact with the zeal of Fearon for history and Plato, the Æschylean wisdom of Ridding, then I knew I had neglected opportunities which would never come again. My own fault, doubtless; but partly the fault of the system, which by now, I believe, has to a great extent been altered. Under that system, Greek plays were taught in relation to grammar and accidence, not in relation to humanity. The whole time I was at Winchester, we never went through a Greek play to the end.

"What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba, that he should weep for her?" Few of us shed a tear for her; we regarded her as the criminal inventor of ει with the optative and εαν with the subjunctive, and other ambushes of the Evil One to keep us from playing cricket on a half-holiday.

Rather inefficient also was the method that tried to teach science and chemistry ("stinks," as they were called) and geology from text-books, instead of in the laboratory with an electro-magnet, or in the chalk-pit with a "mouse digger."

"What is this, sir?" said one original student, with the pathetic look on his face of a hungry soul in quest of knowledge. "What is this interesting piece of black rock?" reverently tendering his specimen.

"This," said the geologist preceptor, "is a piece of carboniferous deposit belonging to the tertiary period. It is also a piece of impudence on the part of

one of my pupils; its abstraction from the classroom coal-scuttle will cost the discoverer two hundred lines, to be handed to me by to-morrow evening."

It was not for nothing that I was nearly "tunded," after my first four weeks, for imperfection in the "Notions Examina." Disposed to treat it all as a joke, I was sternly reprimanded by Buckland, the head of the house. "Benson, don't be spree" (cheeky); "you'll find this a serious matter. You've got to become acquainted with these notions, or become acquainted with my ground-ash." I scraped through without further trouble.

I am thoroughly convinced that, in spite of this small criticism, Winchester was, and is, the best of the public schools. At Oxford a fourfold testimony used to be given to its merits: firstly, its scholarship; secondly, the thoroughness with which a Wykehamist carries out whatever he undertakes; thirdly, the feeling of brotherhood and devotion to their school that obtains in their ranks; fourthly, the well-bred self-restraint and self-negation (carried sometimes to excess) with which Wykehamists usually behave. In a word, ask a public-school man what school he thinks is the best. He will generally put his own first and Winchester second. It was a fine school; it is a fine school; old-fashioned and conventional in some directions maybe, and perhaps it gives more ground than Eton for the complaint that it sets a stamp of uniform type on the boys, and, for the sake of turning out that type, unduly represses individuality and original thought in all save the strongest growths.

One of the dons had a great influence on my career. A mathematical master, he was also the mainstay of the literary and debating societies of the school. Possessed of an exceptional tenor voice, rumour reported him to have said that "the Church's gain was the Stage's loss." Hearing one day of a reading that I had given in the classroom, when studying *As You Like It*, he recruited me as a member of the Shakespearian Reading Society. I was entrusted with such rôles as Rosalind, Constance and Cleopatra. At first I distinguished myself; then I degenerated into an exaggerated melodramatic rendition of the parts entrusted to me. The school paper no longer praised, but referred to me as a burlesque of a third-rate actress. "You saw what *The Wykehamist* said of you," said the Rev. Charles Halford Hawkins. "I got them to say that. You needed it. Come to me for the next reading, and we will remedy the defects." And then commenced a series of intensely interesting analytical studies in Shakespearian characters, and experiments in their representation, for which I have always been profoundly grateful.

After scraping through "Examina for Notions" and satisfying the prefects that we had duly ascended Hills and walked round Trench, and paid our respects to Arethusa on Twyford Down, we were eligible for "Sweat Roll"—that is, we were allotted to perform various menial offices for the community in general, such as opening and shutting windows, tidying up papers, looking

after lockers and dressing-rooms, keeping orderly the hat-rack and boot-rack, etc. In those days, till you had been in the school three years, or risen in the school to one of the highest divisions, you were not exempt from keeping the "toys"—*i.e.* desk—of the prefect clean and tidy, brushing his clothes of a morning, looking after his football change, "watching out" at games, etc. The casual labour was exacted by another junior with the formula: "I nail you to sweat for So-and-so."[3] You were also liable to be sent on any errand that a prefect thought fit: "I sweat you to run down to the booksellers and get me a Latin grammar"—or "a novel," generally the latter. "Go and get me a kettle." Exit fag. . . . Re-enter: "Please, sir, I can't find one." "Don't call me 'sir'! Try again." "I thought perhaps——" "Thought! What right have you to think? You haven't been here two years yet. Don't you know it's spree to think till you've been here two years? Hurry up, I'm waiting for my tea." Re-enter fag: "I'm very sorry, I can't get one anywhere." "Oh, can't you! Get one! Buy one, steal one, make one—and take two cuts with the ground-ash for being such a moke."

Needless to say a kettle was forthcoming, and we learned that there were not so many impossibilities in life as we had fancied. Of course if it is true that youth is nearer the Stone Age than the grown man there is no reason why he should resent corporal punishment. But, apart from any far-fetched argument of this nature, we are a very strong people, and do not as a rule resent discipline, or even chastisement, provided it is not unjust. Of how many in authority has it been said: "So-and-so is a beast, but a just beast"?

He who, with the rowdy exuberance of youth, had imported coal and calves' heads into the classrooms, in time succeeded Jack Shuter as captain of the Eleven, and became a wise and just, if slightly eccentric and humorous, officer of the school commonwealth. He played for Middlesex while still at school and was captain of Oxford. Alongside his Harrow brother, A. J. Webbe, he played for Gentlemen of England. H. R. Webbe, the coal and calf merchant, was also a distinguished scholar, and an excellent amateur musician, playing the violin with more than average skill. In type both these brothers were of what is called the Goidel[4] breed—the large red-haired men who gave freely in all directions their life and strength, whether in battle, banquet, council chamber, commerce or games. True to type, our friend, when failing sight condemned him to abandon some of his favourite pursuits, gave of his best to working in a slum school. There one Sunday morning, in the spirit of Wykeham, of Ken, and of Ridding, he knelt down at his desk to open the proceedings with the Lord's Prayer. At the words "Thy will be done" his head dropped gently forward and his spirit passed on to the *Domum* of Wykeham.

We always regarded Webbe, though at the time we hardly realized his full value, as one of the fine types of gentlemen of which our Empire and our

Public Schools have been happily prolific.

At first I thought the archaic form of football—one of the earliest and most barbaric still played—was rotten compared with the Rugby and Association which I had played at "t'other school." Being a very slow-growing boy, small and light for my age, I always argued that its rules put a premium on weight, on strength and on brute force, as opposed to skill and speed. The fine art of dribbling was eliminated. It certainly qualified you to play full-back, for it was essential that you should learn to kick well with either foot. It taught you to rush, and to charge in rough-and-ready fashion. You were not supposed to defend your face with your hand or arm; you were always supposed to keep a full front to the foe. Obviously the moment the light blown football replaced the old jellybag this left you open to serious injuries, that often incapacitated you for the rest of the day, and sometimes permanently. The effect of a blow on the face from a football that might otherwise have travelled sixty or eighty yards was very often concussion of the brain. The still more serious objection was that it prevented Wykehamists in after life taking their full share in the national game. I was a very keen footballer. Though afterwards up to County form at soccer and rugger, it was only in my later terms at school that I got my chance, for three years representing houses and in my last term playing for the school six. I have often wondered why it was not thought such an honour to play for the school as it was to play for one of its three divisions. I believe many modifications of the football system at Winchester have been adopted since those days.

I am now writing of a time when sport of all kinds was once more becoming—what it had partially ceased to be, owing to the disappearance of the village green—an essential form of national recreation. Possibly, it was the Spartan discipline of canvas (the rows of netting that kept the ball in bounds) and the "Hots" that enabled Herbert Grey, the head of our house and the strong man of the school, afterwards headmaster and developer of Bradfield, to acquit himself manfully in a moment of peril in Naples. Attacked by a brigand with a knife, one evening, he disarmed his assailant and carried him off to the nearest gendarme. To Grey's disgust, this official refused to take the prisoner in charge, and threatened to arrest Grey for making a disturbance. The Beetleite pocket-Hercules dragged the brigand round the corner, gave him a sound thrashing, and then kicked the astonished Neapolitan down the street. Next morning the British Consul hurried him out of Naples to avoid the vengeance of the Black Hand or some other kindred association.

Of course I had to be "cut into" with a ground-ash when I did not brush Grimwood's Sunday coat properly and folded his trousers with the wrong crease, and of course I thank him now, though I was ungrateful at the time.

Poor Grimwood was a kindly clever boy, fresh-coloured, curly-haired, tall

and active, though somewhat girlish in appearance. He passed a brilliant examination into the Indian Civil, and then became the chief actor and victim of the Manipur revolt. Entangled in some mysterious intrigue of politics and human passion, he stood his ground stubbornly, stuck to his post, and held on till the assassins forced him to let go. His wife, a fine, handsome, attractive woman, whom I met afterwards in Dublin, managed to escape with some of the staff. Her adventurous journey caused some sensation at the time, and honours were conferred on her by Queen Victoria. It was rumoured in India that the chief conspirator, the Rajah's brother, had fallen madly in love with this fascinating lady. Few would blame him if he had.

What a number of similar stories hang round the prefects and the brave young manhood of our public schools. They would fill a volume by themselves. I mention them here only because of their formative influence on the subject of this chronicle.

The less said of my cricket at this stage the better. I was spotted by one of the coaches as likely to make one of the Eleven as bowler and batsman, but my passion for theories and my habit of carrying them to an extreme limit interfered sometimes with my proficiency at games. I also think that the facility with which I imitated anything which I saw mixed me up with my bowling action. At one moment, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously, I would bowl slow, underhand, à la bowling-master Turner; next it would be slow, overarm, like Alfred Shaw, the school-coach; next it would be like the Yorkshire fast bowlers, Ulyatt, Emmett and Hill; and so on, until I ultimately ended up with no action at all. These imitations never got beyond a colourable mimicry of the original, minus any particle of their accuracy and efficiency.

As regards wielding the willow I suffered in the same direction. One day it would be Jack Shuter, a short, thick-set All England and Surrey Wykehamist, one of the hardest hitters of his day. His fame as captain of Surrey and All England teams lives still. I once saw him cut a ball with the old-fashioned wrist-flick for which seven runs were scored, all run out. In those days the same attention was not paid to boundaries as is the fashion now. If one hit a ball into the next parish the field had to go to fetch it, and the batsman had to go on running. Then there was the Mitchell school at Eton, with the Lyttelton and Studd forward offensive; the Daft and Shrewsbury back-play; and, in a class by himself, W. G. Grace, the champion, who seemed to be master of all styles that have ever been used on a cricket-field, adopting them each in turn according to the various requirements of wicket, bowling, or state of the match. He remains inimitable, but the tenth-rate imitation of the other worthies indulged in by me shared the fate of my bowling efforts.

Occasionally, it is true, "little Nipper," as I was called in the village

matches, met with success. “Lawk-a-mussy me! If little Nipper ain’t been and gone an’ ’it a fiver; give oi some more beer.” It was in vain that I neglected my Greek and Latin and general studies, devising the best means of defence and attack for the house-team of which I was captain. True, I knocked up eighty with a short bat that I had borrowed from a friend. This was my undoing, for I straightway cut three inches off the blade of my own bat (my friend had restricted his attention to shortening the handle), and naturally never made a run for the rest of that season. Once I scored a hundred and twenty not out with a broomstick in a house-match. I do not think anyone was interested in this house-match except myself. The rest regarded it as an awful bore; but I thought it reminded me of Horatius Cocles holding the bridge against overwhelming odds. I therefore ordained that the First Eleven of the house should play the next twenty-two, the Eleven to play with broomsticks. Probably I was the only one that enjoyed that match; but it was sufficient proof to me and others that I had at any rate a good eye, for the wicket was of the bumpiest.

Here I will leave my cricket career veiled discreetly in mediocrity. It must be said in some excuse for my apparent deficiency in this direction that the weakness for some years of Winchester cricket was due largely to the rotten state of the wickets, on which small boys were asked to stand up to fast bowling without pads or gloves. After all, we thought it great fun. It was great fun, and I never lost keenness and thoroughly enjoyed every cricket match I played in, whether I fielded all day, whether I made runs or did not; with good discipline, good exercise, first-rate physical training I can still sometimes make runs. “All right, Nipper, you are not out yet.”

Probably my readers will have gathered by this time that I somewhat resembled the vainglorious frog that tried to imitate the ox. From a child I was over-anxious to do what the bigger boys did. Unduly uplifted by the joys of hunting, I joined the other small gas-bags in the dormitory, on the first night of our return, in recounting their triumphant holiday experiences. Amidst the chorus of: “I shot a rabbit.” “I hunted.” “I went racing.” “I danced at the Hunt Ball and she was pretty.” “I went to the theatre.” “I saw the Alhambra ballet and had supper at the Cri’.” “I hunted with the Tedworth, rode alongside Cannon and Archer,” I struck a top note with: “Cobs are deuced dear this season!”—interrupted by a boot.

Boundless self-confidence, possibly the result of my exuberant vitality and radiant health, would have led me to undertake any job in the world that was offered me. At this stage of my development this overweening vanity induced me to profess some skill with the single-stick on my first arrival at Beetles. Another new boy, also from Hampshire, of the well-known Humphery family, at once took me on at this pastime. This boy, older, bigger, stronger and better-trained, soon brought home to me that my vanity had again outstripped my

discretion. However, these encounters with young Humphery and others laid the foundation for the proficiency that I afterwards acquired in sword-play and fencing, valuable adjuncts to the actor's art.

"Leave out" days! What pleasant memories! You travelled any distance up to about twenty miles and spent the whole day with your friends. You had to be back for nine-o'clock roll-call. You were allowed to take friends with you and, needless to say, the home folk gave us all the best possible time. Many is the day's hunting that some of my schoolfellows enjoyed on these occasions; and the three meals of breakfast, lunch and late dinner were banquets for the gods. That, perhaps, was the sole advantage of having one's home close to one's school.

It gave me also an early acquaintance with the various interesting families in and near Winchester, the Hampshire Regiment, the 60th K.R.R., the Rifle Brigade—heroes of the Indian Mutiny, the Crimea, Afghanistan, Ashanti, Abyssinia, Burma, New Zealand, Zulu, and even of bush-ranger and convict fights. These battles all took living shape for me when pictured by those who had taken part therein. Dimly we boys realized that some of these quiet, elderly gentlemen, whose mannerisms I was only too prone to reproduce for the benefit of my friends, were really paladins of Empire. When we saw them lounging in the cricket-field, flirting in the ballroom, gossiping lazily in the club, it was sometimes hard to think of them in an entirely different capacity.

The fashionable Brown seemed a being far removed from the solitary subaltern walking up to four hundred mutinous West African native soldiers. Their rifles are loaded, their bayonets are fixed, they have forty rounds each in their possession. The subaltern has only his little swagger-cane. "I want you," he said, indicating six of the leaders; "you must give yourselves up and follow me; the rest shall be pardoned." The difficulty of the situation is increased by the fact that the civil officer in the fort has trained his gun on the little group; an old-fashioned gun that would probably burst at the first discharge, would certainly never have discharged a second round in time to prevent the four hundred desperate men storming the fort and wiping out its handful of a garrison. Will these men believe him and his overtures of peace if the chiefs in the fort are preparing for war? But they do believe him. They have looked in his eyes, and the six men follow him. Six of the best soldiers in his company. Oh, the pity—"his friends"—that hurts; and they have to be shot by their officer, their friend, before the sun goes down. They bear him no grudge, and the Empire goes on.

Perhaps it was the eager look in my eyes, but people always told me things during Sunday "leave out" lunch, over a cigar and a glass of port wine. Thus I heard—an education for an English lad—how in a Zulu war a young officer in command of a small detachment inadvertently killed an envoy from the enemy,

who was approaching with a message of peace. On discovering the mistake the commanding officer handed over the camp to his second-in-command. He gave him his revolver—he would probably never need it again. Then, "So long, old man; cheerio"; "Cheerio, so long," and the commandant steps forth. Alone he marches through the threatening ranks of Zulu warriors, angry at what they deemed the cowardly murder of their peace messenger. Disregarding the scowls and the tightening grip on knobkerrie and assagai he walks up to the chief: "I have done you a great wrong; unwittingly I killed your messenger who came in peace. No warriors, we, nor you, nor any real fighters, do a thing like that. The man who fired did not know. It was a mistake. Now I bring you my life for his; it is all the amends I can make. Do with me what you will." Six feet two, straight as a dart, the huge black chief advanced to the officer; he put both hands on his shoulders and said: "You are a brave man; your fathers were brave men before you; we too are brave. Why need we fight? Let us be friends." And peace was made.

Fights were frequent between the "Winchester men" and "the cads"—reminiscent, perhaps, of earl *v.* ceorl or of cleric *v.* burger. The eternal question, "When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?" had not received any satisfactory answer. Nor did it till the Great War. But that is anticipating.

At Winchester we had it out with snowballs. The "cads," I must say, froze theirs, and sometimes put stones in them. In those days I had neither the skill in boxing and wrestling, nor the strength, that in later years gave me a superabundance of confidence and self-reliance in any street fracas that might arise. That afternoon, however, my conviction of the superiority of the gentleman to the town boy received a rude shock. Remember, I was not yet thirteen and was small for my age. Cecil and I were walking with a very overgrown, lanky new boy belonging to our house. After bathing we were jumping ditches and spearing roach with our brollies in a shallow watercourse to keep ourselves warm. Gradually we found ourselves the centre of a tatterdemalion throng, who were busily engaged in the same recreation as ourselves. The long boy had picked up a big stick as a weapon in the event of hostilities. Some dispute arose between our party and the town boys as to the possession of a captured fish. "Mine," said a brawny ploughboy of eighteen. "Mine," said the lanky Beetleite. "You're a liar!" added lanky, and flung the fish in the boy's face. Who'd have thought that a cad dared to resent, but he did, with a well-aimed stone. Off went lanky's top-hat. "He's cut my eye out; take the stick," handing it to me. All three realized discretion was the better part of valour. The despised ones of low degree were stronger. Better armed, they were also more numerous—eighty to three. The odds were too great. The three of superior caste tried to make as dignified a retreat as they could. Lanky

had outgrown his strength, and the flint had rather knocked the fight out of him. I tried to remember as much as I could of the gymnasium lessons I had learned with the gloves. The proletariat had no respect for Queensberry rules. It was just a rough-and-tumble scrap. Clods of earth began to fly, and sticks, and language that left us deaf and dumb. Reinforcements for the enemy poured down from the hill, or sprang up suddenly from the bowels of the earth. In spite of my pseudo-scientific sparring the party would have fared badly but for the timely arrival of some prefects and senior boys, who, in a semi-magisterial capacity, dispersed the attacking forces and marched the small boys safely home.

Besides affording a school for fly-fishing, the trout-stream gave opportunities for learning to dive—not very scientifically, perhaps—from heights up to thirty to forty feet, running dives from the spring-board, jumping into the water head first at leap-frog, diving over a hurdle or some other obstacle. In these branches of the art I excelled; in fact some of my running dives from high spring-board or raised take-off have carried me as far a distance through the air, before touching the water, as has yet been achieved. Here, again, however, I often allowed my imitative faculty to interfere with true gracefulness. It was to the Itchen—resort of cleverest fly-fishers—that I owed, primarily, sufficient skill to save my own life, and those of others, in various accidents in breaking ice and stormy waters. One queer memory comes back to me, in which I pulled a boy to the bank who was over six feet high and yet so completely panic-stricken that he was drowning in four feet of water.

Stanley Humphery, the youngest of five brothers, was not always popular with the junior boys in Beetles. Of the fast-growing sort, tall and big beyond his age, he was very good at games and at his books. At these he worked. I really liked him; we worked together, in many things “sociused,” as the phrase went, but I fear at times I was a little jealous, for, like the rest of my family, I developed slowly. For some terms we were rivals in class. In this rivalry, entirely through my own idleness, I had for a time to yield pride of place. In the matter of games also Stanley at first went lengths ahead. Independent, self-reliant, with great powers of application, he had been well licked into shape by four elder brothers, all of them Beetleites. He never bullied anyone, never allowed anyone to bully him, or anyone else, if he could help it. “Brock” was the apposite Winchester expression for bully, derived from the old English word for a badger. His father had died when he was quite a boy. The family had ample means; all of them were able-bodied and athletic, excellent specimens of the Nordic breed.

He was a fine young fellow, but we never properly appreciated him. He wasn’t really conceited, but he was thundering good at all games, and knew it, and always came off when least expected and most wanted. Perhaps it was the

supreme self-confidence and independence with which even at that age he faced life and whatever it brought to him; perhaps it was that he was old for his years, but I think in reality, in spite of his outward calm, he was exceptionally highly strung, nervous and shy. A good shot, captain of the rifle corps, in the school four, good at football and cricket, just as his brothers had been before him, he was always rather lonely and aloof. Later we heard of him as a smart cavalry officer in India. He had just ridden a winning horse in a big race at Calcutta when a "plunger" from the grand stand came up to him: "You damned young fool, if you'd pulled that horse, as I asked, I'd have made your fortune and my own." The characteristic reply was a blow across the face with a riding whip and a severe thrashing, delivered in front of the pavilion, with that powerful right and left which we had learned to respect at Beetles. I suppose many of us in similar circumstances would have tried to do the same, but I think few of us would have done it so scientifically and thoroughly.

How curiously our games, when we have an opportunity of playing them, lead up to the discharge of our duties in after life. So it is with the wolf cubs and the young lions in the school of the woods, and so it was with us little Winchester "men."

Some of the bolder schoolboy sportsmen went so far as to keep a dog at a neighbouring pub. One even had a horse. But these were very daring young devils; and then, again, they sported "doggy" coats and horsy trousers, bad for jumping walks. Sometimes "ossiest" men on foot are "footiest" men on a 'oss." Our "pitchup" (fellowship) had neither the money nor the inclination nor the courage for such felonious heights. Besides, there was the cramping feeling, with me at least, that I was overlooked by the family windows at Alresford, and too much rascality might attract attention. That was a wise headmaster—also a great Wykehamist—who used to tell his scholars at Bedford that, in school matters at least, whether we were day-boys or boarders, we never should shelter behind our mothers.

Only rarely did we stray into the region of Poacher's Delight. I once exchanged a stamp album, which would now have been worth possibly four figures, for a beautiful saloon pistol of the latest make. The barrel was long, the trigger was light, the sight very fine, the pellet small. The fingers were generally hot and shaky with running and jumping, and the aim was usually furtive. What if one shot a master out for a walk or a prefect on the prowl? Be that as it may, no wood-pigeon, crow, partridge, pheasant, hare, rabbit or water-rat—not even a squirrel—succumbed to my efforts. I once claimed to have hit a sheep at fifty yards. The only evidence was that the sheep said "Baa, baa," and went on grazing.

Clearly something had to be done to keep up my reputation; therefore that evening I traded the lethal weapon for a short muzzle-loading, percussion-

capped pistol and four shillings and sixpence cash. Next half-holiday we went out, this time with a game-bag. The pistol was loaded with shot; and shot spread—surely we should hit something. We did. One sparrow—not worth three-farthings—fell to the ground. I did not rejoice. I was rather shocked, and sorry for that sparrow. I think I shot it—I know someone else ate it. It was so soft and brown and beautiful and full of life until the pellet winged it, and the hungry one wrung its neck, that I confess it gave me a distaste for ordinary shooting which has lasted throughout my life.

So I was left with four shillings and sixpence instead of a thousand foreign stamps. This capital sum I invested in ices for our "pitchup"—on the whole, an unprofitable exchange. William, by this time head of the house, thumped me for being such an ungrateful ass. Had not he, William, who really took an intelligent interest in stamps, given this collection as a mark of deep affection to his young brother? For what? For nine sixpenny ices, of which I had not even invited him to partake.

Enter one day in the interest of our "pitchup" some other boy's bone-shaker bicycle. Those were the days when the bone-shaker was giving place to the towering front wheel, with the two steps from the little back wheel, whereby the giddy height was mounted. Sometimes I darted home with friends to astonish the home circle at Alresford. Eight miles in an hour, how greatly daring! How like the lightning! How exhausting! The little "pitchup" must be fed abundantly and at once, then packed with their machines into the blue wagonette with red wheels, and conveyed in triumph safely back to Beetles. Our "pitchup" had odd notions. We thought, and thought rightly, that bicycling was an art to be acquired, but not frequently practised, as not tending to the most natural and healthy acquisition of muscle on the leg.

"Commoner Singing" and "Baker Fights" all unwittingly became a means conducive to the future actor's training. We all had to assemble at Commoner Singing in the Great Hall, where we studied and played and had our "toys," and held all sorts of impromptu gymkhanas, including Baker Fights, in which the missiles were hard, red-baize cushions, two inches thick, twelve inches square, called "bakers." The prefects were allowed a larger and softer one in green baize. The chief occasions for a Baker Fight were when some four or five had got leave of absence from the classroom on the score of ill-health. This was called "going continent." I suppose it meant we were forced to be abstemious and careful in our diet. At opportune moments the invalids, unless very sick, sought health in skimming these red cushions across the hall into an opponent's eye. The sides would be Headaches *versus* Sore-throats, or Stomach-aches *versus* Sprained Ankles. I do not know that the treatment was worse for one disease than another, but it often lasted for three-quarters of an hour. We made an awful dust; we upset many inkstands and, alas! sometimes

broke a window. The moments were not always opportune; sometimes a prefect would return unexpectedly. “Stop that row! What the devil do you mean by using my baker? You’re getting altogether too spree. Come here, Benson.” The trembling Benson stepped up and was “cut into.” One, two, tingled across the shoulder-blades.

Still more inopportune was the moment when, while the volleys were at their fastest, the air thick with red and green missiles, light and heavy artillery, the din deafening and the dust blinding, in walked the Beetle, with candle and top-hat. Again was I the unlucky one; a green cushion discharged skilfully at a boy who was sickening for mumps was avoided by a cowardly duck of the head, and caught our venerated preceptor on the top-hat—oh, sacrilege!—extinguished his candle, and nearly knocked the reverend gentleman down. It was not till afterwards we appreciated what a little sportsman the Beetle was. He took it quite calmly. He did not even inquire who fired the fatal shot, but very justly punished us all.

Now the little invalids suffering from mumps, measles, headache, whooping-cough, sprained ankle and stomachache were all told they would have to go to school to-morrow morning; meanwhile they could recover from their illnesses by each writing out a hundred lines of Horace.

I think, in arranging crowds in combat on the stage, I must always have remembered the inimitable hurry-scurry and ordered confusion of those Baker Fights. Anyhow, I was wont to use very much the same tactics in representing the battle of Agincourt, in pageantry or drama.

More to the purpose, as far as training for the theatre went, was Commoner Singing. Assembled at the command of the prefects, you were asked to give a performance of any kind that would amuse or interest the assembled house. Be it understood this was a “Command” performance: “I sweat you to sing.” You stood up on a table and did your best. The penalty of failure or disobedience was to be “monsed”—that is, pushed about and crushed by the collective weight of the whole house—or “bakered”—that is, stoned with red cushions by the united mass of your comrades. This was always my hour of glory. When I was called on I at once impertinently preached a sermon in the style of the headmaster, and, being encored, other masters, preachers, bishops, deans and minor canons were represented, or misrepresented, by me. I really was a very good mimic, and had the faculty of giving an absurd travesty of the pith of their discourse. My imitations became a permanent institution as a star turn on the concert platform of Commoner Singing. Oddly enough, this faculty of imitation disappeared when I went on the stage. You will observe that so far the future actor was gaining endurance, suppleness of muscle, a certain amount of vocal and facial expression, and a faculty of observing the habits and peculiarities of his fellow-humans, that stood him in good stead in his

professional career. I will defy any boy to go through those long jumping walks, sometimes landing on his head, chest, shoulders, arms, or any part of his person but his feet, without being the better for it. At any rate I learned the pregnant truth that gracefulness is no more and no less than the quality that pertains to strength properly applied, that gracefulness is the accompaniment of power possessed, and cannot be pretended.

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[3] The phrases “sweat-cad” and “sweat-roll” have a good old English savour.

[4] Gadhelic = Gaelic.

CHAPTER IV

AT WINCHESTER: THE SWALLOW-TAIL PERIOD

The last chapter endeth what I may call the Eton-jacket period of my schooldays, and I now come to my promotion to swallow-tails and stick-up collars.

First, be it noted, the little boys had been promoted as regards bedtime, seven-forty-five, eight, eight-fifteen, eight-thirty, nine-thirty, and very soon grown-up time, whenever that might be. High tea in the schoolroom had given place to supper, cheese and potted meat, and that in turn—a grand promotion indeed—to dinner, with bitter beer or shandy-gaff from the pewter won at fives or on the river. With these promotions came increased activity: trips to Ilfracombe, explorations to the haunts of Jan Ridd and Lorna Doone, and visits to the old friends, Mills and Aclands, at Bude Haven. "Caw," said the rushing raven, unto his hungry mate. "Ho, gossip, for Bude Haven. There are corpses six or eight." Fascinating stories of wreckers, false lights, conversation with the chief actors in this illicit plunder, furniture derived from the same source, and bathes under Great Hartland. We were rescued during one of these swims on the broad shoulders of the Member for Exeter, who swam out to us in a grey flannel shirt and top-hat in his desire to save the sons of his friend from being carried out to sea by the current. Tintagel and echoes of Arthur, Tristram, Isolde, Merlin and Mark; coach-rides to Clovelly, Bideford and Barnstaple; donkey cavalcades under the wing of a sporting footman. Leapfrog into the saddle of a kicking donkey, circus tricks, voluntary and involuntary. In addition to the ponies we had Prince, the jumping cob of fourteen hands, with the same habit as Dane of a continuous buck-jumping gallop in preference to any other mode of progression for the first mile. Cecil on Prince, I on Dane, unconsciously learned to ride well. The alternative would have been a broken neck, for Prince and Dane were confirmed bolters as well as buck-jumpers, and seemed to have entered into an unholy rivalry as to which should dislodge his rider first. "Sit back and get his head up," and so on for a mile. Faint Heart and Bridegroom were of gentler, milder mood, and therefore somewhat unpopular.

Outside the church on Sunday there was the assembly of the notables to greet one and another of the privileged, and nod good-morning in general to

the neighbours. Among those who held these chief seats in the market-place was Captain Marx and his family, the father a major in the Volunteers, secretary of the Hunt, and a first-rate man across any country. Many useful hints did he give to us boys, as he sat back, with his toes in his stirrups, and cantered along on a tall son of Irish Birdcatcher, never turned aside from the hounds by park-paling, hedge or watercourse, a cheery light in his eye. He literally rode to his death unafraid. Oddly enough, both he and his eldest son were killed negotiating small gaps that a sheep could have stepped over. His clever, artistic wife was a great admirer and good friend of my mother.

Broad-shouldered were the sons. The eldest boy, in the army, was a bruising hard man to hounds, downright, outspoken and strong. We boys regarded him as a descendant of Cœur de Lion, with his fair hair, aquiline nose, blue eyes and crisp, curly beard. The brother was a veritable Hercules, thirteen stone, with a true navy roll of his broad shoulders as he voyaged through life on short, thick legs. His arms reached to his knees; but he used them to great effect on the horizontal bar, swinging round at arm's-length like a giant anthropoid. As a young midshipman he won the Humane Society's Medal for jumping overboard and rescuing a sailor on a stormy day from a shark-infested sea. Of course he made light of it all to his admiring young friends, and explained the day was hot, and the moment the cry of "Man overboard!" was raised every man jack, except the captain, leaped overboard to have a bath, only he happened to have the luck to find the silly beggar who was trying to drown himself. Later on he was one of a detachment of naval officers who succeeded in charting Delagoa Bay and its fortifications. "The captain said that information was wanted, d'y'see; we knew the Portuguese would shoot us if they caught us. The captain called it taking observations for our country, d'y'see; but the Portuguese called it spying. The captain said if we were collared, and got off alive, we should all be court-martialled, d'y'see, and that our captain, the admiral and all the big-wigs, d'y'see, would be the first to disown us, and see us broke. At the same time he wanted to know, d'y'see; so, of course, we all volunteered; that's how it was, d'y'see." We did see; and I think we saw still more clearly when the said John Marx, R.N., a full Admiral on the retired list, rendered distinguished service in mine-sweeping and submarine-hunting in the home waters, rating as a simple Lieutenant—d'y'see? Aye, aye, of course; and that's one way that England won the war, and kept the sea free. We saw. It was Sir John Marx and his companions who showed us.

Naturally, near Portsmouth, Aldershot and Winchester there were many naval and army heroes, with weird stories of man-eating horses and monstrous tigers. A hard man to beat in a quick run was the one-armed Captain Bradford, V.C., afterwards Chief of the London Police. The lost arm had been badly

mauled by a tiger, who was eating him alive. If he had stirred it would have killed him, so he had to lie still, till his pal could get in a shot. After a long illness he recovered, but his nerve had gone. There was only one thing to be done, and that was to have a light rifle made and go out into the jungle on foot and kill another tiger. This he did, but it needed a man of iron will. This he had.

Then there were friendly games with the Christians, noted in army and navy and in service to the Empire and athletics.

"Lost a ship, did he?" said old Admiral Christian. "Got into trouble over it? In my young day we never thought a man could command a ship till he showed nerve enough to lose two or three."

There was clever young Conybeare, member of a family of scholars, voyager to the North Pole with Nares and Markham; and Bruce, strong scion of a brawny family, who juggled with croquet balls, throwing them two at a time as high as the nursery window and catching them with unfailing skill.

Alresford was a neighbourhood rich in pretty girls, black hair or golden, blue eyes or brown, tall or short, pale or ruddy; there were always plenty of young men and maidens to make merry at dances and garden-parties, including six tall, fair maidens at the rectory.

About this time, too, lawn-tennis and badminton made their appearance. We Bensons always claimed to have invented lawn-tennis. After we had got weary of scoring thousands at battledore-and-shuttlecock we used a small ball on an enlarged badminton court. Many families did the same, and in a year lawn-tennis was the rage. In all these various sports and pastimes the chosen companions, guides, philosophers and friends were found in Jack Seeley and young Sumner, afterwards our brother-in-law. His father was a bishop, his mother and one of his sisters were among the best amateur singers of the day, while the eldest sister was the beauty of Alresford.

At old Alresford Rectory we enlarged our acquaintance with drama and song. Dumb crambo and acting words, charades and more ambitious plays, were all the fashion. My mother used to describe how we organized nursery tragedies. One composed and stage-managed by me she always remembered. As usual Cecil was the victim. I was the murderer. Margaret was the heroine and costumier. Agnes helped in the dialogue and, with Godfrey, played crowds and messengers. The family servants were the audience. After Cecil had been duly murdered, and Margaret imprisoned in a dungeon vile, the ghost—Cecil in bath-sheet, with flour on his nose—approached the nursery sofa, whereon the blood-stained villain vainly sought refuge from a guilty conscience in sleep. Alas, no rest for the wicked! His wakeful eye fell on Cecil, the flour, the bath-towel. Vainly he shrank to the farthest corner of the bed, clutched horror-stricken at the black handles of the nursery wardrobe, even pulled some off—a

piece of realism protested against by nurse. At last, with a yell of despair, he collapsed, heart-broken and dying, in the nursery bath. “Lawks, give h’over, Master Frank; you made your little brother cry, and you’ve terrified cook. The other children won’t sleep a wink to-night. Give h’over; whatever are you h’at? You’ve no call to carry on so. H’orful, h’orful, I calls it.” “Real h’orful,” chimes in the butler. “It’s enough to give a man the nightmare.” “He really didn’t orter; it terrifies a body,” sobbed a kitchenmaid. So I presume my early efforts in tragedy were somewhat of a success.

Presently I was introduced to the wonder of Beethoven’s life rhythms. A little lady who was visiting the tenants of Tichborne Park came on to Langtons, to prolong her stay in the neighbourhood many weeks. Very small, very pretty, an accomplished musician. “By Jove! sir,” said her host at Tichborne, “she’s a demure little devil—turns the heads of all the young fellows she meets. Those two Kitcheners are quite crazy about her.” (Historic name!) Thus Colonel Lushington, a breezy, retired colonel of the Guards, beloved of all children, with a superabundant vitality, sometimes asserting itself in a Highland fling, sometimes in strong argument at the dinner-table: “By God! sir, I differ from you *in toto*; absolutely *in toto*!” How this formula delighted us, especially as it nearly gave a fit to the bishop so addressed. To this dictatorial benefactor I can never be sufficiently thankful. Owing to his kindness I learned the geography of that wonderful old manor-house of Tichborne intimately, and in that lesson learned much of the social conditions of mediæval yeoman England. Over and above this, the introduction to Miss Kingdon and to the *Moonlight Sonata* remain among my most treasured memories. From the fingering of those sonatas by small, dainty Miss Kingdon I began to appreciate the master rhythms of the universe. Subconsciously, but permanently, did I absorb the influence of this helper of men-folk, twin soul of my favourite Shakespeare. And all the while we children danced and rode and played and frisked and flirted without a care in the world. All interest in flirtation paled in the presence of fox-hunting.

And now for the history of the “swallow-tail period.”

Glory be! I no longer wore a greatcoat on a summer evening to hide the fact that, unlike Cecil, I was tailless. With swallow-tails came the responsibility of playing for “Houses,” and being a school prefect in the Sixth Book, with a ground-ash, and also an increased repertoire of Commoners Singing, sketches of foreign characters. There came also a place in the boat and on the School Committee of five. Sprinting experiences at prisoner’s base in the backyard came in useful in being just not late for chapel or classroom. I always ran it finer from the house-door to the college than anyone else. This was the time of my triumphs in Shakespearian study, one of the few things I worked at. I read a good deal of Gervinus, Cowden Clark, Mrs Jameson,

Dowden and Schlegel; but always my chief interest was centred in the dramatic expression of the subject.

For my last two years, as head of my house, I had the privilege of a bedroom to myself, wherein I used to rehearse Constance, the rôle entrusted to me for the gala night to which the general public were admitted. I was in the middle of my choicest and maddest effort when I heard a muffled groan outside my door; bumpety-bump went a heavy body, apparently half-jumping and half-falling down the old oak staircase. Then all was still again for a moment. On opening my door to see what the disturbance had been I met my old friend the matron, who asked me if I was ill. Answer, polite negative. She then explained that the new chambermaid had heard strange sounds, and listened at the door, and when it had come to a strangled cry of "Oh, God, have mercy!" had landed in the kitchen in one jump from the top of the house, imploring the matron to hurry upstairs. She had heard Master Benson carrying on something awful. She thought he was praying—dying—or in a fit. "Oh no. I was only rehearsing for to-morrow night." Down trots the matron to the servants' hall: "You silly little gawk, it ain't fits he's got, it's only Shakespeare." "Go on," sobbed the girl: "if that's Shakespeare, I don't think much of him."

It does not take me long to record my scholastic achievements—they simply didn't exist. I learned something from the fiery zeal and dramatic contrasts of Fearon's history lessons and an occasional excursion with that gentleman into the land of Plato's *Republic*. I was quite carried away by the headmaster's thundering out a vibrant poetic translation of Æschylus' *Prometheus*. It made us hear the whir of the eagle's wings, the clank of the fetters, the stroke of the talon and claw on the strong-beating heart.

One thing I did do well, and that was when the Lower Sixth were asked to write out in English their interpretation of Wordsworth's *Immortality* ode. Most served up a sad hash. One of the clever boys in the school, a Colleger, a distant relative of mine, and the son of a distinguished archbishop, sent up a version that was pronounced excellent, "scholarly, full of poetry and understanding"; but to the amazement of the class, amongst whose lazy dunces I was the laziest, the form-master finished up his lecture with a scrawl by me. He read it aloud to the form. Then he turned it over in his hands several times, looked at the writing and looked at me, and then asked with a kindly smile: "Did you really do all this by yourself?" "Yes," I said; "I'm sorry. I certainly wrote it all myself. I suppose it's all wrong, but that's how it seemed to me." "Yes," proceeded the master, "I know you wrote it yourself—you'll excuse my saying that nobody else makes quite so many blots or writes such an appalling hand—but, honestly, it's so unlike all your work that I must ask you again, did you get it from a book, or did someone tell you this was the meaning?" I, who

had, as usual, been working out teams and tactics for football and cricket on the margin of my *Homer*, replied again: "I didn't quite understand it. I liked the poem, and it seemed to me to have a peculiar bearing on the glad vague life of the world in general, and of Wykeham's School in particular."

"My dear fellow, it's amazingly good, amazingly good! I'm surprised, delighted. I've shown it to the headmaster, and he quite agrees with me. But, you rascal, if you can write a thing like this, you are lazier than even I thought you were." "Thank you, sir," I said; "but it happened, and sometimes the other things don't seem to."

Before leaving the Eton-jacket and swallow-tail chapters in these chronicles I must briefly refer to my ideas at that time on my relations to my God and to my womenkind.

This is not the place for a digression on two subjects which have provided matter for three-fourths of the screeds of man, but biographers often shelve them as involving things too personal, too sacred for other eyes.

I agree that the shelving process can be carried too far, and is often the cause of endless trouble to a growing generation. If balked activity has caused half the sin and misery of mankind, misdirected activity has caused the remainder. "Is Saul also among the prophets?" If so, why leave the Ark of the Covenant to commune with the witch of Endor? Amaryllis for centuries has been laughing in the shade, or beckoning through the vine-leaves to the children of men; and all the while, in the groves of the oracle, Egeria dispenses to the wayfarer waters of life from the fountain of wisdom.

How shall the youth hear the call? How shall he mould, fashion, restrain or master the urge of the ages? Each individual must find the answer to the problem for himself, by the living it. Sometimes, alas! he finds too late. The attitude of Western civilization towards these subjects is a pitiable failure when compared with that of many a primitive race. I almost regret at times that there is to-day so little of what the Greeks and Romans, and many primitive peoples, regarded as a holy initiation into the mysteries of nature, or at least a more scientific introduction to the forces therein involved.

Very close to Samuel's shrine, within earshot of David's harping, lurked the daughters of the people and the Canaanitish women. They had, and have, their rites of initiation into one of the great mysteries of life, one of the great forces that may lead men to love or lust, to heaven or to hell, according to its early shaping. We, in the Victorian age, and even now, still treat the sex impulse as something wicked, almost evidence of original sin—something taboo, to be looked at askance; a skeleton in the cupboard, of which the churchwarden keeps the key. At that time, these questions were often brushed aside with an unsympathetic: "You are too young to know anything about these things: in due time you will find out." I sensed that "human passion, a

holy and beautiful process of nature that can make us gods or beasts, should not be left to clandestine inquiry or revealed to the young by the vicious, the depraved, and the ignorant."

My experiences in this respect were little different from those of the average boy, neither better nor worse than the rest of us. I certainly after the age of sixteen had no interest in "blue" stories or loose talk. I do not mean I was purer-minded or better for this, but so it happened. The Quaker and the Puritanical tradition of my family perhaps made the struggle between asceticism and the strong passions of my nature difficult. Though helped in this clash of principles by my exuberant vitality and athleticism, like Saint Anthony and many another I have suffered all my life from the seeming contradictions between the spirit and the flesh. Sometimes victorious, sometimes vanquished, always striving, I could well understand John Bunyan's utterance at the execution of a criminal: "There but for the grace of God go I."

Dear mother, how much I owe to Victorian teaching and all the sanctity of my home life.

Boys would rather be tunded, or "cut into," than birched or set to write lines. As the head-prefect of the house, a position occupied respectively also by an elder brother and a younger, I fear I was something of a prig, almost too severe, though fairly popular with the boys. My house-master was good enough to say I was the best head-prefect that he ever had. I am sure I was not that, but I learned the Shakespearian axiom:

> "Let what is right be said it shall be right,
> And whelm the opposing power in the dust."

I learned, as all Wykehamists when placed in authority learn, to enforce my orders at any cost.

Now, good-bye to school life; standing with the Olympians in the window-sill, the place of honour in the college hall at school concerts, singing *Domum* as a schoolboy for the last time.

London can never find an efficient substitute for the village green that it has obliterated with its ruthless wilderness of bricks and mortar. A. and J. C. Shaw, MacIntyre, Ulyett, Hill, and the rest, kept us in practice, not to mention their kind friends and neighbours, Moberley, Jellicoe, Dutton, Tate (father of the celebrated bowler), Booth and Bencraft. Booth, a sleepy giant who played for the Gentlemen of England when only eighteen, was a great hero with the boys. On one occasion, hearing a noise in his dining-room, he found and collared two burglars. Always half asleep, or apparently so, even when hitting a sixer, he merely said, "What d'you come here for? Nothing for you here,"

knocked their heads together and, after escorting them to the front door, returned placidly to rest. Dutton (owner of a large property near Alresford) stood six foot one, and bowled for the County. He was a fine shot, excellent at cricket, racquets and lawn-tennis. The Rifle Brigade regarded him as shy and retiring, but we boys found him a charming companion. We found a never-failing interest in his wonderful power over animals, the gift possessed by Rarey and other horse and lion tamers. I've seen him go up to a splendid black hunter he had, a noted performer across country. No one else would enter its box without the aid of a companion armed with a fork. It would pound you with its hoofs, hind feet and fore, worry you with its teeth, kneel on you, roll on you, trample on you if it could. Up to Dutton would it sidle, gently search for sugar in his pocket and caress him with its soft muzzle, with a low whinny of affection. I saw him once go into the shed and take her young foal away from a wild blood mare. He had the same power with dogs—could train them to do anything. They would understand his thoughts and he could read theirs. One dog he would send out of the room to bring in another dog. The other dog could have eaten the messenger, but it was his master's message, so he didn't. He would send a dog to fetch him pipe, book, gloves, slippers or a tennis ball—any common object of use. The dog would find it wherever it was.

CHAPTER V

OXFORD: (1) WORK AND PLAY

Oxford! Does it loom larger on the world's horizon than Cambridge? In literature and scholarship, yes; in science and commerce, no. It is the difference between the music—Platonic music—of Oxford and the Pythagorean mathematics of Cambridge. The all-round culture, literary and artistic, the many-sided inquisitiveness, the versatile adaptability of Oxford, the universality of its final school of the humanities, present a marked contrast to the scientific exactitude and the practical, definite, acquisitive common sense of Cambridge. I do not think, for instance, that Ruskin or Rhodes of Oxford would have been equally happy at Cambridge, nor can I conceive that Newton or Lord Balfour would care to have changed over to Oxford. The difference is sufficiently clearly marked by the facts that in 1892 there were two hundred and fifty Balliol men (the college then numbered only about one hundred and fifty students) in the two Houses of Parliament; and that before the war most of the best-known writers for the Press came from Oxford. But this was not the point of view with which I was busy when I first took up residence there. All comers, I suppose, are impressed on arriving in the old town with its towers and spires, the churches, the old houses—red tiles, lath-and-plaster, the quads., schools and colleges, the bridges and ferries, the mounds, the walls and castle, the High Street, the Broad, Corn-Market, Holywell, St Giles's and St Alds, St Mary's Church, the Radcliffe and Bodleian, the schools, the Sheldonian. The streets are teeming with jubilant young life. To this has been added, since our day, the girl students and women graduates; but from the first visit to the last, as you roam round the town, you cannot escape the impression that you are living in the presence of bygone centuries, forerunners of to-day, of rushes and wood, flint and bone, of bronze and iron, marble, brass, steel and parchment. Whispers welcome you at every door, from Celt, Roman, Saxon, Dane and Norman. Plantagenet, Tudor, Elizabethan, Cavalier and Puritan, Georgian and Victorian, hail you as a friend at every corner.

The coming of the friars! Before your eyes, in the mists of Cherwell and Isis, the moon and sun paint pictures of the days of chivalry, the mediæval romance of the schoolmen and the New Learning, all the effort of the student

then and now. Down the staircase, across the Quadrangle, through the gateway, press the multitude, making across Folly Bridge for the meadows, hills and sky—kings and slaves and cardinals, great nobles, shepherds and monks, knights and knaves and herdsmen, schoolmen, friars and clergy, ladies and statesmen, soldiers and pages, men-at-arms, heralds and lawyers, doctors and grammarians, hunters and falconers, greyhounds and turnspits, bloodhounds and wolf-dogs, archers, gunmen and spaniels, fishermen and bargees, pedlars and pilgrims, dancing-girls and dons, townsmen and gownsmen, merchants, traders, moneylenders, craftsmen and artists, singing-men and music-makers, vintners, cooks and brewers, sweet-sellers, reapers, ploughboys and police. Some are walking, some are cycling, some are driving four-in-hands, some dog-carts and trotting tandems, chariots and curricles, sedan-chairs and bath-chairs, litters and pillions, war heralds, horse and wagon, charger, palfrey and gennet and farmer's hackney, arabs, race-horses, polo-ponies, mules and donkeys, glitter of gold and silver, gleam of sword and spear and mace, clatter of shield and buckler, rumble of cannon, bustling pikes and lances, rattle of rifle, musket and pistol, blare of trumpets, shimmer of silk and satin, scarlet and blue and gold, soft touch of furs, sable and seal, velvet and plush, brocade, linen and wool, leather and serge, rags and lace, flags and banners and badges of trade, bandog and mastiff, bloodhound and terrier, bishops, centurions, coffins and crowns, watchmen and beadles, girls and boys and babies, butchers and burghers, masters and mayors. How they jostled on towards Folly Bridge. All the while, Old Tom booms the passing of the yesterdays, and throughout the town the merry bells ring in the summons of to-day.

Can we, too, press through their jostling ranks to join that group? In flannels and blue cap? Our passage is barred by a proctor and his bulldogs. "Your name and college? Why are you not in cap and gown?" Timidly I plead I have but just arrived, and am straightway buying the necessary garment to report me to my warden and, what is more important, the keeper of the porter's lodge.

Next morning, behold me in the presence of the "Shirt," which was the affectionate nickname bestowed on the fine old gentleman who presided over Wykeham's College of St Mary, Oxon. The term suggested a certain stiff and starched cambric conservatism that habitually spoke in the accent of undisputed authority five hundred years old. This imposing presentment, that seemed a combination of Roman emperor and cardinal, was the official disguise of a courteous, kindly, tender-hearted scholar and gentleman of Oxford. The keynote was given at the entering of our names on the books. "What is your father's profession or title?" I had never thought of that. I replied modestly that he was a quiet country gentleman; that he had been

called to the Bar, but had never practised as far as I knew; that he was a county magistrate, etc. “Have you a family crest?” I looked rather puzzled. Whereupon he gently repeated: “Have you a crest or coat-of-arms?” I replied that I had noticed the effigy of a muzzled bear on the harness and plate, and remembered seeing something like a shield in the bookplates of the library, said to be connected with Bjornsen (bear’s son). “Then you will be satisfied if I inscribe you as Armiger, which I am sure, my young friend, you understand —or else you would not have been admitted to this classical institution— means one entitled to bear arms.” After I had undergone a similar cross-examination I once for all concluded, from the vision of the throng on Folly Bridge, that he who blazons a crest must also, when summoned, wield a sword.

Thence, with my Winchester companion, to the lodging that had been found for us by the bursar, in a quaint old house in Holywell, run as a curiosity-shop by the landlady and two comely daughters. These charming ladies were quite capable, doubtless, of giving me and my friend useful experiences in the art of love-making. Fortunately, or unfortunately, for us we had both arrived at the conclusion that somewhat of the same austere and Puritan respect for women that was the point of view of Winchester remained more or less the point of view of New College. Further, that the custom of many a German university, where materfamilias, it is said, selects a suitable female companion to befriend her student son, is entirely alien to the tradition of Oxford.

For that term and the next I explored the delights of Mesopotamia, the Cherwell and the Isis; rowing in eights and gigs and skiffs and canoes; poling in punts in all directions along the winding course of the river, visiting Headington, Shotover, Brill, Cumnor Hurst, Water Eaton, Wood Eaton, Iffley, Little Moor and Kennington. Racquets, cricket and football, lawn-tennis, bathing and squash occupied my time. Varying this programme by occasional lectures, picnics at Newnham, trips to Radley and Abingdon, I soon became acquainted with the lie of the land.

I have never ceased to wonder at the fire, zeal and athletic activity of mind and body that the average undergraduate exhibits in study and amusements. As a chance sample take seven men of my acquaintance strolling out of Balliol into the Broad. First comes the Hon. W. N. Bruce, son of the Home Secretary, Lord Aberdare, and now head of the Kensington Technical Department; then William H. Grenfell, the two Mulhollands, Raymond Portal, Dawkins and Crossley. All of them were well over six feet in height and twelve stone in weight, with the exception of Crossley; all of them Blues (representative of their university in some form of sport); all of them first-rate in mental development; all of them alike true types of Britain, and all of them so different as individuals.

W. N. Bruce, quarter-miler, typical representative of the well-known Aberdare family, winner of the university quarter-mile and one of the best boxers of his day, pet pupil of Tichner, the Harrow instructor.

William Grenfell (now Lord Desborough), a name well known in the Island story, cricketer, runner and oarsman, champion punter of the Thames, Master of Hounds, war-correspondent and big-game hunter, pioneer and explorer, mountaineer and rifle-shot, swimmer and swordsman. There is hardly any branch of sport or athletic exercise in which he is not proficient. As farmer and Member of Parliament, Chief of the Thames Conservancy, and an active assistant in nearly every State Department, he is too well known to need further description. I am taking him as one of the types of Public School and Varsity men of my day.

The two Mulhollands, from the North of Ireland, Barony of Dunleath, oarsmen and all-round athletes, one an officer of the Royal Engineers.

Raymond Portal of a Hampshire Huguenot family, fire of Gascony in his merry brown eyes, warm blood of the South in his ruddy cheeks, the grace of a Greek god in the shapely limbs, square shoulders, handsome face and well-poised curly head, five in his college and the trial eights, winner of the hundred-yards amateur championship and the quarter-mile against Cambridge. He gave his life in helping his brother, Sir Gerald Portal, as Military Attaché to the Expedition in the Hinterland of Somali.

Dawkins of Harrow, scholar and heavyweight boxer.

Sir Savile Crossley, afterwards Lord Somerleyton, Norfolk squire, oarsman and runner of the hundred yards for Oxford, rider, skilful coachman of a four-in-hand, Member of Parliament, Paymaster of the Forces, Equerry to the King, five foot nine, ten stone eleven, strong and active as an Alderney bull.

Nordic superman each one of them. In the course of a long life I have seen many many people, and met soldiers and athletes from every land, but I do not know where I could pick seven men who could force those undergraduates to give ground.

And the wonderful thing is that in nearly every college I could find seven undergraduates well-nigh their match. These men and their kind, their sons, and those they have led in their various activities, are the working-class of the Empire—free children surely of the Great Family of Commonwealths, not one class only, not one race only, but the whole nation if and when we will. So I thought when on the cricket-ground we found the Webbes and Evans and Fowler, Savory, Tylecote, Royle and Jellicoe, and watched them preparing for the contest with the Lytteltons, Studds and Steels, Hawke, Lucas and Longman of Cambridge. On the football field, on the river or the running path it was just the same. “It isn’t us that teach the university or make Oxford what it is, it’s these splendid young men,” said one of the dons as he trotted down to see the

eights, all the power and charm of Oxford gathered by the river-side in the sunshine of early June, joyful and exhilarating.

The fritillaries shared the fun of it as they preened their pencilled plumage in the meadow breeze. Learned and learner, student and don, heads of houses, young and old, girls and boys, visitors from every land were there, to watch the rhythmic eights come tearing into the Cut, sometimes a bump, sometimes a miss, then go racing past the barges to the finish. As an exhibition of vigorous health, strength and high spirits it is unsurpassed. Along the towpath, running, jostling, shouting, blowing foghorns, twirling rattles, cheering, cursing, laughing, throng all the ardent supporters not seated on a house-boat or a barge. On that day the oldest are undergraduates again and eighty runs jauntily alongside eighteen. In the evening there are dinners, wine-parties, dances and concerts for the other fellows' fair sisters.

Now let us, as the chroniclers say, take a little closer look at the ever-youthful dons of my day. New College was fortunate in its equipment. First came Spooner, the enthusiast, the "Silver Spoon," as he was called—in contrast to his brother, the "Golden Spoon"—white-haired from his youth, and spectacled. None took a more kindly vision of the world than he: sympathetic, gentle, understanding, tolerant to indulgence. None was braver than that small scholar with the soft voice and the resolute will. This won for him the hand and heart of a tall handsome Scandinavian madonna from the north country. A tutor, then friend and protector, of my elusive self, he afterwards succeeded the "Shirt" as Warden, enjoying a long and successful reign. He was witty himself, and the cause of wit in others, but generally managed to have the last and longest laugh. George, the historian; Matheson, the poetic Highlander; Robinson, the silent philosopher; Bickmore, the mathematician; Moyle, the fast left-hand bowler; Pritchard, the heavenly body; Prickard, the mountaineer—and authority on Æschylus—and W. L. Courtney (of *The Daily Telegraph*) were those whom I at first saw most frequently.

Out of college, Butcher, an Irish Member of Parliament, drew crowds with his dissertations and reproductions of Demosthenes. The same silvery eloquence guided hundreds in the track of Greeks and Trojans and the quest of Ulysses. Many also would troop to Dean Bradley's Latin lectures or Jowett's *Plato*, the shade of Catullus, the Italian enactor of Cicero's *Orations*—Pelham, Acland, Johnson, A. J. Butler and Canon Butler; Raper, the English Horace; Armstrong, Abbot, the Liddells, Nettleship, Heberden. Dean Bradley received fitful visits from me as a freshman. While Ruskin was still persuading dons and undergraduates to make and mend the roadways, and M'Lagen, Vaughan and Liddon thundered, cooed or trumpeted from St Mary's; and Stanley and Jowett shocked the Fundamentalists with the breadth of their humanity in Balliol Chapel; T. H. Green, the historian, was drawing near to his end. Like

Bede, he lived and wrote “Ad majorem Dei gloriam et Angliæ.” “Oh, Benson,” he cried to my elder brother, “make me a table whereon I may finish writing with less pain ere I die.” And William, being a cunning craftsman, shaped the table to help aright the Swan Song—the Swan Song and the Terror, of the days of England’s hope, her suffering and her strength.

Later on, I, with Bruce, now a great friend, and Cook, got to know and listen to Tommy H. Green, the moral philosopher, and Toynbee, the social reformer. Round Green and Toynbee gathered Albert Grey, afterwards Earl Grey, Sir William Peterson, Asquith, Milner, Edward Grey, Wise, Curzon, Spring Rice, Rennell Rodd, Rashdall, Lowry, Sidney Lee, Lord Olivier, and others.

Toynbee was among the first to take up the protest against an industrial supremacy which was founded on the slum. Like Ruskin, he stirred Oxford, young and old, to set to work to learn and teach, not as you and I but as we, aiming to grow wise by exchanging our experience. In the big towns of England and the East End of London he would give his lectures to working-men. The last lecture was always reserved for any subject they might choose. More than once came the striking and flattering request: “We think you are in earnest, honest and good; tell us, please, what you think of God.” The names of our fellow-students I have given above are but a few of his pupils, who in their life’s work have touched and influenced all peoples and all lands.

Greatest of all to me as a human force was cribbed, cabined and confined Tommy Green, always struggling against ill-health, only half able to express his thoughts in words, only half understood by his contemporaries. Lord Olivier, Sir Sidney Lee, Sir E. T. Cook—these three, one ruler of India, one chief of Shakespeare students and a noted writer of biographies, and one among leading editors and journalists of the older order, President and chief orator of the Union, healer of strikes and Censor during the Great War—were clever boys and comprehended. I pondered, puzzled, tried to apply, and after forty years began to understand.

On going down from Oxford I attended a crowded meeting in a Glasgow public hall. The Glasgow working-men were gathered that Sunday evening to hear Mrs Besant—the Mrs Besant of 1884, not the Mrs Besant of 1925—denouncing Christianity as the foe of human progress. Sincerely, but unscrupulously, she neatly constructed and set up clay idols from pulpits, lawn-sleeves and mortar-boards, and as neatly knocked them down and destroyed them. At the moment she had quite skilfully established the reign of materialism on a basis of objective experience. Fresh from sitting at the feet of Green, I arose and asked how material experience, if it were the source of all knowledge, could ever become conscious of its own existence. Secondly, how the moral sense could be explained solely on her basis of material experience.

She entirely shelved the questions with some unconvincing formulas. A brawny Scotsman pulled me back into my chair. “Sit doon, laddie, y’are richt, mon; she’s too clever for the likes of you and me, but you and I and ithers ken she’s altogether wrang.” I felt that my old professor had won.

It is not too much to say that Green’s influence can be met with in most universities throughout the civilized world—in England, Scotland, Ireland, right through the Empire, right through the United States, in the newest Western university in Chicago, San Francisco, Philadelphia and Boston. There is his rugged thought quietly leavening the ideals and uplifting the opinions of nations. Mrs Humphry Ward, the gifted writer, has made him the subject of one of her best-known novels. I do not know if his nearest friends, however, think the portrait altogether represents the greatness of the man. It is difficult in words to give a satisfactory picture of his personality. Only his life, so very gentle and so iron-strong, could do that. Only the ceaseless service that he rendered to the thought of his time and to his city can explain why his influence still lives and grows. We loved him for it. He was the first that healed the breach outstanding for centuries between Town and Gown. This sterling thinker was always trying to understand, and learned from everyone he met. He gave years of his life and strength to questions of housing and child-training, simple requirements of health and home, for Oxford citizens. Often he lamented the inadequacy of English metaphysical terms. I am not sure myself that this inadequacy is not part of our English common sense and far-reaching imagination. We love to leave room for growth. We do not like to be pinned down to an exact definition or limited by a term in the presence of the Infinite.

Green’s lectures were not crowded—some days ten, some days twenty. We could not always understand, nor could he himself, the gist of what he tried to teach; but, in spite of inarticulate utterance, we sensed that Truth had revealed herself to this humble soul. We felt that he was trying to express thoughts almost beyond the reach of words; at times in a flash would the word be given to him and the vision, unforgettable and glorious, stand out clearly. Mostly, as he was wont to say, “These problems of the meaning of our life here can find their answer only in the Living of the Word”; and because he lived it the Word has become a beacon-light to the world.

Having taken stock of the history and geography of the situation, after two terms of more or less experimental studentship I emerged from the chrysalis stage of the tenderfoot freshman to the full-blown majesty of an Oxford undergraduate. For whom else had a benign Providence spent six days in creating a really good world except for my benefit and that of my varsity? Complacently and cheerfully optimistic, I commenced my brief reign in conjunction with some two thousand equally irresponsible monarchs.

Before I come to the main interests of the subject of this chronicle—art and athletics—I must plead guilty to possessing but little art or aptitude for the making of books. I tediously unfold a twice-told tale. Redundantly do I dwell on details of persons met and conditions surrounding. But the actor "holds the mirror up to nature"; he is himself a kind of mirror, and "modestly discovers to himself and others that of themselves which they yet know not of." Less than others does an actor ever know the exact difference between *meum* and *tuum*. He may in time become Autolycus or Prospero. More than others he is the reflection of the manners and the making and the meetings of his fellow-men. Therefore, with your good leave, gentle, exasperated, somnolent or bored reader, whichever you may chance to be—if you exist at all—I shall venture to continue a little longer an account of the conditions that helped me to grow up—do we ever grow up?—to play my small part among the children of men.

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Three breakfast-parties, all at nine, hot from the kitchen; five single meals for his other masters at nine-fifteen; mulled beer and cider-cup for the breakfasters at nine-thirty. And in the Eights Week, or Commem., six lunches, and the room to clean and tidy for ladies as well. Some of the dons are coming to luncheon; old John must do his best, if only for his great reputation's sake. On the floors above are arriving, at one, mothers, cousins and aunts, fiancées, and the partners of university and college balls. Luckily, most of John's staircase are dining out or keeping hall to-night. Only the two top-stairs have ordered tea with eggs for No. 7; soused mackerel and coffee for No. 8. These two men are reading men; they will sit up till three, and John has strict orders to "coldpig" them at seven-thirty.

My room overlooks the Quadrangle and the sacred green plot in the midst. I can see the chrysanthemums, or tulips, or carnations, round the edge, and the staircase leading to the College Hall in the corner; the Gate House and the entrance to the Cloisters and the Chapel, with the high ante-chapel, and Joshua Reynolds' window at the other end. If I climb out on to the roof a short walk on the leads takes me to a point from which I can look down on the old City Wall, now part of the college, older far than Wykeham; the stately horse-chestnuts and the soft green-turfed garden, and a mysterious mound in the centre, suggesting ancient fort or tumulus. On the other side of a stretch of long grey walls stands out, alone and unattached to any other building, the big square tower, old warder of the town. That was the starting-point from which the roystering sportsmen who had wined in Junior Common Room, not wisely but too well, ran races down the Quadrangle, or steeplechased and fought with other bears on the grass plots fronting the new buildings. The new buildings

were then unfinished, tall and unsightly. At the end, waiting for completion, jutted out unfinished bricks and bits of iron.

Fresh from the gymnasium, after lunch, one day, for a shilling bet I essayed to scale the end wall to the roof, some seventy feet above the ground. Three-parts of the way up the bricks no longer gave firm footing and the iron was beyond my hand. I saw visions of a crash and horrid mess below upon the stones. Close to the wall I cowered, hardly daring to look down, vainglorious though I was, and avaricious of that bob. I called to my admiring companions below for a blanket in which to drop. Admiration changed to contemptuous anxiety, mixed with jeers and inquiries as to whether I was coming down or going up. Thus goaded, I managed to descend before the ladder or the blanket arrived. Vanity and ignorance on that occasion, as on many another, nearly broke my neck. That afternoon I was a fallen idol to my friends. I do not think anyone ever did reach that roof, and I do not think any tried after my humiliating failure.

A lighter task it was for me to jump the iron railings in the Quadrangle close by, about four feet six inches in height (these also were among the many obstacles that were christened Benson's Leap), or the lower fence with sharp-pointed spikes by the porter's lodge. I somewhat rehabilitated myself in the eyes of the climbers by scaling various gates, rain-pipes and angles with projecting masonry into third-floor windows, or by walking round the gutter-pipe that edged the roof of a tall house, much to the disturbance of the starlings and the servants. Subsequently a young cousin of mine established an Alpine club that scaled the gables and the chimneys and forbidden spires and roofs of the colleges and the city of Oxford.

My theatrical activity found its outlet in evening entertainments at the house of my cousin in St Giles—Miss Hardcastle, of Free Trade, Cobden and Manchester Parliament associations. She was keeping house for her brother-in-law, Sir William Herschel, recently a distinguished judge and civil servant in India, and the introducer to this country of police records by fingerprints: he was at that time an unattached undergraduate about to take Orders at the late age of forty-six. In this hospitable drawing-room, in company with pretty girls from the Liddell, Pritchard, Monier-Williams, Max Müller, Arnold, Kitchen and Fletcher families, with Cosmo Melville, Olivier and other boys, I was the leader of the revels and the dance, the charades, the acting-nouns, and plenty of excellent fooling. The Monier-Williams dances methought select indeed. "Only six or eight couples who really could dance, you know." The athletic Crossley was among them. There, too, was the beginning of an effort on my part really to understand the elder Aryan brother. One of Monier-Williams' pupils had recently been converted by the Evangelical set then in residence. On hearing this, Jowett, the Master of Balliol, persuaded him to revert to the

Mohammedan faith of his fathers. Indignant ambassadors upbraided him with his un-Christian conduct.

"Mr Jowett, what explanation can you give?—like a wolf in the fold, you've lured our youngest lamb from the faith."

"Well," said the Master, unabashed, "comfort yourself with this thought, that as far as I know him he's not much credit to any religion."

Two hard winters, during which the frost lasted for twelve weeks, gave the skaters and the curlers acres of ice. The Thames was frozen over. Horses trampled on the surface. Up the Cherwell sledged or skated crowds from Oxford, on to the flooded fields. No need for Butler now to repeat his leap from Christchurch meadow over the river in the dry season. A big jump that, though not so big as Wilson's over the fourth rail from the platform at Kendal Station. On all the meadows and all the pools and all the streams are happy, whirling figures. Arthur Johnson, Monier-Williams, Pidgeon and Allan, with books and Dowlas blades, club figures and ingenious double-rockers, advance the science of English skating and increase the numbers of our new-formed skating club. To my province fell the rougher departments—fen-running, speed and hockey. Hill, W. H. Thompson, Ryle, Bevir, Howard, Fowler, Ainslie and Brown (two varsity oars), Pearson, with the two Eastwoods, and I upheld the pride of New College, unbeaten through the season. And all the while the New College Shakespearian Club gave readings in the panelled rooms of New College—Turner, Ker, Philips, Benson, Perkins, H. A. C. Dunn and Rashdall of Harrow being the star performers. What buckets of tea and coffee we drank! What tons of buttered toast and mountains of muffins we ate! And how the panels—linen, scrolled, Tudor, Elizabethan and Jacobean—must have smiled; "they had seen the kings we acted and knew the men we discussed."

When spring came, "Why hasn't the college got tennis-grounds of its own?" said one. "I'll get you some," I said; and straightway organized a club, and rented and laid out eight tennis courts—thus inaugurating for Oxford its present system of college lawn-tennis.

My friend, Jack Weston, of the north, and I more than once defeated the brothers Renshaw, invincible champions of their time. The elder brother was probably as skilful a player as ever smashed a volley. The "Renshaw smash," the lightning service, the drop-stroke, the cross-drive and the top-spin stroke, in all of which he excelled, still find their place in the repertoire of Davis Cup players. Like a silly ass, I got a Bailey racket at Buchanan's, made to order, weighing seventeen ounces. Disgusted with the ponderous tool, I tried a light metal frame weighing twelve ounces, that lacked all driving power and soon buckled up like a hairpin. During these temporary obsessions I might have been the rawest beginner. Fortunately, my theories were discarded in time.

Armed with an excellent Tate racket, I got third place in the All England Championship, swept the board at Bournemouth, All-Comers Singles, All-Comers Open Handicap, and with my friend Moberley the Doubles; and was asked to play for England at the first inception of International lawn-tennis. Not a bad record seeing the scant practice I allowed myself. I can still play a decent game at most sports, and I stoutly maintain that the measure of a nation's athleticism is not records and prizes, but the age to which the people continue their athletics. At every athletic meeting I always quoted General Roberts as to keeping fit for service, and I used to say I would like to see this put up over every athletic-ground in the country.

When Lord Lansdowne sent for Lord Roberts to entrust him with the command of the South African War he said: "This war will be long and trying, and you are sixty-eight, Lord Roberts."

"My Lord," said Bobs, "I have been in training for this war for twenty-five years of my life."

And now for Tuck's running-shoes and the short pants trimmed with blue. Cricket I played fitfully; long rows I took occasionally; football, Rugby and Soccer, for the college and Old Wykehamists, at intervals holding my own with the best; but I put most of my energy into running.

Of course I thought running-shoes were all wrong. Did they not cramp the foot and lessen the leverage? Had not the Indian runner distanced all competitors with his straight big toe? Henceforth, the last should be straight for the inside of the foot—one of the few theories in which I was undoubtedly right. My other theories were usually at the outset disastrous. I had sense enough to perceive that the training for the Torpids and the Eights, and rowing-men generally, was an unhealthy, difficult and dangerous process: huge quantities of unassimilated meat, bursts of feverish energy, languor, lethargy, troubles with the skin and general health. "The inside of a chop underdone," said little Goodwin, aged thirty-two, a Welsh schoolmaster training for the Church, an enduring runner at any distance, a notable sprinter in his youth, and a first-rate three-miler in 1878. His example helped to get me to shorten that perilously long stride. "The inside of a chop or an egg beaten up in a glass of sherry seems to oil the lungs," said another. I swallowed both, to be on the safe side, and only got second in the Freshmen's Mile. Then came questions of how long to sleep; how much and when to eat and drink; how much, what distance, and when and how to run.

Getting my Blue early in my career, it was not till my third and last year that I did myself justice. I had at last discovered a system that suited me. I found what a professional trainer would have taught me at the outset. It was not the amount that you ate that gave you strength, it was the amount of food that your system could best assimilate and the constant exercise taken every

day.

Having mastered these elementary principles, I proceeded to win the mile and three miles at Oxford. In the mile, I had started for the purpose of making the running for Wells, whom I was helping to train. We wanted Wells to do a quick mile. Off I sprang, to make the running one minute twenty seconds at least for the first lap. A shout, a yell, and then a groan. Wells had spiked himself and fallen, cutting hands, knees and face on the cinder track. I ran back, picked him up, dusted the ashes off him and got him going again. By this time we were many yards behind. For two laps we ran; I, outside, shielding Wells from the wind, coaching and encouraging him all the time. At the end of two laps we had overtaken the leaders, when Wells with a sigh of exhaustion moaned, "I can't stick it, I can't stick it," and turned into the pavilion. I expostulated for a moment, saw it was in vain, and again tore after the vanishing field. I was really fit that day, and knew I could have done a fast time, but that, and possibly the race, had been sacrificed for nothing. So I set my teeth, and ran that lap as hard as I could from start to finish, winning by twenty yards, in the comparatively good time of four minutes thirty seconds. This performance seemed to show that I was capable of a really fast mile.

One of the curious things about athletics is that many a man who is fast at football is slow on the path, and vice versa. It was so with Hills, and many another long-distance man; and so it was with me. I was never outstripped at football and hockey; and yet the men whom I could run round at these games could give me five yards in a hundred on the track. The psychology of this seems to be that the long-distance runner concentrates on running easily in a race, with the least possible exertion to lungs and limbs, while the sprinter hurls himself off from the mark to the tape, bent on getting there first anyhow. When the ball is put before them the position seems reversed, and the sprinter begins to think about how he shall save his resources of endurance. The distance man, who has learned all that in long hours of practice, concentrates on getting first to the ball. Also, sprinting about the football field does not exhaust the long-distance runner to the same extent. It took me some weeks of training, one year with Portal and Bruce and Trepplin (Amateur Champion at a hundred yards), one year with Crossley and Bruce, and a third year with Carter, Cave, Lawrence, Grouse, Latter and Beverley, to learn to train properly. From that day to this I flatter myself I have remained in good condition.

Professionals: Bob Rogers, Andrews, Cummings, Livingstone, Hutchins. Amateurs: Whateley, Bruce, Nicholls, Dixon, R. H. Benson, Shearman, Beverley, Grouse, Kemp, Evanson, Wells, Crossley, Portal, Lawrence, Wise, Clarke, and his fellows were all in the first flight, and kindly led me in training gallops.

Do they still ever practise? I do.

I think I can see them, hurdling, jumping, putting the weight, throwing the hammer and running, at this moment. One of the sights of the world, those Inter-Varsity sports, so clean, so strong, so magnanimous and enduring. In 1881 I was in charge of the athletic team. Oxford had not won the odd event for three years. I let the nervous ones smoke in moderation; the thirsty drink as much water as they liked at night; eat any plain, wholesome food that suited them—never to excess; take plenty of open-air exercise, especially walking; talk and think about anything except sports, so as not to use up athletic energy. "Don't go down to the ground till just before you're wanted. The crowd and the smoky atmosphere will take it out of you, and you may want your last ounce of energy to win the odd event. When you pass your man on the track pass him full swing, don't fritter it away by trying to pass him, till you can do so successfully. Keep as close to the inside of the track as you possibly can. Remember, however badly blown you may be feeling, you may bet your boots that the other man is as bad, if not worse. Never despise any antagonist. The surprise at finding a man better and stronger than you expected will take yards off your chance of winning."

With these principles in mind I marched off on a keen March day—"bother the wind! It will destroy all chance of records"—up to Wimbledon Common from our training quarters at Putney. Sitting down in the sun with my friend, Bruce, we talked of anything and everything except the thing uppermost in our minds.

A good omen from a passing tramp: "Nice day for the race, sir." A shilling was cheap for such an augury—and then the tramp explained he meant the human race! But the augury was encouraging and we hurried off to Lillie Bridge. This was before the day of Queen's Club. Fifteen minutes wherein to get a rub down and change. Bad news greets us. Lawrence, for whom the hurdles was such a "dead cert," had fallen at the third hurdle and badly damaged his knee. Cambridge wins the hurdles one-fifth of a second slower than Lawrence's best. His doughty namesake, throwing with one muscular arm, as was his wont, pulls off the hammer event. Good. The same muscles had put-the-weight to Oxford's credit. Good. The wide jump was a gift for George Lawrence, our president. At practice he had done easily twenty-two feet eleven inches. The hurt knee interfered, and Macaulay, that brilliant football player and Indian civilian, out-jumped him: encouraged by this luck he added the high jump and the quarter-mile to his list of wins. T. A. Wells happily had recovered from his accident sufficiently to win the mile with his graceful, easy stride, in time comparatively slow for a man capable of a record half; but an excellent show for a runner strapped up in plasters, and unpressed by his competitors. Four all. The odd event depends on me. The year before,

hampered in my training by a football accident, I had been beaten by the redoubtable Hough, now Bishop of Woolwich. Cambridge was jubilant. "A gift for last year's winner," and "Ready to back their opinion in solid cash." Oxford was despondent. Hough was one of the best men that Cambridge ever turned out. He also could sprint, whereas last year I was slow. The professionals, and those who knew me best, judged that by very strenuous practice in short distances I was seconds faster than the year before.

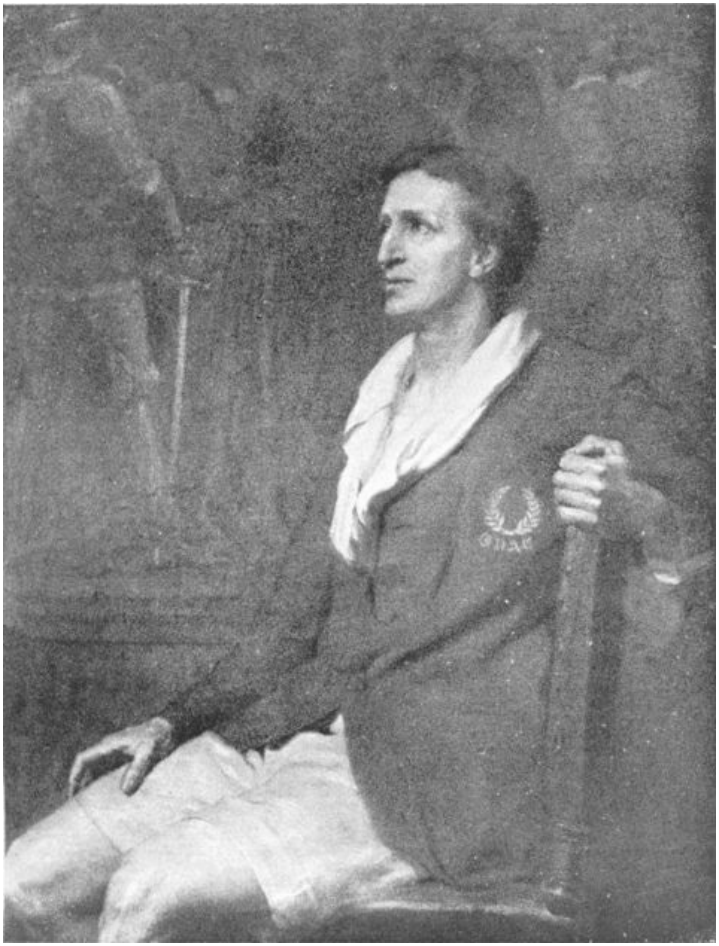
"Well, are you going to have your revenge this time?" said Hough pleasantly. Nothing daunted, I murmured: "There will not be more than twenty yards between us at the end." Off we went.

My instructions were to jump off from the start, cut down the speedy Hough, make him race all the way, wearing him out by his endurance if possible. "Get away from him before entering the straight." My pace-makers, who were to nurse me as long as they could, for the first two miles, in the tempestuous March winds, could not go fast enough for either Hough or me. We two led off together, stride by stride, faster and faster. Hough led me for the first two miles—Cambridge was jubilant. Oxford got more and more depressed, except George Lawrence and the professional trainers. Jackson, father of athletics for Oxford and England, as we reeled off the laps muttered fiercely to me: "Remember your instructions; you are throwing your chances away." I had a different theory, and meant to follow it. I was going comfortably within myself. Last year, at the end of the second mile I practically was beaten. At this meeting we had run the first mile in four minutes forty seconds, the two miles in nine minutes forty-five seconds. Cheerily Hough strode away, going strongly. I stuck to him. Cambridge was still jubilant. Any odds on Hough were offered by Cambridge. Few takers for Oxford. George Lawrence, among the few, cleared twenty pounds in the last two laps from the big guns in the stewards' ring. Stride by stride we go along. Two more laps to go. The crier sounds his bell. Things begin to happen; young Cambridge and Oxford watch. Going along the "backer" of the second lap from home I draw up to Hough's shoulder. A surprised, pained look steals over Hough's face, but he runs gamely. I pull back. It was just a feeler and no more. He thinks he's got me. Cambridge is relieved. Jackson, the mentor, curses his young protégé audibly on the ground. Round the top bend we stride. We are quickening. Now down the straight leading to the last lap. I again come up to Hough's shoulder, making a strong effort to spring by. Hough forestalls me, but in doing so lurches right out into the centre of the path, forcing me almost to the outer edge. Rather unjustly a growl proceeds from the Oxford adherents. Well, if their man is beaten, the other man is not running fair. I, however, am quite satisfied; again I drop back. Anguish of the mentor: "The fool is throwing his chances away." I had gathered that my antagonist was more done

than myself. Hough's breath came sobbingly. I fancied I detected a falter in his stride. "Last lap!" yells the crier; bang goes the gong, the band strikes up to freshen the weary runners. And we needed freshening in that terrible wind. I had planned when the last quarter-mile post came to run my hardest from there to the winning-post till I reached the tape, or dropped. I was not afraid now of Hough's fast time for a quarter. Round the bend we come, still stride for stride. The band is playing, the crowd intent and silent. We reach the commencement of the last lap. With a bound Hough dashes off: triumphant roar of Cambridge. Dismay of Oxford: "This is what happened last year. It was just at this point that Hough left Benson standing still." Not quite the same to-day. I lengthened out a little and was again at Hough's shoulder. Cambridge's shout of triumph dies away. Step by step we struggle to the quarter-mile post. Straining my utmost, this time I spurt past at top speed for home. A roar from Oxford; Cambridge looks aghast. A desperate plunge from Hough to try to regain the lead—he stumbles, trips and falls full-length to the right upon the grass. I heard the Oxford roar in answer to his effort; I heard the roar die away and thought: "I suppose Hough is still holding on." Faster I sped and faster, until friend Bruce, whom I had asked to stand by the corner to cheer me on in the last desperate sprint home, ran at me, waving: "Hough's down, you've won!" Then all the interest died away, and for the first time I felt the wind was blowing hard against me and I had had a tough struggle. Relaxing my efforts I trotted home, with a bit of a spurt down the last hundred yards to show what I could have done had I been pressed, a winner by three hundred and fifty yards in fifteen minutes three seconds. Congratulations, cheers, quite the hero of the afternoon.

Speech at the dinner, incoherent and youthful. Proud wire from the dear old father: "Well done. We are all very glad. Have placed £50 to your account." My regret was being unable to be present in two places at once. The butler, the nurse and the coachman were all over Alresford that day. Hampshire, the County, the College and the Hunt were proud that their man had won. The fly in the ointment was that the wind and the absence of a competitor near at the end had prevented a record time.

But that was a small matter; and there it remains, one of the red-letter hours in my life.



Sir Frank Benson
From a portrait by Hugh Rivière

CHAPTER VI

OXFORD: (2) THE COMING OF THE CALL

About my third year at Oxford came a great awakening—a purpose in life. I found my work.

"You were very good last night, Frank," said my mother. "Your father and I were quite frightened lest you should go on the stage. But of course you would not do that, would you, Frank?"

At the time I had no idea of it. It wasn't done.

"What are you going to do, Benson?"

"I don't know; something in the Bohemian line or a soldier or a traveller."

"A jolly little Bohemian you'd make, but as a rule they have some occupation. Can't you make a living in some less precarious method?"

And now I was to find the way, though I did not yet know it.

There came a very advantageous offer to leave the university and in a short space of time become a wealthy man. So I donned my best coat, of olive-green with silk facings, and a peacock-blue tie—the influence of Rossetti and Liberty's window. I am sent to the Governor of the Bank of England to ask his advice. After ten minutes I, all the while quite unconscious that I am keeping interests which involved millions of pounds waiting, put my fool questions and receive a straight answer.

"No," said the great man, quizzically surveying my rather ultra-careful clothes; "looking at you—pardon me, your overcoat—and listening to you talk, I should say you would never make a man of business."

"Didn't think I should," said I; "in fact, rather hoped that I couldn't; but my people sent me to consult you, you know. Many thanks. Good-morning. I am very much obliged."

Many years after, Mr Lidderdale, when I was acting in London, met me again and reminded me of the interview. "Perhaps you'll thank me now for the advice I gave you. I have often wondered what made you ever think of going into business, and now I have seen you act I wonder still more."

"Don't overwork yourself, Frank, like William." "I'll try not to, mother," was the obedient answer. As I have already shown, this obedience did not require much effort on my part. Headmasters had not then learned that some boys had to be driven and some curbed. William, an exceptionally clever boy,

was overworked when young by an enthusiastic tutor. When quite a child he showed a talent for engineering, drawing and designing, that he afterwards carried into architecture and metal-work, and which endeared him to Morris and Burne-Jones—"What the boy plays at, the man professes." He also became a member of the school shooting team. He it was who directed the guns of infant days, was master of ordnance to the batteries of toy cannon that periodically penetrated the wainscot of the nursery and the schoolroom. Years afterwards he was called on to construct delicate parts of the machinery for our batteries on the Western Front. William, having been second in the Freshmen's Hurdles and High Jump, was taking an ordinary degree while studying architecture with Basil Champneys. He, too, was at New College, and in the summer term we brothers saw much of one another, having many mutual friends. It was quite natural, then, that William should be a mainstay in my work when the call came.

"Benson, Prickard wants to get up a performance of *Agamemnon* in Greek," Bickersteth, destined for a distinguished career in the Church, said to me one day. "Will you play Clytemnestra? You see, there's the Westminster Play; Harvard are doing *Œdipus* in English; Professor and Mrs Fleming Jenkins have done scenes from *Antigone*, also in English, at Edinburgh and at Lady Frekes'. Prickard thinks it would be a grand thing for the study of Greek if we can do it here."

"We can, we will," I replied; "but it is Greek to me. I have been supposed to have been studying Greek for thirteen years, and I have never yet read through a Greek play. It is about time I did, so go ahead and let me know."

And so what was to be my life's work began.

By that evening I, who am nothing if not energetic, had enlisted about a dozen, choosing them for their athleticism, scholarship and histrionic or musical accomplishments. Among the first were my friends, W. N. Bruce, Harrow, Hill of Radley, MacKinnon, H. A. C. Dunn, Wellington, A. J. Ryle, George Lawrence, Smith, Douglas, Lowry, Ker, Fort, Tatham, Seymour, Basil and Thomas Eastwood, Cecil Spring Rice, Latter, Rashdall, Rennell Rodd, Harold Boulton, Bickersteth, Walrond, Pearson, and Perkins of Winchester.

Bruce and I practically organized and ran the whole thing, with the assistance of Hill. In a week, with Bruce's help, we had got together an extraordinary cast. We interviewed, or corresponded with, all the Greek scholars of the day, got out scene-plot and property-plot, and, after a brief interview with Heberden, persuaded Parratt, the Magdalen organist, to arrange the music for the chorus. Parratt's assistance was invaluable. Like myself, he never walked—he always ran. This was a job after his own heart. He consulted all the authorities, and grappled with the difficulties of the situation with most successful results. Unlike Hubert Parry, Stanford, and others, who

subsequently wrote music for Greek drama, he relied purely on vocal music, without any instrumental accompaniment. Much can be said for the different methods. I later experimented with two or three, but on this occasion there was no orchestra. The rhythm was supplied by the scansion of the verse, the dactyl of hand and gesture, the anapæst of the marching foot, the trochee of laughter, the spondee of a song, a sigh, a sob, a stern command, iambus of a soul in its upward struggle through the fires of fate and hell.

"Can't be done. What does Benson know about it? He was gulfed[5] in mods. We will all go, you bet it will be funny."

Such, roughly, was the attitude both of the dons and the undergraduates, with the exception of a few. Dear old Alfred Robinson ("The Hob" was his nickname), wise, rich and generous, silent and thoughtful, a great power in the land, one of the makers of New College and modern Oxford, approved. His formula, "Possibly, yes; probably, however, no," did not prevent his giving whole-hearted support to the experiment.

I was already beginning to be regarded as a kind of enigmatic free-lance—some said original, some said independent, some cracked and irresponsible; but, most people agreed, something of a live wire. I think it was the live wire in me that made me tolerated by the authorities. I thoroughly enjoyed the happy life of Oxford, and with my exuberant high spirits helped to radiate that joy around me. I was one of those numerous young men who, wherever they are—in the trenches, on the football field, at a wine club or in the drawing-room—help to make things go, or upset them.

"If you ever go on the stage," said Dunn, "you might possibly succeed. You never seem to mind how much you make a fool of yourself." "I don't," I said. "I do," said Dunn. In this case if the thing failed, it was merely one of my eccentric fireworks, and the chance of failure would certainly be lessened by the steadiness of Bruce, and the artistic and musical co-operation of Rennell Rodd and Harold Boulton.

Many scholars rallied round. Professor Newton, of the British Museum, gave most helpful advice. Burne-Jones, Alma Tadema, Leighton, by letter and interview, and ocular demonstration of Bolton sheeting and fine linen and twisted muslin, gave me my first initiation into the mysteries of Greek drapery. Advice came from Campbell, Kennedy, Prickard, E. D. A. Moorhead, Jebb, and all parts of the kingdom, in answer to scrawls from me, or neat communications from Bruce, Hill and Bickersteth asking questions, collecting hints.

At first, of course, deluges of cold water were poured on the project. But a great deal of useful information and hints, which I was quick to assimilate, also came through. Like the proverbial snowball, would it melt? Would it grow? Would it just become slush? I was quite unmoved by the jeers and the scorn of

the scribes and pharisees. I was much too busy asking questions, dashing up to London to interview artists and authorities, to take any notice of the gibes of the superior, even if I heard them. I saw in a flash that the thing was worth while, and gave to it my last ounce of energy and capital. It was said of me that it was my rhinoceros hide that carried me through many thorns and briars. I was occasionally dense in sensibility and very often never knew that I was making a fool of myself. In this case my peculiarities served me well. Through Bruce's good offices, an interview with Jowett, the Master of Balliol, resulted in permission to act the play in Balliol Hall.

"By the way, do you know anything about Greek, Mr Benson?"

I had attended his lectures more with a view to studying Jowett than his subject-matter. Perhaps the Master remembered this when he asked the question.

"No, Mr Master," said I humbly, in the voice of a penitent; "but I think it is about time I began to learn."

"I see you have several of my scholars in your list of players, and I consider that Mr Bruce's name is a guarantee against anything like a fiasco. I wish you success. Above all I hope you will do it well; at any rate, you have my permission to try the experiment in Balliol Hall."

Away we went in triumph to announce the glad news of Jowett's support to W. L. Courtney, S. H. Butcher, Cecil Spring Rice, A. J. Fort, A. J. Bradley, and the rest.

Jowett hardly took the trouble to conceal his opinion that I was a rather presumptuous, flighty young fool. He also let it be understood that he, too, thought the experiment worth trying. For the rest of the term, when the Eights Week was over, in which New College made five bumps, the *Agamemnon* became with Commem. and the Varsity Match the most important events of the summer. Rehearsals went on in New College Hall. I had but little time to study my own part, let alone master the play. Perhaps fortunately for us, at the time there was but a slight tradition of things theatrical at Oxford. The "Vic" was out of bounds during term time, and frequented only for the sake of creating a disturbance, not of enjoying drama. There was nothing like the Cambridge A.D.C., or the present O.U.D.S., nor had any interesting experiments such as those tried recently by James Bernard Fagan been dreamed of. The Shooting Stars, organized by Foster Alleyne and others, had fallen to the ground, though they had left behind illuminating sparks destined to revive new fires.

The two Adderleys, Astley and MacKinnon, with some clever associates, conducted a society called "The Philothespians," which from time to time gave excellent renderings of modern drama and burlesques. This society was the matrix of the modern O.U.D.S., which had, among its godfathers, W. L.

Courtney, Arthur Bourchier and H. B. Irving. In a way this was an advantage, as it forced the Agamemnonites back on their own resources. They had to devise and carry out everything for themselves in their own way. Handsome Mrs Harcourt, Bruce's sister, showed us how to soften aniline dyes with soda. Baths and basins were filled with poisonous blues, reds and greens. Linen and Bolton sheeting were twisted into unsightly ropes and hung out of the Quad. windows to be bleached and moulded by sun and wind and rain into crinkly folds. My cash resources were very limited, so dresses were made by kind volunteers.

Wiseacres, who sometimes peeped in to early rehearsals, shook their heads. I bided my time. I was waiting for the effect which the first chorus would produce on the performers and those who heard it. Dire forebodings of failure and break-down increased. "What the neighbours say" began to be heard. Scoffers and unbelievers swelled the chorus of "I told you so," "We knew; what else could you expect," etc.

Mrs Courtney, skilful and comely amateur, gave us many useful hints. The well-known W. L. Courtney, her husband, had undertaken to play the Watchman. His accession and that of Professor Butcher and Andrew Bradley were, of course, a source of strength in the hour of trouble. The boat, however, had not yet got a catch on—how could it? It was in the early stage of construction. Something had to be done to restore confidence, and I extracted from friend Parratt the first music for the chorus. None of the performers had fallen away, in spite of the fact that I ruled them, professors and undergraduates alike, with a somewhat despotic stage-managership, while I bided my time for setting the torch really ablaze. The chorus had been practised by the leaders round the piano; the dramatic and musical effects had been adjusted. One summer evening in the old hall at New College, on the massive oak tables piled up on the dais to form a stage of varying heights, the muscular chorus waited for the signal from Parratt's tuning-fork at their respective entrances. In he came, at his usual trot, flushed, excited, happy, forelock upstanding, music-paper in all his pockets, pen, pitch-pipe and tuning-fork in his hand. "Sorry I am late; just come from the Chapel practice. I will give you the note when Benson gives the signal." And suddenly there arose, echoing among the old hammerbeams, ringing out across the Quad., a new song, centuries old: δεκατον μεν ετος etc., boomed out the strong young voices, as they swung on, with staff and flowing draperies suiting the action to the word and the music to their march.

Strophe and antistrophe, the answering chorus took up the challenge as they counter-marched and circled round the altar, then blended in one great throbbing cry. The scouts stopped to listen; the Warden, although he generally disapproved of theatricals, sensed the coming of some kudos for New College.

Our old friend “The Hob” had kindly undertaken to prompt, and had been good enough to say from the first: “Benson, I believe you’ll pull it through.” In fact, he changed his usual formula into: “Possibly, no; probably, however, yes”; and very soon, when asked about the prospects of the undertaking, simply purred: “Probably, yes,” happily confident of success.

The kindly, enthusiastic Spooner no longer expressed his doubts over the Common Room port. Even over scholarly Moyle, the Winchester left-hand fast bowler, the rhythm of Marathon and Hellenic culture, so skilfully caught by Parratt, prevailed. From that moment success was assured. How it came, whence it came, none could say, for I never seemed to have read through the play. The truth was, the play, like most great simple truths, began to unfold itself in terms of intensely dramatic action. Old Walter Lacey used to say Shakespeare was a damned good horse, and would carry you anywhere if only you would sit well back in the saddle and give him his head. Practically that is what our ignorance of the theatre compelled us to do.

The great day came. The hall was crowded—all seats could have been sold ten times over. Many undergraduates attended in the spirit in which they used to go to the town theatre—for a laugh or jolly rag. Their expectation was encouraged by the spluttering of a match and a smothered, but all too audible, imprecation, “Damn, it won’t light!” behind the scenes. The stately figure of Courtney, an experienced amateur, checked the tittering of the ribald; and the anapæst chorus marching on turned their inclination to laugh to a wish to pray, as the strange religious drama unfolded itself before their eyes.

The actors were, for the most part, quite inexperienced. A few of them came from the ranks of amateur clubs; but “never anything can come amiss when simpleness and duty tender it” as did these brawny, graceful athletes, with youthful enthusiasm and great reverence. They numbered in their ranks many a Blue, First Class scholar, oarsman, footballer, cricketer and runner. Indeed, they could have turned out a team capable of holding its own with the best at any sport. Scholars, professors, students, carpenters, college servants, all helped their utmost. Their unselfishness, sincerity and enthusiasm, their healthy Hellenism, produced the same effect that I have seen brought about in folk drama by peasants—akin to the Ober-Ammergau *Passion Play*—or *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, by the MacDonald family, or plays by schoolchildren, such as *The Death of Nelson*,[6] by the Singleton village boys.

In respect of such single-minded simplicity the artistry of the Greek players was of the best. So, for an hour and three-quarters, without wait or break, a modern audience was held breathless by the boys as the chorus sang their anthem, exultant, with arms uplifted round the lower stage, in front of the gates of Mycene, painted by Willie Richmond. Yellow-plaster walls and timber, with sphinx pattern and tracery, Apollo’s effigy over the central arch, garlands

of laurel, hangings of purple and soft saffron, two or three altars, designed by my brother William, crowned with fruits, garlands and blue lambent flames, carried out with the assistance of Richmond and Rennell Rodd, made a rough-and-ready but simple and singularly beautiful scene. The carpentry was executed by the deft fingers of John Shelton's nephew, my old scout.

Congratulations poured in from every quarter.

At that time the dispute between the opponents of Greek and its supporters was very acute—the burning question of the hour. It was currently believed that the *Agamemnon* postponed the exclusion of Greek from the list of compulsory studies for many years. One of the elderly and learned Grecians stopped me in the High Street. "Sir, I should like to shake you by the hand. You have done more for the study of Greek in fifty minutes than we professors have done in fifty years"—and yet a short time afterwards this kindly old gentleman found it in his heart to gulf me in final Greats.

I treasure letters from Tennyson, Gladstone, Goschen, Browning, Millais, George Eliot and many others distinguished in learning, art, literature and politics. The next week, after successfully repeating the performances at Oxford, we visited Winchester, Eton and Harrow, and were received with acclamations and open arms at all three. Dear old Hob, who very kindly acted as prompter, came round with us to the schools. He was so keen on the performance that his eyes were never on the book, and did any of us forget a word, and look appealingly in his direction, all we got from him was a seraphic smile and the loud-whispered encouragement of "Splendid—splendid!" Still, that was no reason why, at the end of the performance at Winchester, before the audience had left the hall, Dunne and Lawrence should have lifted on high the altar in the middle of the stage, under which the prompter was ambushed, and disclosed to the audience the bald head and benign smile of their dignified and important friend, tutor and bursar of New College, on the governing body of many schools and colleges, and a great power generally and scholastically throughout England. "We never knew till now what a Greek play meant," said the boys at Eton. I do not know that Dr Warre cared much about the theatre, but with his tremendous energy, colossal strength of mind and body he must have appreciated the athleticism of Hellenic art even if he seemed more or less indifferent to its beauty.

Luxmore, on this occasion and many others, stood out as protagonist on behalf of the fine arts. The fact that our company was composed of well-known scholars and athletes fitted them in a peculiar degree for their task. It attracted the attention and aroused the enthusiasm of the audience, while it helped to carry off unnoticed their want of technical skill. The simple directness and reverent thoroughness with which we set about our task suited the austere grandeur of the play.

Even the enthusiast for Greek must have been astonished at the universal recognition accorded to this masterpiece of drama—acted by amateurs in an unknown tongue. Servants came three or four times to see it. An Oxford tradesman, whose bill I had left overlong unpaid, wrote warmly thus: "Let me offer you congratulations and thank you for the pleasure of last night. You were a perfect she-devil. I never thought much of Greek studies at the university, henceforth I shall have a greater respect for alpha, beta, gamma, delta, and what comes of it."

The leading actors in London all came to see it, and many of them wrote nice letters to me expressing their surprise and delight. Among them, one of the most treasured marks of approbation, came a card from Edwin Booth, the great American actor. Still more welcome was a line from Ellen Terry and Henry Irving, inviting George Lawrence and me to see the performance at the Lyceum and visit them behind the scenes. The play happened to be *The Corsican Brothers*. We were ushered into Irving's dressing-room. Tough and sinewy looked that spare figure in the picturesque Corsican dress. The pale sensitive face wore a wistful, restless expression, modified by lines of playful and sarcastic humour; the firm, clean-cut mouth and square chin bespoke determination, corresponding with the command, courage and nobility of the finely modelled nose; from under the refined artistic brows a pair of piercing yet gentle eyes looked into the heart of men and things. "You young men did splendidly," said Irving, with a sigh. "Ah, if only I had had the opportunity in my young days that you have in yours! Why do you not band together in your troupe, work, study and become a company, the like of which this age has not seen? We have the technical skill upon the stage, we have the traditions; the difficulty nowadays is to get a company that has the literary mind and the trained intellectuality that is associated with university students. Should any of you determine to adopt the stage as your profession I shall be only too glad to render you any assistance I can." This was no idle promise, as I found afterwards, and I have remained for ever grateful for the encouragement conveyed in this generous compliment. "Château-Rénaud just on, your cue for coming, please, guv'nor," came the voice of the call-boy, he who must be obeyed.

On our way out we paused a moment in the wings, standing by the side of big Bram Stoker, a warm-hearted, genial Irishman. On the stage the paper snow was falling. Terriss as Château-Rénaud was talking with Sam Johnson, the charcoal-burner in the forest, "La la la!" Glenny, as Montgiron, stamped his chilled feet on the property ice, as a red sun paled before the rising moon. All this nearly a hundred years ago, yet within a yard of last century, on solid planks, repaired in 1880, among scenes and framework platforms of the same date, property men in blue coats, stage men in white, all in list slippers, moved

noiselessly, yet alert, where? on earth? or in heaven? when? how? No matter, the moment was alive, intensely alive, and the call sounded clearly now to me. I heard it and understood.

"Come along, boys, and see the last act from the front of the house," and we followed Stoker down the passage leading back to the third component, perhaps most wonderful, part of the play—the audience. That night it seemed nothing to me, a dead thing, waiting for the touch of life to come from the magicians who lived in the enchanted land behind the footlights. I had heard the call, and got its confirmation next instant in the passage. A presence rustled round us, an atmosphere of joyous, vibrant vitality—Ellen Terry, graciously profuse in appreciation of *Agamemnon*, "one of the greatest things" she had ever seen, and then, alert, erect in her radiant beauty, chief priestess of her own shrine: "You must come and enlist under our banner, help in the great work. Good-night." And so back to the audience, but not to earth and humdrum mortality—for many days.

When all expenses were paid—the prices for admission were purposely kept low—a small balance remained, which, after talking the matter over with Bruce, was set aside for another dramatic venture. I, with my many activities, especially after the *Agamemnon*, had a huge circle of friends and acquaintances, among them Myers, Andrew Lang, the Sellars of Edinburgh, John Farmer, the delightful family of the Bruces, Butler, Harcourt, Selbourne, Farwell and Davy. This was my year of triumph, in athletics and on the stage. Long articles in *The Times* and the London papers said we might look for a revival of dramatic art from some of these young men, in terms of Oxford Hellenic culture, notably from the winner of the three-mile race, who seemed destined to be Irving's successor and carry dramatic art still further forward. Alas for the friendly prophets! Would that I could have fulfilled their prophecies as I would have liked to do. Coming events cast their shadows before. I still think my call came at that moment, and I know that every opportunity and advantage was given me. I had found my work. The world smiled on me, and I thought that smile meant that the world was mine, before I had won it. I thought that I was born with a mission to reform the stage, and it was some time before I learned that the first condition of such work is to reform oneself. Too late I learned the first part of the lesson.

About this time came into my life the large northern circle from the land of my forbears: Croppers, Wakefields, Wilsons, Westons, Braithwaites, Rathbones, Howsons, Hartleys, Willinks, Arnolds and Argles; at Oxford, the heads of houses, the Bradleys, Mrs Woods, the Langs, Myers, Rhoda Broughton, the Max Müllers, Butchers, Nettleships, Abbot and the Armstrongs —Mrs Armstrong, tall and beautiful, was the subject of many an artist's picture—undergraduates by the hundred. "The best-known man in Oxford,"

said *The Scout and the Freshman*; and for a time I swallowed it all. Like the frog I imitated the ox, and almost burst. Now, too, came the fostering influence of the clever artist family that lived in Thackeray's old house, G. B. O'Neill, father of Harry, Frank and Norman, then small boys that I would pick up from the floor and carry round the room between my teeth, now, like their father, distinguished and successful men. Opposite the bow-windows of the picturesque old house dwelt the Thackeray Ritchies, and next door Heywood Sumner, artist, and William Benson, architect. R. H. Benson, Fuller Maitland, Hubert Parry, the Horsleys, Calcotts, Websters, Richmonds, Gore-Browns, Merrimans, Huxleys, Rawlinsons, McCartneys, Law, C. F. Brickdale, Wm. Morris, Burne-Jones, Leighton, Simons, Hook, the Reverend Glynne, the Alfred Hunts (with the three pretty daughters: Violet, the well-known novelist; Venice, who afterwards married William; and Sylvia), the Holman Hunts, and many more, made Kensington, with its tennis, skating, dancing, music, arts and crafts, a pleasant studio for the young. R. H. Benson's pretty house and gardens in Kensington Square, with its tennis court ingeniously planned and walled, and its picturesque red walks and terra-cotta seats, shrubs, flower-beds and creepers, in part designed by William, was a pleasant rendezvous for athletes, musicians, artists, lawyers, professors, writers, merchants, bankers and live wires of all descriptions. Thither came Lubbocks and Lyndsays, Holfords, Stanfords, Jenny Lind, the clever Tennant family, with their able father, Sir Charles, the Godfrey-Pearces, Hamiltons (of Kemble associations), Coleridges, Lytteltons, and many others.

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[5] Gulf = pass degree instead of honours.

[6] Nelson's father happened to be a waiter, so the Admiral wore a swallow-tail coat, many sizes too big, that swept the ground behind him; to show that he was blind in one eye he plastered his optic with a patch of clay. But when he bade farewell to Hardy and died under the beech-tree there was hardly a dry eye in the audience.

CHAPTER VII

OXFORD: (3) THE SOCIAL SIDE

I had now passed through three years of Oxford life, that system of lecturers, college tutors, schools and studentship, combined with social and athletic activities, that is rightly supposed to give a man the power of self-expression. Obviously youth has to stay longer in swaddling-clothes and leading-strings, and Ridding's period of schoolboyishness is somewhat prolonged. In knowledge of the world and the so-called realities of life the Oxford graduate of twenty-three or twenty-four is less efficiently equipped for the general purposes of every day than others of his years. Till he leaves Oxford he is more or less engaged in a sheltered industry, his outlook is somewhat cramped and narrowed by conventions and standards. He is forced to adopt the correct thing, the college fashion—"good form"—the copy-book heading, what custom bids, and what the neighbours say. The categorical imperative of "It isn't done" at the varsity may in some cases interfere with originality and with a first-hand knowledge of men and women. It may give a three years' start at a very impressionable and receptive age to the competitor who commences at nineteen in the workshop of his calling; but, as a general rule, in nearly every profession and occupation, medicine, law, the army, diplomacy and the like, by the time the age of twenty-eight has been reached the handicap of the late start has been caught up, and the advantages of the Oxford training begin to gain ground. Those advantages are, or should be, a high ideal of the value and the conduct of humanity, a gentle tolerance of opinions different to our own, a broad-minded and catholic outlook on facts, a devout reverence for truth visioned from many angles, a faculty for testing by reason the deductions of enlightened experience, the ability to express the same in word and deed, the acquirement of a versatile and elastic body and mind.

The pros and cons of a University career must be always determined by the length of time expended, the individual character of the student, and the work he is destined to undertake. In my case I think the strength and weaknesses of Oxford very soon made themselves apparent. I have often regretted that the time I spent as an undergraduate had not been devoted to soldiering, exploring, or frontier life in mining camp or ranch in one of the Dominions.

At the end of my first three years I was more or less a success in the social and athletic activities of the varsity. I was emphatically a credit to my Bond Street tailor. Owing to my idleness, my general information was singularly small; owing to a quick mind, high spirits and a radiant delight in being alive I was fairly popular. I had gathered a little knowledge from the books I was supposed to study and the lectures I did not attend. I had assimilated, to use my favourite expression, many life rhythms, destined to be of service to me, from the buildings and traditions of Oxford, including New College and Magdalen Bridge and Tower; many from the choirs of Taylor of New College and Parratt of Magdalen, the Cloisters, Chapel and ante-chapel, the precincts and the chrysanthemums of my own college. Much, too, had I learned from the discipline and good comradeship of athletic teams. The beauty of the river, the meadows, the old-world villages, and the hills and downs round Oxford, from Cumnor Hurst to Brill and Shotover, and Thame, Didcot, Henley, the Chilterns and the Ridgeway, from Dorchester clump to the White Horse. Parson's Pleasure, the bathing-place, and the Cherwell early claimed me for an adherent, winter or summer, in sunshine or in snow. When the frost sealed up the rivers with a coating of ice from three to six inches thick a little hole was always kept open just by the weir where "all-the-year-rounders" could still get their plunge.

That study in the great school of humanities for which Oxford has ever stood forced me into at least a shouting acquaintance with leaders in every sphere of social and imperial activity, in their rooms or in Junior Common Room, where all the live wires of the day congregated. Their diaries would practically furnish the history of Great Britain for half-a-century. Slowly music and art influences and interests intertwined themselves in my programme; subconsciously I absorbed more Hellenic culture than I was aware—more, indeed, than the amount to which my abominable and much repented idleness entitled me. These interests were encouraged by my mother, as she drew us children or modelled our growth in clay, then by our elder brother and sister; by the works of Ruskin, Morris and Burne-Jones; studies in the Taylorian, South Kensington and British museums and the National Gallery; Monday and Saturday popular concerts in St James's Hall; controversies concerning Wagner, Brahms, Grieg, Titians, Christine Nilsson, Cummings, Lloyd, Santley, the Robertsons, Halle, Neruda, Joachim, Jenny Lind, Madame Stirling, Patti Foli, and Maas; and the exquisite artistry of Sims Reeves and many others. I gained personal experience at penny readings, concerts and casual entertainments, at which I tried to amuse, or enthuse, with Dickens, Bret Harte, the American humorists, together with Shakespearian recitations and, on two occasions, comic opera. My old love had been low comedy and character, and it was only in the course of time that the balance of my divided allegiance

was given to the Tragic Muse. In fact, for some time in these matters my attitude was that of Nick Bottom the weaver: "Let me play the lion's part, though my chief humour be the tyrant's vein and Hercules." Many of these performances were contemptibly foolish and feeble, though discerning eyes might have detected a capacity for throwing myself into the character I was representing, an absence of nervousness (not an unmixed blessing), entire self-forgetfulness and disregard of an audience. But I really gave very little time or attention to matters dramatic, except always the Shakespeare Society and the Greek play.

Among the many interesting characters I came across in connection with *Agamemnon* was Miss Anna Swanwick, one of the first women students of Greek. She had translated the *Agamemnon* of Æschylus and allowed us to use her translation for those in the audience who could not follow the original. She was a great admirer of my mother, and would frequently come to the old country home. She and her sister were charming hostesses, and at their table I met Robert Browning, Froude, Eastlake, and many other notable men and women. Browning made a great impression on me. To meet casually, he was a well-groomed, well-bred genius, a scholarly typical man-about-town—an addition to any drawing-room society. He was intensely social, vital, vigorous, virile—that is where the poetry came from; with energy, fire, zest of life and life's adventures, ready for sacrifice in a great cause; companion of Hook, kindred spirit of the artists who fought in the war of Italian liberation. At the same time, he was very much at home in a well-fitting frock-coat at a comfortable lunch; a judge of life on the battlefield, on the mountain and at the "ordinary"; with well-trimmed little white beard and moustache, white hair, well brushed and formally arranged, quick-glancing eye, well-formed forehead, aquiline nose, firm jaw, mouth soft and loving. He was a connoisseur of ripe grapes and the wine of life; alert, ready, erect; well fitted to be the poet of a rich commercial and industrial age and help to solve its problems with his song.

Those two dear gentle, well-bred ladies from Cumberland Place, Miss Anna Swanwick and her sister, how modest they were, lady-like and retiring, so Victorian in the sense that, though they had visions of the future, they were strong enough to adapt themselves to the requirements of their own day. It was only when Woman's Emancipation became an accomplished fact that I realized how much it was due to the pioneer work of women like the Swanwicks, the Garrett Andersons, the Gaskells, Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, Florence Nightingale, Mrs Fawcett, and their friends. Afterwards, when I had the pleasure of meeting Miss Flora Annie Steel, I was reminded of that school. You cannot understand the greatness of Trafalgar, of Waterloo, of the Reform Bill, of the old Free Trade, of Peel and Palmerston, of Gladstone,

Beaconsfield and Salisbury, the Indian Mutiny, the Crimea, the Charge of the Six Hundred, the Retreat from Mons, let alone 1930, till you lay your hand on your heart and bow low to the forerunners of our women in the war.

I remember another life of thought altogether different and not so strong, froth of a stream that had to fight its way through rocks of prejudice—the æsthetic craze, laughed at, but used with delightful effect, by Gilbert in *Patience*. What a master of satire he was! The extravagance and the folly that attached to this burlesque of a genuine art revival found a notorious but unhelpful exponent in that savage, irresponsible, talented being, Oscar Wilde. Clever son of a singularly clever family, his gifts, well-nigh genius, bordered on the abnormal. His eccentricities and *outré* colouring were very skilfully caricatured by Beerbohm Tree as Lambert Strake in *The Colonel*, in which Coghlan was so brilliant. Wilde was something much more than a needy drawing-room society jester or decadent gaol-bird. The occasions on which I met him were not numerous. At the time Wilde challenged attention by winning the Newdigate he was described by a Balliol don as a brilliantly clever scholar, who had strangely good taste in art and in humanity; a great appreciation of quality in pictures, in horses, in athletics and in ethics: emphatically at that moment a good judge of what is best. He was also possessed of the extraordinary muscular strength that you often find in big, loosely built Irishmen. So far from being a flabby æsthete, there was only one man in the college, and he rowed seven in the Varsity Eight, who had the ghost of a chance in a tussle with Wilde. On one occasion this vigorous athleticism, scarcely to be expected in that lazy, lumbering, long-haired, somewhat sallow-faced individual, with a greeny brown coat and yellow tie, came as an unpleasant surprise to the Junior Common Room of Magdalen College.

"Let's go and rag Wilde and break some of that furniture he is so proud of." No sooner said than done. Three or four inebriated intruders burst into their victim's room, the others followed up the stairs as spectators of the game. To the astonishment of the beholders, number one returned into their midst propelled by a hefty boot-thrust down the stairs; the next received a punch in the wind that doubled him up on to the top of his companion below; a third form was lifted up bodily from the floor and hurled on to the heads of the spectators. Then came Wilde triumphant, carrying the biggest of the gang like a baby in his arms. He was about Wilde's size and weight, and hefty at that. His strugglings were fruitless, and he was borne by the poet to his own room and solemnly buried by him underneath a pile of his splendid and very expensive furniture—the entombed one was very rich but inclined to be parsimonious. When the debris of tables, sofas, chairs and pictures had been raised to the height of a respectable mausoleum Wilde invited the now admiring crowd—crowds are so changeable—to sample the victim's cellar. No

second invitation was necessary, and the corpse pinned down beneath the ruin of his rooms was soothed in his dying agonies by the gurgle of expensive liqueurs and choice vintages pouring down the throats of his uninvited guests.

Truly, as the American cowboys afterwards said: “That fellow is some art guy, but he can drink any two of us under the table and afterwards carry us home two at a time.” Paradox in himself and queer slave of paradox in his writings and in his life, I never heard him utter a single coarse thought or word; but often heard him give expression to many of the fine sayings and witty aphorisms in his poems and his plays. On one occasion I met him at a theatre: “There goes that b—— fool, Oscar Wilde,” someone said. “It’s extraordinary how soon one gets known in London,” remarked Wilde brightly. Was he aware of the tragic irony of his own utterance? He once repeated an admission of Millais, made in a moment of depression: “I have achieved all I set out to achieve. I have won a European reputation, a beautiful home, a beautiful wife. My home is one of the meccas of Western civilization. Rich, popular, and a notable person, I have lost my sense of the poetry of life; I can’t paint as I used. I have sold my soul, and I know it; and I am haunted by the question, day and night, is the position worth the price?”

Poor Wilde, let us hope that the miserable end to what should have been a brilliant career, to die starving, cold, hungry, scantily clad, in a garret—in a bed twelve inches too short—atoned somewhat for the madness and criminal folly of his life——“τοδ᾽ εν ωικατω.”

Very prominently Dr Jowett of Balliol stands forth in my recollection. “Isn’t Mr Jowett just like a dear little downy owl?” “So glad you think so,” chirped the Master, as he returned for his candle. “Oh, Mr Jowett, I want you to marry me.” “Very great pleasure, my dear young lady; will you name the day?” “Oh, I didn’t mean that; will you celebrate the service for me and John?” “With even greater pleasure, my dear.” The great man congratulated me after the Greek play, and asked me to dinner to meet Dean Stanley. Here was a chance of finding out the inner meaning of the Broad Church Movement. The mystery was too deep for my ill-equipped brain, but I fancy that the lives of the distinguished couple present at that table threw all necessary light upon the subject. If I remember rightly, on that occasion Stanley spoke of Gladstone’s omnivorous appetite for information. The Dean related how, after an eloquent discourse upon the Irish Church, Gladstone turned suddenly round on a well-known peer, owner of that year’s Derby winner, and discussed the breeding of Shire horses in the Midlands with a practical knowledge and grasp of the subject that made his listener appear a novice on his own hobby. All the evening the “little downy owl” chirruped and purred affably. Jowett very soon sized up my complete ignorance on most subjects of conversation, and he kindly left me to enjoy my dinner and to listen unmolested.

I have always been a good listener, and that evening I thoroughly enjoyed myself. Plato cropped up, and Greek drama, and here and there I ventured a word. I drew a smile from my audience when I described our visit to Eton, and how our hostess had not mentioned the performance but expressed great delight at our departure: “Me, with my innocent children of two and three years old, to have that murderous woman sleeping under the same roof. I was overjoyed to find them still alive in the morning.” I afterwards could well picture my host going a long walk with an undergraduate, son of an old friend, and not troubling to start a conversation. The boy was too shy to begin one himself. At Balliol gate came the crushing farewell: “Speech is silver, silence is gold—a very silly remark that; don’t you think so, Mr So-and-so? Good-night.”

In spite of the Balliol port, I dreaded lest I share some such fate as Rhoda Broughton. “Oh, Mr Jowett, I am so glad at last to meet you. How do you like my last book?” gushed the warm-hearted Rhoda. “Not at all, not at all; too much bread-and-butter and kissing in it.” How I sympathized with the curate who found himself one Long Vacation in rooms below those occupied by Jowett at the seaside. “We think that poor old gentleman is in need of spiritual consolation; he’s always working and writing, and talking to himself. Sometimes I think he is a murderer fled from justice,” said the landlady. What a chance for a curate newly ordained to shepherd a murderer’s soul back to penitence and peace. “Mrs Griggs, it shall be my duty and my pleasure to comfort the poor sinner.” That evening Jowett in his labours at Thucydides was interrupted by the entrance of this saintly lodger. He looked inquiringly at his guest. The guest moved aside some carefully sorted papers from a chair and from the floor to a table, and sat him down. He might have been warned by an irritated little chirrup, but was too intent on his mission of mercy. “Brother sinner and friend,” he commenced, “my heart bleeds for your suffering. I bring peace and soothing in my message to your sin-sick soul.” Jowett sat up aghast at this impertinent attack. More was to come. “I hear you pacing up and down the room over my head; I hear your muttered prayers for pardon, your exclamations of anguish and remorse. Ah! guilty soul, it is my sacred mission to bring to you relief. Confess your sin, unbosom yourself, my friend. Tell me of the hideous crime that weighs you down.” A pause, a little dry cough, and then: “I think I ploughed you twice four years ago for ‘Smalls.’ Good-evening.”

As Bruce strolled home that evening with me he told me of how their host was always showing hospitality and kindness to the outcast and the exile. He remembered staying with Jowett at Malvern, where by special invitation came Swinburne to rest and recuperate after an outburst at his club. One afternoon Swinburne had been invited to help to receive Mazzini. Up and down strolled

the little man, feverishly restless, looking forward with joyful anticipation to the entrance of Italy's redeemer. "He comes!" he cried, and ecstatically flying over chairs, sofas and tables knelt at Mazzini's feet. "Saviour of Italy, all hail!" he yelled, and rubbed his nose and chin on the patriot's boots. Whether it was the potency of Day & Martin's blacking, or the delight of meeting the Liberator, that night at the club Swinburne drank fiercely. By eleven he was surrounded in the smoke-room by whiskies-and-sodas, ashes of cigars, and reams of paper on which he had scrawled unfinished lines. By twelve his ravings for freedom were incoherent, his studs and tie had given way, and his shirt, once white, now grey, gaped as if to give outlet to the fiery soul within. He may have felt the cold, or fancied that he heard the Italian mew. Seizing a casual kitten from the floor he placed it on his bosom. His grasp was rough, the kitten scratched, and when its tiny claws drew blood: "How like to woman is the lioness!" the poet sang. Then he saw red, literally and metaphorically: "Death to the tyrant!" he cried. "My hat and cloak." Pussy was hurled into the inkstand as Swinburne rushed for the hat-pegs and the coats. "Death to the tyrant!" was the cry. "Down with the oppressors!"—and right and left the top-hats were hurled and battered and kicked, until a kind friend got him outside safely into a hansom-cab. Next morning came a bill for fifty pounds' worth of new toppers, and a polite request that he should withdraw his name from the club. This he did, and came to calm himself down under the Master's roof. They could hear him at six in the morning splashing about in his cold bath, singing at the top of his voice his odes to liberty, Italy and England—some fine words, some bathos, some obscure, but always the splendid measure of Atalanta's flying feet.

Gentle, kindly soul, in spite of his bitter little sarcasms, we always understood that Jowett was deeply in love, and anxious to win for his wife the great woman of that time, Florence Nightingale—the woman of whom a Cabinet Minister once said: "In all my wide experience, the greatest human force I have ever met." Be that as it may, none who heard the Master of Balliol's farewell tribute to a favourite pupil who had just been drowned will ever forget the tremor and affectionate tenderness of his voice, or the triumph and the hope that rang out: "My friend was young, and life was glad with hope; we that are old, we, too, are glad and hope. For myself, I never read a book, I never take up pen to write, I never commence any task allotted to me, without the sure faith and knowledge that I am fitting myself to continue life and activity in a world where sorrow such as has befallen us this day in Balliol will no longer interrupt, where we shall understand more clearly the meaning and the mystery of pain."

CHAPTER VIII

IDEALS

“Your mother and I would rather your work lay in other directions,” said my father, “but as it does not, and you wish to undertake the stage, I will put no obstacles in your way, and will help you in your profession as though it were of my own choosing.”

Flushed with success, as so often happens, I at once proceeded to court failure.

The praise that is often indiscriminately bestowed on the amateur had no doubt slightly turned my head. I thought my call was to reform the stage. My friends told me that I was already a great actor. I was ignorant and vain enough to believe them. I saw so much that was obviously wrong on the professional stage that I thought it would be easy to amend. Needless to say it was my entire ignorance of the art and its difficulties that led me to this conclusion.

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Sir Frank Benson
As "Becket"

I set to work to train for the stage much as I had set to work to win that three-mile race or to carry through the performance of *Agamemnon*. I took every opportunity of going to the theatre. I would dash up to town whenever I could for matinees of special interest. I dreamed the dream of carrying out the idea that Irving and Ellen Terry had put before me: a band of university students who would study and work into a finished intellectual brotherhood of artists. If I had been Irving I could have achieved my task on the lines that I first laid down for myself in process of long years; being only myself I thought this end could be attained in a few months. I saw Irving as Shylock, Hamlet and Macbeth; Ellen Terry as Portia; Miss Bateman as Ophelia. I was also one of the many who took supreme delight in Miss Ellen Terry's Lillian Vavasour in *New Men and Old Acres*, at the Court, in which Ellen Terry, Charles Kelly, Anson and Conway appeared. I did not at first appreciate Irving's genius; in fact I gave, as many others did, more or less successful imitations of the great

man as Shylock and Hamlet. I thought will and work were all that was required to ensure success. I am not sure that I did not often mistake "I want" for "I will," and treated inclination as a call. It took me years to find out what Irving really meant.

The *Agamemnon* company had succeeded by their simple sincerity in a Greek play. Why not apply the same method to Shakespeare? There I was right; I had grasped the idea of simple strength, the simple strength and complex potentiality dominant in a Greek statue. I had unfortunately not learned the complexity of the life it presents and the technical skill required for its expression. I realized, as others did, that after Kean, Macready and Phelps the stage was marking time. Irving had just begun a new campaign in the same direction, trained in the same school, but different. "The old order changeth, yielding place to new . . . lest one good custom should corrupt the world." Young as I was I could see, as was patent to all theatre-goers, that the new society drama had drawn to its standard many of the recruits most needed for Irving's classic and romantic army; that his work at the Lyceum required reinforcements from the George Alexanders, the Martin Harveys, the Helmsleys, the Havilands, Robertsons and Trees of the day in greater numbers. I did not realize there is "no art but taketh time and pains to learn." My idea was good; my work at that time was promising as apprentice work. I never dreamed of the gulf that separated the amateur from the professional until I had fallen into it head over heels. I was again the little boy trying to drop from the top of the bathing-shed at Winchester.

These things, and more, I had to learn by bitter experience, also the truth —*ars est celare artem*. That the naturalness of Dusé, Rejane, Sarah Bernhardt, Salvini, Coquelin, Jean Hading, Ellen Terry—above all of Got—was art reproducing the effect of nature.

"Surely," murmured Bram Stoker, with gentle wisdom, "acting is different from everyday life. You have to use art-convention. You have to enlarge. I take it that is the chief difficulty. You are quite right when you say there is a great deal of unnatural acting on the stage, but you are wrong when you say it is easy to be natural on the stage. I have won many a bet from actors that they could not go out of the room and return, and say in a natural voice: 'Good-evening. Very fine day to-day, is it not?' Not one in a hundred can do it. It requires self-control, humour and conquered self-consciousness—in a word, technique; and there is only one way to get that—work, work, work. . . . I'll tell you something else," he went on. "I have seen some of the cleverest amateurs, really good on a small stage, hopelessly ineffective on a larger one: no voice, no breadth, no dignity, they could not enlarge to the normal scale."

In my ignorance and vanity, for a time at least, I was blind. In spite of my blindness, in characteristic fashion, I set to work. My first thought was to

combine the Cambridge A.D.C. and the Oxford *Agamemnon* company in a joint effort. Alfred Lyttelton, Elliott, Marsh and Ponsonby promised to join this alliance. For one reason or another this plan had to be modified; and Cambridge and the A.D.C. were content to be represented by its president, W. G. Elliott, hurdle Blue and wide-jumper, afterwards a member of the Haymarket Company, and Gilbert Trent, of Oxford, young brother of Professor Ward. J. G. Adderley, one of the founders of the O.U.D.S., well known for his good work as Father Adderley, gallantly came to our assistance in a most helpful, unassuming manner and played well a comparatively humble rôle. Bruce, Dunn and George Lawrence, again, were excellent. Fowke, from the South Kensington Museum, made a most humorous and artistic Peter. Gilbert Trent and L. L. Holland (brother of Canon Scott Holland), both of whom subsequently joined the professional stage, Tatham, and Brian Farrer all worked with a will. But even for amateurs many of the company were raw, and deficient in stage-experience. In this respect they could not aspire to the Dickens, Pemberton, Quinton Twiss, Lady Monckton and Newnham Davis standards. But most of them had natural talent and excellent voices, and they were a remarkably athletic, good-looking crowd. Who should play Juliet? Modjeska, of course. Mrs Kendal and Ellen Terry would doubtless be too busy.

I never supposed for a moment that possibly these great artists might not care to play with amateurs. I well remember the interview with Madame Modjeska. Charmingly gracious was this beautiful artist. I think my cheek must have taken her breath away. She showed no surprise at my impudent request. To give myself due credit, it was very tactfully and respectfully put. Due stress was laid on the great desire and interest there would be in seeing such a Juliet. The lady, who had been genuinely impressed with the Greek play, gave the proposition her most careful and kind consideration. Her consent was almost obtained when Wilson Barrett, her manager, at the Court Theatre, decided to produce the play on his own account.

After many disappointments, due largely to my reckless hurry, a Juliet was found—Miss Rosa Lamb Kenney, the name a great recommendation, young, of good appearance, and already a professional actress. She was handicapped by my raw methods, puzzled by my new theories; she had more experience of the stage in her little finger than I had in my whole body. But she could not quite agree that Liberty silks were prettier than pearls and white satin; our ideas and methods did not blend, though in many ways she was the most effective of the company.

The crowd was collected from Kensington ballrooms and Oxford colleges. The music was conducted by Gibson, the well-known violinist, who got together a first-rate orchestra. To the strains of Cherubini and Rameau fair

ladies floated across the stage and danced gracefully, an altogether satisfactory vision of loveliness. The fencing, too, was of the best, the duellists well trained and practised with the foil. The struggles between the Montagues and Capulets lacked nothing in realism at the hands of a muscular crowd. The scenery was painted by O'Connor, the well-known artist, with the help of William Benson, and Barthe was the costumier. I had made, I believe for the first time in the history of the stage, a series of reproductions of mediæval pictures absolutely accurate in archæological detail, and beautiful in form and colour, thereby advancing in the same direction as my Lyceum exemplars. The properties were artistically and skilfully copied, and carried out by William, the craftsman, from pictures and original models in the National Gallery and the museums. The arrangement of the text, the designs for the dresses and *mise en scène*, the handling of the crowd, the stage-pictures, the dancing and music, the stage-business, were all new and original. The whole setting, atmosphere and treatment were full of poetic feeling, graceful form and colour.

I, of course, tried to do everything, be everything, manage everything and everybody, myself. In my ignorance I had chosen the wrong theatre, had done no advertising, was unacquainted with the art of "papering" the house the first night, thought the whisper that the Agamemnons were coming to town would fill the theatre. I charged low prices. A theatre for the people has always been one of my pet hobbies. I gave away the pretty programme designed by Hayward Sumner. I was quite surprised and disappointed on the first night to find an empty pit and gallery, though all the other seats were full. The unabridged version was much too long, and it was midnight before the curtain descended on the reconciliation of the Capulets and Montagues.

As a production it was a good bit of work, full of music, full of poetry; it was simple and reverent. But I believed it better than it was. Arrogantly, I claimed for it an importance and merit that can be acquired only in the professional workshop. Naturally, judged by this standard, I failed. The critic was not slow to point out my failures: "These ruddy amateurs from Oxford think they are going to teach the London stage its business, do they? Let them try! A Greek play by undergraduates is one thing; Shakespeare by incompetents, another." A paragraph distorted by a printer's error into, "Some members of the *Agamemnon* company and their friends, ladies and gentlemen," added fuel to the flames. "Pretentious, impertinent young snobs. An insult to the profession, etc., etc. We'll put them in their proper place." The audience, composed largely of the friends of the performers, were enthusiastic. Not so the Press, reinforced on the three subsequent nights by an invited pit and gallery. Juliet, the Priest (George Lawrence), Mercutio (Dunne), Peter (Fowke) and the Apothecary (Tatham) deservedly carried off the honours. Romeo was fair. Poor me. What with looking after all the company, seeing to

every detail in front of the house and behind the scenes (quite unnecessarily), buying cold cream and towels half-an-hour before the curtain went up, ignorant of everything that lightens the labour of the stage-manager, I think it was wonderful that I got through as I did. Many old "pros" and some managers thought the same, and in their next production of the piece copied much of the business and designing. Quite rightly, Press and public make no allowances. "Wherefore art thou Romeo?"

The receipts were very good, but not, as I had calculated, on the same scale as the *Agamemnon*; and the expenses far exceeded the takings. Business had been very good, and I received several offers to prolong the season; but for many reasons I did not see my way to do this, and so, with some qualms of conscience, I busied myself with the settlement of accounts. My dear old father was proud of his son, and thoroughly enjoyed the performances, with the rest of the family, and to my great relief gave me a cheque for five hundred pounds —"an advance of capital," as he indulgently termed it, to start me in the profession I had adopted. He was not a soft-hearted, indulgent fool, but a thoroughly good man of business in the management of his property. At the same time he was one of the most kind-hearted and generous men I have ever come across. I remember his once saying dryly: "You are not extravagant with some things, but you seem incapable of learning the value of a shilling." He realized his boy had managed things badly and wished to help him in his trouble. Though the Press were distinctly hostile to this undertaking, and though it cost me a considerable sum of money, I think it was well worth while. As John Farmer used always to tell us: "We learn much more from our failures than from our success."

One of the immediate results of this performance was that I got an engagement at the Lyceum the following year. Most of the critics had severely condemned, but the old professionals and artists were loud in their applause and encouragement—the artists because of the true poetry and picturesqueness of the production; the actors because of the originality and novelty of the ideas. "Hearty congratulations, young Benson. What struck us so in the club was the bold treatment, the originality of the ideas and stage-business," said old Walter Lacey. "Was it all your own? Where did you get it from? You had no experience, no knowledge of the stage." "I don't know where I got it from; it just came," I said. "Well, if it often comes to you like that, you will go very far indeed, both as an actor and a producer. Don't misunderstand. You can't act for nuts at present; you don't know the rudiments; but you've got power, you've got acting in you and, by God! sir, hardened old stager as I am, you carried me away sometimes and made me pipe my eye." Coming from a man who had acted with Charles Kemble, this was high praise.

To this day I do not know where I got my turn for the stage. I think it

comes from my mother's side, the Celtic craftsman's side, the smiths of Mercia. To them I attribute the art proclivities of many members of the family, among them Wayland Smith perhaps, from the land of the Way. Did the latter as road-maker bring the water to the land, as well as the land to the water? A little perhaps of both. The cunning worker in metal, a smelter and craftsman in iron and bronze, as William Smith Benson was in his workshop at this very time. Later they were cunning contrivers of chain mail and armour, swords and spears, horseshoes and weapons. "Hal of the Wynd" could fashion and could weave, and the men who made the Way helped to guard the Way. Then, in calmer days, they made the watches that measured out time's journey on the road, watches and ribbons to decorate the goal. Then to road-making again: roads across the seas and across continents, roads connecting East and West, carrying English and others from New York to San Francisco, three thousand miles, keeping time within three minutes' margin all the way. This way the sense of rhythm comes, rhythm of word and deed, rhythm of life. I always had a keen sense of rhythm—which rhythm showed itself in running, in rowing, in dancing and in drama, but strangely little in sense of tune. Was this lack the cause of discords in my life? I have to guard against jingle and rhythm pitfalls in my prose. I notice this in cousins and my mother's kinsfolk—Celtic perhaps rather than Scandinavian, Gordon perhaps, or Dockwra, who shall say?—wherefrom is derived the family tendency, resulting in something like this as a cousin's description of ball play: "There was a game we used to play when we were girls together, one threw the ball, the other caught the ball, and lo! 'twas done." In the war I realized how the kinsfolk attuned their lives to great national rhythms of service, reminding me of those in the Bible and Greek plays.

The spires of Oxford faded from my sight, and Iffley Church, that had so often looked down on me as I reeled off lap after lap in a five-mile run, disappeared in the December haze, just touched with the gleam of a sunset glow that seemed to sink into the stone and become part and parcel of those old walls. For four years they had been my second home—such happy years, so full of life and growth, and friends and thoughts and memories, that interlaced and enhanced the joy of Alresford days.

One moment all were red, next moment grey and purple as the sky, and when they faded from my sight I knew they stood there still, and had stood, some for a thousand years, one of the centre stations of life-force for all peoples—for the nations of the world, for all lands and all times. Had I been blessed with prophecy, I should have felt with Eyre, the typical Harrow student-soldier, when forty years later he started for his last journey to the Front. Many of Oxford's chivalry will understand Eyre's words, as he looked back on his old school: "Old spire, dear walls, set on a hill, how much you

have given to me, how little have I ever done for you in return!”

So I passed through the porter’s lodge, and I heard Taylor, whose music I had so enjoyed, training the choirboys in the well-known chants and hymns; and as I looked back to the figure of Our Lady, keeping watch over the old gateway, the night wind carried with it whispers of *Jam lucis sidere* as it murmured “Farewell.”

CHAPTER IX

I COMMENCE ACTOR

When the *Alcestis* at Bradfield was over I continued my studies for the stage. This included boxing, fencing, wrestling and single-stick, chiefly at Angelo's historic school in St James's Street, and Ned Donelly's in Panton Street, Haymarket.

I studied elocution with Elwin, Lacey, Creswick, Vezin, Behncke, Mills, and others, and subsequently stage-dancing with the Lyceum ballet-master.

Under Walter Lacey and Creswick I came into direct touch with the school of the Keans, Kembles, Macready, Glover and Young. With Vezin, who was a graduate of Philadelphia University and an exceedingly well-read, cultivated man, I learned, in the midst of discussions and reminiscences of the great actors in France, America and Germany, the principles on which the great artists worked; the new school as well as the old. These, I found, varied considerably, as might be expected, according to their differing temperament, mentality and point of view. "I know only two schools of acting Phelps said: one, good acting; and the other, bad acting."

Hermann Vezin was, indeed, an encyclopædia of dramatic acting, experience, exercise and training: of how some thought too much and some too little; how some allowed themselves to be swayed by their simulated emotion and passion until they lost control of poise and gesture; how others seemed to come near the ideal of Diderot and the Berserker warrior—the heart on fire, the head ice-cold.

From these teachers I collected anecdotes that in later years I never ceased to hand on to the students in my company. How Talma and Coquelin, and many others, had been advised to abandon their profession as being totally unfitted for it. How, for instance, Hendrichs, the great German Hamlet, seemed at first to make no headway at all. How he for years could find no outlet for the expression of the feelings and ideas that kindled in his soul and consumed his life-energy. One evening the floodgates seemed to open and the torrent burst through the barriers that had kept it back so long. At last he was able, as the saying is, to let the painter go, and revel in the full output of his pent-up forces. In the height of his passion the audience laughed; he did not care. His fellow-actors sneered, and said: "Ridiculous! We told you you would never be an

actor." "To-night," replied Hendrichs, "I know that I not only shall be an actor, but that I am one. I know not yet how to mould, restrain and govern the fires that are within me, but I can at last hold the attention of the audience and put forth my strength. Oh yes, they laughed to-night, but when I have learned to modulate and to shape aright the volume of my passion, my voice, my wild cries, my ill-regulated gestures, facial expression and movements, then you will see that they will no longer laugh. They will weep. They will feel deeply. They will understand. They will live."

Curbing his impetuosity, restraining the sound and fury of his expression, he gradually mastered the mighty forces at work within him, and in less than a year from that date was accounted the greatest Hamlet in Germany. "And to the day of his death," continued Vezin, "every day would he raise his arms twelve times, in a round, full gesture, carried out on the ball-and-socket lever principle, so as to keep supple."

Most interesting were the points of difference that Vezin emphasized between the style of Macready and the style of Kean. How Kean would be laughing and chattering in the wings, telling a funny story—sometimes not always fit for publication. Then he would suddenly dash on, and carry audience and actors, and all who were in the theatre, completely off their feet. The vital or, if you prefer it, magnetic force of the man was so great that sometimes when he reached a climax on the stage his fellow-actors would shrink away from him in terror, as if a flame were coming towards them. To show how curiously his mind worked, once, when he was playing Othello, and was warned by Iago to look to his wife, an expression of pain and bewilderment came into his face; he sank down on to a chair and groaned: "My God, she has bolted!"

On an earlier occasion, his wife found him practising some dozen or more methods of dying as Richard III. When asked which method he was going to adopt he said: "God knows; I don't. Perhaps something else quite different will come into my mind at night, but if I rehearse a dozen effective deaths, I shall be certain not to make a muddle of it when the time comes on the stage." To this day, tradition has it that Kean's genius never shone out more brightly than when (by special request) he recited the Lord's Prayer in a public-house.

Let those who contend that Edmund Kean and his school were unnatural, and ranted, ponder the following. His contemporaries were wont to say that one of his most wonderful effects was the way in which he brought the stage up to a fever-heat of excitement in a part such as, say, the Gamester, and then would make a quietly natural exit, using a tone of voice and a movement that made every spectator turn to his neighbour and say: "That is just how I would have done it."

Not so attractive is the story of his appearing, at a transpontine theatre, to

star as Othello, while the local favourite played Iago. The great Mr Kean, in spite of his world-wide celebrity, had on that night, as far as applause went, to play second fiddle, and at the end of the piece he betook himself in high dudgeon to his dressing-room, leaving Iago alone in his glory, to receive the plaudits of his enthusiastic friends and supporters. After ten minutes' ovation someone raised a call for Kean. At the request of the manager Kean appeared. He glared round at the audience, who were tardily trying to make amends for their coldness; made a lordly gesture of his hand, imposing silence; then, in his most ferocious tone of voice, snarled out: "You bloody fools, you don't know good acting from bad!"

This is in conformity with his exit as Silvius (*As You Like It*), one of his earliest impersonations in London: "O, Phoebe, Phoebe, Phoebe! Damn and blast Phoebe!"

Forrest, the great American actor, seems to have possessed a good deal of the fire and the force of Kean, or of the later actor, Charles Dillon; but from all accounts he lacked the subtlety, poetry and intense power of the Englishman, and sometimes tried to conceal this deficiency by bombast and shouting.

Macready's line of action was entirely different from the two just mentioned: patient, persevering, painstaking, intellectual, full of poetry, but the poetry of a virile understanding and polished intellect rather than that of resistless passion. To work up to the heights of Shylock's cursing scene he would keep himself aloof from his companions all day. He would have an experienced super in the wings, whom he shook and cursed before dashing on to bewail the loss of his daughter. One night the customary chopping-block was absent. What was the stage-manager to do? As luck would have it, his eye fell on a friend standing in the wings for the purpose of seeing the great actor at close range. "Here, Tom! You want to see the governor close by? He will be down directly; you stand here." He then placed him in the usual position of Macready's victim. "Stop there and you will see as much of him as you want." Down came Shylock, two minutes before his cue, bounded at the aforementioned friend and seized him by the throat: "You damned scoundrel! What have you done with my daughter?" "Mr Macready, I protest. I admire her immensely." The more he tried to express his admiration the more Macready shook him, strangled and cuffed him. Finally he threw him violently against the wall of the theatre and dashed on for the great scene. When he came off he beckoned to his stage-manager and said: "I do not think that the gentleman who helped me to work up my fury ever did better than to-night. I should like to make him a little present of some extra remuneration, and ask him if he will be good enough always to carry out his duties in that efficient fashion." "Thank you, sir," said the relieved stage-manager. "They have just carried him off to the hospital, but I will send him your present and tell him

what you say—if he lives through the night."

Perhaps the most instructive story of Macready is the one of his tying his legs and hands with string in order to cure himself of a tendency to redundant gesture. When the shackles that fastened him snapped he knew that the right moment for a gesture had arrived.

I know no greater tribute to Shakespeare's genius than almost the last words of this great actor. As he lay on his bed waiting for the summons of the Universal Call Boy he looked up and murmured, pointing to the volume of Shakespeare in his hand: "A poem in every sentence. Music in every line."

Acquirement of stage-technique has always been a difficult and complex task: the more so because of its seeming simplicity. From Irving right through the list, I gathered that the best school—that is, the stock company, and a season of repertoire alongside trained artists—had well-nigh ceased to exist. Miss Sarah Thorne's repertoire theatre, open all the year round at Margate, for modern, classic and romantic drama, and pantomime, was still turning out most promising recruits for the stage, but as far as good advice from the profession went I received little, if any, help, beyond the advice to join a stock company, qualified by the assertion that there were none. The Conservatoire in Paris suggested itself; but the style of their methods I knew was French, and would not altogether be applicable to the requirements of England.

I attended a big meeting called together by amateurs, artists and critics with the idea of discussing the foundation of a dramatic school. I noticed that the leading actors and actresses were on the whole conspicuous by their absence, and that, with the exception of Mrs Kendal, few of the speakers were acquainted with the subject from the inside workshop point of view. Some of the older actors damned the scheme with faint praise; whilst others, like John Ryder, forcibly denounced it. For the latter, there was only one school: with all its traditions, the workshop, the stage itself, under the control of an experienced stage-manager who knew his job, not an amateur theorist. "I'm damned if anything else is any good," said the old man, "and I think your whole scheme, as far as I understand it, is blasted nonsense," and with these words he jammed on his hat and left the platform.

Nothing daunted, though much puzzled and somewhat disappointed, I set to work to find out a way for myself. In the course of my hunt I encountered a professional elocutionist. "I am the man you have been looking for," said he. "I will make you the greatest actor of the day." I have always believed what I am told, and agreed that was probable. "Immediately I come into a room they all look at me: such dignity, such impressive command in my carriage. Why? Because I have inflated my chest by breathing through my nose. 'My God! who's this?' I hear them whisper. I see a friend. I cross the room to greet him. All eyes are on me. I look him up and down from head to foot; and, mind you,

the eye flashes when the lungs are distended. I take a deep breath—a prolonged sniff through both nostrils. I stretch out my hand boldly, frankly, from the shoulder; in tones that reverberate through the room like thunder I say with perfect elocution: 'How are you? What a lovely day.' Not as if I was ashamed of the day, or of the company, but as if I'd had a share with the Almighty in making the day, the man and the whole universe. By gad! sir, the effect's electrical. It's great. 'That's ——,' they say. The women admire and the men bow low. I'll make you a great actor. You'll be a success. My terms are ridiculously low."

I studied with him for a few weeks. I practised with the loose waistbelt, the straining chest and the tightened muscles until my throat bled, and my voice piped, croaked, whistled and roared, and I became a nuisance to myself, my family and my friends. At last, another student and I decided that salvation was not to be found on these lines. One day we happened to meet our instructor in Regent Street. We both took a profound sniff, we swelled out our chests, and held out our hands, and together we roared: "Good-morning! How are you? What a lovely day!" The passers-by were astounded; the modest recipient of our greeting jumped into a hansom-cab, and we knew his face no more. His method, I believe, has helped many, and some of the lessons proved most profitable to me at a later stage of my development, but they were at that time too advanced for my ignorance and inexperience. They also savoured slightly of the old actor's response to a tender inquiry as to his health: "Bad, laddie; bad," in a feeble voice. "I have congestion of the lungs. The left has been entirely eaten away"; and then with the roar of an enraged lion: "But, thank God! the right is as strong as ever!" Oscar Asche's definition of "Elocution" was: "Elo!" I shout; "Cu!" in the centre of the stage; "Tion!" with all the limelight turned on me.

Continuing my experiments, I was introduced to Madame Schumann, at afternoon tea in my cousin's pretty drawing-room in Kensington Square, which he kindly allowed me to regard as my home when in London. Madame graciously agreed to consider the training of my voice. She sat down to the piano and sounded a chord somewhere in the bass. I responded in a high tenor. She looked up furtively and said: "Vat! You prefer a higher key, eh?" and struck a chord in the region of my first utterance. I immediately responded with a low growl in the bass voice of a Buffalo Bill. She seemed surprised, not to say a little pained, and after a few seconds of chasing one another up and down the keyboard she slammed down the lid, sprang to her feet with flashing eyes, and in a voice of disgust and suffering yelled at me the words of doom: "You have no ear, and your voice he is beaslee!"

On relating this untoward incident to my guide, philosopher and friend the gracious Ellen Terry I received some comfort. She said: "The lady is wrong:

your voice is one of the best things about you. It has great carrying power, is clear and very flexible. Disabuse yourself of the absurd idea of letting them have it off the chest. Take plenty of breath, open your mouth and speak naturally. That is all you need do; experience and practice will do the rest, in the way of increasing the volume and timbre of the voice." This was pretty much the advice I received from all my teachers. The difficulty lay in its application. Still, I had learned something; that was, to keep supple and flexible all the muscles of the throat, mouth and chest, just as in rowing, boxing or any active exercise. I further learned, with the help of paper-knives, spoons, forks, pens, pencils, a mirror and a flaming candle, to control teeth, lips and tongue; to take breath, and to use as sounding-board and drum the vibrant structures of chest and palate. To this Emil Behncke added the singer's maxim: "Feel when you produce the right note, do not listen to it"; while Hermann Vezin finished the chapter by his insistence on the clean-cut sounding of vowels and consonants.

Mr Oscar Asche

The harmonizing of the life-rhythms of voice with play of feature,

movements and gesture began to come only after years of grind in the workshop and observation of daily life. Here at once rises the vexed question of the value of the self-conscious teaching of an academy, with its theories, and the limitations of those theories by practical experience. On looking back I realize that possibly I should have avoided many pitfalls, and have escaped many faulty mannerisms, if I had at once started in the school of experience, the workshop of the actual stage. At the same time, my varied experiences of different teachers perhaps has enabled me to be of some service as a stage-manager and trainer. The danger of all school tuition is its tendency to generate self-consciousness, the great foe to the dramatic and every other art. On the other hand, the danger of experimenting solely in the workshop is the acquirement of certain technical faults and weaknesses that, unless discovered in time and eradicated, lessen the chance of a successful career. It may be that the right principle of development works differently for different people. One temperament develops quicker by actual experience, another benefits more by gradual preparation at a school.

Looking back, as an actor-manager, down a long vista of years, I think that those for whom, as at one time was our practice, we provided teachers of elocution, dancing, fencing and physical drill became proficient sooner than those who were left to their own resources. In the same way, in athletics, cricket, football, golf, riding, rowing, and all forms of sport, there are those with an inborn love of some pursuit who teach themselves the rudiments of their particular art in hours of play, or in assisting the expert—like the caddy at golf, the groundsman at cricket, football and running, the boatman on the river, or the stable-boy. To all alike, however, comes the moment when they need the advice of an adept. Of late years I have been surprised at the rapid progress made by beginners at my wife's school.

At last came the great day for the first rehearsal at the Lyceum. I think the engagement began somewhere about 9th August, and finished at the end of September, when *Romeo and Juliet* had run some eight months in all, a very long run in those days.

On reporting myself at the Lyceum I was asked by the Irish hallkeeper, Barry, an old soldier: "Phwat do you want?" Humbly I said I wanted to see Mr Irving. "Come this way," said Barry. "Look at them," pointing to a small crowd of people. "They all want to see Mr Irving. Many in that crowd are Members of Parliament, peers, painters, poets, all the pick of the land; but I have told them that they can't see the governor this morning. He is busy with an old crony who played with him years ago in stock companies; and I know exactly what will happen. They will talk of the times when they were glad to receive twenty shillings a week, and not certain of that; they will talk for two hours, and then the governor will get up and he will say, 'Fortune has been

kinder to me than it has been to you, and if this is any good to you then make use of it, for auld lang syne,' and he will slip two tenners into his hand. And he won't care a bit that he has kept the House of Lords and all these swells waiting, as long as he has helped an old brother pro. in distress. That's what makes the governor the big man he is, and that is why he is loved throughout the profession.

"If you wait for hours," continued Barry, "you won't see him."

"But I was told to attend rehearsal at eleven," I said.

"Och! and why didn't you say so before? You are the young man Mr Allen has been looking for. Through that door, and you will see him on the stage." (And I there and then registered a vow that one day I, too, would give a season of Shakespeare at the Lyceum. Seven years later the vow was accomplished, and Barry became my hallkeeper!)

"Mr Benson, I presume? My name's Allen. I will just run you through your part; and then you will be ready to meet the company to-morrow morning. So you are going to take Mr Alexander's place? He is a young fool to go, and you are jolly lucky to get such a chance. . . . Now then, we will take the last scene first. You enter left, and strew flowers at a gate that opens out of the tomb on to the stage. Get on with it, please."

Now was my opportunity. Romantic acting on the stage had lost much of its poetry, its sense of rhythm: Oxford culture would restore all this to the stage. Had not the papers said so? Obviously, these actors knew nothing about the art at which they had been working for years. I, the illuminate, fresh from college and a life of comparative idleness, could show them the proper and the only way.

I began, in my most superior "Shakespearian-Reading-Society-cum-curate" manner: "Sweet flower, with flowers thy bridal bed I——" And then it all became a blank. The realization of the great task I had set myself seemed to fade into the background. The words had vanished. I looked at the cleaners busy dusting the boxes and polishing up the rows of seats in the pit and gallery. Alas! I could see no word written on the heavy dustcloths or the rich folds of the celebrated red curtain of the proscenium. My mind was as blank and void as the empty house I gaped at. Driving my nails into the palm of my hand I commenced again—with no better result. I dried up dead. I was not as disconcerted as I should have been. I knew it. I knew my part, and could play it, better than it had ever been played before. Though it was a great mistake that I had not been cast for Romeo. It was all the fault of such a haphazard rehearsal. It was the disturbing effect of scene-painters, carpenters and property men hurrying about their business on the stage, without seeming in the least impressed or interested in the fact that I had arrived from Oxford in order to reform the whole of the theatrical business from top to bottom.

Still, the job was not hopeless, if only I could remember the second line. Alas, it would not come! What did come was a stern rebuke from Allen, the assistant stage-manager: “You young fool, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, wasting my time like this. You are like all the young men; you don’t work; you don’t study; you go running about after wine and women.” I indignantly protested that this was not my habit. “Why did you not spend the night learning your part, instead of rake-helling all over the town!”

“I knew it backwards until I came down here to this unsatisfactory rehearsal. I know it now, if only you would rehearse me properly.”

“It’s no good talking. You show me that you know it.”

Trying again, I floundered through half-a-line more:

> “Sweet flower, with flowers thy bridal bed I strew.
> Sweet flowers I strew——”

And there I stuck.

“Now, Mr Benson, I will give you a bit of advice. You have either got to determine never to dry up, or you have got to leave the stage. Which will you do? Say to yourself: ‘Whatever happens I won’t dry up or else I shall never be an actor.’ ”

“Oh, that is nonsense! I have never dried up before. I am not afraid of that. Why, I said it perfectly ten times this morning on my way down to the theatre.”

“Oh, you did, did you! That shows how much you know about the stage. Never do that. If I am going to lift a heavy weight at an exhibition, or run a race, I don’t lift that weight ten times before the performance, to make sure I can do it, and I don’t run that race ten times before the word ‘Go!’ is given, to make sure that I can last the distance. If I did, when I came to the actual test my muscles would be so tired that I should never reach the winning-post. So it is with the muscles of the mind and memory. Now don’t flurry yourself; just go quietly through it.”

With a great effort I got to the end. It was, perhaps, a little sing-songy, perhaps a little unconvincing. I did not seem able to feel the part as I had that of Clytemnestra. My theory of acting was that Kean’s method of carrying on full sail before a whirlwind of passion, illuminating Shakespeare in his course, by flashes of lightning, was the right one. “Let the painter go,” Walter Lacey used to say. But I could not that morning. There seemed no emotion, no feeling, no life, no fire, all cold, dull and soulless. Still, I knew it was poetry, I understood the inner meaning of the play and of the words. I could write a clever essay about it, which probably this man who was bullying me, and whose “h’s” were uncertain, could not; and so I felt I must have acquired merit, even if I were not quite at my best. I was, therefore, rather staggered at

the question: “What, in God’s name, do you think you are doing?” “I am trying to do justice to the poetry,” I said rather pugnaciously. “Well,” said Allen, “if that’s poetry I never want to hear any more. It may be your idea of Oxford culture, young man, but it ain’t our actor’s notion of nature and real life. We don’t want any bloody brains on the stage, my boy, we want guts, guts, guts! You have got to be Paris, to think Paris, to live Paris. You must not be a little tin-pot Benson, reciting poetry before an Oxford examiner; you have got to be a living, breathing impersonation of the character you represent; so carried away by the truth and the life of it that, without knowing it, you convince the boy sitting up there in the gallery, nearly fifty yards away, that you are doing, moving and speaking exactly as he would under the same circumstances. Always remember that boy has paid his sixpence—more perhaps to him than a guinea to the man in the stalls. You have got to make the one hear you, though separated by fifty yards, while at the same time you seem to be quietly natural to the other, sitting within a few feet. You have got to keep your head so cool that you know exactly where the other people are on the stage, and what they are doing, and what they want you to do; or else you will queer the whole blooming pitch, and get the dirty kick-out after your first performance. You leave the poetry alone, and listen to what we call the profane underplot for a moment. Now then, put it like this.

“You have been strolling down Covent Garden, and you have spent your week’s salary in buying some garden-stuff to strew on the grave of your best girl, and so you begin:

“Swelp me, Gawd, darling, but it ’urts me cruel to think of you lying there dead, and as I chucks these violets and lilies over yer corpus I can’t ’elp thinking as ’ow you was the fairest flower of the whole bunch. That’s what I think, my dear, and so I pipes me eye, and will never forget you, damned if I do! Yours truly. Hamen.”

I did not think this was great poetry; I did not think it was exactly what Shakespeare meant, but I recognized that there was a certain convincing naturalness, a certain truth and tenderness, in the profane underplot, that was somehow lacking in my poetic declamation, and I remembered something that I had read in the same book—how “one touch of nature makes the whole world kin.” It took me years to approximate the naturalness of that old actor; and I realized, with bitter disappointment, how many of the faults of my method have arisen from over-insistence on poetical intelligentsia in the days of my youth, the dangerous tendency of so much of our scholastic and ecclesiastic elocution.

Next day took place the gathering of the clans, after their brief vacation of ten days. Again was I the new boy at the school. Again came the familiar questions: “How did you spend the holidays?” “Whom did you see?” What did

you do?" "Hope you enjoyed yourself." At this school, too, there was the same merging of the ages as on the banks of the Isis during the Eights Week. Eighteen was far older than eighty, and the cheeriest of the lot was old Howe, of seventy-eight, who could tell you first-hand traditions of Garrick, and had seen and acted with the Keans and Macready.

Never had a new boy a kinder greeting; never was a tenderfoot let down more lightly. "Come to join us? Welcome!"

Nothing but helpful kindliness and a desire to make me feel at home, in spite of the fact that young Oxford on the stage was more of a *rara avis* in those days than now; in spite of the fact that I came from the not very welcome class, the well-to-do amateur. Why should such a one go on the stage and keep the bread out of an actor's mouth, whose father perhaps was not well off, and who might, for all one knew, have a starving wife and children? It was a burning question then whether it was fair for anyone of independent means to become an actor or a singer.

Hermann Vezin told a pleasant story of a rich tradesman who once informed him that his son could paint as well as Millais, act as well as Irving, and sing as well as Santley, but, thank God! he did not need any of these accomplishments.

Into the midst of the chattering, laughing throng awaiting him silently stalked "The Chief," Henry Irving. Hardly any greeting, hardly a word to anyone, except to old Mrs Stirling (whom he kissed on either cheek); a friendly, hurried nod to me, "Glad to see you, my boy; hope you will be comfortable," and so off to his sanctum.

He does not realize, I thought, that I have come to teach him how to act.

Mrs Stirling was one of the "Nurses" that will ever stand out pre-eminent in stage annals. Anyone who saw them will never forget her and her nursling, Ellen Terry, in the garden scene: the pettishness of both; the youthful impatience of the one, the teasing crankiness of the other; the laughter, life and love and impishness of the fair girl, contrasted with the peevish rheumatic fatigue, the querulous interest in trifling sublunary matters, that balked and fretted the daughter of the stars; the playful gentleness and affectionate care of Juliet; her infectious joy when at last she gets her lover's message; the crescendo of young love, and its entrance into the garden of red roses; the nurse's commonplace appreciation of her child's joy, quickly giving place to her primary instinct to hurry off in quest of a good dinner.

Breezy Bill Terriss, irrepressible, devil-may-care sailor-man, no respecter of persons, likely to be as impudent to a queen as to an orange-girl, likely to charm the hearts of both, was one of the company. After leaving the Lyceum, he became the beau-ideal of the Adelphi, with its plays of adventure and romantic heroism, predecessor, as many will remember, of the late Lewis

Waller. He was probably the one person in the theatre who never treated the Chief with the slightest respect, though the Chief, perhaps, was the one person in the world for whom he had any.

His absolute inability to express some of the subtle Irving readings would distress and puzzle the great man.

"Now, my boy, what do you mean by—'What need the bridge much broader than the flood?'?"

"To tell you the truth, governor, I have not the slightest idea. It might be referring to Waterloo Bridge and the Thames."

"Ah! very ingenious—very ingenious, my boy. You've better brains than Shakespeare, though you don't use them in the same way."

Then came the first performance. "Aren't you going to make up, laddie?" "No; Mrs Kendal thinks that making-up hides the expression." Ominous silence on the part of Charles Glenney, Tom Mead, Frank Tyars and "Jimmy" Fernandez.

"Yes; but Mrs Kendal, after all, is Mrs Kendal, and, if I may say so, you have not reached quite so high a place in the profession as she has. However, you make up as you think best; but if the governor or Loveday (the stage-manager) catches you, or Allen, or, worst of all, that devil Bram Stoker, in the front—he can see through a brick wall—God help you! And don't say it was our fault."

I went on my own obstinate way, and after the dance scene, in which I had the honour of treading a measure with a lady who seemed to me the Queen of all Worlds, past, present and to come—Ellen Terry—I was pounced on by the inevitable Bram.

"Good God, Benson, you have got a dirty face. I rushed round to tell you, it shows from the front. It's a hot night, you are nervous, and you are sweating like a pig in a blue funk."

"I have a theory," I began.

"Theory be damned! You can't go on the stage of this theatre with a dirty face. Here, Foster, get him some grease-paint, and show him how to use it."

This the dresser did, and, in spite of my theory, I admit it improved my appearance.

"Well done, for first done," came a sweet little note from Juliet. After a few days she took the trouble to tell me that I was not nearly as good as she had estimated after seeing me in the Greek play.

"Ah!" said Bram Stoker, standing by, "you forget it's easier to appear good when you are alongside amateurs than when you are acting with the Lyceum artists, including Ellen Terry."

"That's very pretty," said Ellen; "if your wife were not looking on in the wings I would kiss you. . . . But study and work, young man; study and watch

old Howe and the others."

At the end of the first week I realized that acting was not as easy an art as I had imagined. I was still rather inclined to blame my part, and still at times I wondered to myself why the management was so blind as to keep me as Paris instead of letting me play Romeo, and Irving the Apothecary.

"Why did you not turn up at treasury call?" was the reprimand on Saturday.

"I did not feel that I had earned my salary."

"Oh, nonsense! You did not do particularly well, and you did not do particularly badly. And we don't do things in that way in this theatre. When you cease to earn your salary, you will be shown the door. You wait till then."

So I did, and so I was.

I really could fence rather well, and I knew that I was a better swordsman than anyone else in the cast. I thought that when the fencing scene with Romeo came I should get a chance of showing off. That old weakness, love of showing off and playing to the gallery! I had also studied death spasms at St George's Hospital. My one chance of distinguishing myself did not materialize. My efforts at fencing were too correct to be convenient for the old theatrical use of the rapier, and Irving seemed to fear that Paris's correct opposition might endanger Romeo's eyesight. Therefore with one hand he seized my foil, hit me over the knuckles with his own, prodded me in the stomach with his knee, again dashed his blade against mine, said, "Die, my boy, die; down, down," elbowed and kneed me into the mouth of the tomb, and stood in front of the dying Paris, brandishing a torch, amidst shouts of applause for Romeo, and little, if any, regret for Paris.

The dying thoughts of Paris were that so far he had failed to reform the elocution and the sword-play of the Lyceum Theatre.

It was often said that Irving surrounded himself with inferior actors—it would have been difficult for him to find a company of his peers. This is scarcely founded on fact. During my novitiate at the Lyceum I found myself among such artists as Lady Gregory (Mrs Fanny Stirling), Miss Claire Pauncefote, Miss Harwood, Miss Amy Coleridge, and Miss Jessie Milward; W. H. Howe, Tom Mead, James Fernandez, William Terriss, Sam Johnston, Stanislaus Calhoun, Hudson Carter, Harberry Carter, Andrew Archer, William Haviland, Frank Tyars, (Sir John) Martin Harvey, Charles Glenney, Orlando Barnett, Helmsley, Allen, H. J. Loveday, and many others. Many of these artists had been leading men, stars, and managers on their own, before they joined the Lyceum.

From all this theory, practice and precept I learned, in the words of my eldest brother, William, that "Art has no laws, only general principles"; that among these general principles the most important were the following: to be

always in the picture; always helping to carry on the story; to realize when you are part of the background and when you are bearing the chief weight of the play on your shoulders. To bear the burden and heat of the day in a big situation is hard; still harder is it for the beginner to co-operate unobtrusively with his fellow-artist when it is his turn to discharge the task.

"Ah," said old Howe, one morning, "you will find that it is the most difficult part of your work, without undue prominence and without distracting the attention of the audience, and disturbing the chief actor, to convey by look, gesture and movement the meaning of the words or the actions that are going on around you."

In the theatrical profession it is commonly supposed that this is the infallible mark that indicates the greatest promise in a beginner—the extent to which they are able to register, it may be by the look in their eyes, it may be by a movement, a position, a breath, a gesture, their exact relationship to the picture of the moment. The mere action of taking breath gives new life to the figure, and often brings a new light to the eye, and is the sole condition that renders it possible to convey thought, feeling or life influence to a large audience.

Another golden tradition from the days of Kean, and earlier, was the value of suggesting the "ground swell," as Lewes calls it (see *Actors and Acting*), of some mighty passion. So that if you have to ask for a cup of coffee, or for a door to be opened, after a terrific quarrel, you do so quietly and naturally, of course, but in a way that betokens that you have passed through the recent stress and storm.

The companion lesson of not sprinkling broadcast false pathos—on leaves and flowers, little dogs, cats and mice, that may crop up in a metaphor—is a subsidiary part of the same problem.

"Why move your arm like a signpost, or adopt the trussed-chicken attitude enforced by a modern macintosh?"—"I thought a gesture was needed."—"You thought! What business have you to think until you have been on the stage five years." This seemed to me reminiscent of early days at Winchester: "A gesture is never needed, a gesture comes—the right moment for its arrival being when you cannot keep it back."

Then Fernandez, or Mead, or Howe, would chime in: "That is what is wrong with the governor. He will make gestures, with his arms above the level of his shoulders, that so far from strengthening a point convey an impression of weakness. The arm above the level of the shoulder implies extremity of joy, or grief, and, if you are continually brandishing your arms above your head, when the big moment comes you have nothing left for its expression." "He has got to learn something else," chirped Jimmy Fernandez: "automatically to give the stage, when the chief speaker passes him; so that if A crosses B in the

middle of a speech, B drops down into the right position below A, without the audience noticing that he has moved at all."

"Well, Jimmy," added the Nestor, W. H. Howe, "you should add that you must never make a movement on the stage without having some reason, either theatrical or dramatic, for doing so." "Put it like this," interrupted old Mead. "The theatrical reason for B moving down stage below A is that A shall not have to speak up the stage, but can act and talk to the audience via B. The dramatic reason is the suggestion of some thought or feeling of impatience, assent or disagreement that dramatically gets B into the right theatrical position. In a word, the convention of the theatre requires that B shall be acting, as he merely moves out of A's way." Till they have learned this lesson most beginners feel, and appear, awkward and self-conscious at these interim moments. Kean is reported to have been extraordinarily sensitive to the preservation of what he called his "focus," an imaginary line drawn from the base of the proscenium columns to the foot of the great Mr Kean, beyond which his fellow-actor was forbidden to advance, lest the star attraction's focus should be obscured from those occupying the side seats in the theatre. "Proud, I'm sure, to act with you, Mr Kean. What can I do to help you most in your great scene?" "Do anything you damn please, my boy, only for God's sake keep out of my focus."

Many an amusing duel has been watched by an interested company between two stars who would not give the stage properly to one another. On one occasion they both backed up the stage during their speeches, until they collided with the landscape, supposedly twenty miles distant. Then one led the other solemnly down the stage by the wrist, turned him with his back to the audience, and went on triumphantly to the climax of his oration. The beneficial, or detrimental, effect of movement on the stage has to be very closely watched. The old actor, who could play "Ercles rarely, or a part to tear a cat in," would turn fiercely on a tyro who fidgeted about and ask him: "Why the hell are you hopping about like a parched pea on a drum or a cat on hot bricks?"

"Suit the word to the action, and the action to the word," wrote the actor-poet. Not only is his verse full of movement, gesture and action; but the most suitable moment for its use by the actor is marked for him in the cadence of the song—so true is it that movement is music, and music movement. These and other problems of position find an easy solution when the student has acquired what the French call the *œil de théâtre*—that is, a capacity for seeing ourselves as others see us.

I remember Ellen Terry once saying: "We are the only artists who never see the art work we are producing. I would give ten years of my life to see myself act, that I might learn what to avoid."

Sometimes, in mischievous mood, Irving as Othello would tease Brabantio (played by old Tom Mead) by standing in different places on different nights in the senate scene. Accustomed to the older etiquette of focus and balance, Mead used to prepare to address the footlights below him, where he expected to find the object of his attack. In sonorous voice he rolled forth: "There stands the man——" Then followed in audible soliloquy: "No, no; where the devil has he got to! S'help me, God, he's gone up stage. No, no, my lords; there he is."

Tom Mead had been a celebrated star in his day at the Surrey Theatre, but his memory was beginning to play pranks with him. Admirable in the Ghost and the Apothecary, he found it difficult to remember sometimes the proper ingredients for the witches' cauldron in *Macbeth*. It did not seem to him to make much difference whether he said cool it with a baboon's or a dragoon's blood. His voice was deep and resonant, and his asides were always audible to the entire house. One night a remonstrance earlier by the Chief resulted in the following:

"Cool it with a dragoon's——. No, no, governor, I mean baboon's blood. S'welp me, God! I've said it again."

I had somehow realized the extraordinary efficiency attained by Greek art along the lines of mental and physical development. Having devoted so much time to athletics, I carried my athletic gospel with me on to the stage. When I became my own manager they used to say that I was mad on the subject: that I acted more with my muscles than with my mind; but the fact remains that I did something to keep alive the athletic habit of body rendered necessary for the wandering actor in early days by the requirements of the caravan, scene-shifting, dance, pantomime, harlequinade, circus and sword-play. Inured to activity by such occupation, there are the well-known records of Kean in his penniless days swimming the Thames to get to a theatrical engagement on the farther bank, holding aloft with one hand his theatrical kit, while he propelled himself through the water with the other; or of the same worthy walking ten miles from Limerick to the neighbouring barracks to teach the officers fencing, and then walking back to finish up the day's work with Othello and a harlequinade. This story was told me by an Irish gentleman named Grattan, who was one of the officers thus taught by Kean. Take, again, the custom of Quin and his friends, walking to St Albans for their Sunday dinner, and on the strength of that meal walking back again to London the same day, ready for Monday's work.

At this time, the peculiarities of actors were beginning to be exploited by the authors, who wrote parts to suit such personal peculiarities. The older and the better way had been for the actor to make his own petty microcosm elastic, sympathetic, far-reaching, able to extend sympathy and understanding to the

macrocosm. The range of parts for an experienced actor—take Garrick, for instance—was almost limitless. One night Lear, the next, Abel Drugger. Kean would illuminate Othello by flashes of lightning, and perhaps an hour afterwards convulse his audience with his adroit acrobatics as Harlequin.

"If it ever becomes the custom for actors to devote their spare time and energy to winning for themselves social notoriety they will lose that 'sensibility' which is their most valuable stock-in-trade," growled old Phelps, at Sadler's Wells. "The ruin of the stage," spoke up Miss Alice Denvil, "began when an actress had an evening-dress."

One of the most important lessons I received was given me by Irving as to the traditional first position on the stage. I sometimes think that the modern theatre has forgotten it. The actor should, as a general rule, stand much as a fencer stands at attention, only less constrained, and the feet wider apart, the body three-quarter face to the audience. He can then command with his face the whole audience without moving his feet, and without giving any impression of unreality or staginess.

"The hardest thing, Frank, that I am called upon to do," said the great Ellen Terry, "is when I have to make an exit across the whole width of the stage." It was not till some time later that I appreciated the value of this hint, or the injunction to remember that a stage exit should always end three yards beyond the line of sight, and an entrance commence at the same point. It was an education in itself to watch some of these old actors, steeped in the best traditions of the past, and to know how those traditions always strove never to overstep "the modesty of nature."

"Your capital," urged Fernandez, "is your soul, your body, your voice, your life, and all life's energy. To become even an adequate artist you have to train, teach, develop and govern that complex entity yourself." Vezin and Lacey took up the parable: "Dance, fence, sing; take every form of exercise; train as you would for athletics, as the old actors trained. Watch everyone, listen to everyone, observe the children, the navvies, the sailors, the aboriginals, their power, their grace. You cannot act grace; you have got to have sufficient power and command of your limbs to be able to use them with the greatest economy of energy; your will, your nervous system and muscles so knit together, and so tense, that you can express whatever emotion or thought may be required instantly, without any hesitation—in clear simple outline, as it were, with the ease and readiness of what is called good form. Grace is the inseparable accompaniment of power properly applied." Then I began to understand why Irving, when I had asked him, six months back, how I was to learn to be an actor, sadly shook his head as he replied: "I cannot tell you; since the stock companies, which used to be the only schools, have ceased."

CHAPTER X

WITH IRVING AND ELLEN TERRY AT THE LYCEUM

What the cuff-and-collar brigade, as they were christened in the decade round 1880, gained in formal accuracy they lost in spontaneity, versatility, simplicity and dignity, which were the distinguishing marks of the older school. Granted that the style of some of its exponents had deteriorated into mere ranting and an absurdly exaggerated respect for what was called “the bizness”; granted that some of the diction and gesture had become the imitation of an imitation, meaningless mouthing and theatrical tricks which smacked rather of the circus than of real life; the older school at its best had a breadth of treatment, a directness and simplicity, that enabled them satisfactorily to portray the great ones of humanity, and the tense moments of their life, by methods unattainable by the average teacup-and-saucer actors.

Because of the exaggeration, in the penny-plain-and-twopence-coloured style, of certain barnstormers, the larger method of heroic mould fell into disrepute. Because of the lack of thorough training and grounding in all the elementary branches of the actor’s technique, the producers at the St James’s, the Haymarket, the Criterion and the Court, and to a certain extent even in the earlier days, under Macready and Charles Kean, had to fall back on the more mechanical method of count fifteen and stand at a certain instant on a certain particular mark, a practice that came again into vogue under Gilbert and Sullivan, and the Bancrofts. These distinguished artists, however, had gained their own excellence in the very school whose evolution they supplanted with what they considered modern improvements. The sunny laughter and pathos of Mary Moore; the quick, gay, gentlemanly incisiveness of Charles Wyndham; the finished comedy and dramatic power of Mrs Kendal; the garrulous, lovable old men, with whom you sobbed, smiled or sighed, of John Hare; the genius for absurdity displayed by Marie Wilton (Lady Bancroft); the breezy, light-hearted, impulsive vigour of manly William Terriss would never receive a fair chance under the more modern conditions of their own theatres. The artist now, with few exceptions, gets little opportunity of learning that certainty of touch, that directness of appeal, that clear-cut outline, which was the characteristic of those to whom I have referred.

The French have a saying that tradition is a thing to have known and to have forgotten. It would have been well if we had remembered this, and the maxim of the older players, that the artist must cultivate the capacity to sympathize and understand, to merge his own personality in that of others, and thereby gain a greater individuality for himself.

It is interesting to remember that in the sixties and seventies, in the gallery of the Sheffield theatre, on any occasion when Shakespeare was played, especially on the appearance of a new Hamlet or Juliet, a little circle of workmen would gather round their leader in the front row. The leader held a book, an assistant on either side held a candle. If the text was not treated with proper respect the leader would sing out: "Eh, lads, 'e's skipping it! Gi'e 'un the kettle!" Promptly the assembly indulged in hisses, boos and cat-calls, coupled with warnings to the delinquent to be more careful in the future lest worse should happen—the worse taking the form, in extreme cases, of a fusillade of bottles, candles and bits of coal. Probably this organization owed its origin to the imperfection of certain actors who never studied any part but their own, and that only from mysterious bits of paper called "scrip." These children of Crummles were outraged at the sight of a book. "Text, text? I have never heard of it," they would say. "What the hell is text?" "All I want, laddie, is, first the bizness, then the cues; and I bet my last bob I get a bread-and-butter notice."

One well-known provincial actor-manager of the rough-and-ready order kept a large cudgel in the prompt-corner, and whenever there was a dry-up or a stage-wait he would bound on to the boards and belabour indiscriminately heroes, heroines, villains and humble satellites, and then, having gained the attention of the audience, would indulge in a comic or tragic recitation of the sorrows or joys that he suffered at the hands of the victims he had just driven off the stage. Of course, the explanation had little if anything to do with the plot of the play, but that mattered little; it held the audience steady, and gave the actors time to get on with the legitimate story. It is on record that sometimes the audience having heard part of a play disliked it, and demanded that something else should be substituted.

I accepted the position, and resolved to fight my hardest against the anti-Shakespearian tendency of the age. I conceived it to be my job to preserve what was best in the old, and blend it with the constructive forces of the new. I would be quite content to know that it is realized and admitted that, in following in the footsteps of Irving and Phelps, and working in that sphere with Charles Flower at the Memorial Theatre, Stratford-on-Avon, I have helped maybe to preserve an interest in Shakespeare on the stage, and make the task of the next who shall work in the same direction somewhat easier perhaps than I found it.

"You are too modest, Benson," said Irving one morning, "or," surveying me quizzically from head to foot, "at least you pretend to be so."

On another occasion I broke every rule of etiquette by going up to the great man, seated on a chair in the wings: "A very beautiful part, that of Romeo," quoted Paris airily. Irving looked up sharply, annoyed doubtless at the presumption of a beginner interrupting his rest and talking in the wings. "Yes! And the odd thing about it is that every damned young fool who has been on the stage two minutes thinks he can play it." Even then, it was some months before I realized that this was a snub, so fully convinced was I of my ability to play any leading part that might be entrusted to me.

In defiance of the regulations I used to set myself in the O.P. corner, watch the play, and take notes. Ellen Terry would come and talk to me sometimes when thus engaged. She informed me that it was dead against rules, but that she had assured Irving that it was only my keenness, and begged him to let me stay there. "Only," she said, "make your notes afterwards, and not during the play."

Beloved by the men and worshipped by the women, Ellen Terry flamed through life, restlessly active, buoyantly vital, inspiring and stimulating all she met. Fair and comely in face and figure, extraordinarily supple and strong, she had the sinuous grace of movement that one associates with a leopard or a lioness. With exuberant spirits, and great capacity for joyous laughter, unschooled yet learned, she brought to her task on the stage that sense of virile happiness, that delight in richness of colour and clear-cut shapely outline in design, that betokens the great artist.

I have seen her, in one of her irresponsible moods, catch hold of a bit of scenery that was being hoisted to the flies, hanging on with her lithe strong arms and graceful figure till she was some forty feet above the stage. The terror-stricken carpenters hastened to lower their precious burden so soon as they perceived that they were hauling heavenward one of the mainstays of the Lyceum. The only answer she vouchsafed to the perplexed managers and anxious friends was an impromptu Irish jig, to show how much better she felt for her aerial flight.

"My dear Frank," she said one day, "you were lucky to go to school and college. One of my great drawbacks is that I never had any education whatever, except what I picked up in the theatre, and from my family and friends."

"Perhaps," said I, "that accounts for your being so exceptionally wise and clever."

"Oh, blarney!" was the answer. "I wish I knew more of books."

I think one of the charms of Ellen Terry's personality was that this wayward, irresponsible beauty had an extraordinary faculty for arriving at a

correct judgment on things as they really are and as they might be. No one will pretend that she cared always to exercise this faculty, or to act on its dictation. As a woman, therefore, she was not unacquainted with grief, though the buffets of fortune never quenched her unconquerable courage, and the tears never completely dimmed the rainbow smile. Her experiences as a very human woman were used to develop her matchless gift for the expression of pathos or of gladness, and also to help those around her. A very live and very lovable being, I have never heard her utter one word of malice, or say an unkind thing of any human soul. Alongside her intense vitality, the width and depth of her sympathies in all directions made her at this period the idol alike of the public and the profession. With all her popularity, no one laid themselves out less than she did to secure or maintain her pride of place. She showed as much deference, consideration and kindness to the theatre charwoman as she did to a princess.

To her artistry perhaps is to be attributed the bringing of the stage into direct communion with musicians, sculptors, poets and painters of the Victorian era. The influence of Rossetti and Watts and, in a lesser degree, of Walter Crane, Prinsep, Leighton, Poynter, Burne-Jones, Alma Tadema, William Morris, Browning, Tennyson, Sullivan and German contributed in no small degree to the forces of the Lyceum.

Ellen Terry had the gift of acquiring the inner meaning of all the arts of expression with which she came in contact.

The French actors were always loud in their praise of her simple naturalness. So natural indeed was her technique that it was often said that she was “just Ellen Terry” in her various parts. Such critics did not realize that quite late in her career she would still practise in order to ensure roundness of gesture.

Did these critics realize all the strength and tenderness, all the suffering, all the tears and laughter, required to be “just Ellen Terry,” the radiant queen, whose love is so deep, whose vision is so clear, that she can lead for all time the children of men to “the Land of Heart’s Desire, to the Isles of the Blest”?

The obvious criticism was often made that the magnificence of the setting, the vastness of the stage-architecture, the large numbers of the crowd, and the very elaborate properties and stage-business, lessened the simple grandeur of the piece represented, swamped the acting, and obscured the idea.

To a certain extent this was true, but Irving doubtless would have explained that he could not get his artists to understand his point of view, or to represent the poetry of Shakespearian drama as it revealed itself to him.

Perhaps the methods of his company were simpler and more direct than his own. Consummate master of the actor’s technique, he was sometimes led to overlay or detract from the effects of that technique by the delight he took as a

stage-manager in putting before the public beautiful pictures, in bringing on to the stage the life and atmosphere of the period represented. In the same way, now and again, his restless energy and fiery quest for the ideal led him to over-elaborate his own stage-business, misled by the very richness of his own manifold stage-knowledge and resources. Coquelin said he used to make his hand travel all round his head in order to rub the other side of his chin. George Henry Lewes suggested that Irving showed his true dramatic genius to greater advantage in melodrama than in Shakespeare. Personally, I never realized how great an actor he was until I saw him the life and soul and central attraction of plays that could by no means claim to be masterpieces of dramatic literature. Take *The Bells*, *Louis XI.*, *Charles I.*, *The Lyons Mail*, *Faust*—above all perhaps *The Dead Heart*. In the last-named play, when he came out of the Bastille, after long imprisonment, and saw, the first time for many years, the light of day, felt the warmth of the sun, and slowly realized what it meant to be a man alive again and free, he held his audience spellbound, silent, breathless—without a word, with hardly a movement or a gesture, compelling solely by the power of concentrated thought. William Archer paid him a great compliment when he said that, "The man, who could neither walk nor talk, was yet incomparably the best actor in England."

Like most artists, Irving knew the bitterness of piping to those that will not dance: to the full had he learned the lesson that the artist gains only by giving. Irving was always generous in his gifts, from the early days when, as leading man, he and James Fernandez were dividing up the week's takings among a shivering commonwealth. "Fifteen pounds, boys and girls, this week, among eight of us. Well, let us send three pounds to the company next door as a Christmas gift; they've done worse than we have. What's this? A parcel from an unknown admirer to Henry Irving? What! What! God bless them whoever they be—four vests and four pair of pants. One apiece, eh? And we'll toss which has choice of what, eh?"

Then came profits of twenty thousand pounds in a few months from one play. Again the blind goddess turns her wheel, and, after years of triumphs, harassed and ill, he finds it difficult to raise one thousand pounds to carry on. But he did carry on, great-hearted, brave and generous to the end—the husk to Westminster Abbey, the lonely spirit surely happy at last in many thousand thoughts of love and gratitude. Numberless were those he helped and encouraged in every branch of life, especially the artistic.

"You will never be an actor," said Mrs Stirling, "until you have learned to get through your part though the snow comes through the roof; with an audience consisting of only two or three drunks, who are not listening; while the sparrows twitter and flutter round the auditorium before settling to roost in the flies; while rats trot across the footlights carrying off your pet powder-puff

in their mouths. You have got to learn to act though none of the company except yourself are sober; when no one gives you your proper cue; when you have not had a square meal for a month and will probably get no salary on Saturday; when you are sent on to play a part of two or three hundred lines with one night's study, and no proper rehearsal. When you can do this, and not dry up; but hold an audience, great or small, drunk or sober, stalls or gallery or Royal Box, whether the play is good or bad, and your part actor-proof or impossible, then and not till then may you call yourself an actor."

CHAPTER XI

I START IN MANAGEMENT

When I joined the Shakespearian Company of Charles Bernard and Miss Alleyn, prospects of leading juvenile parts were held out to me.

As these were not fulfilled outright, I protested.

"Yes," said Bernard; "but you have hardly come up to the promise which at one time I thought you would show. I could not possibly give you such a part as Romeo until you have advanced further in knowledge of stage-technique. To be perfectly plain with you, your movements are angular and awkward; your elocution is most sing-songy and unnatural; your gestures are ungraceful and ill-timed. My advice to you is to leave the stage. Good-morning."

I thought that I was hardly used, and said so. In reality it was about the best lesson I ever had in my life.

The Bentley Company, which I joined after leaving Miss Alleyn, was remarkably talented, and included G. R. Weir, W. Mollison, J. Glendenning, R. S. Vandervelt, Henry Jalland, Mr and Mrs Kilpack, Miss Kilpack, Miss Doyle, Miss Belle Cecil and Robert Courtneidge—the latter had just left in rather characteristic fashion rather than submit to some treatment he thought unjust. All of these in the course of their career won for themselves a prominent position on the stage.

George Weir enjoys the reputation of having been the best Shakespearian low comedian of his time. His Bottom the Weaver, Dogberry, First Gravedigger, Stephano and the Dougal Cratur, in *Rob Roy*, could not have been surpassed. The latter part, with William Mollison as Bailie Nicol Jarvie, constituted as brilliant a duologue of its kind as the stage has ever seen, human, pawky and quaintly humorous, with a suggestion of underlying pathos: the one full of wild-cat fierceness and poetic loyalty, the other canny, business-like, thrifty, and averse to risks of any kind, yet possessed of a sympathetic, tender heart, and a faithfulness that often led him into unexpected adventures and difficulties.

Afterwards William Mollison (whose three sons are all well known on the English stage to-day) was to make his mark in leading Shakespearian and other characters, and was connected at one time or another with most of the leading

managements.

Vandervelt was for some time leading man with Sir Henry Irving. John Glendenning became a star actor-manager in America. Hugh Montgomery took up leading parts in drama, and was soon an actor-manager on his own account. Merridew was an admirable stage-manager and leading old man for years with the Benson Company, at the Globe Theatre and elsewhere. Henry Jalland, to whose keenness, energy and devotion I owed so much at this point, and for many years to come, was for some twenty years manager of the Benson Company, during its various seasons in London and the principal provincial cities; and afterwards for Miss Fortescue, Miss Olga Nethersole, and the St James's and other theatres.

At that time, also, no performance of Scottish drama was complete without the assistance of Miss Belle Cecil, in her unrivalled rough character-sketches.

Walter Bentley himself was a son of Dr Begg, Moderator of the U.P. Church of Scotland. He was a nephew of Miss Emily Faithful, one of the well-known champions of feminine emancipation and education in Mid-Victorian days. A clever emotional actor, tall, of good appearance, with an expressive face and telling voice, witty and clever, he made a great success as Clarence, in Sir Henry Irving's production of *Richard III*. Some of the critics indeed bestowed the palm on him rather than his manager. This success, and the adulation of friends and admirers, especially those of the other sex, led him to neglect his profession and his business. His art work suffered much in consequence: its drudgery did not have the same attraction for him as the primrose path of dalliance, and in its treading he recked not his own rede. After acting with Phelps, and filling some starring engagements, he embarked on the hazardous speculation of touring his own Shakespearian company. He was for some time the idol of Scotland, and could he only have run on steadier lines would doubtless have reached his goal. A very sensitive nature, easily moved one way or the other, with strong passions and high spirits, his early training and circumstances had somehow failed to develop the best side of his character. His various escapades—running away to sea, etc.—seem to have attached a black mark to his name in the family records—records distinguished by the rectitude and public-spirited service of many of its members. This disapprobation, though it made him rather cynical, affected him less because his charm and originality made him a welcome *bon garçon* and general favourite in whatever circles he moved.

Just before I joined his company, his father, Dr Begg, was presiding at the Church Assembly in Edinburgh the same day as that on which Walter was billed to appear at the theatre. Dr Begg is said to have offered him five hundred pounds to stay away; but he refused, and advertised the fact that he would accept no bribe that would deprive his fellow-citizens of Edinburgh of their

lawful privilege and delight in seeing their fellow-townsman carry out the special programme he had devised for their benefit. This programme, he further hinted, might be of more profit to their souls than the eloquence of all covenanting carls, including his respected father.

It was about this time that I journeyed up to join the company at Stirling, and had my first view of the snow-covered mountains, heather, lochs, old towns and farmsteads of bonnie Scotland. I arrived after an all-night journey, wearing a covert-coat which would be, as my brother Cecil said, a disgrace to a groom. It was, however, endeared to me by the fact that I had worn it when I cut down the H.H. Hunt over a railway gate on the South-Western Railway and its fellow on the other side of the line. My hat was a brown wideawake, a once-fashionable model. It was a little battered, and the brim was unstable; but it was near to my head and heart, for it had figured in a historic run wherein I, mounted on a hunter of my own training, had negotiated a fence made of thin strands of wire. I had read in a book of the feat being helped by hanging a coat on the obstacle. The beloved covert-coat aforementioned was duly hung up: the fence was leaped in safety, and I enjoyed the selfish pleasure of being alone with the pack running mute over the grassland. The exit from the enclosure across which they were tearing, with a scent breast-high, was a high oak fence of pointed palisades, about the height of the horse I was riding. Over this also the magic garment wafted me. The same day it also saved my neck by helping me to pull up, after a stiff flight of post-and-rails, within a few yards of a chalk-pit which yawned hungrily in front of me. Truly was the coat imbued with “faery,” for later in the afternoon, when riding for a certain fall, with feet out of the stirrups, over a blind hedge with a sloping bank on the far side, man, horse, hat and coat arrived the other side at the cost of a dent in the brim and one or two bruises.

The reader must pardon this digression, because my first appearance and effect on the company and management would be incomplete without some reference to these garments and my shoes. They were shapeless and shabby Russian leather, where the original leather remained. What matter! Had they not walked with me from Oxford to London in a single night? Why should they be discarded? What did it count that the company, who had heard rumours of Oxford athletics and a first engagement at the Lyceum Theatre, were a little shocked at the appearance of the new man? A sympathetic whisper went round that the poor boy was evidently on his uppers: “Quarrelled with his parents, you know. Disowned. Fugitive from justice.”

I do not know that Rosencrantz without words, and in a hideous, straggly yellow wig, improved matters. Perhaps Hamlet expected some of the words, Rosencrantz certainly expected some of the cues—but neither were forthcoming on this occasion; at least, not the words of Shakespeare as he is

wrote. The actor-manager, whom I had not hitherto seen, looked Rosencrantz up and down, turned his back on the audience, and said in a loud aside: "What the hell have you got on your blasted head?" This as a first greeting struck me as a little unfriendly, not to say discourteous.

"What the hell have you got on your —— head? You look like a ——! Get off the stage and change it, for God's sake!"

I was dignified, and replied by firing off what lines I remembered of my part, with a mental reservation to have it out with the management on the first opportunity.

Dramatic impression made that evening—distinctly minus.

Next night, thanks to a super-excellent, Bond Street, single-breasted, long-skirted, brown frock-coat, and a colourable imitation of Bancroft as a fashionable heavy—singularly inapplicable to Sir Frederick Blunt, the part I was playing—my stock in the company rose a point or two. This sartorial success was a little bit discounted by the fact that everybody, fat or thin, tall or short, borrowed the aforesaid garment whenever they were playing smart juveniles within a hundred years of the period. "You only had to add a shoulder-cape and you were bang in the middle of the eighteenth century, you know!" The borrowers also asked, after they had obtained the loan of the coat, why, if I possessed such a *ne plus ultra* stage garment, I made my first entry among them in the ragged covert-coat and battered brown billycock.

The next night I made further progress in my stage reputation by dashing on in a scene with the manager as a wild Irishman in *Still Waters Run Deep*. I had never been in Ireland, and this was before the days of Yeats and Moore, Fagan and Sean O'Casey, and the many sons of the Emerald Isle who have enriched our stage by their acting and authorship in recent years. I therefore accepted, without any qualification or question, the stage caricature of a "typical Irishman"—hat brushed the wrong way, dishevelled hair, flaming side-whiskers, brilliant green tie with loose ends always flapping in the wind, fly-away frock-coat unbuttoned, red waistcoat cut very low, displaying a voluminous shirt-front with one stud doing duty for three, radiant trousers of loudest pattern, with a generous display of somewhat untidy spats and large boots. Added to this, I sought to conceal my ignorance of the mellifluous brogue by a generous interpolation of "shure" and "begorra" on every occasion, possible and impossible. By this time I had learned not to wait for cues, and to be grateful for such scraps of dialogue as the star condescended to hand out to me. Whether it was the Hampshire, North Country, or broken French that did duty for the Irish accent, or whether it was the superabundant muscular energy with which I raced round the stage, the still waters were tempestuously stirred to their depths. The star manager was completely flabbergasted, and stood watching the new man in amused astonishment.

Regardless of cues, which I did not get, I pounded out my sentences in a resistless, continuous flow, banged off my exit at the wrong door, and was rewarded with rounds of applause from the audience: result with the company, jealous apprehension and questioning judgments as to the amount of my dramatic ability. I went to bed that night comparatively pleased with myself.

The next evening yet another triumph; still further apprehension on the part of those who had to act with me; encouragement and congratulations on the part of those who did not meet me in the play. The value of the congratulations may be apprized from the form they took: "Well done, old man! You fairly dried up the governor again, and queered our heavy's pitch; but you scored yourself all right." "I say, you'll draw it mild with me in the scene where I meet you to-morrow night, won't you? There's a good chap!" The part was Glavis, in *The Lady of Lyons*. I had played it before, and was quite determined to secure all the laughs I could, though why Glavis should have spoken broken English in his native country sometimes troubled me in the maturer years of my own management. Next night there came a frost—"a killing frost"—brought about by my efforts to make love to the leading lady in a Scottish accent. It is a difficult job to make love on the stage, with any convincing effect, even for actors of long experience, and that night it proved far beyond my powers. I thought that I was doing it well, poor lad; but was quickly disillusioned by rude remarks from the gallery that no decent lassie would listen to such a gawk; that I had better study the Scots language before I burlesqued it on their stage. They were not sure that I could speak the Sassenach dialect correctly; but, in any case, I had better take the next train back to the habitations of that uncouth and barbarous people. The leading lady, with great presence of mind, rose from the rustic seat on which we were seated and led me off the stage, murmuring: "My father wadna abide ye, an' ma mither wants me at hame." Derisive cheers from the audience; tearful abuse from the heroine for having spoilt her best scene; impression on the company —minus.

Next morning came a message from the management that its august majesty, "Walter the Great," wished to interview me.

"Well, Mr Benson, how are you getting on? You must be a little more attentive to your make-up. It's no use my trying to play Hamlet if Rosencrantz comes on in a wig that makes the audience laugh."

"It's a very good wig, Mr Bentley. I paid three guineas for it, and it was recommended by a thoroughly experienced actor, who sold it me."

"Ah, he would! Saw you coming, I suppose? Take my advice and give somebody three bob to burn it. Nothing more certain than it will get you into trouble if you wear it again on my stage."

"I don't agree, Mr Bentley; but of course you are the manager, and your

instructions shall be attended to. But I want you to remember, and to take this as a warning, that I object to being addressed on the stage in such language as you used to me on Monday night." Here I adjusted my position according to Ned Donelly: left foot in advance, first guard, with the right hand covering solar plexus, left hand ready to lead off. "Further," with increasing vehemence, "I hope I shall never forget I'm a gentleman; but I never allow anyone to be impertinent, even if he happens to be my manager. I'm considered rather strong, and capable of dealing with your insolence as it deserves."

This impressive warning was received with peals of laughter. "Well, my boy, I do not see that that will do you any good, or me either. It'll be much better for you to learn the art of make-up, and a little of the technique of an actor, which at the moment is conspicuous by its absence; though you show promise, and I fancy you'll do all right if you work. Our art is not so easy as you youngsters think. If you wear that yellow wig again, there isn't a management on God's earth that wouldn't insult you. They'd be neglecting their duty as artists if they didn't. Good-morning, Mr Benson. I hope you will be comfortable with us."

One Monday evening Bentley failed to put in an appearance. Ill health was given as the cause; and Kilpack, the stage-manager, deputized as Shylock. Matters were hastening to a climax. In spite of rumoured financial collapse, *Hamlet* and *The Bells* were given, with Bentley in the leading parts, and arrangements were concluded for a journey to Cupar Fife in the following week. Were "the High Gods of Ben Lomond" about to grant my prayer?

I wrote home a lengthy letter, saying that I had a unique opportunity of starting on my own with a company of exceptional ability; that if my father would advance me a hundred pounds I had no doubt that I would speedily make the fortunes of myself and the family. My dear old father wrote back enclosing a cheque for the amount required, accompanied by the remark that he could have wished that I had selected some other profession; but since I had chosen the stage he would help me in every way to have a fair start. I have not yet made the fortune of either myself or my family. The letter I wrote asking for money was the beginning of a long series of similar requests. Fortunately for me the cheque I received was only the first of a long series of similar answers.

On the Saturday night Bentley made all necessary arrangements for the transport of the company to Cupar Fife (I fancy the astute Mr Kilpack saw to all this), and further gave out his intention of carrying on the tour as arranged. In one thing I was perfectly right: the men were a remarkably clever set of actors. The salary list was ludicrously small, amounting to a grand total of thirty pounds. The highest remuneration, paid to the leading man, was three pounds. The stage-manager and his daughter, who played the leading parts,

received seven pounds. I and some others drew thirty shillings a week. Weir, who was an acknowledged genius and assisted with the stage-management, rejoiced in two pounds. Merridew and Vandervelt drew two pounds five shillings and two pounds ten shillings respectively. William Mollison, one of the star "Bailies" of that time, had to be content with twenty-eight shillings. There was every prospect, therefore, that the takings would admit of these princely incomes being maintained. Again the worldly-wise Kilpack stipulated with the local management (when the star actor failed to appear) that nothing should be deducted from the receipts till the actors had been paid.

We played *The Merchant of Venice* twice, *Hamlet* twice and *The Bells* twice; but the attention of the company was more concerned with the future prospects of the coming campaign than with the meagre houses that assembled in the barn-like building, used as a Presbyterian church on Sundays and rented to profane players for the rest of the week. By Wednesday it was ascertained that Bentley had disappeared entirely from his accustomed haunts, and was reported to have escaped from his creditors by taking ship to Australia.

Forthwith, I, with the assistance of Hugh Montgomery, the nephew of a distinguished Liverpool surgeon, as business manager, and helped largely by the advice of my loyal friend, Harry Jalland, signed and sealed contracts, ordered the printing, and arranged to open at Airdrie the following Monday with *The Corsican Brothers* and *Cramond Brig*. George Weir was stage-manager. The leading women's parts were played by Miss Clara Doyle, who shortly afterwards became Mrs Glendenning, and Miss Rosina Filippi.

I soon gathered that I was not going to make the family fortune so speedily as I had expected. In fact, my father was becoming accustomed to the fortnightly wire asking for another fifty pounds, and had begun to write consolingly that "Rome was not built in a day"; that, of course, he knew nothing about it, but did I think it likely that the Scots people would throng to the theatre in the beautiful summer weather they were at that time enjoying?

The last fortnight of the tour was an eventful one in laying the foundations of the Benson Company, for, in spite of the comparative financial failure and the continuous application for a weekly or fortnightly cheque, so generously responded to by my father, I was allowed, in addition, sufficient to purchase from Walter Bentley's man of business the whole of his wardrobe, and swords, and a larger and more complete fit-up than the celebrated little bits of scenery I had purchased at Aberdeen. The wardrobe contained complete costumes for most of the Shakespearian plays, *Rob Roy*, *Richelieu*, and the old comedies. To be sure the ideas of the costumier as regards period were a little mixed. Shakespeare was divided roughly into two divisions—Venetian, shirts of any pattern up to 1540, and then trunks, doublets, etc., for Elizabethan and Early Stuart. The intervening period between this and old comedy squarecuts was to

a certain extent bridged by a very good set of Louis XIII. dresses.

Hamlet and *Macbeth* under the Bentley regime were dressed from early Venetian doublets, a certain amount of chained or ringed armour, a few Roman British costumes and a little borrowing from the *Rob Roy* crowd. For this fairly complete equipment, along with the stuff we had already been using, including a variety of top-boots, shoes and sandals, I had to pay somewhere about one hundred and ten pounds. Boots and shoes, scenery and wardrobe made to order cost so much, but sell for so little. The thirty baskets formed the nucleus round which I afterwards collected a very complete set of dresses and armour from which I could have dressed almost every period known to the costume-books in a thoroughly accurate and artistic manner, that would have challenged comparison with the most elaborate West End or foreign production, not in costliness of material, but in artistry, correct archæology and heraldry.

The net loss on the tour, including the money expended on scenery, properties and dresses, amounted to about four hundred and fifty pounds; but the curtain had scarcely rung down on the Saturday night, the scenery and costumes had hardly been carefully packed away and safely stored, before Jalland, Hugh Montgomery and I had set our brains to work to organize another tour for the autumn and spring.

CHAPTER XII

THE START OF THE BENSON COMPANY, 1883

When I went, in 1883, to Cambridge, where I was still remembered in connection with *Agamemnon* and athletics, the late Sir W. B. Redfern had just converted a rink into a long barn-like theatre. He had tried and, with the help of Dr J. S. Clark of Trinity (a lifelong and valued friend of mine, father of the A.D.C.), had succeeded in introducing a certain amount of orderly behaviour into what had been formerly the pet bear-garden of the undergraduates. He was, therefore, ready to welcome me and my company in such classics as *Hamlet* and *The Rivals*; further, the late Duke of Clarence was brought carefully by his tutor to witness the Benson Company's rendering of Shakespeare's masterpiece.

The Oxford theatre was not so far advanced, and it was only after much persuasion, supported by the arguments of Dr W. L. Courtney, that the Vice-Chancellor consented to place the theatre within bounds on the occasion of my visit. It happened that Dr Jowett, the Master of Balliol, was the reigning authority. He seemed a little hurt that I was not giving a different play of Æschylus, Sophocles or Euripides, in the original tongue, every night in the week. Respectfully I reminded him of how he, Jowett, had practically started Greek plays in Europe, and among the schools, and urged that he might possibly do the same for the British stage-manager, through his humble instrument, Benson, if only he would give the requisite permission for my representation of *The Merchant of Venice*, *Hamlet*, *The Rivals*, *The Lady of Lyons*, *The Corsican Brothers*, *The Belle's Stratagem* and *Robert Macaire*. Though one of my friends among the dons wondered at my having the cheek to bring such rubbish as the last item to the centre of modern Hellenism, the Master, in grateful memory of the Greek play, gave the required permit. Hitherto, the Oxford theatre had been run on the theory that the performers were the last people who required any attention, or who were to be considered as responsible for the entertainment. The play was only of secondary importance. The real excitement was that the pit had to take umbrellas to shield themselves from being pelted and spat on by the gods in the gallery. The umbrella was not only a shield but a weapon of offence when the pit rushed upstairs to retaliate. The front row of the stalls spent most of its time in

destroying the instruments of the orchestra or putting them hopelessly out of tune. The dress-circle would rush on to the stage, via the boxes, dance with those prima donnas who were pretty, engage in pugilistic encounters with the officials and actors, or attempt to give impromptu performances of their own, until driven back to their places by volleys of stones, sticks, bricks, eggs, oranges, teacups and potatoes from pit and gallery. The only calm moment was when all undergraduate sections of the house united in a *sauve qui peut* from a raid by the proctors and their bulldogs. Then windows, doors, rain-pipes, roofs and stage-ventilators were quickly broken in a rapid and undignified flight.

Some such scene as this was followed by my first appearance on the Oxford stage, and by the first appearance in an Oxford theatre of dons and undergraduates, and their wives and sisters, in evening-dress.

The performances were a *succès d'estime*, and seemed to give pleasure to my numerous friends, though I think I was at my happiest when breaking the ice in the morning on Parson's Pleasure before my matutinal swim. In the waters of the Char I sought forgetfulness from the attack made on me the previous night, as Hamlet, by a large ferocious retriever. As a matter of fact the dog saved the situation. The interest of the audience was a little bit flagging. Suddenly, I observed the undergraduates sitting up and taking notice. "Ah!" thought I, "it's the old story of Irving and Kean and Garrick over again. I will compel them to hear me. I have got them at last." From this happy mood I was brought to the prosaic region of common sense by a loud growl close behind me. I was in the middle of "To be or not to be." Turning on "that is the question" I found myself face to face with the Evil One in the likeness of a black dog. The dog was looking at me critically, and I thought I might possibly edge him off the stage; and so I proceeded with the soliloquy, with one eye on the audience and one on the dog, punctuating my speech every now and again with a back kick at the enemy. Certainly the house was breathless with excitement. Bets were being offered and taken on the result of the man-and-dog fight now proceeding. I backed, and kicked the infernal animal into one corner, hoping the stage-carpenter would capture the beast; but it had an evil reputation, and all the staff had fled from the wings. I threw my mantle over it, got in a thundering kick, and proceeded with my speech. My triumph was brief. To the delight of the audience the dog crawled out from under the mantle and charged ferociously in the direction of the "Melancholy Dane." It evidently did not approve of me or of my rendition of the text. The excitement rose to fever-heat. "Two to one on Hamlet!" "Two to one on the pup!" were now to be heard in all parts of the house. Suiting the action to the word—"with a bare bodkin"—I drew my sword, and with the flat of it warded off the animal's attack and, still reciting Shakespeare at my loudest, beat, pushed and kicked the snarling spawn of Satan into the prompt-corner. The flight of the

prompt-corner's occupants attracted the animal to follow them off the stage and down the stairs, where someone put a fire-bucket on its head and hurled it into the street.

The only other interruption of the week took place during *The Merchant of Venice*. The late Professor Fyfe, who happened to be standing for Oxford City at the time, entered the theatre just as Shylock ladled out, in his most convincing manner, "the vile squeaking of the wrynecked fife." Result, cheers and counter-cheers, and a five-minutes bear-fight between the rival factions in the theatre.

CHAPTER XIII

1884-1885

After the autumn season of 1884 had culminated in the Lancaster ball, the company reassembled at Falkirk, to commence their spring journey. During this tour there were several notable accessions, including Eille Norwood, A. E. W. Mason, Miss Constance Fetherstonhaugh (afterwards my wife), Miss Ethel Johnson and Miss Winifred Beadnell, in addition to the old members of the band, J. F. Graham, William Mollison, George Weir, Henry Jalland and Miss Belle Cecil.

Those visits to the varsity towns were followed by a warm welcome from my old school, Winchester, the homeland and neighbourhood. This led us gradually to the larger theatres of Liverpool, Manchester and London. I really thought I was getting on when I was given a starring engagement at the Rotunda Theatre, Liverpool, to play Hamlet and Shylock, with the stock company attached to that theatre.

This was followed by a production of William Poel's *Priest or Painter* at the Alexandra Theatre, Liverpool.

Many of the leading parts were now being played by Miss Constance Fetherstonhaugh, to whom I became engaged, and whom I shortly afterwards married, in the old church at Alresford, Hants. She had been successfully playing at the Lyceum, Strand and Court theatres, but now she joined in the task of assisting the development of the Bensonian effort. Her clever acting, her genius for designing costumes and arranging dances, her quick wit and brilliant cleverness contributed greatly to the successes achieved about this time at the Globe Theatre, and with the gradual production of the whole of Shakespeare's works, a record which the Benson Company were the first to establish.

A brief reference must be made to seasons in Manchester and Birmingham, and in London at the Globe, Comedy, Adelphi, Vaudeville, Shaftesbury, Lyceum, St James's, Court, Coronet, St Martin's, etc.

Last, but not least, came thirty years' work at Stratford-on-Avon; tours in America and South Africa; pageants, tournaments, and mystery plays; personal experiences in travel and war. All of these and similar stories must be told later: the end is not yet. The link with Stratford started with the similarity of

aim between the late Charles Flower, the founder of the theatre, and those co-operating with him.

Miss Cecil was of invaluable assistance with her outstanding performance of Mrs Malaprop, and other comedy and character parts. She was not so successful as the Queen in *Hamlet*, a fact that will not surprise anyone who saw her as Tibbie or Jean. As Her Majesty of Denmark, on one occasion she showed that presence of mind and determination to carry on which is one of the characteristics of our profession. As Hamlet stabbed Polonius behind the curtain, on a stage the size of a kitchen-table, his excited mother rushed on to the point of the blood-stained sword, receiving a severe cut in the eye. In audible stage-whispers ensued the following dialogue, not usually in the text: "My God, guv'nor, I am blind!" Hamlet: "No, you are not. Go on." Queen: "O, what a rash and bloody deed is this! (Guv'nor, is my eye out?)" Hamlet: "A bloody deed! (go on, you are all right)—almost as bad, good mother, as (mop the blood off your forehead with the table-cloth) kill a king and marry with his brother! (Go on, woman, get it sewn up afterwards.)" Which she did, but not till the end of the performance.

The visit to Rugby in 1883 renewed my acquaintance with Vecquarey, of Oxford and International Rugby fame, and Steele, the well-known Rugby master, whose wife, Miss Maude Price, was an old Oxford acquaintance, and for years was one of the three best amateur singers in England. The headmaster kindly permitted the boys to attend the matinee of *The Merchant of Venice*, when, to my immense surprise, the fit-up theatre was filled to overflowing. This matinee stands out in my annals for two little incidents long remembered.

The first was that an official assisting behind with the scenery volunteered to help to take the money from the incoming rush of spectators in the front of the house. He was seen in the confusion most energetically receiving gold and silver coins, and marshalling an excited audience to their seats. Before the curtain went up, however, he suddenly disappeared, and the Theatre Royal, Rugby, and wherever else I acted, never saw him—or the large portion of the receipts in his pocket—again.

The second was that after Shylock's big scene the oldest theatrical inhabitant in the place, and the dramatic authority par excellence of Rugby, came round behind the scenes. Rather pleased with myself, I asked the great man what he thought of Shylock's big scene. The answer was neither expected nor desired: "I think your Tubal was the best representative of the part I have ever witnessed."

Sometimes the artist gets encouragement, sometimes he does not.

During the autumn of 1883 Courtenay Thorpe and MacMahon continually approached me with a view to selling me the Lyceum production of *Romeo and Juliet*, which they had acquired and were touring, with Kyrle Bellew and

the beautiful Mrs Brown-Potter playing the lovers. Kyrle Bellew was the beau-ideal of a romantic juvenile lead. His father, a clergyman, was a celebrated reciter and Shakespearian student. Kyrle himself was very handsome, with classic features, curly hair and beautiful voice, that readily lent themselves, together with his soft wistful eyes, to the expression of love and tenderness. Withal he was thoroughly manly. The eyes that could look so languorous often blazed out with the fire of adventure and romance, as became a sailor-man who had at an early age run away to sea.

There was little of the spoilt darling or pampered drawing-room tame cat about this Romeo. The active movement of his lithe, muscular frame concealed the shortness of his stature, and made him a fitting partner for his graceful Juliet, "more than common tall."

The concern was offered to me for the sum of sixteen hundred pounds. My father, rightly doubtful of my business acumen, suggested a consultation with Sir George Lewis, adviser in most difficulties to many public characters.

Sir George and Lady Lewis were an outstanding couple in the London world—she with her brilliant, all-round knowledge and artistic taste; he with his hawklike eye, that could see through an iron safe, and read men and women like posters printed in six-foot type. Comfortable, hospitable and sympathetic, they were very genial, kindly friends, and preserved an unquenchable belief in the sound heart of humanity, though daily brought into contact with its rogues.

Lewis was of the opinion that sixteen hundred pounds would go far towards bringing me to London without hampering me with a production that had lost its freshness. I sighed acquiescence, though I was disappointed at having to forgo the prominence and success I believed—no doubt erroneously—would have thus accrued to me as Romeo.

Out of these negotiations came the engagement for a spring tour of (Sir) Bernard Partridge and Courtenay Thorpe, notable accessions to the Benson Company. Thorpe, a clever actor with a literary and artistic mind, was admirable as Gratiano, Mercutio or Château-Rénaud. Excellent also were the representations that he gave of Roderigo and Sir Benjamin Backbite. Unfortunately a gun accident had shattered his health, destroyed his nerves and left him with half the right hand made of wood. "You use your hand, sir, as if it were made of wood, blast you!" said a bullying stage-manager at rehearsal. "That is because it *is* of wood, blast you!" replied Thorpe blandly.

Partridge was, I think, the best male amateur I have ever seen commencing a stage career. He was not like an amateur, but acted as if he had been on the stage for years. With his good voice, fine presence, intelligence and ease of manner, what a wonderful actor he would become, said all the judges. But he did not. He was always good, but was no better on the day when he left the

stage than when he first went on. A charming manly personality, and very clever, his heart, I suppose, was in the "Cartoons" which have made him world-famous as the successor to Tenniel on the staff of *Punch*. There lay the true bent of his genius. Born an actor he certainly was, but still more was he born an artist of the brush and pencil.

In 1883 I received an offer, sent round from the front of the house, from Mr Brammall, of the Rotunda Theatre, Liverpool, to star at that theatre at the end of May. This I gratefully accepted. As soon as the tour was over I hurried off to the Merseyside city to try to do after less than two years' experience what the mighty ones of old had done in their middle age. As it was the privilege of former stars, so was it mine, to dictate arrangements and have the final say in stage-management to a crowd of old and young actors brought up from their cradle in stage traditions, and prepared, according to etiquette, to render obsequious deference to the star's slightest wish, and to carry out to the letter the star's august command.

Friendly, kindly folk, they had all been much longer on the stage; they all knew much more in some ways, much less in others, than I did. Doubtless they grumbled at a boy amateur from Oxford being promoted, in spite of his inexperience, over their heads. They had more knowledge and technique in their little fingers than I possessed in my whole body. Yet they were the most loyal and helpful of comrades; always ready to cover up my mistakes; always ready to give me a practical hint or a bit of advice when I seemed at a loss.

Yet I knew that most of them would never get much further in their profession. Their undoubted usefulness, their varied artistry, their keen desire to make the play "go," was not wanted for drawing-room drama, or in teacup-and-saucer passion. Their methods were sometimes more forceful than refined; they had not unlimited collars and cuffs, or wardrobe; their education was in some respects behind the times; but they were all there in breadth, power and directness of effect, and could have so easily and beneficially assisted the stage of those years if the art world had not gone mad on "cultchaw"—the "cultchaw," the false refinement and the snobbishness that lost us Isandhlwana and Majuba Hill, Livingstone and Gordon, and many another. How one sympathizes with the remark: "To 'ell with the 'H' misery!"

In spite of my having shouted my voice away at rehearsal—it took me some time to accommodate my vocal chords to the enormous strain involved by my work—this starring experiment may be counted a success.

Subject for much thought was provided for me in the interest manifested in Hamlet, Ophelia, Shylock and Portia by the squalid and poverty-stricken neighbourhood then surrounding the Rotunda Theatre. Their sentiments seemed to agree with those that I recently heard expressed at Stratford-atte-Bow: "Most plays we forgets as soon as we 'ave seen 'em; Shakespeare stays

with us until you comes again."

Deeply grateful was I for the opportunity which the Liverpool engagement gave me of making the acquaintance of that Grecian goddess, Miss Mary Anderson. She was then carrying all before her, on her first visit to this side of the Atlantic. Graciously and sympathetically did she listen to my enthusiastic views and plans for the stage, which accorded well with her own more successfully executed programme. Shortly afterwards she offered me the position of leading man in her company for England and America. I still wonder sometimes if I was wise to have refused such an advantageous opening. Had I accepted, my life's work would have been altered in most of its details.

Before leaving Liverpool, Philip Rathbone had secured for me a date at the Alexandra Theatre, at that time much sought after by touring managers.

In the city that had helped my forbears to make enough money to support my theatrical enterprises, at this moment in my career R. H. Benson generously augmented the reserve fund that I in bad seasons drew from my father. I often thought of that primitive steamship, owned by my family, that was the first to carry cotton from America to Liverpool, or, as I walked down Benson Street to the station, of my grandfather, who saw Huskisson killed while riding on the first train that started from Liverpool to Manchester; or of R. H. Benson's father, who was still remembered as the only swimmer to travel twice the length of the bath under water.

Good-bye for the time being to Liverpool friends, and a still longer farewell to Thorpe and Partridge, and to William Poel, who had assisted during the tour as stage-manager and actor.

The autumn of 1884 witnessed several changes in the company. Miss Rose Murray and Miss Ethel Johnson made a pair of most excellent leading ladies—Miss Murray as Juliet, Miss Johnson as Portia and Ophelia. Rudolph de Cordova, pet pupil of Hermann Vezin, a very clever author and conscientious actor, was unfortunately given a line of parts that did not suit his capacity for ingenious character studies. Possibly he was too literary and intellectual for the rather rough-and-ready Benson Company. Quite naturally and properly he thought there was a want of finish, a neglect of those little details that are needed to make a stage-picture complete. The company, on the other hand, thought that he spent so much time in making up yellow to show that Faulkland was a jealous man that he had left himself no time to learn his words, or the cues for his comrades. He retorted that to get up fifteen plays with one week's rehearsal was neither reasonable nor artistic. I am afraid that I never really gave him the chances his ability deserved, and discovered his great capacity only after I had exhausted his patience, and damped his

enthusiasm, by the hurry-scurry of rehearsing too many plays at the beginning of the tour.

In contrast with any intellectual angularity that might be found in the company, one of the leading men was what is usually called a “skater” on the stage, and in such parts as the King in *Hamlet*, Bassanio, and the like, was never happy unless curving outside edge, Dutch rolling or gliding by the footlights in a series of graceful figures-of-eight.

The Lady of Lyons was one of the stock attractions that autumn. The play was never a great favourite of mine; and it did not gain in my affections when, in a front scene, while uttering the heroic words, “It is this which shows us we are men,” I pulled off the right side of my moustache, without noticing the loss myself. It was not until the scene was over that I learned why the audience seemed unable to look at the hero without laughing. Of course, this play is an extraordinarily skilful piece of dramatic construction, produced as it was by Macready in close collaboration with the author, Lord Lytton; and though the dialogue is by this time out of date, and the incidents have had their day, it invariably interests the pit and gallery from start to finish.

I now had the pleasure of trying my young wings in Othello, which was always a favourite part with me. It is generally said that no one ever played Othello except Edmund Kean and Salvini. Just as, in Irving’s words, the difficulty of Hamlet is to express emotion in terms of intellect, so, on the other hand, it is still more difficult to express the deepest feelings of our nature in terms of pure emotion. Whatever truth there may be in these sage saws, the fact remains that hardly anyone has ever given a performance of Hamlet that has failed to please and interest an audience, even when the title-rôle has been essayed, as I have seen it, by an elderly actress of over seventy, in a badly lighted booth; while with the exception of the two actors mentioned above no one in the last century has satisfied an audience in the part of Othello. Dillon and G. V. Brooke perhaps attained greater success than most.

Whatever may have been the defects in my Othello I was lucky in being able to secure very often the assistance of Hermann Vezin for the part of Iago. This actor’s perfect elocution, finished technique and invariable correctness of method did not, in Iago, which was a very fine performance, detract, as in some of his parts, by suggesting a want of heart, a cynical detachment and lack of human sympathy. He was, indeed, a very finished and gifted actor, and his Iago was justly admired and popular. After his many successes it was distressing to find Vezin relegated to comparative idleness. The growing ignorance and want of taste on the part of the audience; its indifference to art; the lowering of the standard of management; the commencement on the part of some critics to concentrate on showing their own cleverness, instead of illuminating the work of the author and the artist, were responsible for many a

heartache on the part of the actor and some of his audience.

In spite of its difficulty Othello remained permanently in my repertoire. Sometimes they said I was more like a cat than the royal beast to which Othello is generally likened. Sometimes they complained that Desdemona was black at the end of the play and that Othello was white. At other times, in my effort to remedy this, I would make up with permanganate of potash, with the result that I remained of a dusky hue for weeks on end. The play seemed, however, to rouse the attention of the audience, and my father was quite indignant with me for harassing his feelings by the realistic strangling of Desdemona. "You promised, Frank, that you would strangle her behind the curtains," said the old man tearfully, at the end of the play. "I cannot bear it on the stage."

A lady wishing to book seats for a second performance came back to the box-office to apologize for her stupidity: "Because, of course, as Desdemona died on Monday night there can be no performance given by her on Tuesday."

At Winchester, my old school again received the company with open arms. Of course, it was the duty of the school to support an old Wykehamist, and the friends and neighbours of the countryside naturally felt curious to see how the young man they had known in the hunting, football and cricket fields, and in and on the skating pond, would comport himself on the stage.

Dicker, the coachman, thought Jessica was a minx, and that the Jew was badly treated by the Christians. Kennison, the head gardener, thought "it was proper Shakespeare, and natural-like to see Skylark going home carrying a stable lantern."

A young fellow from Weymouth, who had joined the previous autumn, began to show that marked ability in character and old men that is identified with the work of Arthur Grenville. His Starveling in the *Dream* and his Simple in *The Merry Wives* stood out as prominently, and attracted as much attention, as any of the star parts in the plays.

Another equally fine performance of his, which I have never seen surpassed even by old Tom Mead, was the Apothecary in *Romeo and Juliet*. We were also reinforced by Miss Janet Achurch, Otho Stuart Andreae, Athol Forde and Herbert Ross.

This year, 1885, and the two years following were somewhat eventful dates in our history, not only for the excellence and the fame afterwards attained by many of our members, but because they were fraught with great consequences in the life and development of myself.

Among those who had left the company before Falkirk was reached was Miss May Weston, who married an old Cambridge friend, well known and popular with her comrades on the stage, Raoul de Bourbel. With him, she took up her residence in the Riviera, where, with her sympathetic personality, sense

of humour, general charm and good looks, she became the life and centre of a large circle of residents and visitors. What's in a name? A great deal, when it is so euphonious, historic and representative of its owner and his mate as Raoul de Bourbel.

During the spring of 1885 Miss Constance Fetherstonhaugh had played with grace and charm and with great success Lady Teazle and Kate Hardcastle. She had also displayed much power and pathos in the exacting rôle of Juliet, and had made a marked success in the company.

Her mother, left a widow in India at an early age, had married again, Captain Morshead Samwell.

On the mother's side she was of Highland and of Irish extraction, connected with Mintos, Pagets, Cockburns, Blairs and Hunter-Gordons. From the father she and her brother derived some of the characteristics and appearance associated with that ancient blend of Devonian, Cornish and Phœnician. Samwell took its origin from Sancta Val (Holy Valley), a name suggestive of Arthurian legend and Merlin prophecy, while Morshead figures largely in the traditional history of the two western counties.

The mother had been carried through the lines of the mutinous sepoys by faithful servants, hidden under a pile of old sacks, with her jewels and worldly wealth hidden in her hair. Through the breathing-holes left in the sacking she could see the maddened soldiers tossing Feringhi babes from one spear to another, and could hear the fierce, exultant yells and the moans of pain.

Ultimately she was conveyed to the shelter of Lucknow Residency and heard the manful song-word of Sir Henry Lawrence: "Die, but never surrender."

Subsequently I met old colonels of her acquaintance, in Cheltenham and elsewhere, who still kept up the habit of knitting socks and gloves while they talked—a habit acquired to preserve their sanity, amidst the horrors all round, while they waited and watched, with their weapons by their side, for the relief that came at last.

It was a strange coincidence that Sir Henry Lawrence, the son of the hero of Lucknow, should afterwards have been chairman of one of my efforts to establish a permanent repertoire theatre in London.

Photo by Lafayette, Ltd.]

Lady Benson

Born of such parentage, it was not altogether surprising to find Miss Fetherstonhaugh endowed to an extraordinary degree with the family gift of clairvoyance and a knowledge of palmistry. Above the medium height, of

slight build, she had that supple strength which we are wont to associate with the massage and the kneading and flexing applied by ayahs to their charges. “The suppleness of the East will always be a match for the strength of the West.”

She inherited, too, the Celtic joy that displays itself in expressions of drama, music, dance, design, artistry and rhythm—gifts which she exercised with marked success in much of the company’s pageant and play productions.

Her rapid success was due to the tremendous amount of work she had managed to put in from the commencement of her career. Hardly out of her teens, she had played in the Lyceum *Romeo and Juliet* production of Kyrle Bellew. She had been right through the run of a pantomime, playing principal parts. She had played with the Swanboroughs of the Strand Theatre and was offered leading rôles at the Court Theatre, London, and with the Compton Comedy Company. She had been a favourite pupil of D’Auban, who undertook to make of her a famous dancer, but she preferred dramatic work.

H. Welsh of Keble was a useful and enthusiastic member of the company. He was a large man, thirteen stone, and rowed five for the Keble eight. Ultimately he became the husband of Miss Ethel Johnson, the clever Ophelia and Portia of the company.

He was, too, the possessor of curious psychic and clairvoyant talent. He would come into a room and at once give the name of a card, or give the number that had been selected in his absence, *à la* Zanzig.

From the above biographical notes it will be seen that the company, which by now was visiting many of the principal country theatres, only occasionally renewing their acquaintance with fit-ups, had maintained its dramatic efficiency and had grown in interest and attraction.

Miss Jervis, the beautiful lady who joined the company from the Lyceum on the recommendation of Ellen Terry, had in 1883 gone to America, and had become the wife of our old friend Vandervelt, who was rapidly making a big name in the profession. She left behind with us, however, a pleasant substitute in her sister, Miss May Challis, who ultimately became Mrs Athol Forde.

We were very busy just then preparing for the production of William Poel’s play, *Priest or Painter*, which had been produced the previous year by the author with some success in London. It is founded on William Howell’s novel, *A Foregone Conclusion*, an interesting and pathetic unfolding of an eternal problem, the breaking down of a priest who falls in love, and is saved only by death from abjuring his vows, leaving the lady of his choice free to give her hand to the painter. The American mother was well played by Miss Belle Cecil, the Consul by Herbert Ross, whilst Mollison, Forde and Weir were excellent as the Cardinal and two Italian patriots. The heroine was well done by Miss Fetherstonhaugh. I was supposed to be good as the Priest, if at

first a little inclined to sing-song in the part. The play afterwards, with Miss Achurch as the American widow, was a favourite item in the company's programme.

Priest or Painter, when we reached Edinburgh, prepared the way in that city for a most successful fortnight, and secured for me two dates the following year—at the Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh, and the Royalty Theatre, Glasgow. Thus encouraged we joyfully set sail—by train—for Ayr, where the task of preparing *Macbeth* was varied by one of my usual excursions in quest of adventure. Six foot two, the terror of the town, had got drunk on pay-day, his usual habit, and unless carried off to his home would be arrested by the police, which would mean a period of more or less starvation for his wife and family. His pay-day "drink" was invariably followed by a fight with two or more of his friends. The customary fight was in progress when I, unaware of his desperate reputation, stepped into the fray and quelled the disturbance. I then half-led, half-carried the pugilistic navvy to his home, helped him to take off his boots, and finally placed him on his bed. The only member of the family at home was a little girl of six. Her presence seemed at once to dispel the atmosphere of anger and violence, and he became immediately gentle and grateful, as the little one helped me to settle her daddy down to sleep, clasping her little hand in his great bony fingers. To my relief a neighbour came in and assured me that, though dangerous and fighting-mad when he had taken a "wee drappie," he would be "a' recht in the morning, and as quiet as a lamb with the bairn, but, Lord sakes! it is a mercy he did not kill you, mister."

Raper of Trinity had written to me to introduce A. E. W. Mason as a young man of exceptional and varied abilities, worthy of a much better fate and a larger career than that which could be found by following my example and taking to the stage. After years proved Raper to be right, both in his capacity as mentor and prophet. Mason's many friends are proud of his successes as writer and dramatist and Member of Parliament, and, perhaps not least, of the patriotic services he rendered during the war, in a field of adventure and peril as thrilling as any described in his own novels.

From Ayr to Dumfries, and then to Liverpool, where the Macklins had been specially engaged for *Priest or Painter* at the Alexandra Theatre. The new play went well, and was received with favour by the newspapers; but the Roman Catholics at that time seemed to think it was a slight on their religion, and the Protestants thought it was an attempt to preach Papistry. When the British public regard a work of art from a political, philosophic, religious or economic standpoint they become blind to its artistic merits.

I found some consolation in the fact that when I played Hamlet, on the Friday night, Edward Russell wrote an exceptionally appreciative and thoughtful notice of the performance. I was the more pleased at this because

Russell was one of the first to perceive and proclaim in the public Press the merits of Henry Irving.

Miss Winifred Beadnell was the Lady Macbeth on the night when I essayed to portray the Thane of Cawdor. To rehearse the company in the play and to superintend lighting and a variety of new scenic property and stage-business effects was calculated to reduce any stage-manager to despair.

J. F. Graham was a skilful and resourceful actor and stage-manager. To him I owe many invaluable lessons in stage-craft. He and I became lifelong friends, but I think it was Graham's sense of humour and general kindness that enabled his friendliness to stand the strain of that night. I thought I knew all about everything connected with the play except my own words: many of these were conspicuous by their absence. Owing to the keenness of the company, and the skill of Graham, the curtain came down in reasonable time, and the numbers of the audience went up on the two following nights.

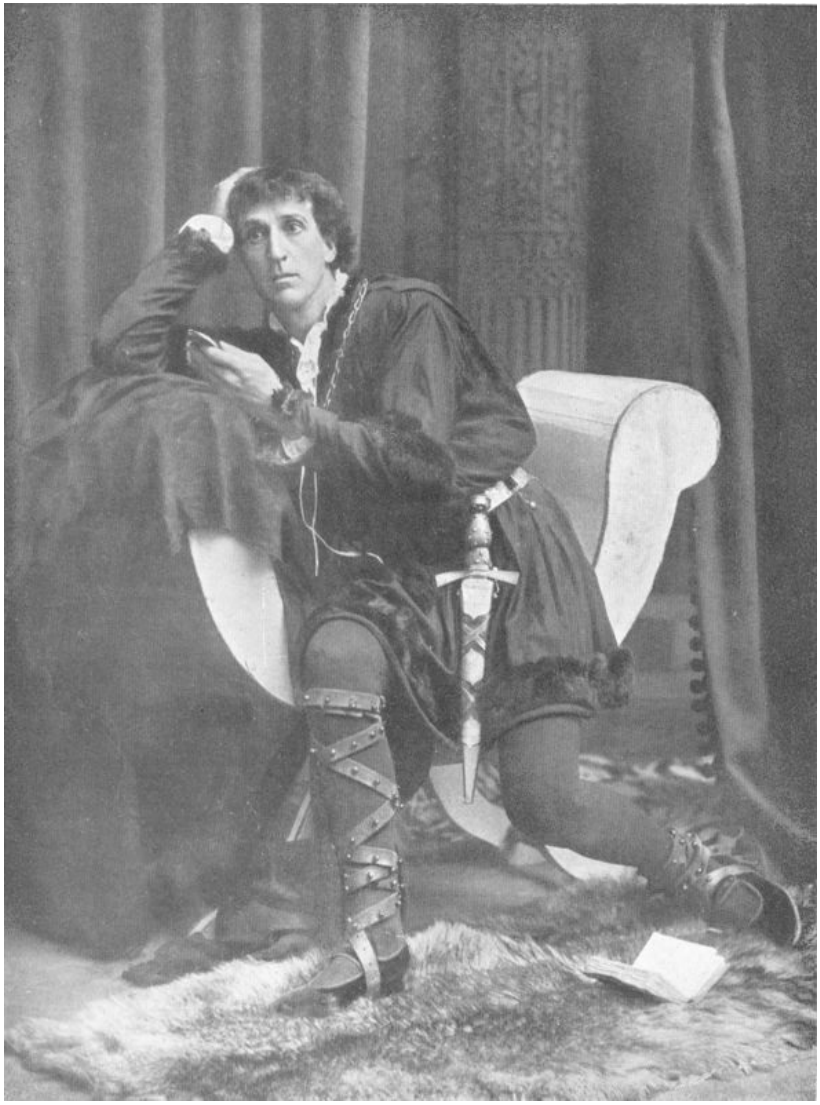

Photo by Ellis & Walery]

Sir Frank Benson
As "Hamlet"

Rob Roy was staged for Saturday. I was exhilarated at being, as I hoped, out of reach of any criticism of my Scottish accent. Heart and soul I threw myself into the struggle, in the climax of which the house fairly rose at me. Inspired by the applause, the yells and the laughter, I thought at last I must be on a level with Kean and Garrick. With half the company tearing at my hair,

my legs and my shoulders, I was engaged in choking and bumping a renegade Highlander, who was acting with an energy and realism equal to that of his chief. “Well done!” whispered the chieftain to the traitor. “Die, villain! Die, you dog!” he roared. “For God’s sake, guv’nor, let go.” “Going magnificently,” I whispered. “You are killing me, guv’nor!” yelled the Highlander, squirming about with scorched legs, one moment on the stage and the next in the footlights. At last I relaxed my hold, and found that I had been bumping the mangled corpse—who, by the by, was wearing his kilt hind side to the front—on the business end of some nails which protruded half-an-inch or so through a worn-out plank on the stage.

“I am sorry,” I said, at the end of the act. “So am I,” said the Scotsman. “Never mind,” said I; “I have never known the scene go better.” “Next time I hope you’ll choose a place where there are no nails, or let me wear leather trunks. I shall not be able to sit down for months.”

But the fight went well, which was what I chiefly cared about.

Thence in due course to Leamington, where Charles Flower had promised to come over from Stratford-on-Avon to see the company in *Macbeth*. Miss Achurch, who had recently left that fruitful training-ground for actors, Miss Sarah Thorne’s stock company, at Margate, the nursery of so many of our successful artists, played Lady Macbeth, in the place of Miss Beadnell, who had recently left the company. Miss Achurch was an actress of the greatest promise, and shortly afterwards made a considerable reputation for herself in *The Scarlet Letter*, and in Ibsen and other plays.

Janet Achurch was of that fair-haired, voluptuous appearance generally associated with Helen and Guinevere and those Northern beauties who strangled the souls and bodies of heroes in the meshes of their golden tresses. Like them, too, she was endowed with more than ordinary brain-power. Her father, if rumour is to be believed, was not the kindest or most judicious of parents to his attractive, wayward child. Launched at an early age on the sea of life, without a mother’s protecting care, she made somewhat of a shipwreck of a voyage commenced with every omen of success.

Her prospects had not been improved by an early and altogether unsuitable marriage with a young husband who, at an earlier date, had been a member first of Miss Alleyn’s and subsequently of my company.

Much was hoped by me from this performance, not only as a preparation for *Macbeth* on a large scale at Reading, but as possibly bringing about an engagement for the Memorial performances at Stratford-on-Avon. Unfortunately, as sometimes happens when one is particularly anxious all should go right, on that night everything went wrong. Weir, who usually gave an impressive mystical rendering of the First Witch, had in the afternoon gossiped with convivial friends over healths five fathoms deep. He came down

to the footlights in a friendly, cheery way, beamed vacuously at the audience, and then, in a confidential whisper, informed them that "The cat has mewed three times." I think I never realized the difference between prose and poetry so acutely as I did when missing the witchery of:

> "Thrice the brinded cat hath mew'd.
> Thrice; and once the hedge pig whin'd.
> Harper cries?—'tis time, 'tis time!"

and in place of this invocation merely came, in the manner of the latest racing tip, the friendly information concerning pussy recorded above.

To make matters worse, Herbert Ross, who was blessed—or cursed—with a keen sense of humour, fastened the cauldron to Weir, so that in the fourth act the First Witch found himself pursued all over the stage by a bowl of liquid fire and sulphurous fumes. To the intense delight of Ross, the poor man kept appealing to him as to whether he had "got 'em" or not.

I was proud of my new business in having a small tea-bell sounded as a signal from Lady Macbeth that it was time for the murder to be accomplished. Unfortunately, as I was preparing for my great exit, the man in the flies thought the bell was the signal for lowering the curtain, and down it came in the middle of the scene.

A faint hope still remained to redeem these mishaps by the spirited acting of the guilty couple after the murder. I, who was inclined, as we have seen, to make muscular activity do duty for mental perception, used to pick up Lady Macbeth with my left arm, carrying her off the stage on my left shoulder, whilst I kept at bay with my right sword-arm the infuriated thanes. On this particular night I brushed my fair partner against one of the wings. "Hope I did not hurt you?" I murmured, as I hurried past the stage-box, in which Mr and Mrs Charles Flower sat. "No, dear, I am all right," replied Lady Macbeth. The next moment this friendly assurance was suddenly changed, as she was banged against an archway, into: "Damn you, you clumsy devil, you have broken my back!" All this in tones plainly audible to the august persons in the box.

When the stage should have been dark it was light, and vice versa; and half-way through the performance the chairman of the Memorial Theatre and his wife walked out.

The following Sunday I went to lunch at Avon-Bank, Stratford-on-Avon, with the Flowers, and explained, as best I might, how these incidents arose, and the various aims and objects that I had in view in carrying on the company. My eloquence on the latter subject apparently removed the bad impression caused by the mishaps of Saturday night, and went far to induce Mr Flower to give me a chance the next year at the Shakespeare Celebration

Festival.

I had begun to gather round me various young enthusiasts from the universities during these and subsequent years: Gerald Gurney, from the O.U.D.S.; Gordon Tompkins, H. R. Hignett of Wadham, Vivian Stenhouse, H. Welsh, Harry Farmer, R. Legge, Gerald K. Souper, Percy Soper, J. Bardswell, Philip Sanders, H. O. Nicholson, J. Plumpton Wilson, Roper Spyers, H. Roper, Harold Large, Guy Rathbone, Hugh Chalmers, Arthur Kettlewell, E. G. Woodhouse, Frederic Harrison (late lessee of the Haymarket Theatre), and many others.

Arthur Bourchier and H. B. (Harry) Irving soon after this approached me with a view to amalgamating their forces, but rightly or wrongly—on reflection, I think wrongly—I thought that the combination would not work.

Stephen Phillips was already beginning to make his presence felt, on the audience and on the company. His father, Canon Phillips, was a clergyman of some distinction; his mother was a connection of mine, a member of the Dockray family (more properly spelt Dockwra), survivors of the hard-fighting, able-minded, fiercely vigorous Iberian Celts. She was a talented woman of many brilliant accomplishments, somewhat penalized by having to bring up and educate a numerous family, of whom Stephen was the oldest. Stephen was a brilliant scholar, head of Dulwich School, and captain of the eleven—when it included the older Douglases, C. M. Wells, and the like. He gave up the Indian Civil Service for the stage. Like his cousin, Laurence Binyon, he began at an early age to write verses that showed much promise and attracted attention. As was to be expected, he was an excellent cricketer, a really first-class bowler of accurate length and varied pace—making good use of his head—and a good bat. Considering that he got little or no practice on tour, his success for West Kent with the bat and ball was a very gratifying performance. He had an ardent love for, and profound knowledge of, Greek drama and the classics. This worship of Sophocles and Virgil rather cramped his style as a dramatist. The model and the midnight oil were a little too much in evidence, but at the same time it gave to his lyrics their peculiar melody and clear-cut form.

Stephen Phillips' favourite scheme when he first joined was to write a series of plays for the Benson Company; but somehow I thought his genius showed more in lyric than dramatic verse. I think I made a mistake, and missed an opportunity that might have helped both my cousin and myself to develop an output of artistic work beneficial to both, artistically and financially. This was one of my numerous errors of judgment.

Phillips made long scores at cricket, chiefly by well-timed drives, leg glances and dexterous late cuts with a flick of the wrist, but rarely by what would be called strenuous slogging. He always preferred correct style and perfect timing. The same with his bowling. He delighted to set traps, and to

mix up slow and medium spin stuff with an unexpected fast one. So it was with his acting and with his writing. There was always in the midst of the most emotional passage the suggestion of a somewhat detached but passionate intellect.

Blessed, or cursed, with a keen sense of humour he was an inveterate practical joker, and could keep a perfectly straight face under most disconcerting circumstances. I did see him once a little confused, when, on the steamer crossing from Liverpool to Dublin, he and a friend pretended to be detectives, shadowing various passengers. They concentrated their attention on a striking-looking military man, followed him about the boat, and pretended to take notes of his conversation and his appearance. After ten minutes the mysterious stranger walked up to Phillips and said: "Real detectives never carry on like you and your pal. I know, as I happen to be the head of the Police Department in Ireland," with which he handed him his card. Phillips' genuine amusement at this contretemps so pleased the official that they at once made friends.

Phillips preserved his sangfroid completely when, on sitting down at midnight to write one of his poems, he discovered a burglar under his desk. Having pulled him out, and given him some beer and bread-and-cheese, he apologized for the emptiness of his larder and for not being the possessor of anything worth burgling. They had unfortunately left the front door open, and when they were in the midst of a most interesting conversation a policeman walked in, and arrested the poet's friend, in spite of his protestation at such a breach of hospitality. "It's no good, governor. We have been after your friend for some time. I watched him come into your house, and there are many other little night visits for which we must detain him." So saying, he led him off, and ultimately Stephen's visitor retired from public view for eighteen months.

My cousin Stephen was never happier than when, after being arrested, or interfered with, or abused in some disgraceful outbreak, he was addressed on such occasions as "Frank Benson," whom he closely resembled. He took a perfectly fiendish delight in getting into scrapes under the name of Benson, and then sending for me to extricate him, to the annoyance and the mystification of the authorities.

Because of the family resemblance, Phillips was cast for the ghost in *The Corsican Brothers* on one of our visits to Cambridge. The slide used for ghostly entrances was out of order, so the ingenious Redfern devised a small trolly on wheels, with an upright at the rear, against which the ghost leaned for support, and to prevent all wobbling, or shakiness, the ghost was securely bound to same. The cue came. Ghostly gloom encompassed the stage, and the anticipatory limelight heralded the approach of a visitor from the nether world. On came cousin Stephen, immovable, with his enormous eyes looking

pathetically into the beyond, in the direction of his mother and his brother.

"Look, mother, look; my brother, my poor brother! (Pull the damned thing off!) Louis, Louis!" ("Can't, governor, it's stuck.") "Mother, look! (Walk off, Ghost.)" (Ghostly whisper: "Can't—tied on.") "Mother—Louis—brother! (Damn it, get a knife!) My God, mother, he is dead!" cried Fabian. (Cutting the bonds: "Walk off, walk off!") The ghost made a stately exit, pointing to his blood-stained breast. I sprang down the stage, dragging with me my poor old mother, and fell weeping on her neck: "He is dead, mother! My brother is ——" The rest of the sentence was inaudible, the undergraduates having perceived the neat little truck left naked and unashamed in the middle of the stage. They signified their appreciation of the situation in the usual way. I think the curtain took longer coming down on that occasion than ever before or since.

Alas! the teeming, active brain of Phillips could not stand the strain of touring and trying to write, under all the difficulties and discomforts involved in travelling through our great cities. The squalor, the ugliness, the misery and the vice seemed to reduce him to despair. From this depression he took refuge, as is so often the case, in those remedies most calculated to produce and prolong the disease.

He looked up pathetically one day in Salisbury Close and remarked to me: "If I could only work in an environment like this my life and my poetry would be so different, perhaps a little more worth while."

His work as an actor was never of the same calibre as his writings, though he was very good in the parts of the Ghost in *Hamlet*, Prospero, Thisbe and Sir Andrew Aguecheek.

Otho Stuart Andreae contributed in as great a degree as anyone did to help the Benson Company to achieve whatever successes may stand to its credit. Very good-looking and clever, a member of a princely house, he was always an unassuming, great-hearted gentleman. Unaffected and straightforward, with position, wealth and influence, he had great talent in many directions—musical, literary, dramatic and artistic. He was born with a knowledge and taste for fine things, and had an intuitive appreciation of quality, a rare gift when combined with intellectual efficiency and great business capacity. Generous and loyal, he was as staunch a friend as a man could wish, though I fear at times I must have tried his patience sorely. For many years he was a member of the company, partner, joint-manager, and always a good friend.

There was quite a plethora of literary ability in the company at this period, which included Eille Norwood, the well-known artist, a distinguished combination of actor, author and musician.

CHAPTER XIV

1885

About this time (1885) I was taken by my brother Willy to see William Morris. I had been told beforehand that William Morris was not in the least the anæmic, gaunt-cheeked, wan-faced, wistful waif depicted in *Punch* and in *Patience*; but I was not prepared for such an amazing personality as presented itself in the author of *The Earthly Paradise* and *The Saga of Sigurd*. On ringing the bell the door was flung open by a jovial, breezy individual in shirt-sleeves and slippers, big and strong and hearty, with a bushy beard and hair, every fibre of which tingled with life. He seemed the quintessence of fiery energy and cheerful good humour, an altogether forceful personality with a great driving power. Capable of wrath, but full of trustful friendliness, such a one could be pictured storming through frost and snow and sunshine, rain or wind, identified in bluff good humour with them all.

In the pretty drawing-room Mrs Morris and May, her beautiful daughter, came nearer to the popular idea of a Rossetti picture. This was not unnatural, seeing that the tall, pale, handsome hostess sat for so many of his heroines. Seemingly, she had stepped from the canvas of Burne-Jones and Rossetti to try, as best she could, in spite of weak health, to restrain the tempestuous zeal of her Berserker husband, and to supply prudence, foresight and tact to the dealings of the impetuous poet-craftsman. What impressed me on this occasion was the dignified patience with which she rose from her chair, a long process, for she was very tall. When the absent-minded Willy had poured hot water over her hand, instead of into the teapot, it seemed like a vision of the stately Queen of Night as a tree watered by Aquarius and crowned with stars. Very pale, with great luminous eyes and blue-black hair, the spell was only broken for me by the mystic rebuke: “Willy, if you make such bad shots with the kettle, you shall have no muffins for tea.”

Mr Otho Stuart
As "Constantine" in "For the Crown"

Of course the argument Willy was carrying on with Morris as to social

democracy and the development of arts and crafts was interesting, but at that period of my life I preferred muffins.

In that summer vacation I met Ruskin at the house of my kind old friends, Sir John and Lady Simon. I had met him before at "The Meistersinger," heard him declaim in eloquence on the wonderful qualities of the British soldier, on the madness of ugliness, on the mistakes of Napoleon, on the lack of all sense of music in Shelley, and the superiority of Byron over both Shelley and others. This to me was a little startling, and not wholly convincing.

From my friends in Kensington Square I also learned the story of Swinburne applying for an interview with Carlyle. The interview was not granted, the only reply elicited being: "Mr Swinburne is a wee man that bides in a sewer and makes it dirtier. I do not want to see Mr Swinburne." I think the wonderful music of a great poet deserved some greater appreciation from the Sage of Chelsea.

At that time, it must be remembered, it was no rare occurrence to hear the remark: "She reads Swinburne? How very improper!"

Somewhat disgruntled with myself I, for the first and the last time in my life, began to wonder whether I had been right in becoming an actor. The call of the services or of exploration just then sounded very loud in my ears, and I gave in my name and arranged to enlist as a soldier if the threatened war with Russia over the Afghan boundaries should take place. On visiting America much attention was given to the pleasant companionship of my brother Cecil and his handsome wife, with their bonnie little boys; to exercising Governor Bowie, the star race-horse of Iowa; to exploring the vastness of the prairie; to meeting Sitting-Bull and getting a glimpse of the vanishing Indian and the bison.

Next time I went to America I met a man who had seen Sitting-Bull die. He was a big man, silent, strong, with an inscrutable face, but clever. A man of his word, kindly in manner and a gentleman, he gave an impression of a capacity to bear pain or inflict the same.

Whatever terror and apprehension he may have caused the Iowa settlement during my visit was amply atoned for by his death. He had given his word to the pale-faces, and that word must be kept, though his warriors were endeavouring to force him to again resume a royal chieftainship; and, as the result of intrigues on the part of jealous competitors, greedy speculators and land-grabbers, he was done to death in a rebellious outburst that he tried in vain to quell.

After a delightful stay in Iowa, I went to Chicago and St Paul; and after a pleasant visit to Boston notabilities and friends at Shenectady set sail for England almost overcome by the vastness and the vigour of our American cousins, which I could only compare to the majestic volume of Niagara Falls,

whether viewed from the bridge or the shores or from the rocks, foam-flecked and green, at the base of the tumbling flood. Vast as the prairie, the mountains and lakes seemed the friendly welcome and the hospitality of the inhabitants.

When I got back to the pleasant, though smaller, land of green and shade and soft grey clouds, chief mother of the giant young nation of the West, I quite understood—but was not content to accept—the aphorism of a Nottingham labourer who thought the Atlantic was of no interest or use to him as he could not boil an egg in its waters.

Chicago and the Middle West were now busy with their rapid centrifugal development. English capital and English engineers were everywhere engaged in constructing lines of communication in all directions. Winnipeg was emerging from its infancy. The towns round Chicago were just reaching their prime. San Francisco and Los Angeles, though growing rapidly, had hardly begun to play the dominant part they do to-day. At Denver the tree or the lamp-post was still frequently decorated in the morning with the swinging corpse of some night-robber or outlaw—the body of the avenger or the avenged.

Nevertheless, many will tell you that America was then in some ways more homogeneous, more united—more one people with a common race-ideal and uniform civic sentiment—than it is to-day.

Though I do not think this view true, it is at least arguable. One still came across the influence of Washington, Lee, Grant and Lincoln. Longfellow and Emerson met one at each turn; they seemed living leaders. Their thought seemed photographed on the minds and lives of all the workers at their daily occupations. I came to the conclusion then, and have found no reason yet to alter my opinion, that the blood tie, the commercial tie, the language tie and the law tie evoke a natural and deep-rooted affection between the two peoples; that, more often than not, when the relations of mutual goodwill and understanding between the two Anglo-Celtic empires were strained it was the insularity of the older country that was chiefly to blame.

As I drew in to the harbour at New York many years later I noticed that the old churches, spires, schools and municipal buildings no longer stood out as in former years—buildings fifty-eight storeys high had taken their place. Some of these could claim a certain amount of stateliness in their design and pleasing architectural details as they towered above the overhead railway. They boasted every convenience and luxury heretofore conceived of in the mind of man, including lifts like non-stopping expresses from top floor to ground floor, calling at certain stairways or stopping at every flight. They woefully shut out the sunlight from the dark wintry street, where men ran to and fro in a feverish hunt for gold, shouting “Wa—wa!” without quest or understanding of the sore need of their brothers passing by these towers of Babel. There was no leisure

and more fever than real life in the hurrying throng.

I sometimes question if, judged by this aspect, we have made much progress beyond the negro and the hyena that I saw a few hours later in the Bronx. With white teeth glistening in the sun, and all the friendly cheerfulness of his race, Sambo communicated to the passers-by, at the top of his voice: "He looks like a dog, and he smells like a dog; but he ain't a dog at all—ha! ha! He's jest an ordinary hyena, and when I spoke to him he laffed aloud, 'Ho! ho!' And that's so."

The Great Central Station seemed less Babylonian, especially when one remembered that it daily dispatched trains that travelled three thousand miles in a little under four days, arriving within a minute of the scheduled time.

The little town hall and meeting-place became more apparent farther west. The Indian Tepe, the cliff-dwelling, the shack, the farmstead, schoolhouse and church revived a feeling of comradeship and handicraft. "A great country," said the man sitting opposite me, whom I was watching with the apprehension that he had designs of holding up the train. "It is indeed," I replied, in conciliatory accents. "So great that hate dies out in it," he continued. "My mother was a Frenchwoman, my father a Prussian, I was born in the Franco-Prussian war. It is what one does here that matters. I am an American. Hate is dead."

The same feeling of a common humanity came through in answer to my application for admittance to a public library in Philadelphia. "May a stranger go over this building?" "Sir, there are no strangers in this country."

In 1885 one came across many traces of the North and South war, and its bitterness.

Many Southerners, including English public-school men, withdrew to California and Texas, as far as possible from the Yankees of the Eastern States.

One seemed to meet, face to face, Jefferson, Davis, General Lee, Grant and Lincoln at every turn.

This is so in all countries: the great ones of the land seem never to leave it —but to live there still.

One summer morning after my return, when the first rays in the east were lighting on every flower and every blade of grass its crystal diadem of dew; when the sons of the morning were beginning their eternal anthem, "Awake, awake, the night is past; it is again to-day—to-day!" and chanticleer shrilled in barn and byre his clarion challenge to be up and doing, Godfrey and I were roused by the news of fire at a neighbour's four miles off, at Cheriton. Away we sped across the fields and the Downs, in hastily-donned tennis shirts and flannels, to a scene of blazing stacks, barns and half-burned homestead. I was the first to arrive; my brother Godfrey had to stop and don the uniform of the

fire brigade, of which he was a public-spirited member under Captain Hunt.

What mattered Shakespeare? What mattered philosophy? What mattered teapot problems of how best to get on? Here was work to do, for the neighbours by the neighbours, and an elementary lesson in the art of fighting the flames to be learned. (I little guessed how useful afterwards these experiences were to be.)

"Smother, smother the flame. Press it back.

"Stamp it out. Confine it to a small space—destroy it.

"The hayricks and the corn are ripe.

"The woodpile is as dry as tinder. Let not the force of the destroyer spread.

"Up with the ladders. Out with the women and children. Then, to save the live stock and the barn."

Just such a scene must have been enacted a thousand years ago, and again some three hundred years ago at the battle of Cheriton in the heart of the West Saxon land. This time there was no raider, no merciless foeman to smite and slay and plunder, only neighbour folk, kind-hearted, strenuous volunteers, working in the sweltering heat for some eight hours till the greater destruction was averted.

Thence hies Godfrey to bathe in our "Pool of Siloam," Stratton Hatches, where we boys swam daily in the clear chalk-stream, lifting our arms skyward, touching our toes without bending our knees, and thanking our God that life in this world was exceeding good.

On comparing notes we found that this worship at the holy well and adoration of the sun had become a common rite to both.

How much of ritualistic ceremonial in the matter of bowing, bending and extending exercises have always been recognized as the ministers of health and strength to soul and body!

Forty years afterwards I visualized my young brother with eyes uplifted to the heavens, to stars or sun or moon, as clearly as if it were taking place, and as if we were not many miles distant from these beloved waters of life. Perhaps this is because, at any rate for the younger brother, the worship still is taking place and the waters still are singing on their way towards the sea.

Now to try to put into practice all the lessons of Vezin, Lacey, Creswick, Behncke, and others, at Southampton, where the autumn tour commenced. Time was found for a visit to Salvini in his magnificent performance of Othello. On this occasion some brainless stallholders indulged in distressingly loud conversation, and comments concerning the spectators, the stage, the weather and Goodwood. Suddenly, to my delight, I saw the figure of a sunburned, vigorous and agile little man like a piece of well-tempered steel spring to a standing position in one of the seats and fiercely denounce the

disturbers in fiery language as follows: “Damn you, damn you, do stop your senseless cackle! Of course you can’t understand it; of course you don’t realize you are seeing one of the greatest artists in the world and listening to one of the greatest plays; but you might have the decency not to disturb those of us who do care, and either keep quiet and behave or go home—to hell or wherever your damned residence may be!”

“Good,” I thought, “for the uncle of Stephen Phillips the poet!”—the often-mentioned Robert Dockwra.

At Eastbourne the Benson Company commenced to experiment in open-air performances, which had been for so long a pleasing speciality of Sir Philip Ben Greet. The company did not enjoy them as much as they did the bathing, lawn-tennis, cricket and walks to Beachy Head; but they were cheered by various little incidents—such as the inquisitive incursions of various quadrupeds, horses, cats, dogs, sheep, goats, donkeys, and cranes and ducks—and refractory tourists who paid for admission to the grounds and claimed the right to sit or stand anywhere in the precincts they chose.

Then to Bath, always the meeting-place for old friends, where all the old traditions of Quin and Kean and Macready come vividly before one. Bath Theatre was once a stepping-stone to London, and many a tyro made his first approach there towards fame or failure. While in the twilight, from the hills and the moonlight in the valley, troop ghosts of Early Britons, Goidels, Ivernians, Stone Age and Bronze men, Romans, Saxons, Danes and Normans, White Rose and Red Rose, Cavaliers and Roundheads, Stuarts and Hanoverians, to listen laughingly to the wit and gossip of Sheridan and his circle. When midnight strikes they all assemble in the forum of the great bath, round the waters of healing, telling of ancient wars and long-healed strife, talking of law and peace, and sighing forth dreams and visions of new promise to the sleeping world as they mingle with the mists that salute the rising sun.

This seems to be the moment to put before the patient reader some chart or map of the track-ways that traverse the bitter-sweet dreamland of the dramatic work; to tabulate if possible the milestones and the signposts; the terrace walks, the bridle-paths, the woodland drives and country lanes; the big houses; the roads of Macadam; the town pavements, of cobbles, wood, stone or asphalt, leading to Fancy’s Capital.

Some are strewed with roses and some with flint or thorns; some lead over ice and snow, and nails and thorns, and some through shadows of a sunshine day; some strike out by the numberless laughter of the sea. Pilgrims travelling thereon sometimes faint by the wayside. Some linger talking by the village inns. Some lay their mortal garments aside in the keeping of the village church-yard. Some turn to other pastures, and halt in palace, farm or cottage garden. Some grow busy with beeves or merchandise or cares of state, but all

who quest along the open road sooner or later "come out of their cage and find their wings" on their pilgrimage. But most of them that I know, whether they fail or whether they succeed, whether the people dance to their piping or whether they laugh to their lament, have to face with courage and good cheer the solution of life's riddle, "What will happen next?"

It follows as a result in actual life that the rogues and vagabonds, the tramps and music-makers, fit into any practical job that is found for them with more success than their fellows. In studying the map, one must remember that in our halcyon days of peace, while the warriors of the world were at war, we became one workshop, and the market for all countries of the globe. Wealth increased by leaps and bounds, to such an extent, and so rapidly, that we are only just beginning to realize the mistake of concentrating all the centrifugal force of industry in the bank and the counting-house, to the neglect of the workshop. The workshop makes the bank, rather than the bank the workshop. The result has been too often an atmosphere of stress and strife, and a growth of ugliness in our midst that threatens to overwhelm all artistry. Especially destructive is such influence on the democratic art of drama. How fatally this must in time affect the life of a people is patent when we consider how drama borrows from literature, music, and all the arts, enriching and enriched. We hold the mirror up to nature, accompanied by a concord of sweet sounds; poor mirror-makers and feeble till the smoke dies down and the mist clears, and the trees and the birds and the flowers gather again round the altars of St Francis and St Therese, and bring back the loveliness of home. Let me at once say that, in spite of difficulties, in spite of the decline in the numbers of our actor-managers and artists, the prospect before the pilgrims is radiant with hope. The promise of the New Age.

The most old-fashioned Victorian must acknowledge with satisfaction the ceaseless activity of daring and unconventional experiments, the flame of a new and more social patriotism, the inspiration of Imperial industrialism, made manifest in various theatrical undertakings, small and great, of the present day.

I commenced my career not far from the signpost that marked a great change in our system of theatrical management; a change which, if we will, may be marked by great progress; but like all moments of awakening uplift it has revealed in some directions dangerous symptoms of decay.

To return to the metaphor of the pilgrims: their vision is sometimes shortened, their outlook obscured, by the interposition of advertisement hoardings that hide a favourite view; by unfriendly notices such as: "Beware of the dog"; "Trespassers will be prosecuted"; "Rubbish shot here," etc., etc. Sometimes, too, a barbed wire of convention blocks a favourite stile, or, worst still, minute directions in highbrow language at every furlong make it difficult for the traveller to find his way. Sometimes the wanderer is lost in the

quicksands of novelty for novelty's sake. Some years ago the change commenced, when the monopoly of privileges and opportunities ceased to be confined to patent theatres. The gradual increase in the number of theatres, the lessening of religious antagonism, the enlargement of the auditorium, the increased scale of expenditure on splendid, archæologically accurate productions, and the drift of the country population into the town revolutionized the methods that were in vogue from the days of Garrick, Mrs Siddons, the Kembles, the Keans and Macready.

The expenditure involved needs, perhaps, more financial and business ability than is usually found in the artistic temperament, and a long struggle commenced between the financial statement and the artist's design. I do not know that the adjustment has been yet successfully achieved.

The first signpost that met me on my own particular journey was the saying that with the decay of the circuit system and the local stock companies there was no school in which the actors could satisfactorily learn their craft. This was the lesson that I learned at the Lyceum. "In six months, my boy," said Irving to Tree, "one used to learn more about acting than your young people would learn in six years, possibly a lifetime, under a long-run system."

The second signpost that I encountered was at Stratford-on-Avon, where Charles Flower and his friends, in Stratford and elsewhere, endowed and erected the Memorial Theatre. Flower deplored the gradual disappearance of Shakespeare and the Shakespearian actors from the stage. He understood, as many others have done, how ignoble and impoverished the national life tends to become if the voice of their sweetest singer and wisest seer is no longer heard in the land.

It was not till I had been on the stage for at least a year that I sensed how my work might one day become attuned to the Stratford undertaking. My first job, as we have seen, was to serve an apprenticeship with the acknowledged masters at the Lyceum; my next, to further ground myself in the rudiments in one of the few stock companies remaining.

The third signpost, a milestone farther on, pointed to the task of forming a Shakespearian company that would preserve what was best in the old conditions of the stage, at the same time adapting them to modern requirements, so that I might grow in knowledge of the art and give a similar opportunity to others.

All of us had to struggle hard in competition with the London companies bringing down some established success, and with the gradual decline in the intimate knowledge of, and friendship for, the theatre which set in on the abandonment of the circuit and the old stock systems.

Another very noticeable change, and one not making for the elevation of dramatic standards, was to be found in the fact that Shakespeare no longer

supplied the chief test of mind in an author and his exponents. When I first began, the majority of every audience would probably have seen a dozen Shakespeare plays, and they would judge other plays in relation to them. They would have measured the skill of an actor by his success in leading Shakespearian rôles, just as the sculptor or the painter measures his skill by reference to the galleries of Spain, France, the Netherlands, Germany and, above all, Italy. Perhaps the position may be better understood when one recollects how W. G. Grace and Hobbs mark the scale of a cricketer's excellence.

To-day, the audiences which have interest in or knowledge of stage-craft can be counted on the fingers of one hand. Shakespeare out of date? Never! Not so long as "It's just me and Bill at the battle of Wipers"—in our army; or so long as the denizen of the slum tells you that the average play he sees lasts for a night, but the Shakespeare play stays with him always.

Among the more or less permanent touring companies (1883) which made it difficult for a newcomer to secure dates were Messrs Roberts, Archer and Bartlett, and Miss Maggie Morton and Talbot in the fit-up towns and small theatres. Then, on a larger scale, there were Osmond and Edmund Tearle, Barry Sullivan, Kate Vaughan, Miss de Grey, Miss Wallis, Miss Alleyn, Conway, old Farren, John Coleman, Charles Dillon, Ben Greet and Hermann Vezin; and in old English comedy the Compton Comedy Company.

At a later period must be added the Lyceum Vacation Company, Martin Harvey, Louis Calvert, Harbury, Matthews, Haviland, Coleridge and Lawrence. In addition, there were periodical excursions on the part of the Kendals, Sir Charles and Lady Wyndham, Sir John Hare, the Bancrofts, Toole, Wilson Barrett and, subsequently, Alexander and Tree.

In another and more variable category the legitimate companies had to make good against Messrs Clayton and Cecil, with Marion Terry from the Court; the Pinero attractions; and, later, the Barker and Bernard Shaw undertakings, the Gaiety company, William Terriss and Adelphi melodrama, the Haymarket companies in Sardou and drawing-room comedy, Mrs Langtry, Mary Anderson, Mrs Bernard Beere and, in more recent times, Ethel Irving, Bourchier, and Henry and Laurence Irving. (Bourchier and Harry Irving approached me with a proposal for amalgamation; but I thought I had to work out my own salvation.) To these must be added Edward Terry, Kate Vaughan and Nelly Farren, that queen of burlesque, a consummate actress, to whom the French in 1890 awarded the palm for all-round artistry and technique. Probably, in certain lines, Nelly Farren—great as Réjane and the elder Robson were—would rank as high as anyone, amongst the artists of the last half-century at any rate. She, Robson and Ellen Terry were the most esteemed and admired by the Paris critics.

Seasons of six weeks by the Carl Rosa and the Moody Manners companies, and, later, the Turner Opera Company; with Gilbert and Sullivan under D'Oyly Carte, still further reduced the number of weeks available for Shakespeare.

Then there was always the possibility of the date one wanted being booked by Frederic Harrison for Mrs Patrick Campbell or Forbes-Robertson.

A successful pantomime, that sometimes ran for twenty weeks, at times interfered with my self-appointed mission—though none realize better than I do, unless it be Robert Courtneidge, that experienced all-round artist, how much the men and women of the stage learned from the pantomime of those days, in which a winter engagement was eagerly sought. Many a first-rate actor and actress acquired grace and versatility, and quickness of mind and body, in that rough-and-ready school.

When the budding manager had struggled successfully through the difficulties indicated above, at any moment he might find himself displaced by some new outpost of Bernard Shaw, Tom Taylor, Gilbert, Byron, Charles Reade, Stevenson, Sheridan Knowles, Wills, Oscar Wilde, or Pinero.

The above chapters describe some of the conditions that produced whatever there was of value in the Benson work, and now to take up again the thread of the Argonauts' story, the voyagers who did not find the Golden Fleece, but something that they valued more—a strenuous life, a continuous adventure, a hazard of win or lose; at no matter what cost, a square deal, the gain of quest and comradeship is ours for ever.

CHAPTER XV

STRATFORD-ON-AVON, 1886-1887

This year (1886) and the following year were among the most momentous periods of my career, including as they did my marriage, the death of my father, the birth of a son, and the abandonment of the old home.

In addition, the company made definite progress in its climb up the ladder that leads to success. The big theatres were opening their doors to the newcomers. Manchester, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Birmingham, Newcastle, Stirling, Dublin and Belfast followed the example of Liverpool and Bristol, and others.

Again the company found themselves at Stirling, where I had first joined the Walter Bentley crowd. Since those days, Bannockburn, the Castle, the tilt-yard, the tournament-field, and all the tales of Wallace and Bruce and the Red Comyn, had gained in interest. The faces of the shades had gained in distinctness of form and colour.

So, with the revelry of Hogmanay and the skirl of broken bottles and of clinking glasses in my ears, I strode up the hill, to look out again towards the south, over the jousting-green and the tilt-yard, now bright with moonlight, now veiled in driving snow. It seemed quite natural that a tall figure should stalk from behind a tombstone and lay a gaunt hand on my shoulder. “Well?” I said, not sure of what the stranger’s intentions might be. “What do you want, at this time of night?” “I want me hame—it’s here, ye ken,” pointing weirdly to the graves and the tombs, and with that he commenced wandering up and down, searching in the snow. “I want me hame,” he moaned, with his teeth chattering and his long beard and hair spread out to catch the snowflakes from the bitter north-east wind. Somewhat disappointed that this was obviously not the ghost of Malcolm or of Wallace or of Bruce, but a New Year bacchanalian worshipper of Hogmanay, I took him by the arm and dragged him, in spite of the refrain of “Me hame is here, me hame is here,” into the street outside the Castle gate.

“I want me hame, and dammit if that’s no’ ma hoose,” lurching into a doorway. “Come awa’, man; come awa’ and have a wee drappie. You’ve been a guid friend this nicht.” With difficulty I extricated myself from the clutch of the spectre as I pushed “the ghost” into a jovial circle singing *Auld Lang Syne*.

The next day came an early start for Dundee, where I forgathered with many friends: friends of Professor Burnet at St Andrews, friends who had stayed with Godfrey in the old country home, hospitable Scots merchants and manufacturers, Sanders, Professor Thomson, the biologist, and Bishop Campbell, and the late Sir William Peterson. Peterson had been a brilliant Scots scholar of Corpus. In his Oxford undergraduate days his hand was always against the authorities, his head was always busy devising plans for circumventing the statutes, for proving that they never applied to any particular case in which he broke them, and never could mean what everyone for centuries had thought they meant. His quick brain, in spite of thwartings from the deans and bursars, enabled him to obtain a brilliant degree, and secured for him at an early age the headship of this young university.

A very original mind, peering and probing into mysterious wherefores and whys, philosophizing as to whence and whither, yet keenly and poetically alive to the practical demands of here and now. Years afterwards I met him again, as the distinguished head of McGill University in Montreal, and the right hand of Lord Grey in his efforts to blend all that was best of the old country into the growing bosom of the new. To him I owe the honour of being a Doctor of Laws, my fellow D.L. on that occasion being Sir Gilbert Parker, the novelist.

Peterson was a great Empire builder, one of those practical Scots poets with the vision to see, the ability to plan, the courage and skill to carry out successfully. To an artist it was an encouraging sight to see agricultural students enjoying Beethoven's sonatas in the interim between lectures on Holstein cattle and maggots in the turnip. His mother was a typical Scots lady, of great dignity and shrewd perception. Her favourite quotation to me, which became a sort of friendly watchword in years to come, was "Nevertheless"—an inevitable connecting link between the green bay-tree and the brand for the burning.

He was one of a remarkable but not a rare family in Scotland. Two daughters were accomplished teachers in school and university; one son was a judge in India and a dramatic author; another son a musician, carrying the flag of the Empire through Australia and New Zealand to the music of all nations.

The Dundee theatre of that time was not very popular; but on the night on which Peterson sent round word that it was to be full it was overflowing and enthusiastic.

Besides the Principal and his mother, another outstanding friend of mine was the genius of Dundee, in the person of a seal that lived on a rock at the mouth of the harbour, and was regarded by the sailors and the citizens as the presiding deity of commerce and shipping. It was related that a Sassenach from London hired a boat from whence to make war on the seagulls. Unfortunately for him, he levelled his gun at the presiding genius of the Tay. Before he could

pull the trigger he was hurled into the water by his indignant boatman, and there left to drown or get back to the pier as best he could. By the time he had struggled back to land a crowd had collected, which stoned, pelted, kicked and beat the would-be sportsman back to his hotel. The seal was not molested again.

An interesting town, Dundee. Jute and flax and whaleboats built up a marked manner of citizenship among them. From my friend the Rev. A. Keen I heard the following epitome of Dundee citizenship: "My father never earned more than thirty shillings a week, but he managed to give all his sons a good education. There were four of us, and we have all done well. I tell my friends on the Corporation that we who have made thousands should share some of it with those who haven't. If we don't, certainly in the next world, and maybe in this, our riches will be given to the poor, and we shall taste of all they suffer from our neglect." Queer sentiments to hear in the town that regarded the Tay Bridge disaster as a judgment against Sunday travelling! Quite recently at Dundee I was trying to buy some cheap material for wrapping up papers and correspondence, and had the greatest difficulty in securing what I wanted, as the drapers told me that, unlike England, it was no good stocking shoddy material. People bought the substance that endured, whether it was fashionable or not, and it was no good trying to fob them off with flimsies.

What a host of memories and pleasant recollections, of sports and suppers and dinners and dances, come crowding in at the mention of Edinburgh. From her situation, nestling round the Castle set upon a rock, sheltered by Arthur's Seat, perched on many hills looking towards the lochs and the bens, keeper of the passage of the Forth, watcher of the moorland and the sea, she occupies a position unique among the cities of the world.

Her story is of the parting of the ways and the blending of the peoples—Highland and Lowland, Northumbrian, Saxon, Roman, Teuton, Frenchman and Dane have all left their mark upon her history.

Pilgrims of every land flock to her streets, to learn at her university or her hospitals, or her schools of art and literature and economics. Fleets and armies have from time immemorial gathered round her holy well, her palace, and her fortress on the hill.

I have watched a Highland regiment defiling down the hill from the Castle, the heather tread swinging on in rhythmic unison with the mysterious call of the bagpipes. They were marching down to take ship for India. Halfway down, a snow-shower from their native hills veiled them with her farewell, as though she hid them from our sight. For the moment, she only seemed to heighten the valiant cry of the music; she only seemed to strengthen the firmness of their tread; like the march of that regiment has always progressed through centuries the story of "Auld Reekie."

Art, industry, commerce, war and worship—sometimes at strife with one another, sometimes at one—gather for the actor an audience that will put him on his mettle. Keen and critical are they, and yet sympathetic and emotional, like their own heather mountains or winds from a sunny crag.

Is there another town in the world that contains such able and varied capacities of mind and body? I think it is harder to find a fool in Edinburgh than in any place I know. I have tried for forty years, and failed.

I was fortunate in knowing several of the city's notabilities. Professor Sellar and his family had a world-wide circle of friends, and their house was typical of Scottish culture and hospitality. The same may be said of the Graham-Murrays, the Pitmans, the Burn-Murdochs, the Pelham-Burns, and many another household.

The owners of the theatre—Messrs Howard and Wyndham—from the very first gave me and my company a warm welcome. Both of them were well-known actors; and with Mrs Wyndham's social charm and tact, and knowledge of drama, the Lyceum Theatre has been for forty years one of the best-managed and helpful centres of dramatic work in the kingdom. J. B. Howard was an old friend of Irving's—hence the theatre's name. He was something of an autocrat, a great believer in his profession, and of a grim and somewhat studied humour.

I think most actors will agree with Gladstone that an Edinburgh audience can be the coldest and the warmest—according to whether you hold their attention, or the reverse.

Quite recently, after the Historical Pageant at Craigmillar, which could never have been done at such short notice in any other town, I, on receiving the thanks of the Pageant Committee, deprecated the importance they attached to my services. "You were successful," I said, "because you are poets—that is, you see things and feel them and do them."

"Well," said George Campbell, one of the mainstays of the undertaking, "that is true. We will thank you, then, for reminding us that we are poets and giving us the opportunity of making poetry."

That answer explains the fine quality of an Edinburgh audience and the delight of acting to them. The romance you place before them on the stage is theirs by tradition, inheritance and daily life.

Lady Mar and Kellie, who was Chairman of the Pageant Committee, might have been the lovely Queen Mary Stuart making arrangements for her coronation festival; the late Walter Montgomery might have been any one of his ancestors organizing a crusade; George Campbell might have been the Provost who arranged the defence of Edinburgh after Flodden; and so on, through the list of those who took part—whether it was Lady Clementina Waring, or the saucy lassies of the caller-herrin' brigade; whether it was the

superintendent of the traffic, or the page-boy, or Major Cadell, Master of Horse.[7]

And so when I speak of meeting Professor Saintsbury and Miss Stevenson, and of the kindness of Captain Blaikie, and gratefully think of a thousand others, I am really telling the story of how my efforts in Shakespeare and other dramas were received, and how the life of the artist is mysteriously intertwined with that of the people.

Photo by Ian Smith]

Jimmy Pow, from the Pleasance, Edinburgh, applies to Sir Frank Benson for a Job in the Pageant

The life of Edinburgh is her own—the result of many centuries. The life of the artist who comes to Edinburgh is his own also—but when he is acting, singing or painting to Edinburgh he becomes for the time being part of Edinburgh; and so his story is theirs, and theirs is his; and that is the mystery and the charm of the theatre and its meaning to the audience and the players therein.

If you try to show the community *Faust*—Germany's masterpiece—it has some bearing on the performance that Professor Blackie kissed my wife at one end of a long drawing-room, then marched down humming a Scottish folk-song, caught me a resounding box on the ear and by way of apology screamed out: "That's because you do not know your Goethe!" It also matters when the same eccentric prophet led me to the top of his house, and explained to me that the beauty of the sunset was an infinitely greater force than all the power of Napoleon.

These few remarks about Edinburgh sufficiently explain what the theatre at Edinburgh and its audience have meant for forty years to me.[8]

From Edinburgh we went to Glasgow, where lived Godfrey's friends, the Burnets. As Miss Burnet and the American Consul, Dr Underwood, and his daughter had paved the way for a series of visits, and also welcomed and encouraged my efforts at Edinburgh, they, the Glasgow art clubs, with Christie and Lavery among their members, and Newbury at the Art School, extended a welcoming hand to what they were good enough to consider some live wires of drama.[9]

Later on, Mrs Struthers-Stuart of Edinburgh and Mrs Wilson of Glasgow joined in with the British Empire Society in supporting the company's visit. Thanks to Miss Burnet, the first step of formally linking up the theatre with the educational forces was successfully taken, in the form of matinees specially given for the schools. Professor Storey and his family, and Professor Jacks, and others round the university, brought the theatre to the serious notice of the students. Professor Storey had shown himself an invaluable friend to Irving when the actor lay prostrate with illness in that city.

Those were the days when the Glasgow School of Art was startling, or repelling, many minds by Futurism and Cubism. All such theories seem but names for exaggerated systems of experiment. If they remain content with mere eccentricity they lapse into extravagant burlesques, and are soon forgotten. If at their root lies some new idea or growth that is struggling sincerely to find a suitable form of expression they ultimately win through, to take their place in the only two schools of picture-painting that exist, good pictures and bad pictures.

Among the skilful painters of good pictures must be counted another friend of Irving's, the great landscape painter, Aitken. "I've had no chance," said he,

one day in his cups. “I am one of the foundlings in the world. The world has always been beautiful for me—but not always kind. You have painted some beautiful pictures on the stage, Benson, my boy; I’ll paint you one of my best on canvas and give it you next time you come.” (He never did.) Then he would bestow a drunken benediction, “In nomine, etc.,” and the loving-cup was again quaffed to the dregs. “Come and see my work,” he would say; and he would stumble up his staircase, pausing to genuflect at every third step before some priceless crucifix, or figure of the Madonna. These he had collected from all parts. They were made of all materials, and all of exquisite workmanship. One crucifix came from South America, and the Saviour was black like an African.

He took me to the drawing-room, and we chatted to his patient, gentle wife. Pointing to a chimney-corner he said: “That’s Irving’s favourite seat. He will sit there for hours without speaking, and then look up and thank my wife for letting him rest in what he does not himself possess—a home.”

From the drawing-room he led me to his studio—with pictures full of light that belongeth not entirely to land or sea—and then to a cupboard where, seated in a chair, was a skeleton in cap and gown. “He sits at our feasts,” said the artist, “when we are making a night of it with the whisky. He’s not been out for some time,” he continued. “The last time Colonel Blank and Major X. were among our number. Within two months both of them were killed in South Africa—the Boer War of 1900. The other three have passed on. I suppose it will be my turn next.” In a couple of years his turn came. A great artist. *In nomine Patris . . .*

At Edinburgh and Glasgow—through visits to Glenalmond, Loretto, Fettes, and the universities—athletics again formed a connecting link with the educational and recreative forces that centre round the theatre. At Rugby the universities were too strong for the wandering actors, though we managed to put up a decent fight. At Association and at hockey the play-folk were victorious, whilst they also enjoyed an overwhelming victory at ice-hockey over the 9th Lancers. Their pride on the ice was, however, considerably lowered by the skilful combination of the Higginbothams, the best team that I have ever had the pleasure of meeting. I am speaking with experiences in my mind of an undefeated New College team of which I was captain.

Surely all this sport and pastime with good company is, and always has been, a most important and essential condition of a healthy form of art expression. The benefit thereof cannot be weighed in pounds, shillings and pence—in the measurement of chest and biceps, in publicity, records or avoirdupois. Walks, swims, skating, golf, rides, cricket, football, hockey, lawn-tennis, squash-rackets, boxing, fencing and single-stick, hunting, rowing and gymnastics still kept up the athletic fibre of the company.

(“Oh, heavens! Can’t you get away from athletics and games for once?”

“No, I can’t.”)

Both Glasgow and Edinburgh seemed to take a friendly interest in my representations of Hamlet, Shylock and Macbeth. *Romeo and Juliet* dealt with subjects which evoked the comment: “All that love-making and poetry nonsense is better kept off the stage, and carried on in the privacy of a body’s home, and not exhibited to the public eye.”

On one occasion, after *Hamlet*, I received the doubtful compliment: “The finest Hamlet I ever saw in my life—maybe I was drunk when I saw ye, and that’s the reason I think ut.”

The old comedies never failed to attract and please an audience singularly quick in entering into the spirit and appreciating the wit of the “patch-and-powder” period. *Othello*, too, with its fierce motives of love and hate, and *Julius Cæsar*, with its military discipline, its democratic freedom and the humanity of its friendships, were close favourites with the people we so often wrongly accuse of being hard and unsympathetic to grief or jest. It hath not appeared so to those of us who, on the battlefield, came across the work of the Scottish Women’s Nursing Association and the valour of the Scottish regiments.

I have elsewhere tried to give a sketch of a Saturday night in the Sautmarket.[10] Not far from that ill-famed locality, blood-and-thunder melodrama and popular successes were enacted in the Princess’s Theatre, whilst travelling booths gave versions of the classics in the open spaces reserved for merry-go-rounds and coconut shies. One of these primitive Hamlets came round on a night when we were acting at the Royal to ask us to lend him six muskets for *Hamlet*. He explained that they would be returned at ten o’clock, as their show closed at that time. In one conversation I learned they commenced *Hamlet* at six. Between that time and ten, they gave nine representations of this drama. “But then, you see, we cut out most of the words and come to the combats.”

Now it is time to be preparing for the journey south. Before leaving I hope I have suggested, however slightly, some realization of the all-round physical and mental activity that has influenced the literary and artistic and dramatic expression of our Imperial race, just as these qualities are shown in the road that led from the holy well to the citadel on the rock, and back again past the universities and the hospitals, past many a stately mansion, wynd and pleasance, to the palace at Holyrood and the ports of shipping on the Firth of Forth. Boats are too slow and precarious. The Forth is no longer needed as a barrier against hostile clans, and so the Forth Bridge, that triumph of engineering, conducts the traveller to the trackway laid by Agrippa through Invicta Caledonia. The actor and the dramatist find the same spirit at work in the port at the mouth of the sister river, the Clyde. Forests of masts and miles

of rigging and bright-coloured funnels carry on the chivalry of commerce and history where once were only waste lands and marshy pools.

Naturally we look for the influence of drama, the poetry of doing, among such a race, in the midst of such sturdy people. In spite of the sometime ban of "the unco' guid," Scotland, especially Glasgow and Edinburgh, has always been a nursery and contributory of histrionic art. Periodically do they try long stock seasons, periodically do they hark back to repertoire experiments, while Barrie bulks largely in the public eye as a skilful and poetic writer of plays. Frequently works of no common interest are played by semi-amateur and professional casts, drawn from the ranks of Law, Medicine or the University.

Efforts like the Moffats in *Bunty*; work such as that of Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson, chieftain of our clans of Anglo-Celtic gleemen—clans that include such names as George Weir, William Mollison, Norman Forbes, Walter Bentley, Howard and Wyndham, and a goodly host besides—testify to the truth of Mary Stuart's remark to Knox: "Hatred and discord will die, but music abideth ever."

"When the blasted dog saw the old devil act it died," said the carpenter.

"A slight mistake, Mr James. The blasted dog did not die," and the old devil gave his stage-carpenter a week's notice of dismissal.

In spite of Howard's sardonic humour he was a kind employer, and was loyally and faithfully served for years by a very excellent staff under Messrs Howard and Wyndham.

The art energy and output of Glasgow derived sympathetic support from, and in its time contributed progressive ideas to, a school of scene-painting dating back to the days of Kean and Kemble, that for some time took precedence of the studios throughout the country. A notable name in this respect stands out among many others, that of Samuel Glover, son of Edmund Kean's contemporary and rival. He kept alive unswervingly the best traditions of scene-painting and scene-accessories in our island. The cloths he painted for the Howard and Wyndham productions, and earlier, are beautiful landscape pictures on a giant scale. From his father he passed on to me some valuable precepts on the actor's art. One of them I venture to quote in these pages. After the cursing scene of Shylock, in my youthful and more boisterous days, the old man came up and gently instilled the following golden rules: "Young man, remember that the loudest shouter on the stage is rarely as impressive as the full, round, vibrant voice; not in the volume of sound but in its quality lies the true power of a great actor's voice. Remember also, my boy, that to whisper effectively 'I love,' or 'I hate,' so that it can be heard in the largest theatre, requires as much breath as the longest and loudest rhetorical effort."

I like to think that Sir Henry Lawrence was a staunch friend and supporter of the National Drama Company, formed in 1900, to carry on my organization

of giving seasons of classical drama in connection with local committees throughout England. Sir Henry at the age of eight was in the Residency of Lucknow, and must have heard his father's heroic words, ere he gave his life for his country: "Die, but never surrender."

Another link in the chain that intertwines India and England in thought and word and deed, in philosophy, in faith and in facts, was the presence in the company, at a later period than that of which we are writing, of Miss Lucy Hare (Mrs Frank Darch). Her father, Colonel Hare of the 60th, was by General Nicholson's side when he received his death wound, and heard his never-to-be-forgotten message: "Tell your General-in-Command that I'm dying; but that, if he makes terms of peace, I've enough strength left to shoot him with this pistol, and I will."

And yet another generous soul linked us to Lucknow. Mrs Samwell, the mother of Miss Constance Fetherstonhaugh, knew and revered the great Nicholson as the bravest and the best in that unequalled company of chivalry. Now she lay dying, the victim of a stroke, with her daughter caring for her night and day, in theatrical lodgings—a change from courts, kings' palaces, romance and war.

In the long watches of summer evenings, or the chill of winter nights, there often come into my mind all the stories of that time, all the talks I have held with old friends who in those strenuous days had kept their appointed wardship, amid shouts or silence, always watching, always waiting, until at last —relief. And with the deathless story was always associated the dauntless little lady of ancient lineage whom we welcomed in the wings. She was clever, bright, witty and quick-minded, and true daughter of an historic Scottish house, whose pretty children made a practice of eloping through the schoolroom window at the age of fourteen, or being lowered in a closed basket from the nursery window, in order to many the men of their choice.

From Glasgow I travelled down to Stratford just in time to take part in the opening performance.

It felt strange that Mrs Samwell should have to be left at the point of death in Scotland alone with her daughter, when it was owing largely to their influence that the Flowers had placed the Memorial Theatre at my disposal. Mrs Samwell and her children had for years lived at Stratford-on-Avon, and had many friends in the town and country round. Now, to the disappointment of these friends, Miss Fetherstonhaugh was unable to appear. Her place in the company was taken by Miss Lehmann, a sister of Liza Lehmann, the singer, who at very short notice played Lady Anne in *Richard III.*, the Festival play, and other leading parts. Clever Miss Mary O'Hea helped to fill the breach.

I had better say at once, that the Festival was then in its infancy. After the first start off, with a flourish of trumpets and the whole-hearted support of

Whittier, Russell Lowell, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Washington Irving, Emerson, Longfellow, and the literary leaders of American thought, as well as General Grant, the President of the United States, and a performance by a collection of the theatrical stars of the day, the theatre hardly met with the support that it deserved, and afterwards secured.

It was still feeling its way as to what course to steer and on what lines best to develop its usefulness. Unknown to either, the alliance between the Benson Company and the Flowers provided some solution for the difficulties of both. In those days the weekly receipts did not amount to as much as would often be taken now in a single day.

Neither Mr Charles Flower nor I was easily daunted. The former possessed great patience, foresight, business acumen and skill in the handling of finance. At first there were various differences of outlook, theory and practice to be adjusted. The old gentleman had a rooted objection to the introduction of ballet-dancing and limelight. The theatre was as complete, well furnished and equipped as money and artistry could make it. John O'Connor, the great scene-painter and artist, who had learned his business in grinding colours for the productions of Charles Kean, had provided most beautiful sets, wings and cloths—perfect gems of the scene-painter's art. He had superintended the equipment of the theatre, with properties, furniture and effects on a corresponding scale of archæological accuracy and beautiful workmanship.

No expense was spared in the matter of orchestra or in the provision of a sufficient staff. The lighting—in those days gas was the medium—was complete, and of the latest pattern; but all these precious paraphernalia had been designed for certain plays and consecrated to some rigid method of employment. The proximity of such a valuable collection of books, pictures, manuscripts and Shakespearian relics and cognizances entailed some limitation and obstruction to lighting effects. So, too, with the use of the scenery and properties.

Naturally the chairman liked to be on the stage, and to have a hand in the settings that he had provided. The methods, too, of Barry Sullivan, Creswick, Kean, Lady Martin, Irving and Phelps did not always coincide with my new ideas and original treatments. All through my career I have preferred to produce plays that I had never seen acted, in order that I might not be hampered or prejudiced in my creative efforts.

Serious difficulties and differences of opinion were prophesied as likely to arise by those who knew the determination and originality of the parties concerned. It needed but one or two small clashes, one or two heart-to-heart talks, for Mr Charles Flower and me to come to the conclusion that our objects were in the main identical, and to agree to concentrate on points of sympathy and mutual understanding rather than stress differences.

This was perhaps easier for me than for my elder, for no one could come into contact with Mr and Mrs Charles Flower (who was a member of the well-known William Martineau family) and not be carried away by their enthusiasm, their unselfishness, their ceaseless activity, and their devotion to any cause or object that tended to the betterment of their fellow-creatures and their beloved Warwickshire. To this was added an unbounded hospitality and generous friendliness to all pilgrims and workers for the cause which they deemed essential to the upholding of the noblest tradition of English life.

It must have been harder for the older man, and speaks well for his politeness and courtesy not to have been shocked and offended by my self-willed impetuosity. It speaks well for his tolerance and broad-mindedness that he should have forgiven the self-assertion and optimistic self-confidence, the daring experiments, which must have seemed to him reckless irreverence, in virtue of the keenness which we shared for a common object.

The Edgar Flowers and Sir William Flower, whose son, the architect, had been a contemporary of mine at Winchester; Frank Glover and his family from Leamington; the Rev. F. de C. Laffan, the headmaster of the Grammar School, and his wife; Sir Arthur Hodson and another old Wykehamist friend, the Rev. G. W. Barnard of Alverston, from whose house I some years previously had won most of the local tennis competitions; Archdeacon Arbuthnot, and his wife, and afterwards Canon and Mrs Melville, Canon and Mrs Hodson; the doctors (Nason and Norberry); Frank Glover, an Oxford contemporary, and owner of *The Leamington Courier*, constituted the main part of the audience. Professor Geddes of Aberdeen, of Aristotle celebrity, and Philip Rathbone, the Bohemian representative of the well-known Liverpool family, were staying at Avon-Bank for the week.

A certain amount of novelty attached to the production of *Richard III.*, the special play for that year, in that it was one of the first representations of Shakespeare's version undiluted by Colley Cibber.

I do not think any of those concerned in 1886 realized what a harvest was to spring up from the seed that was lightheartedly sown on that occasion. The week was saddened for me by the not unexpected news of Mrs Samwell's death.

I remember that the stars were shining when I got the news, and somehow their throbbing brightness seemed to make the thought of the end a great illusion. On the Saturday I made arrangements to dash off by road to Birmingham, catching the night train for Glasgow. This I was enabled to do through the kindness of Mr Justin, my first acquaintance with a family destined to play a large part in my career.

So the Festivals succeeded one another, year after year, sometimes given by me, sometimes by Miss Alleyn, sometimes by Ben Greet, Patrick Kirwen,

or others. But gradually, after the death of Charles Flower, the work was entrusted mainly to me, who had by now received the honour of being a Governor of the Memorial and a Trustee of Shakespeare's Birthplace, and also a Freeman of the Borough. A favourite wish of the original founders was that every play of Shakespeare should be represented on the Memorial stage. Year by year this ideal drew near fulfilment. "Thank God," said the stage-carpenter, after sitting up two nights preparing scenery, "here's another bloody king disposed of."

Much is owed by the Governors of the Memorial Theatre to those managers and actors who, besides those particularized above, would come and lay their tribute of service on the altar of our great actor-author—among them Martin Harvey, Nellie de Silva, Oscar Asche, Lily Brayton, Matheson Lang, Hutin Britton, James Fagan, Genevieve Ward, Violet and Irene Vanbrugh, Arthur Bourchier, H. B. and Laurence Irving, Ellen Terry, Lewis Waller, Mary Anderson, Henry Ainley, W. Poel, Hermann Vezin, Otho Stuart, W. T. Stead and Miss Estelle Stead were for some time members of our company.

I put forward plans for enlarging the scope of the Festival, and holding a summer season. General approval was expressed, and it was determined to hold another meeting at a later date. At the second meeting I arrived just as they had made up their minds that the scheme was too large to be undertaken at present. I set to work to convert them to a more hopeful attitude. I explained that many items in the proposed enlargement of the programme could be undertaken and carried through by the co-operation of the members of the company with the town, especially in the matter of illuminations, dances, regattas, open-air performances and gala displays, without unduly clashing with similar local celebrations. I further stated that the assistance of lecturers—Mrs Watts, Alfred Rodway, Mrs Leo Grindon, Professor Cramb, Lord Howard de Walden, Llewellyn Howell, and others—could be secured. Upon this the enlarged scheme was accepted by the chairman, Sir A. O. Flower, and arrangements were made for summer performances in addition to the spring.

Very soon a Stratford-on-Avon Association was formed, to co-operate with the theatre in carrying out the enlarged programme. The Benson management continued, with the town and the founders' family, to make the theatre "our theatre" for all who visited it.

A year or two previously, with the assistance of Hugh Chalmers and Harold Large, I had helped to start a Folk Drama Association. Through this organization performances of *Job*, of *Ralph Roister Doister*, of miracle and mystery plays, including *Everyman*, and performances by village Shakespeare societies were given, in addition to the usual programmes. My wife extended the scope of the May Day revels, with the help of Mrs Cameron Stewart, the Vicarage, Miss Nancy Justins, and practically the whole township, including

old Mr Pierce and Tommy Baker, an expert with foot and fiddle in the country dance.

Oh! the old Festival days at Stratford-on-Avon.

We were not busy doing anything that we were told we ought to do. We were not out only to get, rather to give, as much as we could. “The wind bloweth where it listeth,” and many ships of various sizes, bound for various havens all the world over, passed and repassed, with full sails, on a Shakespearian sea, and each one hailed the other on its voyage, and each one exchanged some commodity of ideas for the sake of friendliness. All sang for the joy of singing, any music that came down the stream from the Cotswold Hills, from the walls of Warwickshire church and castle, the stone walls, the lath-and-plaster, the red tiles, and the ample eaves and chimney-corners—songs of the past, the present, and the hope of the future.

We could not be silent when Avon sang the whole night long to the stars; and the blackbird, the thrush, the lark, the nightingale, and all the feathered choir, trilled out their anthem to the sun and moon, to their rising and their setting.

That is what made it a school; that is what made the Festival International, Imperial, English.

Everybody took part therein, everybody knew one another—from the star actor to the call-boy, from the Cabinet Minister to the cowherd.

It was just our Festival and, therefore, our play; we all, town, audience and actors, contributed to the celebration, and shared its harvest of comradeship and joy.

In all the above undertakings a prominent part was played by Lady Flower, and by all the members of the chairman’s family, by Charles Lowndes and his daughter, Ella, now Mrs Spenser Flower, by Canon and Mrs Hodson, the Melvilles, the Arbuthnots, the headmaster of the Grammar School, and by successive Mayors, Aldermen and Memorial Governors.

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[7] I was lucky in having on my earliest list of supporters such names as Burn-Murdoch, Mitchell-Innes, Seton, Hole, Home, Kennedy Frazer, Ian Smith, Stewart Kennedy, Hay, Masson, Jardine, Chancellor, Charles Bruce, Hunter, MacLeod, Sinclair, Crum, Caird, Cadenhead, Graham-Murray, Balfour Melville, Pagan, Shaw-Stewart, Brodie Innes, Renton, Cockburn, Cassillis, Pitman, Borthwick, Geddes, Crawford, Forbes, Baldwin Brown, and a thousand other admirers of Shakespeare.

[8] I did not know then I should have the honour and pleasure of being the Master of their Royal Pageant in 1927.

[9] To these kind hosts must be gratefully added the names of Robert Phillips, the Fyfe family, the Rev. Dr Gordon and the Higginbothams.

[10] See Appendix.

CHAPTER XVI

1886-1890

A great stride forward, Jalland and I thought, was made when, in 1886, the Comedy Theatre, Manchester, opened its doors to me for a week of Shakespeare. That week was the first of many subsequent visits to that thriving, forceful community. It laid the foundations for many successful seasons before as fine an audience as could be found in any theatre in the world.

The company had for some time been strengthened by the presence of Vibart, strong boxing man and active Rugby forward, from Edinburgh, and Alfred Brydone, from the same city. Miss Taigi Keene, the picturesque child-model of many a London studio, had smiled and danced herself into the favour of our audiences. The company was strong and efficient, and obviously full of promise.

This summer (1886) I was married, at Alresford Church, to Miss Gertrude Constance Morshead Samwell. The wedding took place very quietly, from my old home, as my bride had so recently lost her mother. All the countryside assembled. Neighbours and friends of the family, and of my college, hunting and sport days, and all the dwellers in the little town, gave the bride a hearty welcome, and a joyous godspeed to us as we drove off for a brief honeymoon before the autumn tour. Just prior to the wedding, a kindly neighbour, Colonel Purefoy Fitzgerald, who in his young days had also served in the navy, was on the lawn at Langtons, when I introduced him to Miss Fetherstonhaugh. “What name did you say?” he whispered. “I’m sure I know her; we’ve met before, I cannot remember where.” I explained that her real name was Morshead Samwell.

Photo by Elliot & Fry]

Mr Alfred Brydone

Just at that moment a miniature whirlwind swept across the lawn and the park, and moved across the valley into the distance, in the form of a pillar of

sticks and hay and straw some twenty yards wide. Such phenomena are, of course, of very rare occurrence in England. When the eddy had passed on, and our surprise had abated, Colonel Fitzgerald said: “Now I remember. It was your father, Captain Morshead Samwell, to whom I was talking at Simla when just such another whirlwind, only more violent and larger, swept by. That was before his marriage, more than thirty years ago.” Always afterwards they were great friends. Truly it is a little world, and the points of contact strange and varied.

In this marriage I certainly had the best of the bargain. I often used to say that I had been somewhat selfish in allowing my wife, besides playing the lead, and doing so much costume-designing and other work in the company, to rush on and fill up any breach at a moment’s notice, whether the part so taken suited her or not, whether she had ever studied it or seen it before, and with or without a rehearsal. She indeed accomplished some wonderful performances under these trying conditions, such as when, at two hours’ notice, she got through Desdemona at Cambridge as though she had been playing it all her life. This was what is called “winging it” with a vengeance, but it was not quite fair of me to take such advantage of her loyalty and cleverness.

After a brief honeymoon in Devonshire the autumn tour commenced at Bournemouth, with a star engagement of Mr and Mrs Beerbohm Tree as Sir Peter and Lady Teazle in *The School for Scandal*, and Tree as Iago in *Othello*. Tree’s performance of Iago was repeated at Oxford and Cambridge. At Oxford, Tree, in his nervous apprehension, was found in his dressing-room eating grease-paint and making up with a mutton chop. After the performance he sprang into a hansom-cab in his stage-clothes, narrowly escaping arrest as a lunatic, and arrived in town just in time to take up his cue in *Jim the Penman* at the Haymarket. Hermann Vezin used to relate how Tree came to him and asked to be coached in the part; how eager he was to learn the bits of business that various Iagos had made use of, and how impossible he found it to persuade Tree that business was of secondary importance, and depended entirely on the player’s conception of the character: this serves as an interesting object-lesson in the difference of the schools and the methods of which these two were exponents. Both were masters of stage-business: one might be said to err in the austerity, the other in the profusion, with which he used it.

Naturally, the young wives compared notes on housekeeping, and Mrs Benson confided to her friend that she had ordered a leg-of-beef for Sunday luncheon. “Indeed! Your husband must have a very large appetite.” “He has,” said my wife. But this opinion was no consolation on Saturday night, when the landlady refused to admit such a monstrous piece of flesh into our lodging. I think this may have been the origin of Lady Tree’s advice to the lady who

complained that her husband was always ill-tempered: “Feed the beast!”

The company in 1887 received a great accession of strength from the addition of Miss Denvil to their ranks, who, with her daughter, Marion (Mrs Norman Page), gave invaluable assistance. I always speak of her as a supreme artist in character parts and old women. What a rough life she had to encounter; hardship, struggle and want were her portion most of her days. She had been introduced to me by Miss Fetherstonhaugh, who was a profound admirer of her genius, and who owed her much for many a protective kindness and rough-and-ready championship.

Miss Denvil was continually occupied in a gallant and successful struggle to bring up three children and support an old mother, without much help from a talented but somewhat casual husband, who paid more attention to music and musicians than to the members of his household. Born into the flotsam and jetsam of Bohemia, she was wont to relate how her father was the first actor to play Werner in Byron’s tragedy. Proudly would she tell of the immediate and great success he made in the part: how the whole town was at his feet.

Fêted by the men, caressed by the women, he thought the world seemed within his grasp. Then came the inevitable set-backs, and illness and imprudence contributed to bring about too soon “an unregarded age in corners thrown.”

When the play was again performed, after a lapse of some years, in the theatre that had been the scene of his triumph, the original Werner was on sufferance in the gallery, taking tickets, while a younger rival in the name-part reaped the harvest Denvil had sown.

Commencing her career with Charles Kean, alongside Ellen Terry and many others destined to be famous, promoted to the stock company at the Queen’s, she was a mine of anecdotes, old ballads and stage traditions. Everyone, after a stately, formal, ceremonious introduction, and a courteous reception of the patch-and-powder period, was addressed as “duckie,” “dear,” or “darling.”

These affectionate epithets on one occasion lost her a case in the Law Courts. The judge was nonplussed by being addressed as “My Lord,” “Ducky,” “Your Honour,” “Darling—I mean Your Worship,” “Beg pardon, dearie—I should say, Mr Judge.” Mr Judge could only re-establish his dignity in the eyes of a hilarious court by summarily dismissing her case.

“Believe me, my dears,” I once heard her addressing an audience, “the stage commenced to decline when actresses took to wearing evening-dress.”

Her Mrs Malaprop and Mrs Hardcastle were unique, while during her Mrs Quickly’s description of Falstaff’s death many a time I have seen the carpenters wipe away a tear as they watched silently in the wings, so natural, so convincing, so human was the pathos of the portrait.

Irving admired her talent, and gave her a good engagement with the Lyceum Company; but it was not very long before she returned to her old friends, without, I fear, realizing her modest ambition to earn enough to secure a quiet old age in a cottage home, free from all worry and business anxieties. Such a small reward to ask in return for the exercise of her superlative genius!

At Kidderminster we gave our first performance of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, a play that had not been produced on the English stage for many years. George Weir played the part of Falstaff, and I played Caius. Though the play centres chiefly round the merry wives and the amorous knight, we conceived the idea of bringing into prominence the underplot of Caius, Evans, Shallow, Fenton and Anne Page, and the connecting interests of Mine Host, Pistol, Bardolph and Nym. We elaborated with considerable success these interesting subordinate parts. In fact, Simple, in the clever hands of Arthur Grenville, stood out almost as prominently as Falstaff; and a long and eccentric struggle between Evans and Caius served as a cheerful preparation for the coming humours of the buck-basket. I also realized the advantage it would be to the play to end up in a scene suggesting fairies and moonlight revelry, adding the graceful beauty of song and dance to the broad rollicking comedy of the preceding acts.

This method of treatment revived the popularity of this hitherto neglected Elizabethan comedy. Condemned at first by the critics, as irreverent farcical treatment, it has suggested the lines on which the play has been produced ever since on the English-speaking stage.

Among the applicants for membership of the Benson Company came a singularly handsome, stately Irish girl, whose name afterwards became well known in connection with the troublesome times in Ireland, Miss Maud Gonne. I remember, to this day, finding her in my mother’s drawing-room. I asked her to recite. She commenced rising from the low chair in which she was seated. I wondered when she would finish drawing herself up to her full height. She was very tall and beautiful, a most impressive figure. Very well, too, did she recite, some story of revolution, freedom and death. I at once made arrangements for her to join the company; but just before the date arrived I received a letter saying that she was going to devote herself to the cause of her country, and had, therefore, decided to give up all thought of a stage career. She would certainly have been a success on the stage. She had a splendid appearance and much dramatic talent; perhaps her career would have been less stormy and romantic had she been content with the strifes of make-believe.

Shortly after this she came into political prominence, and was invited to Paris to address an assembly of sympathizers with the Irish cause. She was prevented from attending by a severe cold on the chest and slight inflammation of the lungs. A Press apology contained the statement, “*Elle a rompu un*

vaisseau," implying that she suffered from a slight hæmorrhage. This was cheered by an enthusiastic crowd, who for some time were under the impression that the biggest war-vessel of perfidious Albion had been sent to the bottom of the ocean by the gallant lady.

My wife had the disappointment of being out of the full enjoyment of the first two performances at Stratford. On the one occasion she was prevented by the death of her mother; and on the second by the birth of Eric W. Benson. A wonderful moment in a man's life, the advent of the first-born! This first-born received a very warm welcome into the world at the hands of the Alresford folk, and his parents' professional comrades and audience. As he and, afterwards, his sister grew up they became more and more close pals rather than children. They became identified with the company, as part and parcel of its sports and social life, in many of the towns they visited.

Moreover, the boy developed into a first-rate athlete. Many a century did he score for or against our large circle of friends, and many a goal did he obtain at hockey and football on a variety of playing-fields in the United Kingdom. Always a laughing, yet sympathetic, understanding friend. So he remains to this day, though it is now twelve years since, as the youngest Colonel in the British Army, about to be made a Brigadier-General, he received the summons to a Higher Service in another sphere.

"He was like a father and brother to us," said one of his men. "Even when a Colonel he'd creep out at night, crawl up to a German trench, and, if he thought the moment opportune, spring to his feet and rush down their line shouting words of command to an imaginary force. When the Germans had stampeded, he would come back for the regiment to occupy the abandoned position."

On 16th September 1916 he had come out of hospital, in spite of the doctors, with an injured ankle. His regiment that day was to be in the van of the attack, leading the advance. He hobbled along, waving his stick and laughing like a boy, till a machine-gun cut both arteries with bullets through either leg.

"I don't mind; I'm only sorry for my people," were his last words. "Give them my love."

Shortly before starting to rejoin his regiment he had won the Military Cross, and his name had been mentioned as deserving the Victoria Cross. What lingers uppermost in my mind is a farewell remark: "I often wonder what my splendid boys at the Front will say when they return from the great adventure of war to the sordid squalor of the slums."

We in England have not yet answered that question, but slowly and surely are we tackling the problem. If we fail to find the solution, "Let us be worried, and our Nation lose the name of hardiness and policy."

To revert. We had a week of repertoire in Manchester at the Comedy in 1886. How well I remember my eagerness to please the audience, that in those days was the most critical, the keenest and the most warm-hearted audience in the British Isles. In addition, the Manchester playgoers had preserved the traditions and memories of the old stock companies—it was not so very long before this that Boston Browne and William Calvert, together with Phelps at Sadler's Wells, had for some time kept alight the Shakespeare torch.

In those days the citizens of a town were not so diversely scattered in the country districts round as they are now. The motor and the aeroplane had not scattered the city fathers to rural centres at a distance from their workshop and place of business.

Manchester playgoers represented the most active and intelligent life of the city. Through the office and through the factory, on the Tuesday, ran an intelligent criticism, appreciative or the reverse, of the performances of the previous night. Their standards and their taste were formed in reference to Shakespeare. Did the play bear any resemblance to the best Shakespeare model of construction? To what extent did the actor approach or fall short of the achievements of Garrick, the Kembles, the Keans, Macready and Calvert? These were the first questions asked. My Lancashire connection stood me in good service on this occasion. There were those who remembered an uncle and a grandfather connected with the cotton firm of Hadwen & Co. The Heywoods, founders of the Manchester and Salford Bank, were old family friends, with Sir Perceval at their head. The well-loved father of the city, Oliver Heywood, was a prominent supporter of any art undertaking that was worthy. Connected as they were by marriage, Oliver Heywood, brother Edward and brother Charles took a warm interest in this first visit of the Benson Company. Then there were the Hardcastles, my cousins, one of whom had represented Manchester in Parliament as a supporter of Cobden. Harvey Goodwin, son of the Bishop of Carlisle (whose charming wife had been before marriage Miss Wakefield), Cosmo Melville, George Murray and George Dixon were prominent leaders in the cotton industry. These and their friends were the mainstays of the Gentlemen's Concerts of Norman Neruda and Charles Hallé, of the Richter Concerts and similar organizations.

A commendatory critique in *The Manchester Guardian*, and another in *The Courier*, on whose staff were James Farrell and Horsburgh, an old New College man, went far to secure for me success and popularity, that grew as time went on.

Hamlet was the opening item in the bill, and I, at my best that night, managed to win the enthusiasm and good opinion of the house. That good opinion was further confirmed by subsequent performances, and resulted in a two weeks' engagement for the following year, for which I secured the

assistance of Miss Ellen Wallis, wife of John Lancaster. In 1889 I brought my company, including Miss Constance Fetherstonhaugh, now Mrs Benson, to the Prince's Theatre for a three weeks' season just before Easter. Though the worst time of the year, we packed the house with our own repertoire, including *Hamlet* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, and our special productions of *The Merry Wives* and *A Midsummer's Night's Dream*. The visit evoked so much enthusiasm, with promises of support from Freemantle, the musical critic of *The Manchester Guardian*, from Darbishire, the architect, William Gilliebrand, and others, including Vernon Armitage and his brothers, who were proprietors of the Royal and the Prince's, that I was very nearly induced to settle in the town for good. Captain Bainbridge's tenancy of the Royal was then drawing to a close. The Arts Club, of which I was a member, and of which Mr Nodel of *The Daily News* was president, and to which the two Rowleys (Charles and Christopher) belonged, urged me to take over the Theatre Royal.

This would have been probably a wise step, and might have led to the realization of my dreams. My difficulty was, first, that I had expended a lot of capital in securing a lease of the Globe Theatre, London, for 1890; that I had always set my ambitious little soul on achieving a London success, not realizing that the essential condition of success is the quality of the work done rather than the meretricious *réclame* of locality and environment. Another difficulty was that I hesitated to become responsible for the work that might be done at the theatre when I happened to be away on tour. I probably was a little too much of a precisian in these respects: both these difficulties could easily have been adjusted. However, they turned the scale in deciding me to carry out the more ambitious, but much more risky, venture at the Globe.

The old story of "vaulting ambition that o'erleaps itself." The Manchester venture would probably have been exceedingly profitable, and would have given me the opportunity I desired of founding a school and a stock theatre with a repertoire programme. Rightly or wrongly, I allowed myself to be swayed, not for the first time nor the last, by a conscientious punctiliousness, which is frequently found to exist in what is called the Nonconformist conscience.

I should have been able to arrange a programme for the theatre which would have satisfied my scruples and at the same time proved a profitable undertaking. Thus once again I found myself, in spite of good advice proffered from all quarters, preferring a leap in the dark to a more or less certainty.

Apparently for no adequate reason, except a hankering after martyrology and a habit of straining at gnats and swallowing camels, a friend of mine assures me that I do not possess the gift of attracting money, or of keeping it when I have got it. I think a simpler verdict would find merely that I never realized the value of shillings, was obstinate in the pursuit of any object that I

had once set my mind on, and was lamentably deficient in that heroism which discharges little everyday duties before enjoying itself in shooting arrows at the sun.

This visit to the North laid the foundation of all the manifold support we received for many years from Liverpool and Manchester. In addition to the names mentioned above I can never sufficiently thank Sir John and Lady Grey Hill, Principal Rendall, Messrs Freemantle, Hadwen, Grey, Rae, Rea, Knowles and Gatehouse, Sir Alfred Jones, the Rev. Lund, William Rathbone, Lever, Armitage, Conrade Dressler, Philip Houghton, Bailey, Walker, Behrens, Shuttleworth, and a goodly host.

About this date my father passed on, with the familiar watchword of the unseen hosts on his lips, “More Light!” and a loving farewell word to each.

My father’s death and our departure from Langtons ended the continuous friendly touch with all our kindly hospitable neighbours there—Deacons, Christians, Shields, Cokers, FitzGeralds, Palmers, Seeleys, Greenwoods, Duttons, Turners, Williams, Shelleys, Sumners, Onslows, Moberlies, Booths, Longs, Coveys, Hunts, Blackmores, Newnham Thomas, Corrie, Conybeare, and many another who often chats with me in twilight talks.

Miss Kate Rorke
As "Helena"

CHAPTER XVII

MY FIRST LONDON VENTURE

"Some day you will all be proud of me, and if you like I'll start on my own to-morrow," I said once, in a fit of impatience at some well-deserved rebuke from my all too gentle father.

My father was proud of whatever good deeds I did; but he never showed me, and it was not till afterwards I realized, how much store he had set on any successes I happened to achieve. I did realize how tolerant and helpful he was in moments of failure and distress. I did realize, too, that he was proud of the growing reputation of me and my company; but my father had passed to the bourne from which no traveller returns before my first London effort at the Globe.

For eight years I had prepared for my pet scheme of establishing in London a theatre that should revive the palmy days of the Lyceum and the repertoire seasons of the old stock companies. This undertaking seemed to me the best means of ministering to the ever-growing demands made on the theatre by the developments of drama. To attain this object I had been content to carry on my company on a larger scale of expenditure than the waning interest taken in Shakespeare by managements warranted if there was to be any margin of profit.

Judging from the way that the members of the company at once came into demand, and judging by the numerous successes that have attended their efforts since, I do not seem altogether to have missed my mark. This has been my happy experience on many subsequent occasions. Many of those already referred to in our chronicle went with me to the Globe. Among the newcomers were Kate Rorke, Dorothy Dene, Maud Milton, Rose Mellor, the graceful and comely Ada Ferrar and her sister, tall and fair Mimi Gray, and Miss Townshend, the soprano singer. Strikes among musicians at intermediate rehearsals; carelessness and dishonesty on the part of some of my most trusted subordinates; slanderous misrepresentations made by jealous rivals that deprived me of some of my most efficient artists—notably Ernest Thalberg—all these drawbacks were overcome and forgotten in the veritable triumph secured by *A Midsummer's Night's Dream*.

Mrs Benson had most successfully carried out in the costumes the idea of

merging the fairies into the trees, plants and flowers decorating the stage. The small elves were the spring's choicest flowerets come to life, taking human shape. The wood-nymphs, in their green leaves and green muslin, blended with the graceful shrubs and foliage of Oberon's wooded glade and Titania's bower. Mr Bogetti and his orchestra and Mr Steadman's melodious choir, with the Mendelssohn music, gave the basic rhythm of mortal movement and of fairy dance. Among others were Miss Michelmore, the contralto, Miss Agnes Nicholls, Miss Thornton and Helen Steele; and last—and least in stature—there was Miss Geraldine, especially engaged to play Puck. Among the minor elves was Miss Jessie Bateman. The ingenious Hugh Moss had devised accurate and adaptable scenery on his patent match-box principle, beautifully painted by William Helmsley, child of the woodland and high priest of the trees.

The original intention was to play through our large repertoire. This plan, owing to the smallness of the theatre, had to be somewhat modified. So I started off with an elaborate production of *A Midsummer's Night's Dream*, followed at short intervals by *Hamlet*, *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Othello*.

Handsome, debonair, with a beautiful clear voice and poetic utterance, Otho Stuart as Oberon bewitched many more than his stage victims. Mrs Benson floated midway 'twixt heaven and earth, through an atmosphere of moonbeam, mist and mirth, as the sylphlike Queen Titania. Here, there and everywhere, above, below and all around, darted the nimble Puck. A spark unquenchable, with tireless wings, she flamed through the shadows of the night. This Puck was of more than mortal daring. One night she had forgotten the fastenings requisite for her aerial flight in the final tableau. In a moment she had joined the two ends of the wires, and hung her weight therefrom by hooking on to them with her folded arms. There she swung, twenty feet above the stage, pronouncing her last speech over the heads of the artists and the audience with the wire slowly cutting into the flesh and sinew of her arms. But that is the stuff of which the daughters of the stage are made, and that is but one instance of their staunch courage and endurance.

"How dare these young people come to town and make all these innovations? What right have they to depart from old traditions, and experiment upon us with their new inventions and ideas?" "By the right of their own brains," snapped out Hermann Vezin, in the stalls, to the dismayed grumbler behind him. "They've done what you never do, man, in your criticisms—taken the trouble to think." And the artist colony approved. Walter Crane, Burne-Jones, Alma Tadema, William Hunt, Holman Hunt, Hook and William Morris, and many more, joined in a chorus of praise. But, oh, how slowly did the old moon of ill-success and misplaced effort wane!

First, it took so long for the general public to find out the charm and beauty

of the show. Then Royalty came, and the house began to fill to overflowing. "Your fortune is made," said all my friends. "So glad to hear of the success of the *Dream*," poured in on all sides; "hope it will have a very long run."

"Oh, but we don't want long runs," I said; "our programme is repertoire."

The public accepted the *Dream* as a success, and they flocked to take tickets. Suddenly it was announced that *Hamlet* also was going into the bill. Argal, the *Dream* cannot have been a success; argal, we have been duped; argal, we will ask our money back; argal, the whole thing is a fraud.

"A box for the *Dream*," said an opulent patron, springing out of his hansom-cab.

"Very sorry, sir, but it's *Hamlet* to-night. The *Dream* is on to-morrow night."

"Blast the place!" exclaimed the outraged Mæcenas. "One never knows what's on. Damned if I'll ever come near your theatre again!"

I always feel I should have been able to adjust this difficulty; that I should have been able to make clear to the public, difficult though the task was, that I had come to town on a repertoire, not a long-run, basis; that I had not come to star myself, but to give an all-round performance in which every artist got a chance of giving his best. I failed to make either of these points clear; or else the public are denser than I believe.

It was a great temptation to me to sacrifice my theories for the sake of exploiting a legitimate and well-earned success; but, though I might have made a fortune, I felt I should have been untrue to my text, and so I decided to carry out my original intention. I should have had to bring my season much earlier to a close than I did had it not been for a generous loan—which, alas! I have never repaid—from my brother Godfrey. Again, I delayed making a settlement on my wife and children, until my fortune was lost in my theatrical ventures. Thus I have lost the satisfaction of feeling that I have been true to my theories solely to my own let and hindrance, and I seem to pose as a martyr at the expense of my friends and family.

"Never bow with another man's hat," says the Brazilian proverb.

Another weakness in my administration was that I had expensive artists on my salary list without making use of them. Charles Cartwright, for instance, appeared only a few times—in *Hamlet* as the King, and in *Othello* as Iago, giving in both plays an admirable performance. *The Taming of the Shrew*, with Mrs Benson as Katharina, hardly increased my personal reputation, though it subsequently became a favourite part with myself and my audience.

Mrs Benson scored as Katharina, and again repeated her success as Desdemona and Ophelia. Ophelia she had specially studied in Ireland, on a Christmas visit to an asylum, when a beautiful fair-haired girl who had lost her wits in the process of some unhappy love-affair came singing towards her and

pelted her with flowers. Whatever was the fate of the principals, the company distinctly made good. Miss Mellor, Miss Ferrar, Miss Dene, Miss Rorke, Miss Milton and Miss Geraldine all added to their laurels. Herbert Ross, Stephen Phillips, Gerald Gurney, T. S. Merridew, Arthur Grenville, Alfred Brydone, William Mollison and Athol Forde firmly established their position as notable actors.

I ran my season from December till May. I then let the theatre for the remainder of my tenancy, and prepared to renew my provincial campaign in the autumn.

I have never quite relinquished the idea with which I started. That there is some method in my madness; that, in spite of many mistakes at the Globe, my theory is a sane one, is proved by the numerous repertory efforts that have continued to be started from that time to this. Then followed what is largely the history of Stratford's development, and my preparation for another effort in London.

In all these, as at the Globe, I had staunch support from many friends. Arthur Hutchinson, the late editor of *The Windsor Magazine*; Miss Violet Hunt, the authoress; W. N. Bruce; George Lawrence; Morrison, of *The Morning Post*; Sir E. T. Cook, Sir Sidney Lee, Davenport Adams, André Raffalovich, Andrew Lang, Green, Arnold Bennett, Gollancz, Child, Agate, Hannen Swaffer, Compton Rhodes, Marie Corelli, Stephen Burrowes, Comyns Carr, Bruce, Muspratt, W. T. Stead, Miss Estelle Stead (some time a member of our company), and others, devoted time and energy to helping my project in every way.

I may well say, as many another has said: "In nothing am I richer than the remembrance of my good friends." Among the many literary and artistic folk who gathered round the Globe, Alfred and Holman Hunt, Walter Crane, Alma Tadema, William Richmond, Hook, William Morris, Brett, Sumner, G. B. O'Neill, Burne-Jones, Anning Bell, Rivière, Humphry Ward and Justin McCarthy stand out in my memory.

This visit to town achieved much less than I had hoped. It gained for me many offers that would have more than recouped the outlay, and secured for me wealth and prosperity, had these things been my main object—I mean, in the direction of possessing solid brick-and-mortar interests at the commencement of the modern rise in the value of such theatrical property. But I felt the old qualms about owning a theatre for whose output I could not always be responsible.

I felt that my own pet scheme of a central home and school of poetical and national drama would be jeopardized if I chose the primrose way to heaven. I therefore elected to stumble blindly down the strait and narrow path, which often led near the precipice of hell.

For a brief moment I had taken my seat among the charmed circle of London managers. The theatrical world watched with amused interest what some called a duel between Tree and Benson for the succession to Irving. Either the difficulties of the course, or the limitations of the horse engaged in the race, caused me shortly to drop behind in the contest, and give place to Tree, Alexander, Forbes-Robertson, and others. I think the later theatrical world would agree that, while Irving is still without a successor to fill his place, the mantle of Elijah fell legitimately on the shoulders of his disciple, Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson. Sir Henry himself, before his death, said that the days when such an institution as the Lyceum was possible had passed away for ever. I think myself that he was wrong in this view, and am sufficiently an optimist to believe that a similar temple will again arise.

Often when I had prepared an elaborate production of a Shakespeare play that had not been acted for many years the ground was cut from under my feet by someone, with larger resources at his beck and call, jumping in before me and taking the wind out of my sails.

I was too sensible, however disappointed I might feel, not to acknowledge that this was all in the day's work and part of the fortune of war; but I did not so readily acquiesce in the wholesale exploitation of my ideas, and the business I had invented, or the commandeering of the artists I had trained.

I may have been thin-skinned in this respect; but I received my rebuke when talking on this subject with a celebrated designer. The latter made the remark: "If people can use my work before I can bring it to the market I do not grudge it them. I learned long ago that the law for the artist is that he must give." "Many a heartache would I have been saved," I said, "had I adopted your philosophy earlier in my career."

And so ended the first of many battles. That was forty years ago, and the task is not yet accomplished—the charge given me by Irving and Ellen Terry not yet carried out.

A notable alteration in my surrounding conditions at this time was the advent of a daughter, so that I too learned to appreciate the value of humanity's tender phrase "the children," and all it means in one's life.

Succeeding years were but a repetition of what we have already described, and therefore may be briefly summarized.

In the years following, elaborate productions were *The Tempest*, *Julius Cæsar*, *Richard II.*, *Henry V.*, *Coriolanus*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, the triology of Æschylus (in English), *The Piper*, *Andrea or Mine Enemy*, *The Comedy of Errors*, a play by Stephen Phillips, Masefield's *Pompey the Great*, *Timon of Athens* and *King Lear*; whilst in due course we were the first to achieve the notable feat of playing the whole list of Shakespeare's plays.

In dealing with the Stratford Festival, space does not permit me to enlarge

in detail on the interesting development started by Mr Charles Flower, nursed by him and his wife, assisted by his brothers Edgar and William, and their families, and now conducted by Sir Archibald and Lady Flower. The subject has been fully dealt with in various publications, but I cannot omit all reference to those who, until I left the movement in 1919, contributed so generously to making the Festival a success. A host of names of friends and workers comes to my mind, too long to be inserted here. From first to last, during the time when I was associated with the Memorial Theatre, I was made aware of the great debt that the movement owes to the family of Justins, especially to the distinguished member of that family, Miss Nancy Justins, who occupies for the second time the honourable but arduous position of Mayor of Stratford-on-Avon. The families of Jackson, Murray Smith, Howell, Arbuthnot, Melville, Mrs Leggett, Miss Macleod (from across the sea) and Lady Isobel Margessen will always hold prominent rank among the pillars of the Stratford state. Gilbert Hare, Alfred Ferrand, Cyril Keightley, Asheton Tonge, Graham Browne, Manners Sutton, Harry Caine and Frank Darch were among our prominent recruits in the acting line, whilst Helmsley, the lover of beech-trees, Harker and Le Maitre provided our mimic background. Through the kind offices of the present Lord Sandwich I had the interesting opportunity of bringing together President Hoover and the late Lord Balfour, two leaders of men—one with the outlook of the University, the Courts and the Parliaments of Europe; the other by nature and training a live wire in the workshop of the world. For some seasons the President and his charming wife were distinguished and popular worshippers at Shakespeare's shrine. In the early days my work at Stratford was in conjunction with that of Charles Lowndes, Salt Brassington, and the Rainbow family, now represented by the energetic secretary, Mrs Crowhurst (*née* Alice Rainbow).[11]

Through Mrs Leggett, Miss Macleod and Lord Sandwich came a notable linking up with representative men from America and our Indian Empire. From the very first, Mr Charles Flower had received the sympathy and support of Russell Lowell, Whittier, Whitelaw Reid and their contemporaries. Indian rajahs now began to take an interest and Indian sages to lecture on similar aspirations and the appeal of Shakespeare to the East. Miss Georgie Fyffe, Mr and Mrs Pethick-Lawrence, Miss Neale and Cecil Sharp made Stratford-on-Avon one of the cradles of folk-song and folk-dance, while Hugh Chalmers, Harold Large, and the two Misses Macardle helped further to develop the revival of folk and village drama. Mrs Leo Grindon, Alfred Rodway, Baker, Llewellyn Howell, Mr and Mrs Murray Smith, the Neweys, Sir William Mills, Mrs Hervey, Whitworth Wallis, and others, discoursed on arts and crafts; while on behalf of the human and international side of the scheme Professor Cramb and W. T. Stead stood up and testified among the elders of the

congregation. Meanwhile, Messrs Jack Ashley (the celebrated boxer), Thomson and Davis, and the Boat Club, Football, Athletic, Hockey, Cricket and Musical Associations contributed their quota of muscular and musical Christianity.

Early in 1891, in the interim of an autumn and summer, I found myself engaged, with Robert Courtneidge, Lionel Rignold, the late W. Beveridge, and others, in a movement which resulted in the establishment of the Actors' Association. Though I was not one of the original promoters of the scheme, I was largely instrumental in bringing it to practical completion. I had been associated a few years earlier with a similar attempt, called the Actors' Exchange. Profiting by this experience, I became the Association's envoy in securing the support of our chief managers and actors, and was deputed to approach Irving and enlist his interest.

The very morning of my visit Irving had delivered a scathing denunciation of the whole undertaking to his applauding fellow-managers—"revolutionary," "trade union," "subversive of managerial authority," "destructive to our best traditions of comradeship and understanding," etc., etc. I explained that it was to avoid these calamities that the Association was started; that it was in existence a corporate society, with a definite constitution and programme; that it sought to establish co-operation between managers and artists; that it was an endeavour to avoid the establishment of a trade union in the ranks of our art; that it desired to hold its first meeting in the Lyceum Theatre, and that I was authorized to try to secure Irving as its first President.

This counter evidently surprised the chief of the Lyceum and his two loyal henchmen, Bram Stoker and George Loveday.

Sir Henry replied that he had heard much to alter his views; that if the Association were true to the programme I had put before him it would certainly have his approval. He would send an answer in two days.

Before the two days had passed the Actors' Association received word that Sir Henry would be proud to become its first President, and that he would be glad to place the Lyceum Theatre at our disposal for its first meeting.

We managed to secure the support of Wilson Barrett and John Hare, the Kendals, the Bancrofts, and the outspoken assistance of Edward Terry, versed in municipal and civic administration. Ellen Terry became an enthusiastic adherent. Sir Charles Wyndham, Terriss and Lestocq, and practically all the leading actors and actresses, followed suit.

A crowded meeting at the Lyceum launched the Association on a long and useful career. Much good work was carried out under its auspices, though of late it seems somewhat to have changed its original policy, and lost something of the friendly spirit which at first guided its actions.

I always think that Irving's complete change of front, when faced with the

true facts of the case, furnished but one of many instances of his quick and sympathetic perception of all that tended to advance the true interests of our profession and uphold its dignity. His action was typical of the profession, in which, according to the late Sir George Lewis, no contracts are so loosely drawn up, no contracts so scrupulously kept.

In the same year, 1891, between the winter and the spring tour, I was asked by William Archer to play the part of Rosmer in Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*. Miss Farr and Hudson Carter from the Lyceum were among the cast. Very early differences of opinion became manifest between Archer and myself as to the right way of treating the story. I thought myself a little fettered by what I called "amateur stage-management." Archer complained—with some show of justice—of my carelessness in studying the text. However, the performance went smoothly enough, especially where Miss Farr and Hudson Carter were concerned, in the two representations given at the Vaudeville. And if I, as Rosmer, did not set the Thames on fire, some of my adherents were very favourably impressed by the passion and sincerity of my performance.

Though I have always admitted the absolute sincerity and impartiality of Archer's criticisms, I have sometimes expressed the opinion that his mind was more distinguished by its mathematical precision and logical consistency than its feeling for the artistry and dramatic values of the stage. I feel that he had just reason to be dissatisfied with my performance of Rosmer, and, in spite of my avowed dislike of his theories and point of view, he always treated me with courtesy and consideration.

From *Rosmersholm* to *The Tempest* and my pet part of Caliban was a far cry; a cry that took us first to Stratford, where it was the play of the year; and thence to Liverpool, Manchester, and the other big cities in the kingdom.

One result of the season in the old Globe Theatre—long since demolished, together with Hollywell Street—was to at once make *A Midsummer's Night's Dream* a popular and perennial attraction at all theatres. It introduced a new fashion in the arrangement and the costuming of dances and the ballet and stage representations of nymphs and fairies; it also revived an interest in Hellenic dress and decoration. In all of this, my brother William, as in *Agamemnon*, rendered invaluable assistance.

Very carefully did I study Caliban, always a favourite part. I treated him as a sort of missing-link, and was the first actor, I think, to bring out his responsive devotion to music, songs and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not.

With the music of Taubert, Haydn and Arne, and the scenery beautifully painted by Helmsley, we gave a very complete production of the play. With my wife as Miranda, Stephen Phillips as Prospero, Athol Forde as Trinculo, and George Weir an inimitable Stephano, it attracted a good deal of attention

throughout the country. I may have emphasized too much the athletic side in the various antics—weight-carrying, toe-climbing, headlong descents down a rope from the flies, and the rest of it—but people on the whole were interested and entertained. The dance of the harvesters and the nymphs, and the rendering of Sullivan's "Honour, riches, marriage, blessing" always brought down the house.

The finale, with Caliban's "I'll be wise hereafter and seek for grace," and Ariel's "Where the bee sucks," and his final farewell, and Prospero's breaking of his magic wand and the consigning of his book of spells to the fathomless ocean, sent the audience away with a sympathetic sigh that the vision had ended.

Sir Frank Benson
As "Mark Antony"

In 1891, my mother, after a happy little visit to us in the North of England, on her return to London caught a severe chill, and died. This was a great loss to us all. She had been a singularly beautiful woman, with a natural gift for drawing, and an understanding of art and literature; at the same time she had a

man's power for consistent thought and logical argument. She had been always a particularly close and helpful friend to me. No family had more cause to be grateful to their parents for an example of a wise, gentle and useful life than my brothers and sisters and myself; but it was only after I grew up that I fully appreciated the strength, courage and wisdom of my very kindly, patient father.

The Stratford play for 1892 was *Coriolanus*. Unfortunately, I contracted typhoid fever. For three weeks I had felt unwell, but I had gone on acting, sometimes with a temperature of 103°. The doctor at Newcastle told me in the middle of *Richard III.* that my temperature was 104°. The hallkeeper informed Titherington's successor, Charles Richmond, that he had better look out for another master, as the governor was evidently booked for the Beyond. Richmond at once repeated these words to me, and they formed my chief recollection during three weeks' delirious struggle against the disease. On arriving at Stratford from Newcastle I took to bed, and all through the fever rose to my mind the fixed determination that I must get well in order to falsify the statement of the Newcastle doorkeeper.

I did get well: thanks to a strong constitution; the skill of the doctors, Norbury and Nason; the attention of the Justins family, in whose house I was lodged; and, above all, the sleepless care of my wife, who, in spite of having to keep the theatre going, never went to bed till the crisis was over. The doctors and all agreed that I was bound to die. Mrs Benson said, "No; his work is not yet done," and set to work to save my life. My recovery was hastened by a change to Avon-Bank, where Mrs Charles Flower provided me with a comfortable room, a pleasant garden, and restful Warwickshire drives, that insured my speedy recovery to full health and strength. A further convalescent week at Margate, in which I put on a stone weight in the course of six days; a restful return to the new home we had set up at Maidenhead; a visit to Domum at Winchester; a canvass at Mid-Oxford for my brother Godfrey and his successful return to Parliament as member for Woodstock, found me in the autumn playing football and hockey and working thirteen hours a day for the stage with all my old energy.

Two months after the London doctor had pronounced my illness as hopeless, I walked into his consulting-room in such aggressive health that the doctor did not recognize his former patient.

I certainly needed all the strength that I could gather together, for the years ahead were strenuous indeed.

Merry Wives, *Coriolanus* (which was given in a summer season instead of the spring), *Julius Cæsar*, *The Tempest*, *Twelfth Night*, *Richard II.*, *Henry V.*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Macbeth* were all prepared with a view to presentation in London; and in all of these performances it was fated that I

should be forestalled, or hindered, by some elaborate and long-run production of one or other of them. Just a rub on the green, and taken as such.

The next production after *The Tempest* was *Julius Cæsar*, with Mollison as Caius, Louis Calvert as Brutus, myself as Mark Antony and Asche as Casca. Some success it achieved at Manchester and elsewhere. In those days I worked up the crowd in the forum scene to a great climax, some of the best actors in the company being among the citizens—Weir, Nicholson, Clarence, Quartermaine, Ainley, Whitby, Asheton Tonge.

On the raging throng, with stones and staves and broken benches, tearing their hair, casting their treasures of bracelets, jewels and offerings into the flames, the curtain came down, with Antony in golden armour and drawn sword urging them, from the pinnacle of the pyre, to sally forth and drive the murderers from Rome. The shouts and flames and gestures of the maddened women and the struggling men round the burning body ended the scene in tumults of applause.

One management that tried to imitate nearly burned down their theatre, so had to end the finale in their own way, not in mine. I dare say it was just as effective, but I was glad that this time my inventions remained my own, intact.

The scenery had been designed by Alma Tadema, for the Oxford production in which Arthur Bourchier and Harry Irving took part. Repainted and reinforced by me, it formed a very fitting background for the interesting efforts of various representatives of Brutus and Cassius. This list included Otho Stuart, Frank Rodney, H. Athol Forde, Arthur Whitby, Oscar Asche, H. Warburton, Cyril Keightley, Murray Carrington, Harry Ainley, Matheson Lang, and others. The severity of the Roman lictors and the pathos and the tenderness of Brutus and Cassius were occasionally relieved by the eccentricities of the crowd. “Now, lads,” I shouted, “be natural; talk and behave as though you were in the street.” “All right, governor.” At night sounded in audible tones, as the curtain rose, discovering Cæsar’s body on the bier: “Tommy, lad, Cæsar’s dead.” “You’re a bloody liar!” “ ’Struth, saw it in *The Evening News*.” Final and overwhelming retort: “The *News* be a bloodier liar than even you, lad.”

At that time the company were truly sons of Anak. Matheson Lang, Hignett, Fitzgerald, Asche, Lyall Swete, Vibart, Brydone, Dainer, Francis Hastings (fast bowler for Warwickshire), Warlock, Keightley, Worsley Roberts and Stephen Phillips were in stature above the size of ordinary men.

Then we had the lighter-made but “take-on-at-a-minute’s-notice-size-no-immunity” fighters like Arthur Grenville and Oliver Clarence. The latter was the hero of a pleasing incident on Trinity College football ground. A plucky and pugnacious half-back, with his curly light hair he was at first described by some fair ladies looking on as “Dear little angel-face.” But in the course of the

game he was hurled to the ground head first in a puddle at their feet, and his remarks on extricating himself from the quagmire changed the opinion of his admirers: “Oh, what a profane, foul-mouthed little devil! Really shocking!” Then there was Langley, who afterwards, as a magistrate in South Africa, nailed a man’s hand to the card-table with his knife to convict him of cheating; Stenhouse, the sturdy and solid full-back of thirteen stone; genial Graham Browne, from North Ireland, with all the speed and toughness of his race; and last, but not least, as a semi-detached friend, super, and intelligence department, Henry Harrison, the stripling, Parnell’s protector, and the hero of many an election fray—incidentally as good a full-back as any professional or amateur in the three kingdoms. R. W. Hignett, too, was an athlete much above the average, and over six feet. Singularly quiet, retiring and gentle, he earned the nickname of “Pansy,” from the almost lady-like refinement and softness of his speech and manner. We asked if he ever played cricket. Sometimes, he said, and he would be glad if he could help to make up an eleven. He then quietly knocked up sixty-seven off two County pros., and bowled, fielded and kept wicket, when wanted, with the same quiet efficiency. He had played in the Seniors Match at Oxford, had rowed in his college eight; and was an A1 half-back at Association and hockey. To listen to him, you would imagine that he knew nothing about any of these pastimes; to look at him you would think he wouldn’t and couldn’t hurt a fly. In reality, he was prodigiously strong, and I have seen him go through the Clifton Villa team cutting over all who got in his way till he landed the ball safely into the net. They had played it rough on him for some time, and at last he didn’t like it.

There was the stalwart Whitby, brother of the celebrated fast bowler, and himself a County half-back at Rugby, together with the active Lawrence, R. Legge, and Clarke, who played cricket for Gloucestershire. The company, at one time or another, acted, kicked, scrimmaged, rowed and hurled themselves into favour with their Irish audiences for many years.

Want of space has crowded out of the above paragraphs Messrs Henry Herbert, Gerald K. Souper, Gerald Lawrence, Carl Leyel, Soper, Paul Benton, Arthur Machen, J. F. Graham, and many others.

About this time Mr H. V. Neilson joined the company—a young Lancastrian of wide shoulders and strong frame, and with the firm jaw that betokens the determination that is such a marked characteristic of Lancashire and Yorkshire. Modest and retiring about his own achievements and abilities, it took us some time to find out that he was a tower of strength in the water-polo team, that he held the record time for fifty yards swimming, and had been the mainstay of a Manchester team that successfully disputed supremacy with the invincible Tyars and his companions. It took us still longer to find out that the occasional rough-and-ready method he adopted screened an extra sensitive,

kind and tender-hearted nature. This the writer had many opportunities of testing when, after thirty years of Shakespeare, Ibsen, Shaw, Galsworthy, Ashley Dukes, Masefield, and numerous English and foreign dramatists, he took charge of a final effort on my part to get somewhat nearer the accomplishment of the task I had set myself from the first moment that I went on the stage.

To the above names must be added Mesdames Cissie Saumarez (Mrs Whitby), Helen Haye, Rose Murray, Aicken, Mona Oram, Achurch, Rose Norreys, Nellie de Silva, Lilian Braithwaite, Florrie Gretton, Leah Hanman, Lucy Hare, Isadora Duncan, Minnie Hawkins, Elder, Wetherall and Constance Robertson, and Messrs Darby Foster, R. H. Forster, Basil and Guy Rathbone, Gerald Lawrence, Charles Bibby, Gerald Ames, Manship, Merrivale, Howard Gody, Arthur Phillips, Hanman Clarke, Leonard Buttress, Henry Herbert, Randle Ayrton, Laurence Irving, Garnet Holmes, Matheson Lang, Harry Farmer, Harry Stafford, Charles Quartermaine, Warlock, H. Hardwick and Balliol Holloway, worthy forerunners of numerous talented artists who joined our ranks in later years. Michael Balling, Christopher Wilson and Churton Collins were our prominent musicians.

Miss Lily Brayton
As "Portia"

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[11] A special book has been published, with a Preface by William Howells, dealing with the Festival efforts of the town and the Governors. In its pages names occur of many of our friends and fellow-workers in this field—among them councillors, aldermen, and citizens—Pearce, Priest,

Bailey, Ballance, Galloway, Whitcombe, Knight, Linell, Fox, Winter, Archer and Grein, and a regiment of workers, loyal and strenuous, in Festival, Peace, Industry and the Great War.

CHAPTER THE LAST

When I passed through the stage-door of the Lyceum in 1887, as a beginner, I promised myself that one day I would return as its manager. The day arrived.

As I made my later entry into the theatre I told the hallkeeper, Barry, the genial Irishman, how I had pictured it all eighteen years earlier, though I could not expect him to give the same description of the new manager as he had given of the Chief to the tenderfoot.

Sir Henry had been obliged to let go to a certain extent his hold on the Lyceum, which had now passed into the hands of a company, under the management of Comyns Carr, art critic, supporter of the Grosvenor Gallery and various artistic undertakings, and the wittiest after-dinner speaker in London.

Poor Irving, accidents, fire and ill-health had of recent years made sad inroads on his resources. Time had naturally brought in its train a severance of the long artistic partnership between himself and Ellen Terry, and, for the moment, there was no one to take her place. How could there be? It has not yet been filled. It never will be, as she filled it.

My pleasure at returning to my earliest stage-schoolroom was enhanced by the kindly wire of greeting and good wishes that I received from my two principal leaders—Sir Henry Irving and Dame Ellen Terry.

"A great success" was the universal verdict on *Henry V.*, and for a moment my hopes of achieving my dearest wishes ran high.

Although the takings for the first eight weeks were on a large scale, the expenses of producing eight plays in eight weeks, on the top of the loss incurred by a fire at Newcastle, prevented there being any adequate margin of profit, and it was only through the generous support of Otho Stuart Andreae that the season was carried through for the advertised four months.

Sir William and Lady Mills, Sir Henry Lawrence, Mr and Mrs Alec Murray Smith, Sir John Gray Hill, Otho Stuart Andreae, Mrs Singleton, Lady Violet Greville, the Howell family, and Edward and Robert Moon were among the many stanch upholders of the Shakespearian flag, and with their assistance and support I formed, that summer, a brief-lived organization called "The National Drama Company."

But I must return for a moment to the fortunes of the Lyceum.

Henry V., in which the late Isadora Duncan made her debut on the stage as

a dancer in the camp scene, was followed by *Richard II.*, during the performance of which George Wyndham turned to Large and said: "I now understand why you claim that Benson is something of a genius"; *Antony and Cleopatra*, in which Mrs Benson won encomiums from James Agate; *Twelfth Night*, in which Lily Brayton and Oscar Asche attracted the attention from the public which they have held ever since; *A Midsummer's Night's Dream*, from which Weir, the incomparable low comedian, was absent ill, his part being taken at short notice by Lyall Swete, the ever-ingenious and many-sided artist; Kitty Loftus, active dancer, merry urchin and true-hearted poetic actress that she was, distinguished herself as Puck, a laughing, irresistible imp of mischief; Alfred Brydone, George Fitzgerald, Kay Souper, Hignett, Miss Ferrar and H. O. Nicholson, with those mentioned above, and Miss Ormerod and Miss Michelmore, the singers, completed a cast that with an orchestra and chorus of over a hundred, conducted by Christopher Wilson, gave an even more notable performance than that at the Globe ten years before; *Hamlet*, in its entirety, *The Rivals* and *The Tempest* completed a programme of performances any one of which would have run at a profit for a considerable length of time.

It is sufficient for my purpose here, however, to indicate how I again failed to adjust the difficulties arising from establishing a repertoire season for a public accustomed to long runs.

Good as the booking had been and, in spite of the War, continued to be, the popular parts of the theatre were not always as full as could have been wished. The season of Lent and the war-time no doubt interfered, but the main difficulty remained, of adequately advertising repertoire, and concentrating the attention of the public on a changing bill. My receipts for this visit were good, and the Press on the whole were very encouraging. The excellence of the company is evinced by the fact that sixty-eight of them and their successors were playing prominent parts in the London theatres in the year 1920.

Being fully occupied at the Lyceum, I had to send down another company to do *Pericles* and other plays at the Stratford-on-Avon Festival, and with the help of John Coleman and Hermann Vezin the Festival was carried through. I think the impression was confirmed that *Pericles* was a play that has rightly been consigned into the region reserved for the "unwept, unhonoured and unsung."

After the Easter holidays *The Tempest* and *Richard II.* were given at the Lyceum, till Madame Duse, one of the world's greatest actresses, commenced a summer season with *Magda*.

Impoverished, but undaunted, I, with Large, set to work to organize "The National Drama Company." We started work with a capital of six thousand pounds, two thousand pounds being paid for goodwill, scenery, wardrobe and effects. It carried through a tour of a year of the principal towns, and ended

with a season at the Comedy Theatre, London, conducted on the same scale and system as the Lyceum.

Unfortunately, Large made the mistake of sharing the theatre with another company, each company giving six performances a week. This proved disastrous to the very interesting season that we carried through from December till May, our programme including the Lyceum plays, with the exception of *The Tempest* and the *Dream*, for which were substituted *Henry IV*. (Part II.), *As You Like It* and *The Merchant of Venice*.

The Comedy season ran its appointed length, though in its course "The National Drama Company" came to an end, the shareholders quite naturally declining to carry on at a loss. Hamilton Fyfe, on behalf of the shareholders, at the final meeting, expressed their pleasure at the work accomplished.

It was also generally admitted that a satisfactory issue might have been arrived at if the successful performance of *The Merchant of Venice*, in which Miss Calhoun played Portia, had not been interrupted by the death of Queen Victoria.

Photo by Press Portrait Bureau]

Mr Matheson Lang

This was one of the rubs on the green that have somewhat chequered my career, as, naturally, the death of the Queen and the anxiety of the Boer War reduced the inclination of the public for theatre-going to zero.

To add to my difficulties, at this time I had for a while to be content with a milk diet, and to take more rest than usual, as my neglect of regular meals had given rise to some temporary digestive trouble, brought on by working during meals.

As an unforgettable and most prized memory in my professional life stands out the loyal friendship of my company and the old Bensonians. To meet the exigencies of the occasion the dramatic company voluntarily formed

themselves into a commonwealth—on condition that I should sell no more pictures, furniture, plate or household effects—to keep the season on for the stipulated time. And so, on a reduced scale of expenditure, but with no slackening of discipline or whole-hearted service, we continued.

Miss Genevieve Ward, a true artist, and true friend for many years, gave a very noble and tender rendering of Volumnia in a rather notable performance of *Coriolanus*.

The final curtain was rung down on the appointed day at the Comedy Theatre, amid much enthusiasm.

During the Lyceum season was instituted by the old Bensonians our yearly dinner. In this way grew up, informally, the society of freemasonry and comradeship calling themselves "Bensonians," christened and baptized. The first meeting was opened by an eloquent speech by J. Comyns Carr.

At one of these celebrations my wife and I were the recipients of two large and very beautifully executed loving-cups, from which yearly the fellowship imbibe new strength and endurance.

Again had Otho Stuart Andreae come to the rescue. He entered into partnership with me at the end of the Comedy season, and actually succeeded in making the audited accounts show a very handsome profit; but Otho Stuart was that rare combination an artist and a good man of business.

Many of the company had found promotion and wider opportunities at His Majesty's, under Tree, the St James's, the Garrick, and other leading theatres. Prominent among these were Henry Ainley, Charles Quartermaine, O. B. Clarence, Lily Brayton, Oscar Asche and Henry Jalland. A sufficient account has been given of their activities on tour in former pages. During the next five years sometimes as many as three Benson companies were "on the road" with Shakespeare.

Matheson Lang, Dorothy Green and Hutin Britton were conspicuous favourites in a successful West Indian tour, organized by A. Smith Pigott, the loyal friend and indefatigable worker who succeeded to the duties of Harry Jalland. A worthy successor he proved himself, thorough and capable.

In the light of subsequent events we may notice the establishment in the company of a small section of volunteers who devoted their spare time to drill and military exercises in case their services should be required during the threatening times of 1900-1902.

We may note also the growth of the Benson School, numbering among its first pupils Dorothy Green, Olive Noble, Hutin Britton, Walter Hampden, Nancy Price, Moffat Johnson and Harry Caine, whose successful careers were imitated by a succession of promising students.

The normal round of Shakespeare's plays was varied by our undertaking to produce at the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin, Yeats' *Diarmuid and Grania*, a

beautiful Irish legend dramatized by George Moore and W. B. Yeats, with music written by Sir Edward Elgar. The music was very beautiful, and the play full of poetic thought. I do not quite know to what extent my wife and I were good in the title-rôles, or whether the play was not sufficiently dramatic for the virile Dublin audience; but it failed to attract as much as Shakespeare, though it certainly aroused a great deal of interest, and gave much pleasure to the performers, and the public who witnessed it. I suppose the veracious chronicler will have to write it down as only a qualified success.

The enthusiastic poet, W. B. Yeats, in front of the curtain at the end of the first night's performance, seized the opportunity to indulge in an invective against English actors, English companies and all their works. His eloquent periods were abruptly cut short by Mrs Benson grasping his coat-tails and dragging him back on to the stage. Three-parts Irish herself, she volubly protested that we were an English company, that at his invitation we had crossed the stormy St George's Channel, and had done our best, according to our capacity, for his play. We could not possibly allow him to step forward on our stage and insult us and our nation. Of course he saw that he had made a mistake, and, like the Irish gentleman he is, reappeared with chastened brow to qualify his remarks and make the *amende honorable*. At the ensuing supper at the Shelbourne, peace and harmony reigned, bringing in their train Miss Glossop Harris and Miss Haidee Gunn, who soon became valuable artists in the Bensonian band.

I was talking over these things the other day with Henry Ainley. "You didn't teach us, though you never knew it. Rodney and Weir did. We knew what you wanted and tried to do it. You were so fearfully aloof and detached," he said.

"Thank you; I don't think I am so much now. A teacher can only teach by showing the student that he, the teacher, is still more keen to learn than the taught. One thing I taught you, that if your body wasn't fit, and your nervous and muscular energy kept up, you could neither be quick nor graceful nor powerful nor natural, nor anything else that may become an actor and a man. I always say that what I can teach, or try to teach, is nothing. The opportunity I give you of learning is everything. Possibly I, or your fellow-students, or the older members of the company, above all the audience, can help to bring out what you have in you, or show you that you have mistaken your vocation."

"You're right at least about the other actors," said Ainley. "One day I heard you, and then I understood some of the Benson crowd. You used to make us terribly angry, but we never let anyone else curse you. That privilege was reserved for ourselves. But you never knew half the devilry that went on, and the other half you pretended not to see. You made us work like blazes; you didn't spare us, and you didn't spare yourself. You never said you were tired,

so, of course, we couldn't. After rehearsal, you rushed us all to football, or cricket, or hockey. Perhaps, after all, this strenuous regime did sometimes save us from getting into trouble."

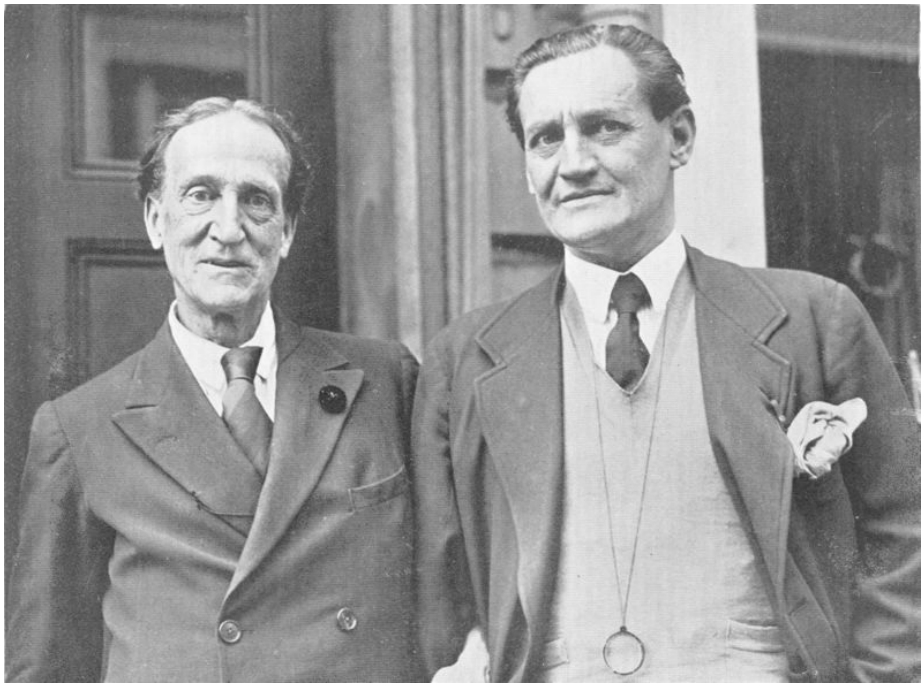

Photo by London News Agency Ltd.]

Sir Frank Benson and Mr Henry Ainley

"Yes," I answered; "you all thought I was mad on athletics, and said I acted with my muscles instead of my mind; but that's one of the theories whereon I was sane. Of course sometimes, after a hard game, one had lost magnetism, electricity, vitality, or personal charm—or whatever it is that grips an audience. For myself, I never liked playing before Hamlet or Othello. But at other times the game made one play fresh and joyously, seemed to increase force."

"Yes, you forced us more or less into a fairly healthy routine of exercise for mind and body. Rodney was the most finished actor of his day on the stage. He would take hours with a beginner, helping him to learn the best way of making an exit or entrance. And 'Jarge' Weir would show you how it had been done by the old school. I said one morning, very cocky: 'I know all my words, George.' 'Yes, laddie, but d'ye know how to use them?' Weir was something apart from all of us, one of the Olympians on the heights, whose home was in the peaks towards which we Bensonians humbly and laboriously sought to

climb."

"Anyway," I retorted, "I gave you the opportunity of learning, of trying your wings in the best drama in the world—Shakespeare before that great master, an English audience."

"You did that right enough," Ainley replied; "and Oscar Asche completed the lesson. He came up to where I stood trembling in the wings, at a rehearsal, and growled out: 'Never mind what you're told; if you make that entrance as you did just now, you'll queer my best speech, and if you queer my best speech I'll punch your cherubic jaw.' Swete's ingenuity and artistic elaboration set one to think furiously, and there was always 'Old Uncle' [Alfred Brydone] coming up and pushing one off the stage if one was a bit nervous or fluffy. 'Uncle, I've dried up, what shall I do?' 'Get off. I'll do it on my own, you'll only spoil it.' "

"Well, it was all very good for you."

"Possibly; but we didn't think so at the time. Nor did we like it when after Lang and Quartermaine and I had fought fiercely in the dressing-room over our claims to the first officer in *Antony and Cleopatra*, you gave it to Harcourt Williams. We kicked him with one accord, and then lent him our wigs, and made him up, to show we bore him no malice. Do you remember the man who stayed only two days—just long enough to black Herbert's eye, because Herbert would not let him wear a morion and a breastplate in *Macbeth*? I shall never forget the lordly way in which you handed him his cap at rehearsal in the morning, and told him to take it and the head it concealed from the contemptuous gaze of the public, off the stage and out of our sight for ever. The best of the joke was that it was Whitby's cap you gave him, a shabby bit of homespun that the company had been trying to suppress for two years. Whitby was going to protest; but we all quickly sat down on him, and tied his head up in Rodney's overcoat."

Sir Frank Benson
From a drawing by R. G. Eves

“Dear old ‘Granny’! Do you remember the little comforts he used to travel with, about which we always chaffed him and called him mollycoddle?” I remarked. “We didn’t know till later that he’d been under sentence of death

from cancer for five years. True heroism, surely? Doomed to leave the profession he loved, just as he was coming into his kingdom, yet never complaining. An artist, and thorough to the smallest detail. Never sparing himself time or trouble that might improve his work; always gentle, kind and forgiving, loyal, brave and strong. Always considerate, ready to help everyone who asked his sympathy or his aid. He was the backbone and mainstay of our company for many years, and his farewell words on the stage took that form of expression he most cared for. George Weir—'Laddie,' the boys called him—was one of the greatest actors I've ever seen, a simple-hearted genius with the God-given power of moving men and women to tears or laughter. Never properly appreciated in the big world, he was beloved by every audience that ever saw him and were quickened by his wonderful art. A household word in every theatre we visited; children, animals and birds loved him, and flowers, sunshine, brooks and meadows smiled at him as he trod his single-minded road among them. They seemed to know the world was better for his workmanship, and gave him in return some of their laughter to use, a touch of 'God's Nature' upon the stage."

"Yes," Ainley concluded, "that was what made the spirit of our Bensonian brotherhood."

Under Otho Stuart's administration a second company, with Frank Rodney and Mrs Benson playing the leading parts, was dispatched in order to meet the growing demands for the Benson representations; while Miss Olive Noble and Miss Dorothy Green played leading rôles with the main company.

Shortly after this, Otho Stuart was arranging to take over the Adelphi Theatre for a season—as he hoped—of successful runs with a Benson company. The company he got together included Oscar Asche, Lily Brayton, Lyall Swete, Matheson Lang, H. B. Irving, Walter Hampden, and other old friends, making a very strong combination.

Some distorted cell in my brain seems to have kept me still unable to make wise business decisions or practicable adjustments of slightly different points of view. In this case, I was genuinely afraid that the comparatively long run of a popular play for Otho Stuart, not unnaturally pleased, might lead him to weaken on some of the theories for which I had already sacrificed so much. I also feared lest my obstinate attachment to my own methods and principles might jeopardize the friendship and affection which I had for Stuart, and which I valued far more than financial or theatrical success. This all sounds very foolish and weak-kneed on my part, but it is characteristic of that inconsistent obstinacy which has often puzzled me and my friends.

I realize now how much I missed on this occasion, and am the more annoyed with myself because subsequently I considerably modified my attitude on this point.

In the course of the Adelphi season referred to, the plays were so beautifully mounted, the long-run system so modified, that the performances never became lifeless and stale.

Oscar Asche and Lily Brayton were not the only ones whose careers were substantially advanced by Otho Stuart's Adelphi season. H. B. Irving added to his reputation by his performance of Hamlet; while Walter Hampden, who played the part when the above-named fell ill, might almost regard this as the starting-point of the career which he has made for himself in the States as a leading actor-manager. Matheson Lang, in *Tristram and Isolde*, also further strengthened the good impression he had made on the public.

Here we must leave a life's programme—only half accomplished, indifferently carried out—at the point where, after a very enjoyable visit to Canada and the United States, a promising, prosperous summer Festival at Stratford, on the largest scale yet attempted, was cut short by the Great War.

The American tour, the pageants, the Great War, the visit to South Africa, where record business for any company was achieved, may form the subject-matter of another book.

Among pleasant memories of Africa and America for me stand out the great kindness I experienced at the hands of the Hoovers in America and of General Smuts and his wife in South Africa; and the hospitable, sympathetic reception that I met with in both countries.

Very rich I count myself in the number of my friends and supporters.

And, after years of comparative failure, I am still as full of optimism and high hopes as when I started.

The story of these memoirs is now drawing to the close of its first stage. Neither time nor space—nor my ability as a writer—permits of my dealing with what were to me perhaps the most interesting phases of my life—namely, tours in America and Africa; experiences on the Western Front (first with my wife's canteen for soldiers; secondly, as driver of an ambulance collecting the wounded in the firing line); and, finally, my present undertaking with Mr H. V. Neilson. Leaning against the seventy-first milestone of the appointed road, on looking back, the writer is amazed and ashamed of the many mistakes and sins of commission and omission that accompany his halting footsteps. On looking forward, towards the end of the journey, he senses anew a firm conviction of the joy of life's intensity, and a confidence in its continuity. He feels failure and success matter little, that it is the effort and the aim that count. Under the friendly guidance and management of Mr H. V. Neilson he feels that the quest will continue and the goal be ultimately reached. The passing years have brought him many changes of fortune, but life has been good to him, better than he has often made it for others. He appreciates the truth of what his

French fellow-soldiers used to say at the War: for good comrades no parting, no farewell; in life or in death, *toujours au revoir*—always to meet again. As the sun sinks in his red glory of the west the writer seems to visualize, written in letters of gold across the purple firmament, the rhythm of his first Greek play—"τοδ᾽ εν ωικατω." Pass on, friend, all's well.

APPENDIX A

THE SAUTMARKET

Before leaving Glasgow I had the pleasure of renewing my acquaintance with an old New College friend, who had been a first-class oarsman in the Varsity Eight, and was now busy as a school inspector. Under his guidance I went down to visit the Auld Sautmarket, long since swept away. This was accounted one of the sights of Glasgow on a Saturday night. It was a hot-bed of all the crime in Glasgow, the Alsatia of that polyglot port, where the poorest of the Scots, the rowdiest of the Irish, and the scum of foreign cities were wont to hold high carnival till three or four in the morning.

A demoniacal revel of drink and dissipation was carried on in the narrow streets and the tumble-down hovels on either side. Every gas-jet, candle and lamp were alight: open doors and windows contributed to the ghastly glare and helped to destroy any feeling of peace, privacy or home. To the accompaniment of cornets, tin-whistles, fiddles and bagpipes danced and drank a motley crowd, of every age, sex and nationality. Children of four seemed to contend with young girls, buxom wenches, sturdy fishwives, bearded beldames of ninety, and boys and men of every age and clime, as to who should carry the unholy spirit of wickedness and misrule furthest. Amid oaths and many-tongued obscenities, shrill cries, curses, shrieks of pain and meaningless laughter, the crowd surged this way and that way in a rhythmic measure of hell. Three policemen would occasionally, with difficulty, force their way through the maddened, reeking throng. From the upper windows scantily clad hoydens shouted lewd invitations and oaths to the crowd below.

A stone crashes through a window. A broken bottle clinks against the kerb. There is an outcry against some arrest by the police, an attempt at rescue; reinforcements are rushed up, to be received with blows from fists and shovels, sticks and stones and bottles. Suddenly a shrill cry of agony, the flash of a knife; a figure furtively runs away for its life, scuttling along under cover of whatever shadow is to be found. The mob and the police are at one now, the tide is turned. One policeman is left, unmolested, to take his captive to the police station; the other two start off in pursuit of the fugitive. The women lead with a savage yell in the race for blood. It is as much as Hobbs and I can do to prevent the human pack trampling the poor victim, who has tottered out, and

collapsed in the middle of the road with a pathetic cry of: “Jamie, come back, come back! I love you. Why did ye do for me?” A murmur from the crowd: “It’s James MacDougal: he’s done her in.” “It wasna Jamie,” moans the girl, lying for her lover, as she faints in compassionate arms. The policeman who had stayed on the spot binds a wound on the right shoulder from which blood is pouring. The din dies down for a moment, as if the orchestra had stopped. The song and dance have given place to the tragic climax of the scene.

The police have blown their whistles and are now some thirty strong. Jamie, mad with fear of the women-fiends behind him, has run straight into the arms of the reinforcements, and is now brought back to the centre of the stage: poor, wizen, ill-grown, stunted Jamie, nineteen years old, with the face and frame of ninety, and a soul smothered in the reek of the gutter and the gin-palace.

Down the street they hurry him to the station, amid the groans and snarls of his companions and their tribe. Behind him follows his victim, carried gently by four of the Glasgow constables.

The police who had been hastily summoned return to their beats. Clink, and again a bottle of whisky is broached against a wall. Music and song take up the strain again, and pandemonium reigns supreme beneath the wondering stars.

“She will not die,” says a medical student who is standing by.

“Perhaps it would be better if she did,” says a voice: “just fifteen, and she’ll be a mother in three months.”

The scene seemed to last but a few seconds. The pool of blood still shimmered purple in the roadway, the bier and its burden had hardly turned the corner, when the mad delirium, the dance of death, was again in full swing. Hobbs and I strolled on through the curious crowd, who whispered among themselves: “ ’Ware ’tec! ’Ware ’tec!”—sometimes timid, sometimes threatening. They were hungry to feel alive, hungry to shake off and assert themselves against the shackles and the torpor of their squalid slum. One by one the babies fell asleep, doubtless to be sorted out and collected late on Sunday afternoon; while the lovers sank into drunken slumber in each other’s arms. Only the fighting Irishwoman of eighty was steady enough on her feet at four A.M. to dance an Irish jig and, with a pipe still lighted, gaze defiantly in the face of the rising sun.

“Good-night, Hobbs,” said I. “I’ve learnt something to-night for the stage —something of Humanity.”

“I, too,” said Hobbs, “have seen something that my schools will make impossible in the future. Good-night.”

APPENDIX B

FREEDOM OF STRATFORD AND KNIGHTHOOD AT DRURY LANE

On a shelf devoted to medals, athletic trophies, and the like, stands in close proximity to the Croix de Guerre a box of cunningly carved oak, part of the old woodwork of Stratford Church. Within rests a scroll, blazoned with red and gold and blue, conferring the Freedom of ancient Stratford. The sight of it conjures up visions of grave seigneurs and gracious burghers in the well-known Council Chamber; then of a crowd of friendly faces and kindly smiles, hand-grips strong and gentle, and a shout of cheering around the steps of the Memorial Theatre. Many of the faces I can see before me clearly at this moment—Aldermen and Councillors Fox, Pearce, Bird, Winter, Ballance, Everard, Priest, Bullard, Canon Hodgson, and many other friends, including the Chairman and the family of the Founder's Kin. Many of the voices are silent, but the words remain, words of kindness and citizen comradeship, blending with the melody of the nightingales across the river, the glad song of the mavis and the merle, and the low murmur of the Avon as it whispers and winds between the Cotswolds to the western sea. Some of the faces, care-free and kindly, look through the mist of vanished years; others I still meet on occasional visits to my fellow-townsmen. Ever since has glowed in my heart, in storm or snow or scorching heat, the gladness and the comfort of that English summer day. Some years after a similar scene is enacted when my wife and I return from the Tercentenary Performance at Drury Lane. On the previous day, at the Old Drury, His Majesty had graciously conferred on me the honour of knighthood. The fact that when summoned to the Royal Box I was made-up in stage-apparel for the corpse of Julius Cæsar—with blue lips and sunken eyes and a long Roman night-shirt—though it evoked at first a genial smile from the Royal Party, did not lessen the solemn feeling of reverent homage with which I received the accolade from a sword kindly fetched by Mr Arthur Collins from Messrs Simmons, the costumiers. The stroke bestowed by one "every inch a King" seemed to speak of Stratford, of Shakespeare, of the New Empire, of strenuous endeavour rather than successful achievement, of an urge to strive to the uttermost until the end. It was in this sense that our friends in the High Street outside the Shakespeare

Hotel, next door to New Place, welcomed the promotion of their Freeman and his wife.

APPENDIX C

CONCERNING OUR TRAVELLING SCHOOL

Life is the great examiner for all of us. The workshop and the world are the ultimate authorities for the conferring of degrees, and therefore it is only with certain qualifications that school and examinations are serviceable. Especially is this true of Dramatic Art, and yet in some cases standards and preliminary training have proved helpful to the student artist.

Bearing these notions in mind, some years ago we started, in connection with our Dramatic Company, classes for Elocution, Dancing, Fencing, Callisthenics, Rehearsal, and general technique. We thought that in this way free development of individual talent on the stage at night could be usefully supplemented by the more formal process of the classroom.

We were lucky in securing the experience, advice and assistance of M. Paul Berton, who had been trained in the Conservatoire and the methods of the Théâtre Français, and also of Miss Genevieve Ward.

Miss Genevieve Ward frequently played Queen Margaret and Volumnia with us. I take this opportunity of recording our grateful appreciation of her grand work in these parts, and of her kind assistance, by precept and practice, to our students.

The French method, of course, is different from our own, but they use a trained system of breathing, elocution and movement, in which subject, since the decay of the repertoire companies and stock seasons, our English stage is often sadly deficient.

The French audience is not so tolerant of crude and amateur efforts when they masquerade and claim to be acknowledged by the public as mature professional work.

I hope that I do not flatter myself when I think that our system of school theory and stage practice has proved beneficial to many artists who have distinguished themselves. Certain it is that those eager young students formed the nucleus of a very animated and interesting stage crowd.

Again, as a general rule, I found that those who had some kind of preliminary training were more quickly advanced, and sooner became capable of playing responsible parts, than those who commenced perfectly raw from the beginning.

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Transcriber’s Notes

The spelling of Otho Stuart Andreae has been corrected throughout. Other minor typographic errors were corrected.

Hyphenation was changed to the most common form.

The footnotes have been renumbered sequentially throughout the entire book.

[The end of *My Memoirs* by Sir Frank Benson]