

ALL THE WORLD MY STAGE.
LIFE'S BUT A WALKING SHADOW

----- a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more.

THE REMINISCENCES OF A SHAKESPEAREAN ACTOR-MANAGER
IN FIVE CONTINENTS

by

ALLAN WILKIE, C. B. E.

"There is no book so bad, but something good may be found in it."

Cervantes.

"HEUREUX QUI, COMME ULYSSE, A FAIT UN BEAU VOYAGE"

DU BELLAY.

PREFACE

It was about forty years ago that I saw my first Shakespeare play. With a group of fellow art-students, I sat in the front row of the gallery of the Theatre Royal, Christchurch, New Zealand. We had skipped our afternoon life class and, since three o'clock, had waited on an iron staircase in a cold wind for the early doors to open. The play was Hamlet, the house was full and the Dane was Allan Wilkie. Thirty years later, when I produced the play, I remembered how, at the climax of the Mousetrap scene, Hamlet had stood before the King and had flung his script high in the air and how the leaves had fluttered down in a crescent as the curtain fell. When, so long afterwards, I asked my young Hamlet to repeat this business, the years ebbed back on a wave of nostalgia and gratitude and there I was, on a wooden bench, clapping my palms sore, on what was perhaps the most exciting night I was ever to know in the theatre.

What would one think now if one could re-visit that glimpse of the moon? Impossible to say. In retrospect, it seems to me that the production had a thrust and drive and an absence of tarting-up that contemporary direction seldom achieves. I know there must have been a determined respect for the text since the actor-manager was also a Shakespearian scholar and a stickler in such matters. I know that the Ophelia was the best I have seen. But it's impossible to recapture that night as a whole. Indeed, in this book, Allan Wilkie himself writes of the ephemeral character of all dramatic enterprise. One can only record

incidents and the effect they produced. The effect, over ten years, that his Shakesperian Company produced in our antipodes was an enduring one. He engendered, to a point that I think nobody else has reached, a lively appetite for the plays and a natural inclination to think of them in terms of the living theatre rather than as obligatory ingredients of an Arts Degree. His work is remembered. Four generations of New Zealanders and Australians have seen, or been told, about it. His enduring passion for these plays, his cheerful acceptance of the most terrifying financial hazards, his integrity and determination, have made his name a living legend in Australasia. Theatre people tell stories of Wilkie as they might of Irving and indeed he is in the direct line of the great actor-managers: a bit larger than life, a dedicated man. And surely the youngest octogenarian in the business.

In this endearing book we follow his heroic and devoted course over half the world. Success and disaster chase each other about the Far East, across Northern America, through Great Britain and all over Australasia. He is broke in Sydney and affluent in Calcutta. He loses by fire, every stick and rag of his wardrobe and scenery. He is enabled, through public subscription, to renew them to great advantage. He is awarded the C.B.E., is on the rocks and finds a forgotten nest-egg. He founds a distinguished Shakespearian Quarterly and, without benefit of costume or make-up, plays melodrama in a West Coast mining town. He gives pastoral performances in the grounds of

Government House and Henry VIII in a Sydney slum. He opens the dock gates at the back of a stage somewhere in the Far East and so provides himself with a fabulous backdrop. We follow him as he leads his company up and down in the world and although it is by liners, trains and buses that they travel, through all their journeyings one catches the whiff of an Elizabethan packhorse and the clash of a bundle of small-swords. Those of his company, and there are many, who have since attained star-billing, long runs, and all the bally-hoo of the fashionable theatre, will remember, as I do, with nostalgia, a bullet head, a large frame, a drooping cigarette and a voice of peculiar resonance, reduced, at moments of disaster, to a terrifying hiss, letting forth streams of a particularly inventive blasphemy.

In this book we catch that voice again, fulminating magnificently against such aspects of the modern stage that seem to Mr Wilkie to be detestable and valiantly proclaiming its owner an unrepentant traditionalist. His autobiography, like himself, is unique. Many a more solemn and pretentious book tells us far less about the living theatre than this. It will be read with pleasure by anybody who has the smell of greasepaint in his system or gets a jolt under his diaphragm when the curtain rises on a play.

Ngaio Marsh

Chapter I.

"Then you will go to Hell !" Thus, in one crisp, telling phrase, did my immediate boss in the Liverpool merchant's office, in which I was terminating a weary, stale, flat and unprofitable five years apprenticeship, condemn the theatre and all its ways - to say nothing of myself - when I told him of my intention to exchange my office stool for the boards of the stage. Whether his prophecy is to be fulfilled I shall possibly know in the hereafter. At this juncture, I can only state, that I have found the path thereto, with all its hardships, trials and tribulations, an exceedingly pleasant one, though admittedly more strenuous than the smooth descent down the primrose path is usually represented. One thing I can ^{say} ~~state~~ with certainty is that I have never for one moment regretted the exchange.

Although I had neither the taste nor any real aptitude for a business career, I suppose, if I had chosen to stick to my original occupation I might, in course of time, have become a prosperous Liverpool merchant and led an exceedingly drab, uneventful, but eminently respectable life. In contrast to this, my stage career has not only given me an occupation that has been a joy and delight in itself; it has led to my travelling all over the world, to the extent of perhaps a million miles,

visiting all sorts of strange and colourful places, mixing with the peoples of scores of nations; having the privilege of making the acquaintance, and in some instances the lasting friendship, of world-famous figures, and, in a wider sense, the friendship as well as the plaudits of untold thousands. True, it has not led to the accumulation of wealth which I might have hoped for from the pursuit of a commercial calling, but my experiences and memories are infinitely richer and more valuable than any money could purchase.

The smug and self-righteous boss of my department who foretold my everlasting doom, kept his moral prejudices in watertight compartments, for in furthering the interests of his firm he had no scruples in resorting to most dubious and, on occasion, downright dishonest practices. The head of the firm was an old Russian Jew, reputed to be worth between two and three million sterling - in the days when sterling was sterling. His outstanding characteristic was a passionate horror of waste in any shape or form. To give the old boy his due he was most consistent, for even the unnecessary wastage of a post office telegram form would give him as great a pain as if it were his own personal loss. When I commenced work at the office one of my minor duties was to seal the registered letters, and he hobbled round to my desk and gave me a lesson in frugality by showing me how to make a new stick of sealing wax by joining together the stumps of the old ones. His most amazing achievement, at any

rate during my term in the office, was when his silk topper, which he kept in a private cupboard and only used when he did his morning toddle to the cotton exchange, having successfully withstood the vile blows and buffets of the world for about half a century, ^{and} at last showing an aching void between the crown and brim, ^{was} he sent it round to his hatter to be patched ! Not bad for a triple millionaire.

The only surviving partner in the firm was his son-in-law, a pompous bearded Prussian, afflicted with flat feet and perpetually squeaky boots, who in August 1914 went all British and, in the belief that there is nothing like doing a thing thoroughly while you are about it, changed his very German name which was preceded by a "Von" to St. George.

The most likeable member of the staff was a little Jewish gentleman, who stood four feet ten and incessantly smoked or chewed cigars about half his own length. I never quite knew what his position was in the firm but it evidently carried a big salary combined with freedom of action, for two or three days a week during the hunting season he brought a bright splash of colour into the dingy office by turning up in a pink coat and immaculate riding kit. After hastily scanning his mail he would hasten across to the Cheshire side of the river to spend a day in the hunting field where he held the reputation of being a particularly daring rider.

The remainder of the staff, numbering about twenty-five,

made up of German correspondence clerks and English bookkeepers, etc., were a pretty dull crew and I was devoutly thankful when my five years apprenticeship having expired I was able to bid farewell to cash books and ledgers and announce my intention of adopting a more congenial profession. I loathed every moment of those five years perhaps even more than I realized at the time, for the only form of nightmare from which I have ever suffered, and one that recurred for nearly thirty years, took the shape of a ghastly dream that I was back again working in that foul office.

My first acquaintance with the theatre, reckoning (if I may paraphrase Lamb's tale of the great Elliston) pantomimes and circuses as nothing, was not until I reached the age of sixteen, but indirectly I had gleaned something of its fascination from my paternal grandfather, who, born in 18¹⁰66, and attaining the ripe old age of ninety-six, delighted to entertain me with stories of his youthful playgoing, more particularly of the great Edmund Kean, whom he had the unique experience of seeing one night from the gallery of the old Theatre Royal, Glasgow, in the principal scenes of no less than five of his greatest impersonations including, as I recollect, Othello, Shylock, Richard III, and Sir Giles Overreach in Massinger's "A New Way to Pay Old Debts".

Another, and even more romantic, reminiscence of my grandfather was how, as a lad, he had often spoken with a very old

man - a kinsman of ours - who as a stripling had been "out" with Prince ^{Charles Edward} Charlie in '45 and had taken part in the last stand of the faithful Jacobites at Culloden. Thus, there is only one life between me and a man who looked upon and fought for 'Bonnie Prince Charlie', a span of well over two hundred years, at the time I write this.

While on the subject of my grandfather, it is interesting to note that he was solely responsible for an invention which has been instrumental in saving hundreds of thousands of lives, for when he was superintendent engineer of the Royal Mail Line, with the permission of the Directors of the company, he installed, experimentally, water-tight bulkheads on one of their ships; an invention which proved so successful that it has since been adopted with certain modifications and improvements throughout the shipping world and has saved many thousands of badly damaged ships from total loss. Like so many public benefactors, he never received very wide recognition or kudos for his invention, and I don't suppose his name is known to a single naval architect in this connection, so I am glad to have the opportunity of placing the facts on record.

My grandfather was a man of exceptionally strong character and imperious nature of whom even my father, as a middle-aged man with a large family of his own, stood in considerable awe. A staunch conservative of the deepest blue, he not only had the courage, but the practical strength of his convictions, for

up to eighty years of age or more he never failed to journey from Southampton, where he lived in retirement, to his native town of Rothesay in the Isle of Bute, where he had a property vote, to register his name on behalf of the conservative candidate, ^{The} involving a return journey ^{was about a} of ~~some~~ thousand miles. ~~Whatever the colour of one's political opinions, one cannot but applaud such devotion to principle.~~

My ancestors and relatives on both sides of the family appear to be comprised, for the most part, of shipbuilders, engineers, sailors, pilots, and smugglers; the latter calling, with its flavour of romance, and smacking of the rogue and vagabond, seems to be the only suitable background I inherited for the acting profession. Certainly my early environment played no part in my decision to go on the stage, for while Liverpool is a city of great theatrical traditions, and incidentally the birthplace of a number of famous actors, including two of the finest light comedians of the nineteenth century in Charles Matthews and Sir Charles Wyndham, yet playgoing was rarely indulged in by my father, and definitely not encouraged, if not actually forbidden, to his children. ^{Christmas.} A visit, ^{the pantomime at} to the ~~Christmas pantomime~~ in the charge of our nurse, to ^{the} old Alexandra Theatre, then under the management of a member of the well-known theatrical family of Saker, coupled with an annual visit to Hengler's circus accompanied by our father and mother, were the nearest approach to playgoing permitted to us until we

reached years of discretion - the age at which we attained the discretionary period being a point on which we held widely divergent views from those of my father. His attitude towards the theatre was not, I believe, the outcome of any strong convictions, so much as a lingering prejudice resulting from his Presbyterian-Scottish upbringing; a prejudice which was far from being shared by his father, though a much stricter Presbyterian and even more Scottish in his outlook and habits. However, be that as it may, it is my everlasting regret that his objection to playgoing resulted in my missing the opportunity of seeing several famous actors who paid their final visits to Liverpool during my schooldays, particularly that idol of the Liverpool public, Barry Sullivan - what a rich mouth-filling name for a Shakespearean tragedian - when he took his farewell of the stage at the Alexandra Theatre. Even ^{Bernard Shaw} G.B.S. repeatedly testified to his extraordinary power and his perfect technique, with as near an approach to enthusiasm as his coldly critical mind would permit. The theatre was packed from floor to ceiling, night after night, for those farewell performances with wildly cheering, almost worshipping audiences. I was only a child at the time but could I have been present I am sure it would have been a life-long memory, even as was my Grandfather's of Edmund Kean.

During my first year in the office I ~~happened to be~~ ^{spent} spending a brief holiday in Barrow-in-Furness, ^{where} and curiosity,

despite my father's ban, which was more implicit than defined, took me to the Royalty Theatre in that town, where I saw my first play, presented by what was, I suppose, a third-rate touring company in a domestic drama by Sydney Grundy, called "A Bunch of Violets". While neither the play nor the performance made any very deep impression upon me, they at any rate sufficed to whet my appetite for this new-found and most delightful form of entertainment, and on my return home I managed to wring a reluctant consent from my father to go and see Osmond Tearle, who was playing that week in Liverpool in a round of Shakespearean plays.

Osmond Tearle was probably the last exponent of acting in the "grand manner" - of that great school whose methods and traditions were handed down through the old stock companies and carried on by Garrick, Kemble, Kean, Macready and Barry Sullivan, amongst others. By all accounts he was a man of singularly lovable but independent character who refused many tempting offers from Irving, Tree, and others, preferring the glorious uncertainty of an actor-manager's life, ⁱⁿ touring the industrial towns of the north of England, to the wider fame of the London stage. He died at the premature age of forty-nine and was buried at Whitley Bay in Northumberland where he had an almost royal funeral, thousands following him to his grave. When I decided to go upon the stage he was the first manager to whom I applied for an engagement. I still possess his courteously

^{written}
 worded letter in reply in which he pleaded that ill-health precluded him from taking novices into his company, and concluding with the stock advice which is tendered by actors to the stage-struck in all ages, "Besides the stage is so overcrowded I should advise you to give up the idea." This advice no more deterred me in my resolve than it did his own sons, to whom it was doubtless also proffered, and who all took to the stage as ducks to water; in the case of Godfrey Tearle, at least, with very distinguished success. His youngest son, Malcolm, was for some little time a member of my company, and, indirectly, I was to have further associations with his famous father, for two of his leading ladies, first Laura Hansen and later Carrie Baillie, an actress of great ability and personal charm, were with me in a similar capacity.

After a lapse of ^{sixty-FIVE} ~~fifty~~ years I can still visualize certain moments in ^{Osmond} Tearle's performances of both Othello and Hamlet but I cannot pretend to any clear-cut recollection of his performances as a whole; nothing beyond the fact that on both nights I sat ~~as usual~~ entranced. A new world had opened to me, a world of poetic illusion and hitherto unimagined beauty. ^{In that week,} ~~That was~~ indeed a fateful week for me, for from then my decision was made: The ledger, double entry, invoices, and the confines of a stuffy office were not for me; the free, spacious, romantic life of the Shakespearean actor was henceforth my sole ambition, and though I had to wait some years for the fulfilment of that ambition my resolution never wavered.

My latent, ~~but hitherto unsuspected~~, appetite for play-going having been at last developed, my idea was to make up for lost time, and Tearle's season being followed the next week by that of Mrs Bandmann-Palmer, I went to see her as Hamlet. Mrs Bandmann-Palmer, known prior to her marriage as Miss Millicent Palmer, was the widow of an anglicised German tragedian, Herr Daniel Bandmann, of some repute, whose otherwise excellent impersonations were, I understand, somewhat marred by a strong Teutonic accent. She, herself, was considered, with the possible exception of Mrs Kendal, to have the most finished technique of any actress on the English stage; and her company, which was practically a school of acting, provided many of the most successful recruits to the London stage.

Next to the ~~revolting~~ spectacle of a "female impersonator", I know of nothing more objectionable than a woman attempting to represent a mature male character and, although the fact is too often overlooked by actors and critics, the irresolute, poetic and philosophic Hamlet, courtier, soldier and scholar, was essentially masculine, capable when not "thinking too precisely on the event" of courageous and even ruthless physical action. Not even the genius of the great but intrinsically feminine Sarah Bernhardt failed to carry the least conviction in her impersonation of the character. And when I saw an obviously middle-aged and rather stout lady dressed in black velvet, in the person of Mrs Bandmann-Palmer, as Hamlet, Prince of Denmark,

I confess that even in my first flush of enthusiasm for the drama it was more than I could stomach, and not wishing to have the illusion created by Tearle completely shattered I crept out of the theatre half way through the performance.

Four visits to the theatre in the space of three weeks was too much for my father's Presbyterian prejudices and I was sternly ordered to limit my theatre-going to once a month. By this time, however, I had got stage fever pretty badly, and though brought up in the habits of strict obedience in which our parents' word was law - to an extent almost unbelievable nowadays - I cast about in my mind for some means whereby I could evade my father's orders without bringing down his wrath upon my head.

A youthful hobby of mine was chess, and the bright idea struck me of joining the City Chess Club which used to meet, and possibly does so still, chess players not being remarkable for their volatile habits, at a certain café in Liverpool every Wednesday evening. As soon as my work at the office was finished, I would put in an appearance there for an hour or so, but I left many an interesting game when only half over, or threw it away to my opponent, in order to dash off to one of the theatres. Unfortunately, a strict rule of my father's, only broken upon exceptional and rare occasions, was that the house had to be locked, barred, and bolted at ten thirty nightly, and our home being half an hour's journey from theatreland I

always had to leave, on these secret visits to the theatre, before the last act commenced, with the result that there are scores of absorbing dramas of which to this day I am ignorant of the final solution. But, in reply to the regular paternal query, "Where have you been this evening?" I could always truthfully, if prevaricatingly, reply "To the Chess Club, Father!"

In those days the Royal Court Theatre was almost continuously occupied throughout the Autumn season by a succession of stars from Sir Henry Irving downwards in their latest productions complete with their London company, of course at considerably increased prices of admission over those of the ordinary touring companies, but, even so, much lower than those charged in the West End. *of London.*

Thus, by means of my stolen Wednesday evening visits to the theatre coupled with secret visits to Saturday matinees and the authorized monthly visits, I was able to see, in addition to a number of lesser lights, Henry Irving and Ellen Terry in "The Merchant of Venice", and the latter in Madame Sans Gene; ~~(Irving being unfortunately ill I did not see him as Napoleon)~~ Forbes-Robertson in "Hamlet" and "For the Crown"; George Alexander in "As You Like It" and "The Prisoner of Zenda"; Beerbohm Tree in "Julius Caesar" and "The Red Lamp"; John Hare in "Caste"; Lewis Waller in "The Three Musketeers"; Ada Rehan in "Twelfth Night" and "As You Like it"; Wilson Barrett in "The Silver King"; The Kendals in "The Ironmaster"; Olga Nethersole in "Frou-Frou";

and many others almost equally gifted.

And what a thrill the theatre was in those days. A place of magic and mystery and romance. Unlike the modern theatre which all too often both in its design and decoration resembles a cold-looking lecture hall, those old ^{playhouses} theatres had warmth and a real theatre atmosphere. How well I remember them. Still lit by gas with the old-fashioned limes that on occasion were apt to hiss, crackle and splutter - but what a lovely soft light they gave. (Irving realised this ~~for~~ after going to great expense to install electric lighting in the Lyceum; he found he was unable to create the same illusion and beautiful effects as with gas and quickly reverted to his former method of lighting.) Then what an indescribably intoxicating smell the theatre had too. Compounded of the aroma of crowded humanity, oranges, gas and all the other odours that seemed to cling and pertain to the theatre alone. No horrible canned music either, but a jolly orchestra which from the moment they began to tune up their instruments engendered an atmosphere of excitement, and with the overture worked one up to a pitch of delicious expectation. And what audiences! Out for an evening's enjoyment and full of gusto. None of the shrill hysteria of the bobby-soxers, but an uninhibited and generous expression of enthusiastic appreciation - or the reverse if the play or the actors were not up to the standard they expected and demanded. To them actors were romantic people to whom they attributed the heroic ~~or~~ or villainous ~~or~~ qualities of

the characters they impersonated, for cheap publicity had not familiarised them with their daily doings and human foibles, and destroyed the glamour which then surrounded these mysterious creatures, the actors. Their only contact with their public was when they took their curtain calls from the other side of the foot-lights. I am not at all sure that the custom of taking calls at the end of each act was altogether a bad thing, although it would be regarded as hopelessly inartistic to-day. It gave the audience the opportunity of giving vent to their pent-up emotions and with each successive curtain call the applause and enthusiasm was cumulative and worked up to a tumultuous climax at the end of the play.

The trouble with the theatre to-day - or one of its many troubles and the greatest - is that it is too damned intellectual. It has lost touch with the People. That is what is killing the theatre - not the entertainment tax, the cinema, the radio or television, nor the high prices of admission; in ratio to the value of the £ the theatre is cheaper than ever before in its history. Forbes-Robertson declared that "the theatre was the most delightful form of entertainment yet devised by the mind of man". But he said that when it was the popular form of amusement, before the high-brows turned it into a lecture hall or pulpit, and occasionally a dissecting room, for the dissemination of social and political propaganda. The theatre will never come back into its own until the dramatists give us plays with a strong

story and an exciting plot, and we develop actors who can give a full-blooded interpretation of the characters. The public does not want realism in the theatre. More than ever in this drab, mechanized but frightening age they want to be taken into a world of illusion and romantic make-believe. ~~The first dramatist that realises this and can find an enterprising impresario to back him will make a fortune for both of them.~~

On the approach of my twenty-first birthday which coincided with the end of my five years apprenticeship in the office I carefully selected the most opportune moment to make a request to a true Scot - the hour after his New Year's dinner, when he was always in a particularly genial mood - and asked my father's permission to go upon the stage. He was so utterly astounded, and indeed thunderstruck, at the idea of a child of his wishing to be an actor, and being also mellowed by the influence of the festive season, that in a moment of unprecedented weakness he gave his consent.

Although on more mature reflection he endeavoured to dissuade me from my purpose, ~~to his credit be it said,~~ he never attempted to withdraw the consent he had given, nor did he place any obstacle in the way of my achieving my ambition.

By one link with the stage was a cousin, a few years older than myself, who as an actor with the Don Grant company had met with some success, and ~~but for whom~~ kindly assistance I might, in my ignorance, have been months in getting my feet through a stage door. It is true that I nearly flaked an engagement of

Chapter II.

It would be difficult to imagine anyone more completely ignorant of everything connected with the theatre than I when, ^{IN 1899} at the age of twenty-one, I set off for London with a few pounds in my pocket to seek my fortunes on the stage. I had had no experience as an amateur actor which was then usually the back door to the professional stage before schools of dramatic art were so numerous as they are to-day. I had never crossed the threshold of a stage door, while to grease paint, crêpe hair and other mysteries of the craft I was an absolute stranger.

My ideas of stage life must have been vague and shadowy in the extreme, for they were almost entirely gathered from novels professing to deal with the life and conditions of the actor, and my later personal experience soon shewed me how false and highly coloured these romances were and that the authors, for the most part, either had not the faintest knowledge of their subject or were dishing up the sort of stuff about the stage they knew their readers expected.

My one link with the stage was a cousin, a few years older than myself, who (as an actor with the Ben Greet companies) had met with some success and ~~but~~ ^{his} but for whose kindly assistance I might, in my ignorance, have been months in getting my foot through a stage door. It is true that I nearly fluked an engagement off my own bat,

within twenty four hours of my arrival in London, ~~off my own bat,~~ for my first act when I had settled myself in a little hotel situated in a street off the Strand had been to send off a batch of letters to the managers of various theatres who had announcements of forthcoming productions. Amongst these was Norman Forbes, the brother of the more famous Johnston Forbes-Robertson, who was rehearsing a play at the old Adelphi Theatre based upon Dumas' novel "The Man in the Iron Mask", and it so happened that when rehearsal commenced the next morning they found, coinciding with the arrival of my letter, they were short of an "extra gentleman" and my hotel being within a stone's throw of the theatre the assistant stage-manager was hurriedly despatched with an urgent message for me to come to the theatre immediately. Unfortunately I was out at the time gaping at the sights of London and when I eventually got the message and dashed round to the theatre at top speed in a state of high expectancy thinking as I ran how the difficulties, of which I had been warned, of getting a footing on the stage had been grossly exaggerated, it was only to be greeted with the information that I was too late, that the vacancy had now been filled.

To all the letters with which I deluged the theatrical managers there was only one other response, from a well-known Shakespearean actress in her day, Mrs Lancaster-Wallis, who was making a final tour of the provinces as Isabella in "Measure for Measure" and Beatrice in "Much Ado about Nothing". Being quite

innocent of the illusion that could be created by the aid of make-up, costume and lighting it was a considerable shock to discover on meeting her that these beautiful, and romantic heroines were to be impersonated by a middle-aged matron, or so she appeared to my youthful eyes. It was a still greater shock, however, when the lady demanded a premium for the privilege of appearing in her company which was quite beyond my means to pay, and my hopes of an engagement were again dashed.

By way of compensation for these disappointments I was at last able to give ^{full play to} my passion for theatre-going; ~~full play~~ and every evening, to say nothing of two or three matinees a week, ~~found me presenting~~ ^{I presented} my humble "bob" at the gallery door of one of London's many theatres.

And what a charm London itself possessed - that is, the London of the closing years of the nineteenth century. It was, of course, before the days of mechanized traffic and in the West End there was an air of dignity and leisure, pomp and circumstance, and a restrained gaiety wholly lacking in this jostling, scrambling, fear-stricken age. What a delight to walk about the streets and squares with their beautifully tended gardens, the fine houses with their gay window-boxes, striped awnings and brightly painted doors, which at the approach of a magnificent landau or brougham were flung open by powdered flunkeys in handsome liveries. The very smell of London was different. No stink of petrol fumes and hot metal but the pleasing odour of

horseflesh and leather harness. It was an entertainment in itself to stroll along the ~~(then)~~ uncrowded pavements with their beautifully gowned women and formally attired men; to leisurely gaze in the windows of some of the finest shops in Europe before the era of the chain store and mass produced goods. But fascinating as London could be to a raw youngster just up from the Provinces it could also be devilish lonely; a loneliness such as can be experienced only in a great city surrounded by millions of strangers, of a desolating ^{ion} nature of which one is never conscious on an isolated mountain-top, so that even though I was revelling in an orgy of theatregoing, I was very thankful when an introduction from my cousin to Mr (later Sir Philip) Ben Greet, at last led to an engagement.

Ben Greet, with his shock of prematurely white hair, cherubic countenance, cavernous voice, and waddling gait, was a unique but not unpicturesque personality. As an actor he was at his best in parts in which his child-like sense of humour could be given full play, such as Bottom in "A Midsummer Night's Dream". Like so many low comedians he was bursting with desire to distinguish himself in the higher flights of tragedy, and ^{once} while I was a member of his Shakespearean ^{and} Old Comedy Company he attempted the part of Hamlet in which, apart from the fact that he contrived to look like a huge black-beetle, he gave a most grotesque reading. It was rather pathetic to hear him explaining to some inoffensive stage-hand, after making an exit from an

intensely dramatic scene to the sound of not very subdued laughter from the audience, that Hamlet was a comedy part. However, he soon had the good sense to revert to his Polonius and gravedigger.

As a manager he had a remarkable and very chequered career both in England and America. His occasional incursions into the West End of London were usually on a small scale and uniformly unsuccessful, but in the provinces there was no limit to his activities. First, there was the Ben Greet Comedy company with which he personally toured in a repertoire of Shakespearean and Old English Comedies and which was the training ground for a large number of distinguished artists, including the two young Irvings, H. B. and Laurence, Mrs Patrick Campbell, Edith Wynne Matthison and many others. With this company, for about three months every summer, he gave a season of pastoral performances, of which he was, if not the originator, the pioneer, (in the Botanical Gardens in Regent's Park and popular resorts in the south of England; in addition he frequently entertained large house parties in the grounds of "the nobility and gentry" for which he charged a handsome fee.

Then he had about twenty-five companies touring the "fit-ups". These were the small towns, ^{to which} ~~to which~~, not possessing a theatre, companies would bring a collapsible frame that could be bolted and screwed together in an hour or two and erected in the local town hall, corn exchange or other suitable building and on which the act drop and scenery could be hung.

At one stage of his managerial career he also had six or eight companies playing the big cities with the spectacular Drury Lane dramas. With these and many other activities it might be imagined he was making a lot of money but as a matter of fact, apart from the necessarily speculative nature of all theatrical enterprise, he was rather an old muddler and was generally broke. I think one or two of his managers did better for themselves !

The engagement that I now obtained with him was for one of his occasional London ventures to which I have referred. In conjunction with J.B. Mulholland he was producing "A Lady of Quality" by Frances Hodgson Burnett of "Little Lord Fauntleroy" fame.

His partner in this venture, Mulholland, controlled several of the leading suburban theatres. My only recollection of him is the extraordinary costume in which he frequently attended rehearsals at the Comedy Theatre where he would arrive on a bicycle from his home in the suburbs, his legs encased in what were then known as knickerbockers, but would now I suppose be termed plus fours, with ornamental stockings, and brown boots; these were worn in combination with a black morning coat, the tails of which protruded about half a yard below the then fashionable short fawn-coloured topcoat; the whole being surmounted by a bowler hat. Presumably a compromise between a regulation West End costume and a bicyclist's outfit. It never impressed me as being a very happy one.

My engagement for "A Lady of Quality" was to "Walk on" and understudy at a salary of a guinea a week, or as it ^{was} more usually known in the vernacular of the theatre, "one-one". My first rehearsal in the strange and bewildering atmosphere in which I was plunged, as a raw shy youth suffering from a bad inferiority complex resulting from years of repression in the home circle, was overwhelming, and it was fortunate that in this, my first ^{introduction to} engagement on the stage, very little was demanded of me. In the livery of a lackey and assisted by another budding actor of the name of Collins, which formed the noteworthy (and as we hoped auspicious) combination of "Wilkie Collins", it was our duty to fling open a pair of folding doors for the entrance of our leading lady, who, while she stood waiting for her cue attired in the resplendent costume of a lady of quality of the Queen Anne period, used to clear her throat in a manner which, though possibly strictly in the atmosphere of the period, was yet another blow to my youthful illusions regarding the dramatic profession.

The cast was adequate without being particularly distinguished, the most interesting personality to me, because of his being a direct descendant of the William Farren who was the original Careless in the production of "The School for Scandal" in 1777, was William Farren, "junior", as he was called, his father being then still a well-known figure on the London stage. He was the fourth of the line and a William Farren had had a prominent and

honoured place on the London playbills for one hundred and fifty years and every member of the family had specialized in Eighteenth Century Comedy. A good story is told of the second William Farren illustrating their virtual monopoly of certain characters in high comedy. When Bunn, the manager of Drury Lane, approached him with regard to playing Sir Peter Teazle in a revival of "The School for Scandal", Farren demanded a salary of sixty pounds a week, and on Bunn's remonstrating with him on what he considered his excessive terms, Farren replied, "If there's only one cock salmon in the market you must pay the price for it. I am the cock salmon". He was ever afterwards known as "The Cock Salmon".

My "first appearance upon any stage" as the old playbills used to have it, was at the New Theatre, Cambridge, followed by Ipswich, where the piece was tried out ^{before} preliminary to its production at the Comedy Theatre, London, where it had a short-lived and inglorious run of five or six weeks.

I do not think the failure in London was due to any lack of merit in the play, which had at least one very powerful situation, but to the fact that Greet was not able, as he had built upon, to secure Julia Neilson and Fred Terry for the star parts and had to fall back upon two artists who whatever their merits might be had no drawing power with the public. Big names can rarely, if ever, bolster up a bad play but they can greatly assist in making the success of a good one.

A noteworthy instance of this proposition occurred many years

ago when Henry Ainley (then in the heyday of his success as a jeune premier) having only recently taken the town by storm with his Apollo-like appearance, beautiful voice and interesting personality, as Paolo in "Paolo and Francesca", was engaged by a certain management for the part of Cassio in "Othello" at a very high salary in the belief that the expense would be more than justified by Ainley's drawing powers, apart from his value as an artist. But the production of the tragedy not being otherwise to the taste of the public the weekly theatre receipts did not equal half the amount of the salary that was being paid to Ainley alone.

Another example of a similar nature was the production at the Garrick Theatre of a play called "Change Alley" written round the great "South Sea Bubble", with at least a dozen star artists in the cast, any one of whom would have been an attraction in a good play. "Change Alley", however, was a badly constructed, wordy play and the production was a complete failure.

The mention of Ainley and "Paolo and Francesca" reminds me of two interesting incidents in connection with his appearance as Paolo told me by Ainley with whom, during the run of the play, I was sharing rooms in the not over salubrious district of Pimlico, or, as our landlady preferred to describe it, Belgravia. Previous to the production of the play, George Alexander and his henchmen were scouring the London and ~~the~~ provincial theatres in their search for an actor possessing the exceptional gifts of looks,

voice and temperament requisite for the part of Paolo. Alexander being informed that there was such an actor playing Lorenzo with F.R. Benson's Company, then appearing at one of London's outlying theatres, went in person to see the performance of "The Merchant of Venice", but was much more favourably impressed by the suitability of a very youthful actor playing the rather thankless part of Salarino and promptly engaged him (Ainley) at a salary of £8 a week, which small as it may seem for a leading part in a West End theatre, was an enormous jump from the thirty bob or so that Benson was paying him.

When it came to rehearsals, despite his matchless physical qualifications, Ainley's lack of experience for such an important role became very apparent and Alexander was so doubtful as to whether he would measure up to the part that ~~all unknown to~~ Ainley, he privately rehearsed the part of Paolo himself with his understudy in his own part of Malatesta. These rehearsals, carried out in strict secrecy so that Ainley's confidence would not be shaken by the knowledge of what was going on, were continued almost up to the date of production. Ainley however made such vast improvement under Alexander's tuition that he was allowed to open in the part and of course made an instantaneous and sensational success, so that his performance became the talk of London. Only some weeks later when he had thoroughly settled down in the part was it disclosed to him what a near thing it had been. Not that any temporary setback could have prevented

Ainley with his great gifts from ultimately climbing to the top of the tree, but he would not have climbed it quite so swiftly if Alexander with his shrewd managerial eye had not picked him out of the ranks and finally taken the risk of entrusting him with what was an ideal part for him to burst upon the London public, and this too, at the St. James's which under Alexander's regime was the best managed and the most fashionable theatre in London.

The lady engaged for the title-role in "A Lady of Quality" was a rather short and somewhat swarthy Californian, Eleanour Calhoun, whom Greet referred to as a "pocket Bernhardt", but though possessed of considerable fire and emotional power, hardly I think on the Bernhardtian scale, and her distinctly homely appearance failed to suggest the beautiful Lady Florinda Wildairs.

After an interval of ^{over half a century,} ~~fifty-three~~ years I found myself ^{being} ~~once~~ ^{drawn to} again in Cambridge ^{being drawn thither} by a sentimental nostalgia, in a desire to see if a return to the scene where I began my stage career would evoke some of the thrill which I experienced when I first became "a real live actor". I made my way to the theatre which I found was in the hands of the decorators, but being the lunch hour it was quite deserted. Passing through the unattended stage door I groped my way on to the dim stage lit only by a few pallid rays from the auditorium. I took up the position from which off-stage I had spoken my one line of ^{half a dozen} ~~five~~ words with which fifty-three years ^{before} ~~ago~~ I had announced the

entrance of "His Grace the Duke of Osmonde". As my voice reverberated round the empty building the ghosts of the thousands of dead actors that haunt every old theatre no doubt chuckled in silent, but I hope not unsympathetic, amusement at the lone figure vainly endeavouring to recapture the past. Many memories came crowding in upon me as I recalled the high hopes, ideals and ambitions with which I had trod the stage of that old Cambridge theatre. A few to be realised, thank God ! But how many illusions to be shattered in the struggle and vicissitudes that I was to encounter. I thought too of all the men and women with whom I had been associated in "A Lady of Quality". All but two or three of us had joined that silent Company of ghosts, and such is the ephemeral nature of our calling, were now for the most part forgotten. Saddened, rather than thrilled by my attempt to conjure up the past, I was glad to shake off these memories and emerge once more into the bright sunshine and busy streets of Cambridge.

At the conclusion of my first brief engagement it soon became apparent that my footing in the theatrical profession was as yet very insecure. I had another weary and disheartening search to find a manager willing to avail himself of my services. When I discovered that the fact that I had "walked on" as a "lackey" in one act and as a "gentleman" in another act in a West End production was in itself but a poor recommendation, I camouflaged my lack of experience by describing my "last"

engagement as "two small parts at the Comedy Theatre", and by this means inveigled an unfortunate manager into engaging me for a stock season he was running at Llandudno, where on my arrival I found that the programme was being changed twice weekly. This, of course, only permitted of three rehearsals for each production.

For my first appearance with the company I was called upon to double two parts in a comedy called "Jedbury Junior", one being a very important part of a rascally clerk and the other an old Irish Colonel. Up to this time, be it remembered, I had never spoken a line in view of an audience upon any stage either as an amateur or professional, and it will be realized how painfully obvious must have been my lack of experience. Hopelessly overweighted, I struggled through my two characters for the three nights with a painful dry-up on the first performance whereby I cut out the entire plot of the play. In the meantime, my manager, presumably hoping against hope that I might show some spark of intelligence in a role more suited to my youthful appearance, rehearsed me in one of the juvenile parts in "A Private Secretary". But, by this time, whatever little confidence I had possessed quite oozed away, as did my manager's patience, and my engagement was abruptly and very justly terminated.

Such is the whirligig of time that twenty years later, when playing with my own company at the Grand Opera House in Sydney, Australia, I had a painful and rather pathetic reminder of this disastrous experience when that same Llandudno manager, very much

down on his luck, called at the stage door to negotiate a small "loan".

My first two engagements were not a very auspicious introduction to the dramatic profession but my life-long experience has shewn me that, in my own case at anyrate, good and bad fortune always goes in cycles and sooner or later the tide turns. So it was ^{then,} now, for shortly after the Llandudno fiasco I was re-engaged by Ben Greet and joined one of his numerous companies to tour the fit-up towns of Scotland in Wilson Barrett's famous classic "The Sign of the Cross", playing an average of four or five and not infrequently six towns a week. Despite the constant travelling such a tour involved, together with the difficulty of finding "digs" in small Scotch towns with a company of over thirty members, where so many of the landladies had a strong prejudice against letting rooms to playactors (though because of the pseudo-religious nature of the theme of "The Sign of the Cross" they would often make an exception in our favour), the whole tour was a most delightful and novel experience, and I felt I had at last secured a firm footing on the stage.

If one were to analyse the conditions on that tour, it was, I suppose, pretty rough going, for the accommodation was usually extremely crude, almost invariably consisting of a combined room, or in more genteel parlance "bed-sitting room", with the usual Scottish hole-in-the-wall bed, which I shared with Vivian Gilbert who, although two or three years my junior, had been at least six

months longer on the stage and regarded himself as a veteran actor compared to myself and gave me much fatherly advice on stage lore and etiquette. He never went very far as an actor but later he achieved considerable distinction as the author of "The Romance of the last Crusade", being an account of Allenby's campaign in Palestine in which as Major Gilbert he took an active, if subordinate, part. He also made a great success as lecturer on the same subject throughout the U.S.A.

^{Vivian Gilbert}
 He had a great gift of narrative even in those days, and one amusing story in particular that I remember was of his brother, ^{then} ~~who was~~ a midshipman in the Royal Navy ~~at that time;~~ ^a fellow snottie with whom he became great pals was the young Crown Prince of Siam. Before leaving Siam his royal parent had given into his keeping a number of Siamese orders with instructions to bestow them only upon eminent personages with whom he might be brought into intimate contact. The highest of these orders was called, I believe, the Order of the White Elephant, or some such title, somewhat on a par with our Order of the Garter, carrying with it all sorts of dignities and privileges to the recipient if ever he should visit Siam. Who more worthy of the highest distinction Siam had to offer than his dear young friend Gilbert? The Order was bestowed accordingly and His Majesty duly notified, when there was of course a terrible hullabaloo, with the explanation that there had been a little mistake, that the Crown Prince had misinterpreted his instructions, and ending in the return of the Order.

We made our own purchases of food, as was customary, and the landlady of course prepared and served our meals; for the room and this service we usually paid two shillings or half-a-crown a night for the two of us and our total expenses would come to an average of seventeen or eighteen shillings a week each.

How ridiculous these figures seem ^{nowadays} in 1956. Yet on these few shillings a week how we fared in those bad old days! Such food as is unobtainable today even at the leading hotels. Nothing but the best British meat, butter, cheese and vegetables; and the tin-opener was unknown. My salary having been raised from a guinea a week to the munificent sum of twenty-five shillings, by the end of the tour I was actually able to save four or five pounds - the only theatrical engagement in which I recollect ever saving money.

We were a very youthful crowd; ~~for~~ excluding the three or four comparatively old actors who formed, as it were, the backbone of our company, I don't suppose our average years would be much over twenty-one or so, and, fine or wet, we spent every afternoon in long tramps through the glorious Scottish countryside discussing our future plans, our hopes and ambitions, which never fell short of starring at Drury Lane Theatre or stepping into Irving's shoes when he retired. My particular group included Vivian Gilbert and also my life-long friend, H.F. Maltby, whom I met for the first time on this tour and who has since become a famous playwright with a score of London successes to his credit.

Excursions to places of historic interest and renowned beauty spots were another feature of this entrancing tour and at my father's ancestral town of Rothesay in the Isle of Bute I paid a devout pilgrimage to Edmund Kean's cottage on the shores of Loch Fad, where the great actor used to retire to recuperate after his strenuous seasons at Drury Lane and his all too frequent bouts of dissipation. In one of his letters Kean describes it as "the most beautiful place in all the world" which is perhaps a little extravagant, beautiful as it undoubtedly is. The term "cottage" too is rather a misnomer although it is always referred to, and even marked on the local maps, as "Kean's Cottage". On my first visit, misled by this description, I took the little stone Lodge at the entrance to the park-like grounds to be the "cottage" which I found on further acquaintance to be a fairly spacious Georgian type of house then occupied by a distant kinsman of mine, well steeped in all the anecdotes and legends of Kean's associations with the place.

There is always a feeling of sadness and regret at the end of a tour or the run of a play. Not only does it mean the end of that close daily companionship which the work in the theatre entails and the break-up of new-made friendships, but there is also the feeling of uncertainty in this most precarious of all professions as to when one will again be in harness and earning a salary. At the close of "The Sign of the Cross" tour I fortunately had no immediate worry on the latter score for I was

already re-engaged by Ben Greet for a New Year's stock season in Kilmarnock at the old Corn Exchange Hall, in which every member of the company was favoured with a "star" dressing room consisting of a large stall or bin whose legitimate purpose was for the storage of corn.

Our programme consisted of four famous old dramas - "Proof", "The Two Orphans", "The Lady of Lyons", and the ever-green "East Lynne". F.H. de Quincey, a picturesque personality and a relative of the de Quincey of opium-eating fame, was the leading man. Having to study four long parts in quick succession, by the time he got to his last part, which was Archibald Carlyle in "East Lynne", his brain refused to function; but with his part concealed in his hat which he carried in his hand, both in and out of season, he with great adroitness read his lines undetected by the audience.

In this company I first made the acquaintance of "The old actor", a species now quite extinct. His type, however, still lingers on in the drawings of comic papers where he is usually depicted with some fidelity. A cadaverous, blue-chinned individual with a slightly bulbous nose, his principal garment a moth-eaten fur coat worn winter and summer, a flowing tie, a large expanse of shirt front, a slouch hat, check trousers and down at heel boots. "Laddie" or "Dear Boy" was his usual mode of address to his fellow actors, and to the ladies of the cast "My Dear". His articulation was studied and elaborate, his voice

unnatural and orotund. He never ceased to act either on or off the stage. All novices he regarded with a certain degree of contempt, but he would patronizingly borrow their make-up, in return for which he would bestow much gratuitous but often valuable advice. If you wished to get on the sunny side of him you could usually do so with a pot of beer, which he would repay by the recountal of innumerable anecdotes, many highly amusing, and all going to show his prowess as an actor when he held the boards as Hamlet at Whitehaven in '75.

His particular idol was usually Barry Sullivan. If he was very aged he would proudly reminisce of "Mac"; a familiarity which would not have commended itself to the austere and haughty Macready, the subject of his discourse. I recollect one of this brigade holding forth on his favourite topic of "Mac" to an admiring and gaping group of young Thespians, when one poor unfortunate ignoramus timidly interjected the query "Which Mac was that, please sir?" With a look of utter amazement combined with withering scorn the old man drew himself up to his full height, thrust one hand into his waistcoat and thundered at the luckless wight in his best bass tragedy tones - "Which Mac? The only Mac! Macready, you bloody fool!"

In thus describing "the old actor" as he existed in my early theatrical days, I am only depicting those of a particular class. Many of his contemporaries were highly cultured and scholarly artists. But all these products of the old stock theatres

almost invariably had certain great virtues in common, resulting from the rigid discipline of their early training. They ^{took} ~~did~~ take their profession seriously and were punctilious in the extreme in the observance of their duties. They maintained a strict etiquette of conduct in the theatre and were conscientious and painstaking in their work. Always punctual in their attendance at rehearsals and performances, they could be relied upon, as far as is humanly possible, to speak the exact text as written by the author. They had a wide and intimate knowledge of the whole range of the Shakespearean and classical drama, and finally, they knew their job from A to Z.

Their one failing, from a managerial point of view, was a tendency, with a large number of them, to look upon the wine when it was red, but that is a fault which experience has taught me is not entirely confined to their age or school.

The particular specimen I met in the Kilmarnock season, although at one time, I believe, an actor of some repute, had fallen in the theatrical scale owing to his alcoholic habits. He was engaged as low comedian and the fact that he arrived at the theatre without a scrap of make-up did not hamper him in the least, as a burnt cork applied to his eyebrows and some red brick dust scraped from the walls of his dressing room for rouge appeared to supply all his needs in this respect. His unfortunate habits had, however, greatly impaired his powers of study and he rarely gave a correct cue; but in my scenes with him, as I was

determined not to be cut out of the few lines allotted me, and not being endowed with his gifts of improvisation, I threw ^{then} back every ~~one of my~~ lines in rotation as I had learned them, even though they had no connection with the speeches he had just uttered. Our joint dialogue must have somewhat puzzled the audience.

Where the old chap was really invaluable, however, was when, as not infrequently happened in a stock season, a "stage wait" occurred while the staff were struggling with an unfamiliar and particularly heavy set. A front scene would be hastily lowered and he would be pushed on by the stage manager with instructions to hold the fort until the big scene was ready. Here, my old actor was in his element, and being no longer cabin'd, cribb'd, confined by the dull mechanism of a studied part, but allowed to give his artistic temperament and fertile imagination full play, he would proceed to demonstrate his powers of improvising.

Striding confidently to the centre of the stage he would declaim a long speech in which, although it had absolutely no connection with the story of the play, he would always contrive to introduce the names of the principal characters, in order, I presume to justify the nonsense he was speaking. On a whispered injunction from the stage manager that the scene was now ready, he would wind up his oration with a few ornate and florid phrases relating some particularly heroic action that he himself (in his role in the play, of course) had performed or was just about to perpetrate, and having thus "collared the fat" as he expressed it,

he would make his triumphant exit to the accompaniment of a terrific round of applause.

Another quaint character I came across in this company was an actor who apparently not too sure of his breeding, and suffering from a sense of social inferiority, during the course of general conversation and apropos of some remark that had been made to him, with colossal and at the same time delightful candour, suddenly blurted out, "Oh ! you think me common, but you should see my people !"

Chapter III.

It was at this time that Ben Greet acquired the touring rights of all the Drury Lane dramas and immediately after the Kilmarnock season I was engaged by him for the company presenting "The Great Ruby". In this five-act melodrama I played five separate speaking parts - one in each act; and I account it a minor triumph of make-up and characterization that when my father and mother made a special journey to York to see me on the stage for the first time, they failed to recognize me excepting in the one part for which I was credited on the programme.

~~Before they were outdone by the moving picture screen with its almost unbounded capacity for sensational realism and scenic splendour~~ I these annual Autumn productions at Drury Lane were a feature of the dramatic year and had an enormous vogue. They were always most lavishly mounted with a tremendous cast and hosts of supernumeraries. The plot centred round a big sensational scene which owed as much to the stage carpenters and scenic artists as to the actors for its effect; it was also extremely topical as it invariably included scenes based on the most recent cause célèbre or society scandal, with the personalities involved but thinly disguised. In fact they were practically dramatic revues and the forerunners of the

musical revues which are such a popular form of entertainment to-day.

In "The Great Ruby", the theft of a famous gem in Bond Street jewellers shop in the first act is gradually built up to the great sensation of a struggle for its possession in a balloon in mid-air. Another spectacular scene was that in which a coach with four horses bearing a fashionable party to the races dashed on to the stage. It was my unfortunate duty in the character of the head ostler to superintend the unharnessing of the beasts: ~~and~~, on the opening nights in particular, the unaccustomed surroundings, the glare of the footlights, the noise of their hoofs on the hollow stage, and the applause of the audience, would make the poor animals plunge and rear to such an extent that I was always thankful when we got them safely into the wings and handed them over to the genuine ostlers who were waiting to take charge of them.

From the fact that Greet's companies were largely recruited from the Public Schools and Universities, they were usually referred to by the hardbaked members of the profession as "Greet's bloody amateurs". This description certainly did not apply to the companies organized to tour the Drury Lane dramas, for which Greet engaged only very experienced artists with big provincial reputations in all the leading parts; in fact, although they played to exceptionally good business, the expenses were so top-heavy that Greet lost heavily on them and after a year or two had to relinquish his rights in the dramas.

It was therefore ^{not} hardly in the best of taste when the author, Cecil Raleigh, who hardly fulfilled my preconceived notion of an eminent playwright, a horsey looking individual with a big black moustache looking as if he were made up for the "heavy villain" in one of his own melodramas, after seeing a performance of "The Great Ruby", addressed the assembled company to the following effect: "Ladies and gentlemen, I was greatly delighted and at the same time absolutely astonished at the excellent performance I saw last night, as I don't mind telling you I came expecting to see a lot of damned amateurs."

It was while I was with "The Great Ruby" that I had my first experience, (but alas ! not my last) of a theatre fire. We were playing at Chatham at the time and I had just returned after a matinee to my rooms, which I was sharing with H.F. Maltby, when he dashed in to inform me the theatre was on fire, and a glance through the window at the mass of flames shooting up into the sky quickly showed me that it was only too true and not an attempt at pulling my leg as I at first thought.

Even a disastrous fire can sometimes have its amusing side and one incident I recall in connection with the Chatham experience was that one of the actors, determined to rescue his personal possessions at all costs, plunged through the flames at the peril of his life and made his way to his dressing room. Then, losing his head, ^{he} snatched from his dressing table a powder-puff, value about sixpence, and with this trophy attempted to

make his way through the iron pass door from the stage to the auditorium. He turned the handle and pushed against the door, but to his horror discovered it had apparently jammed. He flung his full weight against it and kicked and hammered at the unresponsive iron in a panic-stricken frenzy - every moment the flames were creeping nearer - the stage was filling with smoke - the flames roared above him - the sweat poured down his face.

"My God !" he cried out, "it's all up, I'm done for." Suddenly an inspiration seized him. He stopped pounding and pushing and pulled instead. The door flew open and he tumbled into the auditorium, as yet untouched by the flames. Thence he charged into the street still bearing aloft like a banner before him, the powder-puff which he had clung to through all his frenzied struggles with the pass door.

The theatre was completely gutted, and of course the entire production destroyed, but thanks to the energy of our general manager, who ransacked all the theatres and stores in London, a new production was whipped together in three days and we were able to re-open at our next booking on the following Monday. This was no mean achievement considering the enormous scenic and unique mechanical effects the play demanded.

It was a curious coincidence, by the way, in connection with this fire, that for the first time on that tour the owner of the coach at Chatham (which was used in Act II and always hired from a local livery stable) insisted upon an indemnity

against loss or damage by fire being signed by our manager. I always think the proprietor of that coach, taken in conjunction with other information that leaked out later, must have known something.

Following upon "The Great Ruby" engagement I now achieved my ambition of becoming a Shakespearean actor, a goal I had always kept before me, when I was engaged by Rawson Buckley, who had been the Marcus Superbus in "The Sign of the Cross" and was now launching out in a small way as a Shakespearean star with an experimental tour. The repertoire consisted of half a dozen plays in which during my first week I played eleven parts.

Being a summer tour we all had to accept what was known as "summer terms" and my salary was again down to twenty-five shillings a week. On this salary I had to provide the accessories required to dress the characters allotted me, except the bare costume supplied by the management, and these extras included wigs, tights, shoes, boots, gloves, jewels, ballet shirts, etc. I mention these conditions of my engagement not in any spirit of complaint or in the belief that I was not more than adequately rewarded for my immature services, but merely as a contrast to the sheltered conditions provided for the beginner by Equity nowadays. And after all, the stage is the only profession that I know of in which one is paid to learn one's job. I have never experienced the slightest difficulty in adapting myself to the costume, speech and deportment of an earlier period; in fact from the very commencement of my stage

career I have always felt more at home on the stage in doublet and hose, and cloak and dagger, than in the garments of my everyday existence. Most of the old actors ^{known} with whom I ~~came in~~ ~~contact~~ in my youth had a feeling and sympathetic approach to the period due, ^{I think} in part, ~~I think~~ to their having been trained in the atmosphere of Shakespeare and Old English Comedy, but more because they were so much closer to those times in their traditions and general way of life. We have travelled fast of late, and the gap of three centuries that divided the Victorian from the Elizabethan was in many respects less, in all but point of time, than the fifty odd years that separates us from the Victorian. The young actor of to-day, lacking the training of the older generation and not animated by the spirit and traditions of bygone ages ^{frequently} ~~only~~ succeeds in suggesting, no matter how accurately costumed and carefully made up, he is taking part in a fancy dress ball. He ^{does not} ~~cannot~~ live the period.

Our company included some very excellent actors, amongst them, Leon Quartermaine, who even in those days was a brilliant Mercutio, Laertes, etc., but I was most concerned with our low comedian with whom I, as second low comedian and general utility, had most of my scenes. He was an old actor of the name of Alfred Tate and was the only gravedigger I ever saw who retained the time-worn business of peeling off half a dozen waistcoats prior to the commencement of his digging operations. Although this childish effect could not but make the judicious grieve, it certainly made the unskilful laugh; and as the second gravedigger

I might have added to the humour of the scene had I then known of the complementary business introduced, for one night only, by the famous comedian, James Welch. Welch, being cast for the part of the second gravedigger, In his youthful days, ^{Welch} grew tired of "feeding" the first gravedigger night after night, and his resourceful brain evolved a new reading of the part. As his superior officer flung each discarded waistcoat behind him, Welch immediately picked them up and put them on, one by one. The actor playing the first gravedigger, oblivious of the new business, was overjoyed - never had the scene gone to such hearty laughter - in fact it was so uproarious and continuous that it would evidently stand building up - to-morrow night he would add a couple more waistcoats ^{... but, on} turning round to pick up his spade, he catches Welch in the act of appropriating the last waistcoat he has shed. Tableau !

After an interlude during the autumn with another Drury Lane drama, "The White Heather", I again joined Rawson Buckley, being now promoted to the more important parts of Horatio, Lorenzo, etc. Our stock repertoire of Shakespeare and old comedy was augmented by the production of a stirring historical drama, "The King of the Huguenots", by H. A. Saintsbury, with Henry of Navarre as the leading character. It was an excellent and admirably constructed play, but lacking the "comic relief" demanded by the English playgoer, from the days of Shakespeare onwards, it never achieved the success it otherwise deserved.

The company was a particularly strong one, including Miss Mary Rorke, Matheson Lang, Charles Bibby and Saintsbury, but whatever chance Buckley might have had of establishing himself as a provincial actor-manager was absolutely ruined when the death of Queen Victoria occurred a few weeks after we started, and though we struggled on for some time afterwards, theatrical business was completely disorganised by the national calamity.

We had been given provisional notice of the termination of the tour at the Grand Theatre, Croydon, where, however, Buckley hoped to retrieve his fortunes, in which case the tour would continue. All our hopes were centred on Croydon. We arrived there on a miserable wet Sunday afternoon and as we emerged from the railway station we were faced by a large sign on the opposite side of the road, on which were painted the fateful words "WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE. UNDERTAKER". From that moment all hope was dead. We finished at Croydon.

For some years I made my headquarters in London at a house situated at the top end of a picturesque little paved court, Thanet Place, lined with plane trees, which opened off the Strand by Temple Bar through a low and narrow archway. The windows of my bedroom overlooked the Temple Gardens, but the house and court have been long since swept away, and this peaceful little backwater replaced by large commercial buildings. From this conveniently placed eyrie I was able to swoop down upon unsuspecting managers whenever I heard of a job going, so that

I had the somewhat exaggerated reputation amongst my fellow actors of never being out of an ^{work} engagement for more than twenty-four hours.

Although my ^{four} engagement with Buckley finished in mid-season about Easter, I secured a series of engagements that followed closely upon one another, sometimes actually over-lapping, so that on one occasion I was playing both in the West and the East End during the same week. The latter engagement constitutes my only appearance in the "Halls". A Mr George Kirk was exploiting his little girl, aged about twelve, as a Vaudeville turn in scenes from "Hamlet". She impersonated the title-role and I was engaged to support her as Horatio for a week in a Music Hall in the purlieus of Whitechapel. It was probably about the roughest audience in the East End of London, but although she was an intelligent child and had been carefully drilled in the part, I think it was the instinctive chivalry of the Cockney-Jewish, fish-and-chip eating fraternity, of whom the patrons of the Hall were composed, that not only accepted but warmly applauded her juvenile efforts, ^{But} and I tremble to think what would have happened even to Forbes-Robertson had he dared to appear there in a similar programme.

Another engagement of this period was to play Corin in "As You Like It", in which the famous old actor Hermann Vezin was the Jaques. In this character he appropriated all the speeches of the First Lord descriptive of Jaques ruminating upon the

sobbing deer by simply altering the text from the third to the first person. I was very much surprised to find Vezin thus taking liberties with Shakespeare. For though there was a certain coldness in his acting, a fault which some critics thought had prevented him from taking the high place to which he was on most counts entitled, all were unanimous as to his intellectual and scholarly attainments.

He had an extraordinarily rapid and incisive speech and his tempo even in such a contemplative character as Jaques was something to marvel at. This question of pace had, I think, become rather a fetish with him in his latter years. I remember him telling me with great pride that when he played Macbeth at the Lyceum during Irving's illness, the curtain fell half an hour earlier than when Irving played the part.

I found him a very interesting and vivid old gentleman with a keen, albeit somewhat mordant wit. He dwelt for many years in a block of old-fashioned houses (also improved out of existence) by Waterloo Bridge facing the river, and I frequently used to meet him in the neighbourhood of the Strand when, if he did not stop to speak, he never failed to greet me by furtively making the sign of the cross accompanied by an admonitory shake of the head. The reason for this cryptic greeting was that when I rehearsed the part of Corin I had introduced a little bit of business of crossing myself when Touchstone informed me I was damned, whereupon Vezin immediately pounced upon me and explained

that whereas it might be quite legitimate to cross oneself reverently in a serious scene, that such a gesture in a comedy scene might possibly give offence to some of the audience.

Although I saw the force of his argument and fell in with his views he never missed his little jest at my expense.

Hermann Vezin

He bitterly complained that he had been unjustly labelled "an unlucky actor", to which fact he attributed his long spells of enforced idleness between engagements. ^{But} Whereas I think the salary of £100 a week, that he at one time invariably demanded, was the chief obstacle to managers engaging more frequently this actor whose great abilities were not allied to a magnetic and popular personality.

Nevertheless I saw Vezin give the best performance in an all-star cast of what is generally considered the most thankless part in "The School for Scandal". This, too, when he was over eighty years of age, and I think the last part he ever played. It was in Tree's revival of the famous comedy at His Majesty's Theatre, with Tree himself as Sir Peter and including such names in the cast as Edward Terry, Henry Neville, Robert Loraine, Basil Gill, H. V. Esmond, Godfrey Tearle, Lionel Brough, Courtice Pounds, Marie Löhr, Suzanne Sheldon and Ellis Jeffreys. With one or two notable exceptions they were all square pegs in round holes, of which Tree was the squarest. The play was taken at a terribly slow tempo and although I do not suppose it has ever been so superbly mounted either before or since, I also imagine

Theatres in an old-fashioned amphitheatre called "Siberia".

it was one of the worst performances of "The School for Scandal" the London public has ever had the felicity of witnessing. *seen.* However, both the public and the critics, dazzled by the magnificent mise-en-scène and the effulgence of the stars supporting the costumier and scene painter, acclaimed it as a superlative production, and the revival was a great success.

I recollect, by the way, that one or two of the London papers congratulated Tree upon the novel and effective introduction of the minuet, with which the second scandal scene closed, a customary feature of every production of "The School for Scandal" for at least fifty years previously and probably longer. As the critics responsible had probably never seen the play before and had hastily read through the printed copy in which there is, of course, no mention of the minuet, they doubtless considered they were on safe ground in alluding to its introduction as another proof of Tree's genius as a producer.

However, to return to Vezin; he played old Rowley - a tedious part in inexperienced hands, and apt to be shunned by self-respecting actors - with a polish and finish, a sense of character and period that made the ^{part} character stand out like a clean cut cameo amidst the efforts of his misplaced associates. *(N.P.)*
~~I regret I never saw him as Sir Peter.~~

It was during this spring and summer period of 1901, while I hopped from one brief engagement to another, that I played my first "lead", the occasion being a short tour of suburban theatres in an old-fashioned melodrama called "Siberia". My

manager was John Lawson who acquired considerable fame in the music halls with a dramatic sketch called "Humanity". This playlet had two great moments of popular appeal - one in which Lawson sang a pathetic ballad entitled "Only a Jew", at which every Hebrew in the audience would weep and applaud violently - the other being the great climax of the drama in which Lawson (as the Jewish hero) had a terrific combat with the villain (a Gentile), everything on the stage being literally smashed to pieces. Staircases were rooted up, curtains torn down and furniture, lamps, crockery broken over the villain's pate, and when he had succumbed to the onslaught of the frenzied Jew, the curtain would fall on a scene of complete devastation, to be raised again with Lawson standing in the centre of the wreckage, panting, perspiring and bowing to a sympathetic and cheering audience while the band played double forte.

"Siberia", a four-act drama, served merely as a curtain raiser until Lawson having already wrecked a couple of homes in adjacent music halls could get to our theatre to wreck yet a third, as the pièce de résistance following upon our comparatively unexciting entertainment. "Siberia", too, had its moments, however, as is demonstrated by a speech in which I apostrophized the absent villain. It ran: "Now, Michael (N.P.) Jarakoff, look to yourself. If any harm has befallen the woman I love, I swear before Heaven I'll rest neither day or night until I have found you and thrashed you like the cur you are."

As further added to my apprehension by calmly informing me that

Of all the glorious speeches I have been called upon to deliver in melodrama, from "East Lynne" to "The Grip of Iron", this I think is my favourite.

For my first leading part, in a tour of London suburban theatres, Lawson paid me the not extravagant salary of £2 a week.

Yet another of these casual engagements was as assistant stage manager to the Irving ^{Amateur Dramatic Society,} A.D.S., for a performance of "The Two Gentlemen of Verona", at the St. George's Hall. The raison d'être of this production was, I imagine, to launch upon the stage Miss Norah Lancaster who played Julia, and who was the daughter of the before-mentioned well-known Shakespearean actress Mrs Lancaster-Wallis. For this purpose all the West End managers were invited to witness her début.

What became of Miss Norah Lancaster I do not know, but I do know that Sir Lewis Casson and Athole Stewart who jointly played the title-role, Valentine and Proteus, could both date their highly successful careers from that performance, which proved to be their jumping-off point to the professional stage.

Whilst fulfilling these miscellaneous jobs I received an S.O.S. message from Ben Greet. When I ^{saw} interviewed him on Friday midday he ^{told} informed me he wanted me to play on the afternoon and evening of the following day, Saturday, Mr Page in "The Merry Wives of Windsor" and Borachio in "Much Ado About Nothing", in two Pastoral performances in the grounds of the Alexandra Palace. As he handed me the cut copies of the plays he further added to my apprehension by calmly informing me that

there would be no opportunity of giving me a rehearsal for either part.

Now, I have never had ^{the} ~~that~~ happy knack of absorbing lines like a sponge that many actors possess. Of the hundreds of thousands of lines I have spoken upon the stage every word has had to be separately hammered into my brain. While this method has the advantage that when one learns a part in this way one does speak the author's text and not something merely approximating thereto, it is a distinct handicap when one is asked to play two fairly long Shakespearean parts with which one has not even a nodding acquaintance, with a company of strangers, and in the unfamiliar conditions of Pastorals.

However, by sitting up half the night with wet towels round my head I turned up next day at the Alexandra Palace word perfect, which was more than could be said for many of the cast, all of whom had been playing their parts for some time, and their imperfectness was responsible for one or two amusing incidents in the performance of "The Merry Wives of Windsor".

Many years later I was able to recall to Sir Philip Greet (as he had then become) when we were dining together, how during the matinee of "The Merry Wives" there was a nasty "dry-up" in the middle of the first scene, and how he, as Falstaff, turning up stage to make a premature exit, to a whispered but agitated remonstrance from his fellow actors not to desert them, replied, without turning round or even looking over his shoulder, in a

stentorian voice which could be heard in the remotest parts of the grounds, "I've said all I've got to say, you young men should learn your words," and left them to their fate.

And how, at a later point of the play Falstaff having to be carried off in the buck basket down an almost perpendicular ladder from the high wooden platform that formed our stage, whether inadvertently or out of revenge for his former desertion, I know not, the basket was reversed so that Falstaff was jolted head first down a twelve foot ladder; and how the cries, threats and curses that emanated from the basket provided the heartiest laugh of the afternoon.

This strenuous initiation to Pastoral work led to an engagement for a long season at the Botanic Gardens in Regent's Park with a tour of popular resorts to follow. I have no recollection of the actors experiencing any great difficulty in being audible in the open air excepting perhaps on one or two occasions when confronted by a strong breeze. Thus the charm and happy realism of a natural background were not destroyed by the adventitious aid of microphones and amplifiers, which are apparently necessary to eke out the vocal defects of the modern actor when engaged in this class of work.

~~The Pastoral tour~~ ^{the Pastoral tour} With the oncoming of autumn, was merged into the usual theatre tour of the Ben Greet Comedy Company in a repertoire of Shakespearean and Eighteenth Century Comedies, and also a delightful modern comedy "A Royal Family" by Robert Marshall.

We visited only south coast towns and the old cathedral cities, and my sole unpleasant memory of that delightful tour is connected with "A Royal Family", in which I not only inherited the part originally played by "Mr James Erskine", the nom de théâtre of Lord Rosslyn, but also his resplendent uniform and military boots. Those boots ! I would not venture to estimate the size of his lordship's feet, but I know I stuffed them with several pairs of boot socks and about two pounds of cotton wool, and then flopped and floundered round the stage vainly endeavouring to preserve a smart military gait, and miserably conscious that it resembled that of a ploughman.

London a number of companies were organized to tour the provinces, and for one of these playing the smaller towns I was engaged by Ben Greet. In the readiest way of becoming acquainted with the very intricate "business" of the piece, I visited the Lyceum several times. A comparatively well-known and subordinate member of Gillette's Company was Mr Charles Chaplin who was later to become world-famous under the auspices of "Charlie Chaplin".

But for his American intonations of speech Gillette was both physically and temperamentally an ideal representative of the great detective, and when I saw him play the part again thirty years later in Toronto at the age of seventy-eight, although it is true both Gillette and the drama cracked a little, it was extraordinary how the draft of both the actor and the playwright triumphed over time and distance. The mere feat of giving seven performances a week of such an exacting role at that advanced

Chapter IV.

Those of my generation whose London playgoing experiences date back to the autumn of 1901 will recollect the furore produced by the American actor, William Gillette, in the character of the master detective Sherlock Holmes in a play that he had himself constructed around Conan Doyle's famous creation, and which filled the Lyceum Theatre for many months.

As a corollary to the great success of Sherlock Holmes in London a number of companies were organized to tour the provinces, and for one of these playing the smaller towns I was engaged by Ben Greet. As the readiest way of becoming au fait with the very intricate "business" of the piece, I visited the Lyceum several times. A comparatively undistinguished and subordinate member of Gillette's Company was Mr Charles Chaplin who was later to become world-famous under the soubriquet of "Charlie Chaplin".

But for his American intonations of speech Gillette was both physically and temperamentally an ideal representative of the great detective, and when I saw him play the part again thirty years later in Toronto at the age of seventy-eight, although it is true both Gillette and the drama creaked a little, it was extraordinary how the craft of both the actor and the playwright triumphed over *anno domini*. The mere feat of giving seven performances a week of such an exacting role at that advanced

age was a surprising tour de force; (~~though it is good to know that it was a labour of love and not of financial necessity~~) and I feel sure that Mr Gillette would have sympathized with the reply of the eighteenth century actor-dramatist-poet-laureate Colley Cibber to Horace Walpole who, on meeting him one day, ~~when he had reached the eighties,~~ exclaimed "I am glad, sir, to see you looking so well." "Egad, sir," replied the veteran Cibber, "at eighty-four it is well for a man that he can look at all."

The difficulties of producing such a play as "Sherlock Holmes", largely dependent upon its effects, under the primitive conditions and limitations of the "fit-up" halls of which our tour was mostly comprised, often drove our stage manager to distraction. His chief hurdle was the big situation at the end of the third act in which Holmes smashes a lamp, plunging the scene into complete darkness and then eludes his would-be captors while they rush at the glowing end of his cunningly discarded cigar. With electric, or even a gas-lit stage this effect was comparatively easy to work; but when, ~~as not infrequently happened~~ the sole means of illumination was a row of oil lamp footlights, it became in the words of Polonius "an effect defective". Still, notwithstanding the ludicrous spectacle of the local hallkeeper's arm and hand emerging from the auditorium and vainly endeavouring to turn down the wicks of half a dozen lamps, as Holmes knocked one off a table, so thrilling was this great climax that the situation always brought forth thunders of applause which the actors acknowledged

amidst the reek and smoke of hastily extinguished paraffin oil lamps, holding candles in front of their faces hastily snatched up from their dressing rooms.

Amongst the various engagements with which I was occupied in the summer of 1902 after the Sherlock Holes tour was a little venture organized by Matheson Lang, to visit Inverness and the neighbouring towns in which he had family associations. The repertoire was so nicely adjusted that only a company of eight was required. Of these, two who were elderly people retired from the stage shortly afterwards. The names of the other six are worth quoting as they all later attained some eminence in the dramatic profession. Besides Matheson Lang himself, there was his future wife, Miss Hutin Britton; Miss Dorothy Green, afterwards leading lady to H.B. Irving and well-known to London playgoers; Walter Hampden the acknowledged leader of the American stage and President of the Players Club; Charles Bibby who did some magnificent work with the Manchester Repertory Company, and whose brilliant career came to an untimely end in France, and lastly the writer of these reminiscences. ~~Peer Charlie Bibby!~~
~~It was not until many years later that I heard the story of his last appearance on any stage.~~

~~It appears that he was wounded "somewhere in France" in 1917 and sent down the line to hospital in Rouen; from whence, in due course, he was transferred to a Convalescent Camp. As was usual at that time, the convalescent camp boasted of a Concert Party~~

and the authorities, learning from Bibby's papers that "in civil" he was an actor, at once commandeered his services to assist in the amusing of the soldiers. The gentleman running the concert party was an amateur actor who, being more anxious to display his talents than to entertain the troops and fancying himself in the role of The Prince of Denmark, decided to give a performance consisting of scenes from "HAMLET" and cast Bibby for the part of The Ghost. From the theatrical costumiers in Rouen a suit of armour was borrowed, it happened to be a few sizes too large for Bibby, but in it he was incased.

Hamlet, however, was not much to the taste of the wounded "Tommy" and before the proceedings had gone very far, a certain restlessness was to be observed amongst the audience. Bibby's entrance drew near: "Look where it comes again!" etc. and on to the rickety stage clanked poor Bibby. For a moment there was silence and then a voice at the back of the hall exclaimed: "Gawd Blimey, Bill! 'Ere comes a bleeding Tank!" The roar of laughter that greeted this sally completely stopped the show and not another word was audible for the rest of the evening.

Scenes from "Hamlet" were not repeated and a few days later Bibby, being once more classified "A1" was ordered to rejoin his ~~unit from which, alas! he never returned.~~

At that time we were all at the ^{beginning} commencement of our careers and the selection of the Company was a first indication of the perspicacity to be subsequently displayed by Lang in his highly successful career as an actor-manager.

Another tour of "Sherlock Holmes", in which I was promoted to the part of "Professor Moriarty, the Napoleon of Crime", was followed by an engagement at the Royalty Theatre under the management of George Giddens, in which I played in a somewhat old-fashioned curtain-raiser that preceded an amusing comedy called "Lyre and Lancet" by Anstey, the author of "Vice-Versa".

Mr Charles B. Cochran was the manager for Mr Giddens, but the season did not meet with the success of the later ventures with which Mr Cochran was associated and came to a disastrous conclusion at the end of a couple of weeks.

In the times of which I am now writing theatrical agents were comparatively few in number, the majority of the engagements being made direct between the manager and the actor. The method was more satisfactory to the actor, who was not penalised by the payment of commission to an agent on his hard-earned salary, and the manager ran no risk of having the personal friends or favourites of the agents foisted on to him, nor ^{of paying} the payment of the increased terms which the actor frequently demanded in order to cover the cost of his commission.

My next engagement was the only one I ever secured through the medium of an agent, and is an illuminating commentary on the value of these intermediaries to both managers and actors. On a wet and wintry afternoon in December I called upon a very well-known theatrical agent, and while waiting in the outer office with several other actors also looking for a job, the agent in question

put his head round the door communicating with his inner sanctum. He glanced round at the occupants of his waiting room, and as I was presumably the most presentable in dress and appearance he beckoned me over to him when the following dialogue ensued:

"Do you play Heavies?"

"Yes, I play anything and everything."

"What's your name?"

"Allan Wilkie."

"Come this way!"

(We now enter the inner office where is a dark-moustached gentleman who, from the fact that he is occupying the agent's chair and smoking one of his cigars, is obviously a manager.)

"Here, Mr Atkin, I have just the man you require, Mr -!

Mr -! (in a hurried whisper) What's your name?"

(sotto voce) "Allan Wilkie."

"Ah yes ! Mr Allan Wilkie. I can thoroughly recommend this gentleman, Mr Atkin, as an excellent heavy man. I know his work well. You will find him a quick study and very reliable in every way, in fact just the man you are looking for."

On the strength of this astounding recommendation from a man who had never seen me before, and did not even know my name, I was promptly engaged by Mr John A. Atkin to leave for Bradford the following day to play the heavy lead in "The Grip of Iron" at a salary of £4 a week. True, I apparently managed to live, or I should say "act", up to his recommendation, for I remained

with Atkin for six months, but I still think that the £4 commission I paid for the introduction was easy money for the agent, especially as when later I applied to him again, he never made the slightest effort to secure me another engagement, and indeed had utterly forgotten my name and identity.

The Grip of Iron Company was in many respects quite the most extraordinary theatrical organization with which I have ever been associated. The sub-title of this old-time ^{French} thriller was "The Stranglers of Paris", and it was an ~~translation or~~ adaptation from the French by Arthur Shirley.

When I joined the Company it had been touring continuously for about a quarter of a century. On its initial tour it had not been at all successful, but Atkin then made what was, at that time, an innovation in provincial touring, by travelling a most elaborate scenic production for the drama. It was, I understand, the first play toured in the English provinces in which, neither wholly nor in part, was the stock scenery of the local theatres relied upon, but for which the complete production was carried. This doubtless appealed strongly to provincial playgoers weary of seeing the same "drawing rooms" and "country lane" doing duty week after week.

With "The Grip of Iron" there were some unique scenic effects, including the exciting spectacle of a ship going to pieces and foundering in mid-ocean; but the gem of the production and that which I firmly believe was responsible for the enormous

popularity of the play was the final scene which, intended to represent a drawing room, was an absolute monstrosity such as was never conceived in the maddest nightmares of Tottenham Court Road. It baffles detailed description. I only remember it as a gaudy mass of red plush furniture, multi-coloured rugs and carpets, staircases, balustrades, candelabras, fringed velvet tablecloths, antimacassars and ornaments of all descriptions - all flooded in a glare of hissing limelights ! This scene made an instantaneous hit, and familiar as it must have become to the audience by that time, it never failed to draw a round of applause when the curtain rose revealing its splendours.

The combined effect of this scenic magnificence and the undoubted merits of the play as a melodramatic thriller were such that for many years there was not a single night that it did not fill theatres to their utmost capacity, and even at the end of twenty-five years run it was still doing big business.

It was toured for some years longer and a condensed version of the drama was then played on the Music Halls, and, I believe, even now it is occasionally produced by stock companies.

Atkin must have made an enormous amount with this play, but when Arthur Shirley, the author, attended a dinner during the tour given by Atkin to commemorate the 25th anniversary of its production, in the course of a speech he strongly advised any embryo playwrights who might be present on no account ever to sell a play outright. He had sold Atkin the rights of "The

Grip of Iron^m for £20. Had he let it on the basis of a very modest royalty, I imagine he would have netted from first to last anything up to £20,000.

The company playing this classic was a curious bunch of people. Atkin himself, who perhaps naturally regarded the drama as a masterpiece, was afflicted with a very bad stammer which did not deter him, however, from making an occasional rare appearance in the cast. It was always his delight on the opening night in a town to come round to the stage from the front of the house and put the finishing touches to the set for the last act by straightening out the antimacassars and seeing that the five hundred lights in the candelabras were all burning brightly. With all his little foibles, a straighter and more decent man I have never met within theatrical management, as was perhaps best certified by the fact that most of the members of his company had been with him for ten to twenty years.

Indeed, his leading man, Fred Powell, had been with the play for twenty-three years and had played the part of Jagon continuously for the past nineteen years. His eventual association with the play must have extended to about thirty years, which I should think constitutes a record engagement with the same play, part, and management. Apart from his being a very sound actor, his greatest asset for the role of Jagon was a capacity for grinding his teeth together and thus emitting a blood-curdling sound which would freeze with horror the factory girls in the pit,

and thrill the small boys in the gallery. How his teeth had stood the wear and tear of nineteen years of nightly and constant grinding I do not know but they still functioned vigorously.

Both ^{Powell} ~~he~~ and the low comedian, who had also been with the Company for twenty years or so, were well-known and immensely popular with the drama public of every town in the British Isles and received a big reception every night on their first entrance; but whereas Powell was of a placid, good-natured disposition, the low comedian was of an extremely jealous nature. He would stand in the wings and if he did not grind his teeth à la Powell, he would literally gnash them with rage when Powell was greeted with an exceptional ovation. This jealousy so affected the poor fellow's brain, though possibly there were other contributory factors, that eventually he became completely unbalanced.

The first manifestation of his mental condition was when we were playing at a town in the Black Country where Atkin and Powell came to me with grave faces and showed me an anonymous letter, which had been addressed to the former, written in a rambling incoherent manner and apparently the composition of a lunatic. The writer made all sorts of accusations and threats against Powell and further declared that stationed in the gallery of the theatre he intended to put a bullet through Powell's head while he (Powell) was in the act of strangling Lorentz de Ribas (me) during the final scene of the play. I naturally could throw no light upon the authorship of the ^{letter} ~~missive~~ and was inclined to regard it

as a foolish practical joke. But not so Atkin who for the remainder of the week had policemen posted in every corner of the theatre and also plain clothes men who carefully scrutinised every person entering the auditorium; nor yet Powell who, instead of hauling me around the stage and throttling me for about two minutes to the accompaniment of much teeth grinding as was his wont, after a hurried and furtive glance round the auditorium seized me momentarily by the throat and then dropped me as if I were a red hot iron. As I then had to roll over a lifeless corpse, the audience must have been filled with admiration and amazement by the wonderful powers of "The Strangler of Paris".

Nothing, however, happened at the time, but shortly after I left the company the comedian lost his reason entirely, and it was then discovered that in one of his fits of mad jealousy he had been responsible for the ^{extraordinary} letter in question.

From "The Grip of Iron" to Shakespeare was from the ridiculous to the sublime, and a welcome contrast when I was engaged to share the leading parts with two other actors in the F.R. Benson North Company.

The only incident of note about this tour that lives in my memory is in connection with a matinee of "The Merchant of Venice" which was announced for Boxing Day in a Scottish town, and for which (the smallest audience assembled) I have ever experienced. It is true there was no performance as the entire audience consisted of one solitary enthusiast who paid for admission to the

pit, and who was returned his "saxpence" with a grave warning never to repeat the offence !

^{Sir Frank} Benson, in the heyday of his fame and success was at that period touring several subsidiary companies, and of the leading actor in one of them, a good story was told which incidentally illustrated ^{his} Sir Frank's innate kindness of heart.

Constant reports reached Benson from his numerous friends in every town in which this actor appeared of his incompetence and total inability to cope with the leading parts with which he had been entrusted. So damning were his performances, both to the business of the company and also to Benson's reputation, that the latter was at last reluctantly compelled to send the actor a fortnight's notice terminating his engagement. Immediately he received his notice the actor ~~in question~~ arranged for his understudy to play his parts and, armed with his press notices, he travelled to where Benson was playing, and ~~in an interview~~ succeeded in persuading him that the reports concerning his work were entirely malicious and unwarranted.

Having by this means induced Benson to rescind his dismissal he then turned upon him and said: "Now, Mr Benson, as you agree that I am perfectly competent to play these parts, you must also admit that the salary I am receiving is quite inadequate for such important work and my position as leading man in your company." He thus returned to his company not only with his dismissal cancelled but also with a new contract for a considerable increase of salary.

I cannot, of course, vouch for the truth of this story, but as Mrs Candour says, "To be sure, I had this from very good authority."

In the early part of 1904 Beerbohm Tree organized a company, with which it was proposed to tour permanently the larger cities of the United (~~now unhappily disunited~~) Kingdom, with a repertoire of the Shakespearean productions from His Majesty's Theatre and a cast of the same calibre as it was his wont to engage for their London presentation. I was fortunate in being associated with this organization for a couple of tours. When Tree, able to detach himself from his activities at His Majesty's Theatre, made intermittent appearances with the Company, we did enormous business, but in his absence the takings dropped to zero, so that for financial reasons the ambitious project had to be abandoned before it attained any degree of permanence.

The contrast in the receipts engendered by Tree's presence or absence from the cast was more a tribute to his personality and great reputation than any nice discrimination on the part of the public. Tree was never a great, nor even a good Shakespearean actor excepting in one or two parts, and taking the repertoire as a whole, the performances were certainly not weakened by his absence.

Some idea of the magnitude of the expenses of this company will be gathered from the ^{cast} personnel for the initial tour which, nearly a hundred strong, included Oscar Asche, Lyn Harding,

William Haviland, Lionel Brough, Constance Collier, Margaret Halstan, Cicely Richards and also Viola Tree, who made her first appearance upon the stage with this company as Viola in "Twelfth Night". Indeed, I suspect that the launching of ^{Tree's daughter} ~~this lady~~ on her theatrical career under the most auspicious conditions was not an unimportant factor in the formation of such a powerful organization.

In the course of this tour we played a fortnight's season at the Theatre Royal, Dublin, which, coinciding with the State visit of King Edward VII to the Irish capital, it was arranged that Tree should give a command performance consisting of famous scenes from his repertoire, in one of which I played the Earl of Northumberland in the abdication scene from Richard II. Never before or since has such an audience been assembled in a Dublin theatre. The whole of the large auditorium was crowded from floor to ceiling with the élite of the Irish aristocracy, resplendent in diamonds and jewels either unearthed from the family chest or borrowed or redeemed for the occasion.

It was fully expected that Tree would be knighted after the performance, but rumour had it, ~~whether true or no I am not able to state not being in His late Majesty's confidence,~~ that the King was somewhat peeved because Tree, allowing his parental pride and affection to outweigh his managerial discretion, gave his daughter, Viola, who, of course, was but a novice at the time, undue prominence in the programme. Be that as it may, Tree had to wait for several years before he received the well-merited honour.

At the conclusion of the tour I appeared in several brief revivals at His Majesty's Theatre, and then after a short interlude in melodrama and another tour with Tree's Repertory Company there followed what was to be my last engagement before embarking upon the stormy seas of theatrical management. This was with Fred Terry and Julia Neilson in their original production of "The Scarlet Pimpernel".

The history of this play should be a warning to all dramatic critics never to indulge in prophecy, and also an object lesson to those theatrical entrepreneurs who may be inclined to haul down their flag if their production does not meet with immediate success.

There was a more or less general tendency on the part of the press to damn "The Scarlet Pimpernel" outright or, at least, with faint praise. Why, I know not, for as produced and played by the Terrys it fulfilled its purpose in providing a most excellent entertainment. For some time, as a consequence of its adverse press, the fate of the play hung in the balance, but Fred Terry with a complete faith in its merits and an abiding faith in the final judgment of the public, ^{and} with the co-operation of his astute and faithful henchman, Arthur Garrett, filled the house with "paper" for several weeks until it outlived its press and became the greatest success of their long and honourable career. Besides several revivals in the West End, it occupied a prominent place in their repertoire for about twenty-five years and must have netted

the Terrys a considerable fortune.

In view of the ultimate record of the play the following notice which appeared in one of the leading London dailies the morning after its production should be hung over the desk of every dramatic critic. The gist of the criticism (!) and almost its sum total, as near as I can recollect, was something like this:

"The Scarlet Pimpernel is a little wayside flower that fades in a few days. We imagine the play of this title produced last night at the New Theatre will have the same fate."

It is true that in six and a half years on the boards I had played about a hundred parts of all descriptions of every type of play ranging from farce and comedies to Shakespeare and classical drama; but I had never ~~played~~ ~~acted~~ ~~in~~ ~~a~~ ~~first-~~ ~~hand~~ ~~knowledge~~ ~~of~~ ~~stage~~ ~~management~~, while of the business side of my profession I knew less than nothing. However I was very fortunate for my years and had no experience whatever of that most essential faculty of an actor-manager, the ability to select, handle and control men and women tactfully and yet firmly. Above, it must be remembered, from the very nature of their calling are inclined to be temperamental.

On the credit side, however, I was blessed with super-abundant energy and unbounded optimism. And these two invaluable assets to the equipment of an actor-manager have enabled me to overcome many a financial straits and surmount almost insuperable difficulties.

Chapter V.

At the time of writing this, with all my years of experience as an actor-manager behind me, and realising the many qualifications requisite for the successful pursuit of this arduous and hazardous branch of my profession, when I look back and consider how ill-equipped I was at the age of twenty-seven to engage in such a perilous undertaking, I am amazed at my own audacity.

It is true that in six and a half years on the boards I had played about a hundred parts of all descriptions in every type of play ranging from farce and melodrama to Shakespeare and classical drama; but I had never produced a play and had not even a first-hand knowledge of stage management, while of the business side of my profession I knew less than nothing. Moreover I was very immature for my years and had no experience whatever of that most essential faculty of an actor-manager, the ability to select, handle and control men and women tactfully and yet firmly. Actors, it must be remembered, from the very nature of their calling are inclined to be temperamental.

On the credit side, however, I was blessed with super-abundant energy and unbounded optimism. And these two invaluable assets to the equipment of an actor-manager have extricated me from many a financial morass and surmounted almost unscalable difficulties.

Could I have foreseen the trials and tribulations, the disappointments and heartbreaks and the almost incessant financial worries that were to beset me for practically the whole of my managerial career, I still do not think I should have hesitated in adopting the course I chose in my youthful innocence, for the compensating factors have far outweighed these by no means trifling drawbacks.

My rewards have been many and bounteous. My career as an actor-manager has not only made me hosts of good friends and brought me into contact with many celebrated and distinguished men, ~~who in a private capacity it is highly improbable I should have ever had the privilege of meeting,~~ but in addition, my work in the Shakespearean field won for me the distinction of being honoured by His Majesty, King George V, on the recommendation of the Prime Minister of Australia. Last, but not least, I have for ^{most} ~~the major~~ ~~portion~~ of my life been engaged in work that I enjoyed, and I take pride in believing that in familiarizing millions of people with the spoken word of Shakespeare I have in a humble way done the state some service.

The motives that influenced me in going into theatrical management were firstly the possession of a temperament that preferred to reign in Hell rather than serve in Heaven. In other words, to be at the head of my own company appealed to me far more than the actor's usual ambition - that elusive and frequently disappointing Mecca - a position on the West End Stage.

Also, there was in those days a certain romantic flavour to the life of the touring actor which greatly appealed to me. The circumstances and conditions of his life and the attitude of society towards him were not so very far removed from that of the Elizabethan. He had not entirely outlived the stigma of that Act of Parliament which designated all unlicensed players as "rogues and vagabonds".

It was this romantic side of the stage that appealed to me from the first. It was a revolt against the narrow, ultra-conventional surroundings of my boyhood from which my only escape at that time was in the realm of books and occasional lonely jaunts with a knapsack as I explored the beauties of the Lake District and the Derbyshire dells. From these rambles grew a desire for wider horizons that developed an absolute lust for travel which as an actor-manager I have done my best to satisfy, visiting with my company all kinds of strange out of the way places even though doing so frequently involved me in monetary loss. It always gave me immense satisfaction to take Shakespeare to towns and countries where no one else had dared to penetrate with the Bard. At one time when touring with my company in northern India I had the quite mad idea of taking my company through the Khyber Pass and playing a season in Kabul; *but* I was denied the chance of testing the universal appeal of Shakespeare so far as the Afghans were concerned, as when I broached the proposition to Indian officials it was first

ridiculed and then frowned upon. While I have touched upon the shores of South America I regret to have missed a half opportunity I once had of touring that country ^{with my company.} ~~professionally.~~ In spite of these setbacks, I think I may claim, ~~however,~~ to be the most widely travelled of living actors, professionally at least.

Then again as a manager I would be able to satisfy a burning and impatient ambition to play scores of famous parts for which in the ordinary course of events the opportunity might not present itself for years.

I don't think the thought of making any large sums of money entered into my calculations, otherwise, ignorant as I was of theatrical management, I should have chosen a more popular form of entertainment than the classical drama, being already familiar with the saying of Chatterton, the one-time manager of Drury Lane, that "Byron spells bankruptcy and Shakespeare ruin."

At any rate, actuated by these mixed motives, I now decided to follow in the footsteps of my youthful hero, Osmond Tearle. The first difficulty I encountered was in obtaining theatre bookings for my company. There were at least a dozen companies of repute touring the provinces with repertoires of which Shakespearean plays were either the main or part attraction, and as I found that theatre proprietors were naturally chary of booking an unknown youngster to compete with established favourites I was compelled to ^{begin} ~~commence~~ with a less ambitious programme ~~than I had purposed.~~ Once accepted as a manager I

calculated it would be possible to convert the composition of my repertoire by the gradual introduction of the Shakespearean drama.

I opened my campaign at the old Court Theatre, Warrington, with Laura Hansen (~~whom I have previously mentioned~~) as my leading lady in a repertoire consisting of "Belphegor", "The Corsican Brothers", "The Ticket-of-Leave Man", and "East Lynne".

"Belphegor", with the sub-title of "The Mountebank", was a quaint old costume drama, originally made famous by Charles Dillon, who made an enormous success with the production of the play at the Adelphi Theatre. It was in this production that Lady Bancroft, then Marie Wilton, made her London début and attracted most favourable notice in the part of the boy "Henri".

Dillon apparently gave a superb performance as Belphegor and his name was associated with this part in the same manner, though of course in a lesser degree, that Irving's was to be later on with Mathias in "The Bells"; but I confess I could never galvanize much life into the old play, partly I think because its sentiment and construction had outlived its day so that it was hopelessly dated, but perhaps more, as I suspect, because in my raw experience the part was beyond my capacity, and although I played it for a year or two I was relieved when other additions to my repertoire enabled me to shelve it. Wilson Barrett had attempted a revival of the piece under the title of "The Acrobat" without success, so I have the dubious consolation that I failed in good company.

Apropos of this play and Dillon, I have a good story against myself. One night, after the performance of "Belphegor" at South Shields, I received a message from an old chap of the name of Dockwray, who turned out to be the local dramatic critic, to say that he would esteem it an honour (so he kindly put it) if I would take some refreshment with him in the theatre bar. After the usual greetings and having told me how much he had enjoyed the performance, he proceeded,

"You must know, Mr Wilkie, I saw the great Charles Dillon as Belphegor and tonight's performance brought back many memories. At the end of the second act when you have that beautifully pathetic and infinitely touching scene with your son Henri, I looked round the theatre and I saw two ladies seated near me were visibly moved as they wiped the tears from their faces, and I said to myself, 'That is good - that is very good !'"

At this point of his discourse I became immensely proud of myself and began to murmur my gratification.

"But," continued old Dockwray, "but, Mr Wilkie, I would have you know that when Charles Dillon played the part, the whole house wept."

The three other plays of my initial repertoire are at least known by hearsay to present-day theatre goers, and to these I soon added another costume drama, "The Fool's Revenge", a blank verse play by Tom Taylor, founded on "Le Roi s'amuse", the same theme as the opera of "Rigoletto". It contains ^{in the last act} one of the most

powerful and striking situations ~~in the last act~~ to be found in the whole range of the British drama, but it is a somewhat gloomy tragedy, and never attracted large audiences.

With this distinctly varied programme, designed to suit all tastes, but which apparently appealed to few, I toured for two or three months with little success and then, according to my pre-conceived plan, I introduced at Shrewsbury ^{my} the first Shakespearean production, ~~of my repertoire,~~ "The Merchant of Venice", which proved to be the most consistent attraction of my repertoire for thirty years, and which I came to regard as my mascot. It was my opening play on all important occasions, including Calcutta for my Eastern tour, and also in Melbourne for my Australian campaign, and I have played the part of Shylock about fifteen hundred times.

Finding it necessary to augment my little company for this play, I engaged an actor of the old school, of the type to which I have previously referred. This was John Paley, who for the six years (on and off) that he was a member of my company was a constant source of joy and infinite amusement to me, even if his frequent alcoholic outbreaks were a cause of perpetual anxiety and annoyance.

Paley was a man nearer sixty than fifty years of age and of a decidedly portly habit, but he strode the stage with the jaunty ^{step} stride of a lissome youth of eighteen, and he carried a cloak with a swagger, or a Roman toga with an ease and grace I have never seen bettered by any actor. He had an open orotund voice and always

spoke off the stage in a slightly pompous manner; and he had a curious practice of shooting out a pair of none too clean linen cuffs attached to a flannel shirt, to give additional emphasis to his more weighty remarks. In his youth he had been associated with Barry Sullivan who was his professional god, ^{and} on whom he had, I imagine, attempted to model his manner and methods, and whose name he introduced, both in and out of season, no matter what was the subject of conversation.

He possessed an extraordinary knowledge of the text and traditional business of the whole of the Shakespearean and classical drama, and he took a justifiable pride in being word perfect in his part at the first rehearsal of every play.

Although of an ingenuous and simple nature ^{Paley} he was not without a childlike cunning and should he chance, as rarely happened, to be at a loss for a word at rehearsal he would never admit it, but would break off with some such query as, "When I played this part with Mr Barry Sullivan it was my practice to make a cross at this point. Is it your desire that I should do so, Mr Wilkie?" When I had replied in the affirmative or negative, as the case might be, he would then have an excuse to turn to the prompter and ask for the line where he had broken off.

Besides being a very sound and versatile actor who could be relied upon to play any part at a moment's notice, his familiarity with the business of the plays I was constantly adding to my repertoire made him exceptionally useful to me, but unfortunately

he was afflicted with an all-consuming thirst and his knowledge of the British Drama was only excelled by his phenomenal acquaintance with the price and brewage of the beer in every public house in the British Isles. On an average of about every six months, after a particularly bad burst of intemperance, I used to dispense temporarily with his services in the vain hope that this might lead, if not to his reformation, at least to some improvement in his behaviour. It was then his invariable custom to transfer his histrionic activities to a friend of his who owned a portable theatre usually operating somewhere in the depths of Cornwall. After a lapse of a few weeks, still fondly hoping that he might have learned his lesson, I would wire or write to him to rejoin me, and he would promptly arrive by the first available train. Despite the fact that he was more than old enough to be my father I would then proceed in my managerial capacity to give him a paternal lecture when something akin to the following dialogue would invariably ensue:

"Well, Mr Paley, I am very glad to see you again, but I do trust you will give me no further cause for complaint. You must realise that your previous intemperate habits, besides being very detrimental to your own work, set a very bad example to the younger members of the company. I hope I can rely upon you to keep straight for the future, now that I have given you another chance."

"My dear Mr Wilkie, I assure you this unfortunate incident has been a lesson to me which I shall never forget to my dying

day. On the very day that I was - er - reluctantly compelled to leave your company I immediately signed the pledge - witness the blue ribbon I am wearing - and the complete abstention from alcohol has had such a beneficial effect that I am an entirely different man mentally, spiritually, morally and physically, so that I shall never touch a drop again as long as I live, so help me God !"

"Oh, that's all right then, Mr Paley, I am very glad to hear it. What will you have to drink ?"

"Thank you, Mr Wilkie, I'll have a glass of - er - beer !"

Some little time after he first joined my company I brought out a little brochure containing my press notices, but as those I possessed were not sufficiently panegyric for my purpose I embodied an appreciation of my talents which I wrote myself, in which with a hardihood that can only be excused by my youth, I compared myself very favourably with all the great actors of the past. In fact, although I no longer own a copy of this arrogant effusion, I believe I endeavoured to convey the impression that I was a reincarnation of Kean, Macready and Barry Sullivan combined. In order to disarm criticism I took the first opportunity of showing it to Paley, of whom on account of his years and experience I stood in secret awe. As he scanned it I apologetically explained to him:-

"I am afraid, Mr Paley, you will think it rather presumptuous on my part to compare myself in this manner to

these great actors, with some of whom you have yourself been associated, but you know one has to do this sort of thing for publicity purposes."

"Not at all, not at all," replied my friend Paley, and then blurted out with unpremeditated candour, "and in any case, my dear Mr Wilkie, far better a live ass than a dead lion."

I could neither deny the truth of the old adage nor the justice of its personal application.

Paley never failed when he arrived at the theatre for the morning rehearsal to regale us with some humorous anecdote before the serious work of the day commenced, frequently based upon some real or imaginary conversation with his landlady. One of these stories, for the authenticity of which he vouched, he related to us at the little Cumberland town of Workington. At the time of our visit a partial eclipse of the sun was due to occur and Paley had started the ball of conversation rolling as his landlady brought in his breakfast kipper with the remark:

"I see, Mrs Brown, by the morning paper there is to be an eclipse of the sun to-day," to which innocent announcement the sceptical lady with great severity replied, "I am astonished, Mr Paley, that a gentleman of your age, education and experience should believe in such superstitious nonsense."

Many of these theatrical landladies, particularly in the smaller towns of the north of England were extraordinary characters and besides doing their homely best to make one

comfortable during the week's sojourn in our digs, they took a vital interest in the profession at large and their local theatre in particular, and they could be relied upon when one arrived on the Sunday to give a pretty fair estimate of the business possibilities for the following week as, apart from being regular patrons of the theatre themselves, they had a good deal of inside information from the actors and managers who occupied their rooms.

Occasionally, however, their replies to the usual query as to the prospects were more amusing than instructive. One good dame, I remember, in response to my anxious inquiry said:

"Well, sir, some companies does badly here and others not so well !"

This reply while perhaps slightly ambiguous could hardly be deemed encouraging. Still less so was the answer of another to my inquiry who declared she could give no opinion on the matter as

"You see, sir, I never go to the theatre myself."

"Never go to the theatre, Mrs Jones, how is that ?"

"Well, sir, I puts it to myself this way - if it's a good company what's it doing in this one-eyed place ? And if it's not a good company I don't want to see it."

With the addition of several more plays to my repertoire, including "Othello", my tour continued on its devious and uphill course, only occasionally brightened by a week of moderately decent business; but after Christmas I struck the worst patch

imaginable, and one which but for my incurable optimism might have quenched my managerial career for ever. Owing to the fact that I had yet to establish my reputation with theatre managers and also because the majority of the better-class theatres were occupied by pantomimes at this season of the year, I was compelled to book a sequence of theatres, every one of which had the unenviable reputation of being known as "The actor's grave."

What little hope there might have been of playing to even moderate houses at these death-traps was completely damned by a general election which, in those days, instead of being held on one day, was spread over a period of about six weeks, with a resulting disorganization of business in general and theatrical business in particular. This election coinciding with my tour of these "bush towns", as they would be termed in Australia, or "Tanks" in the U.S.A., my receipts for six consecutive weeks never once reached the gross amount of £30. As from motives of economy I was not only leading actor, but also my own business manager, stage manager and producer, and also as the very modest capital with which I initiated my venture was now practically exhausted, it required no little faith in one's star to battle along and hold to the belief that in the next town the luck must surely change - a belief that lures so many unfortunate theatrical managers to continue in their hazardous enterprise.

The situation was not without its humorous side providing ^{ed} one had sufficient philosophy to say "we shall live and laugh at

this hereafter". One of the places I visited at this stage was a little Yorkshire town where the theatre, as I recollect it, was situated in semi-rural surroundings on the top of a mountain at some considerable distance from the town for which it was supposed to cater. The principle that actuated the erection of the building in this strategical position was the proximity of another small town which lay on the other side of the mountain, and it was thus hoped that the theatre would draw upon both towns for its audience. Unfortunately, mountaineering, though a popular pastime with a certain section of the British public does not appeal as an adjunct to theatre going. In this Thespian eyrie I opened on the Monday night to about £6, but whatever the audience lacked in numbers they more than atoned for in their obvious appreciation. I was playing Mathias in "The Bells", and Henry Irving himself might have been proud of the reception my efforts evoked from an audience that was almost delirious with enthusiasm.

I rather suspect that some of this enthusiasm was inspired by a rumour, of course quite unfounded, that circulated in the district that I had been Irving's understudy in the role and that the audience imagined (also, alas! without foundation) that they were witnessing something approximating to that great actor's interpretation of the part. However, be that as it might, I was quite overwhelmed by their applause and after the curtain had been raised about a dozen times at the end of the

play, while I bowed my acknowledgments and the sparse audience had shouted itself hoarse, I justifiably believed that my luck had changed at last, and looked forward with confidence to bumper houses for the remainder of the week.

But alas ! on that one night we had apparently gathered in almost the entire population of the neighbourhood that were not only lovers of the drama but also of mountaineering propensities, for on the Tuesday night the house dropped to thirty shillings at which figure it hovered for the remainder of the week.

This, my first, tour concluded with three weeks in Ireland commencing at the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin, where we were honoured by a special visit of Their Excellencies, Lord and Lady Aberdeen. Their presence, let me hasten to add, was not a tribute to myself personally but solely as a compliment to Mrs Michael Gunn, the proprietress of the theatre, whose daughter, Miss Haidée Gunn, was playing my leads at the time. However, it was here I received my first and much treasured encouragement from a really reputable paper, for The Freeman's Journal was kind enough to state that "No appreciative critic who saw Mr Allan Wilkie play Shylock, could doubt that he has the making of one of the finest actors on the stage."

A visit to Cork which followed Dublin I shall always remember with gratified delight on account of the warmhearted welcome we received night after night from the people of that city. I

cannot believe that our performances merited the unstinted enthusiasm they displayed, but they succeeded in making me imagine (for the moment) that The Freeman's Journal had understated my talents and that not only was I a fine actor in the making, but that I had actually arrived. It is my only experience of a Cork audience but I am sure that their inherent love of the theatre combined with their Celtic fervour makes them extend a similar welcome to every visiting actor, especially when appearing in the classical drama of which the Irish people are notoriously more appreciative than their Saxon brethren.

At Wexford, the final date of my tour, my experience would appear to be a direct contradiction of this last statement, providing as it did a striking contrast to my happy impressions of Dublin and Cork, but then "There were reasons and causes for it."

When I went to inspect the theatre on the Monday morning I found it to be extraordinarily primitive both as a building and in its general arrangements. The approach was down a narrow, dirty lane, and when I entered through the front of the theatre I discovered the pit, when not devoted to its legitimate purpose, apparently served as a gigantic hen roost, being filled with a large flock of poultry, many of which were perched on the pit seats which, by the way, consisted of long backless forms about four inches wide. Having wended my way through the clucking hens

and crowing roosters, I ascended the stage which was occupied by an aged man and a small boy. I accosted the aged one and enquired where I could find the stage carpenter.

"'Tis mesilf that am the carpenter," replied the veteran.

"And the property man?"

"'Tis mesilf!"

"And the gasman?"

"'Tis mesilf!"

I then asked this Admirable Crichton what staff he had for me, whereat, pointing to the small boy, he said:

"That young fellow there's the staff."

On trying the lights with every gas jet to its full capacity, I found the faint glimmer they gave off would be barely sufficient to discern the features of my fellow actors on the other side of the stage, and the audience would be compelled to guess at the identity of the characters from the spoken lines.

These conditions coupled with the weather which was of tropical heat did not augur too well for my business prospects, but I counted upon the fact that all my publicity matter announced that the company was "direct from highly successful seasons at the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin and the Opera House, Cork" and hoped this would induce the Wexfordians to regard the visit of my company as a supreme event in the history of their theatre. Unfortunately this announcement instead of creating a favourable impression aroused their antagonism at what they regarded as

another affront to Ireland (in this case Wexford) on the part of the Saxon by an attempt to impose upon their simple and guileless natures; their attitude, much the same as the landlady whom I have mentioned in this chapter earlier, being "If they have been playing at the Gaiety, Dublin and the Opera House, Cork, what the Hell should they be doing in Wexford ?"

At Wexford in those days, it was extremely difficult to obtain the London newspapers and one of the members of my Company, wishing to keep in touch with the great world beyond, had thoughtfully ordered "The Daily Mail" to be delivered daily at his digs, where it turned up at about three in the afternoon.

During the matinee, anxious to learn the current news, he called to the aforementioned "staff" and, giving him the address of his rooms, asked him to run round and "bring me my Daily Mail".

The staff disappeared and was seen no more until the final curtain was just about to fall, when he arrived, bearing a large tray upon which was set out a steak, chips, bread, butter, cheese and a bottle of beer. This he solemnly set before my friend.

"Good Lord !" exclaimed the latter. "What the devil's this ?"

"Sure, your honour," replied "the staff" in his rich Irish brogue, "and it was yourself who ordered me to bring you your daily male."

Which reminds me of ^{an amusing incident} ~~a~~ happening in one of the smaller Welsh towns.

The graveyard scene in "Hamlet" was about to ^{begin} commence when my Stage Manager, discovering that the bier, upon which the body of Ophelia has to be borne to its last resting place, was not in its proper place in the wings, turned to the local Property Master and exclaimed:

"Where's the bier ? The bier for Ophelia ? Quick !"

The Property Master rushed away and in a few minutes returned, a tumbler in one hand and a large jug of foaming liquid in the other.

"What is that for ?" asked the frantic Stage Manager.

"Ophelia's beer," replied the Property Master, in a tone of injured innocence.

~~And, talking of the small Welsh towns, I remember one morning standing outside the old Theatre Royal, Merthyr, with the local manager; a strange person, of the type often vaguely classified as "a rough diamond".~~

~~The inhabitants of Merthyr, being entirely working class, one had to rely upon the patronage of the cheaper parts of the house, the front seats being there more for ornament than anything else. There were, however, outside the town, a few of the "stately homes of England", or I should say, Wales, and very occasionally, the lordly inhabitants of these mansions, when "anything special" was to be seen at Merthyr, would grace the local theatre with their presence.~~

~~Charmed, no doubt, by the magic name of Shakespeare, the~~

~~scion of one of these houses arrived at the Theatre Royal, with the obvious intention of booking seats for my show. He put in his appearance in his dog-cart, attended by his groom and, leaving his horse to the latter, alighted from his conveyance and ascended the steps that led to the vestibule, where he was met by the unshaven face of my friend, the manager.~~

~~"Are you the manager?" enquired the young man, in a marked Oxford drawl.~~

~~"I am," replied that worthy. "What then?"~~

~~"I want to book seats," the first speaker continued. "Er - what are the front seats here - what?"~~

~~The reply he received hardly contained the information he was seeking.~~

~~"Wood, you bloody fool, you didn't think they was diamonds, did you?"~~

~~I never did know the exact number of three shilling seats my would-be customer had intended booking, for, with a look of disgust, he turned on his heel and, remounting his dog-cart, drove away. Thus the drama was robbed of money it could ill afford to lose.~~

The theatre is now crying out at the lack of support it is receiving from the public, but I often, regretfully, think that it has largely itself to blame and that, to a great extent, it is suffering from the sins of the fathers which are being visited upon the children. Did such places as Wexford do anything to

foster the love of the drama ? Did they not rather stave the public off until the up-to-date and wily cinema manager came along ?

At any rate, to return to my narrative, they boycotted me at Wexford to such an extent that after playing to "shillings" for three nights, by arrangement with the manager of the theatre, I brought the season to an abrupt termination and my tour to an ignominious conclusion and shipped my company and myself back to England.

Another valued recruit to my company was Frank Fay, who with his brother W.G. had for some years been the mainstay of the famous Abbey Theatre in Dublin. He brought to his work a tremendous enthusiasm, and was a gifted actor and a most accomplished speaker of verse.

Chapter VI.

The end of my first tour in theatrical management found me financially broke. With "head bloody but unbowed", however, I immediately set about preparations for a second tour to ^{begin} commence on August Bank Holiday, and I managed to borrow a very small amount of fresh capital, so small indeed that if business proved as wretched as in the past my tour was bound to come to a sticky end ^{after} in a matter of two or three weeks. It was even with some hesitation and only after the house on the opening night seemed to warrant the expenditure that I dared to spend the small sum necessary to purchase a sword and dagger for Hamlet, which part I was playing for the first time that week.

My company was considerably strengthened this tour by the inclusion of Alexander Marsh, a sterling actor who remained with me for four years until he went into management on his own account, Aubrey Mather, ^{LATER} ~~now~~ a featured Hollywood player, Ian Fleming and Frank Royde, both of whom have since attained prominent positions on the London stage. ^{in addition here} And last, but by no means least, it was at the ^{opening} ~~commencement~~ of this tour that a young and very enthusiastic graduate of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, Frediswyde Hunter-Watts, joined my company playing minor roles: ^{two years} ~~and who later was to become~~ ^{she became} my wife, and ^{together we were to share} ~~the ideal representative~~ both our lives and our theatrical careers, in a partnership which brought us great happiness for almost half a century.

the roles.

of Desdemona, Ophelia, Rosalind, Imogen, Juliet, and a score more of Shakespearean heroines.

TRS.

In my fifty years experience as an actor and over sixty years as a playgoer I have yet to see her equal in ~~these and kindred roles.~~ She brought to them a depth of feeling, a refinement and rarity of spirit, a keen intelligence, an intense love and appreciation of poetry which, enhanced by a beautiful voice, made her speaking of verse a particular delight. Exceptionally graceful in all her movements and blessed with great beauty of face and form, she won the admiration and affection of all classes of playgoers, though I think perhaps that those rare qualities to which I have referred made their greatest appeal to the more intelligent and cultivated section of the public.

From now onwards I worked into a better class of theatre than I had to accept for my first tour; but it was a gradual process, and when playing at the Grand Theatre, Leeds, or the Theatre Royal, Bradford, it was necessary for the sake of my managerial prestige to conceal the fact that I had just come from some obscure date such as Bacup or Accrington, though very often these small theatres with their more generous terms were more profitable to me than the big "No. 1." theatres.

Holiday dates were always difficult to obtain, particularly for a Shakespearean company as Shakespeare was not considered a good holiday attraction. Also the theatre manager expected one to accept a smaller percentage of the receipts owing to the

entirely problematical advantage of increased business on the Bank Holiday, frequently nullified by blazing hot weather on the summer Holidays or a heavy fall of snow on the winter ones.

While for the week preceding the Bank Holiday when the public were reserving their pocket money, and the week following when it was all spent, with a corresponding effect upon the receipts, there was, of course, never any question of an increased percentage as an offset to the lower terms one was obliged to accept for the holiday week.

The invariable practice before the days of daylight saving, entertainment tax, and the opposition of the films, was for the regular provincial companies to commence their tour on the August Bank Holiday and they would commonly continue, as did mine, for a period of forty-four to forty-eight weeks. Even though salaries were much less this was a healthier proposition for the actor than the present day tours of eight or ten weeks in the Autumn and a similar period in the Spring.

For the opening ^{date} of my second tour the only theatre available was the Miners' Theatre, at the little colliery town of Ashington, in Northumberland, which as the name suggests was owned by the miners on some sort of co-operative basis, and as a consequence the stage staff was recruited from the miners who voluntarily officiated in extravagant numbers, as they were thus able to see the play gratis.

An unfortunate accident occurred during this week which only

just missed ending in a real tragedy in place of the mimic one we were depicting in Othello. In the last act when Othello wounds Iago, ^{Alexander} Marsh, who was playing the latter part, made a slight movement backwards and my sword instead of passing behind his body penetrated his leather jerkin and entered his side to the extent of several inches. In the excitement of the moment I hardly realized what had happened, but when Marsh, who with tremendous pluck continuing his part, uttered his next line "I bleed, sir, but not killed" with a realism that was obviously not counterfeited, I recognised that something serious had occurred and quickly brought the scene to a close. Being a Saturday night the two or three medicos Ashington supported were holidaying, and we had to send six miles to a neighbouring town for a doctor who, however, quickly relieved my anxiety and distress by the information that, although the sword had only just missed a vital part by half an inch, Marsh would be alright in a week or so.

Though my apprehensions regarding Marsh were allayed, my managerial instincts made me regret, from a publicity point of view, that it had not happened the following week when I was playing at Leeds instead of in the obscure town of Ashington, when the next morning the London press appeared with flaring headlines of "Actor stabbed upon the stage", and full details of the accident.

In the course of a varied life I have come in contact not

only with many distinguished men and women, but what has given me even greater delight, many extraordinary and eccentric "characters". The days of the eccentric under the impact of the mass mind and herd life seem to be rapidly passing and therefore I derive much enjoyment in recalling some of the very unusual and individualistic personalities I have met in the past. People quite undistinguished and unknown to the general public, but whose peculiar habits and viewpoint and original outlook on life were a constant joy and endeared them to all those who were privileged to be counted their friends. In my little gallery of eccentrics I must not fail to include ^{one} ~~him~~ who was perhaps the most remarkable; ~~of all.~~ This was T.R. Beaufort, known to all and sundry as Tommy Beaufort. Among the dozen or so professions he followed was that of commercial artist, and about this time, within a year or two of my becoming an actor-manager, Beaufort was commissioned by David Allen & Sons, the theatrical printers, to do the designs for some coloured posters I had ordered from them. In this way I first made his acquaintance. He was a character that might have stepped straight out of the pages of Dickens and only the pen of Dickens could do him justice. He was a Londoner of the Londoners, soaked in ^{their} ~~its~~ lore and traditions, with an intimate knowledge of every phase of London life both high and low. Back in the 'seventies and 'eighties, when Bohemia was still to be found in London, he had mixed in those circles of which George Augustus Sala was the shining light. In appearance he was tall

and dark, invariably dressed in a heavily braided frock coat in the tail pockets of which he usually had crammed, broadside on, a large oblong sketch board which flapped against his backside and projected about six inches each side of his person. It took a good deal of negotiating as he hopped up the narrow stairway to the top of a London bus. I never saw him either bearded or actually clean shaven as by some mysterious means he always appeared to have about three days of heavy dark growth on his chin, neither more nor less. I think he was round sixty years of age when I first met him but he may not have been as much. And finally he always spoke with a pronounced Cockney accent and in a hoarse whisper that could be heard half a mile away.

He lived in those days in an old, largish house in the Wandsworth Road, and his housekeeper, Ellen, (quite a character too,) had served Henry Irving in a similar capacity. At the back of the house was a large stone-flagged room, lined with books, in which an open fire burned all the year round; this was Beaufort's living room, studio and library, where he spent all his working hours in the company of a small black-and-tan terrier, the most understanding dog I have ever known, for at a word from his master he would fetch him his pipe, tobacco-pouch, slippers, boots, matches or whatever article he wanted without the slightest hesitation and without ever making a mistake. Beaufort was offered a large sum by a French film firm to take him to Paris to have a picture made depicting his dog's super-canine intelligence but he refused the very tempting offer when he found that on

his return to England quarantine regulations would temporarily separate him from his beloved dog.

The books on his shelves were mostly rare editions that he had picked up for a few coppers from second-hand bookstalls, ^{and} which he would reluctantly part with for as many sovereigns when, as not infrequently happened, it was necessary to meet a writ served on him for some pressing debt. Upstairs, every room was crammed with pictures, valuable ornaments and bric-à-brac, the floors being literally knee-deep in folios of old prints, engravings, playbills, programmes and what not. Yet in this seemingly hopeless jumble, on the request for say, a print of one of London's old theatres, he could go straight to the pile where it was located and dive his arm down for the folio containing the print required.

In addition to being an artist he was an authority on the restoration of pictures and had written a text-book on the subject; he was also frequently commissioned to decide as to the authenticity of an alleged old master. As an expert photographer he had the official job of photographing the exhibits at the annual Chelsea flower show; and amongst other strange posts he held was the secretaryship of the oldest pigeon-fanciers' society in the world.

I can't remember now one half of his varied occupations, but with them all, as I have already hinted, he seemed to be chronically hard up until, on a visit to England in 1926, I called upon him and found him at last in financial clover.

In the time of the Napoleonic wars the French prisoners confined on Dartmoor used to while away the weary hours, and also earn small sums to purchase tobacco and other luxuries, by carving beautifully finished and accurate models of frigates and other men-of-war from the large meat bones begged from the kitchen. Hundreds of these models were scattered all over England mostly in a state of disrepair, and a collector's craze for them having arisen, Beaufort, by some freak of fortune, had secured a monopoly in the work of restoring them. It was a highly technical job to which he had devoted much study and he was able to charge a pretty high figure for the work so that he was making not less than a thousand a year. His method of getting rid of some of this surplus increment was as novel as his new-found occupation. Every Sunday he would reserve the back bench, made to seat four, on one of the open char-à-bancs that plied to the South Coast watering places, then with a clay pipe and a couple of ounces of shag, stretched out on his bench, he would smoke his way to Margate, Dover, or Folkestone and back.

The last time I called upon him was about ~~twenty~~^{THIRTY} years ago when by my computation he must have been about ninety and would therefore be now about one hundred and ~~ten~~^{TWENTY}. I don't suppose he is still in this world but as on that occasion he took me round to the local hostelry and drank about eight or nine rums in rapid succession without turning a hair I imagine he survived the London blitz and anything else that came along.

During the six years that I toured the English provinces, I produced over thirty plays, including about a dozen of the more popular plays of Shakespeare, several Old English comedies and a number of classical dramas, embracing besides those I have already mentioned, "Richelieu", "The Lady of Lyons", "Virginius", etc. The programmes were exceptionally heavy work for a star actor apart from managerial duties. In the north of England where I spent most of my time, Lancashire alone absorbing nearly half the year, the popular taste ran to tragedy or drama for five nights a week with a comedy on the Friday which was regarded as the "fashionable" night. As a special attraction I would frequently give a double bill composed of say "The Bells" and "The Corsican Brothers", or a selection of five acts from the most popular plays of my repertoire. These latter programmes made great demands upon one's physical resources, but they were greatly appreciated by the canny northerners who delighted in getting full value, and if possible a little over-weight for their money.

The majority of provincial theatres, in pre-war days, were managed by the proprietor or lessee of the building. This meant that the business was conducted by the person solely responsible, instead of, as frequently happens now, by the local representative of a syndicate; who is nothing more than a glorified office boy and has to refer every detail, outside the strict routine, to headquarters. This manager-proprietor was usually an individual of some prestige and authority in the community, who took an active

part in the local civic life, and there is probably no business in which the personal equation counts for so much as in that of the theatre.

Some of these old-time theatre managers were unique characters. One I remember in particular was old Harry Yorke, proprietor of the Theatre Royal, Blackburn, who at one time I believe had been a Music Hall star. Possessed of a broad Lancashire accent, he was always sartorially resplendent in a somewhat horsey fashion and invariably bedecked with a generous buttonhole. For some years he had as general factotum, a pimply faced youth, but on returning to Blackburn for one of my annual visits I noticed that the youth in question had been superseded by another assistant. Being curious to know what had become of him, I said to Yorke:

"What has happened to young Jones, Mr Yorke ?"

"Eh ! Young Jones ! Oh ! he's left."

"So I see," I replied, "did you give him the sack ?"

"Oh, no, I never like to give any man t'sack."

"You mean he left of his own accord ?"

"Well, not exactly."

"Illness, I suppose, he didn't look too strong ?"

"No - he wasn't what you might call ill."

"Well," I persisted, "if you didn't give him the sack and he didn't go voluntarily, and he wasn't ill, how the dickens did he leave ?"

"Well, you see it was this way," said old Yorke, "I just gave him a gentle hint. One day I says to him, 'Look here, young feller-my-lad, you're no bloody good to me, so you'd better jigger off'!"

~~If this was old Yorke's idea of a "gentle hint",~~ I should have dearly loved to have been present when ^{Yorke} he found himself compelled to give one of his staff a really abrupt dismissal.

It was on one of my visits to Blackburn, by the way, that the much lamented death of King Edward VII occurred, and I shall never forget the almost medieval atmosphere conjured up by the solemn voices of the newsboys re-echoing through the darkness while I lay in bed in the early hours of Saturday morning, as they called out the fateful announcement 'Death of the King! Death of the King! Death of the King! Death of the King!'

Not knowing what would be the general procedure on the occasion of such a national calamity; whether the theatres would be closed immediately or only on the day of the King's funeral, I decided to run round to the other local places of amusement to see if I could get a hint as to their attitude in the matter. I arrived at a matinee at the local music hall just in time to see the manager come before the curtain and make the following tactful speech: ~~It ran something on these lines.~~

"Ladies and Gents: I know that there are many people who are thinking that we ought to have closed down to-day as a mark of respect on account of the death of our beloved sovereign, but

much as we all regret the passing of His Gracious Majesty, I try to put myself in his place and think as he would think. And, ladies and gents, we have to remember that above all things Teddy was a sport, and I am quite sure if he could speak to us now Teddy would say 'Go on with it, boys', so with your kind permission, ladies and gents, we will go on with the performance !"

Of strikes and lockouts in the cotton trade, the coal and railway industries, etc., with their resulting havoc to theatrical business, I had my usual share. Two episodes I recall in this connection; one with its ludicrous side; the other not so amusing. The first occurred at the seaport colliery town of Seaham Harbour. A local strike in the mines had been adjusted on the Saturday, on terms highly satisfactory to the colliers. In order to celebrate their victory they attended the theatre in vast numbers in a state of alcoholic jubilation not, as events soon showed, so much from an overpowering love of the drama, but because it was the most convenient meeting place in which to celebrate their triumph. The din and uproar, as can be imagined, was terrific. Pit called to gallery, and gallery to dress circle. Jocular and exulting comments upon the successful issue of the strike were exchanged, interlarded with playful badinage. Amidst this pandemonium, the actors, utterly ignored by their audience, ~~went~~ went through the play in what practically amounted to dumb show. Half way through the performance, just when the tumult was at its

height, an irate occupant of the dress circle burst into my manager's office and vehemently demanded his money back because, as he bitterly complained, "he could not hear himself speak !"

The other incident arose from a railway strike which temporarily disorganised transport throughout the whole of the north-east of England, to such an extent that I was unable to get out of Grimsby, where I had just finished a week, until the Monday morning. I was due to open at Darlington the same night. The situation, therefore, was serious. By cajolery and entreaties I managed to induce the railway authorities to allow my company and scenery to be attached to the mail train from Hull to York. On arriving at York at midday, we found the station crowded with soldiers, who had been called out in expectation of serious trouble. We were transferred to another train for the short run to Darlington where we were told we should arrive about two o'clock. We sat in our carriages and waited. Five or six hours went by; at last the train pulled out, and we ultimately arrived at our destination at a little after seven. There was then, of course, no hope of getting our scenery into the theatre for the performance at seven thirty.

I was met at the station by my advance agent who, rather cruelly as it turned out begged me to drive to the theatre on my way to my rooms. I jumped into a cab and did so. There, the entire population being on strike holiday, appeared to have assembled to see our performance, and I had the heart-rending task

of dismissing one of the longest queues I have ever seen outside a theatre. (N.P.) This same agent, Tom Kuner, was a good fellow and a conscientious worker, but I could never quite reconcile myself to his one foible. He had the disgusting habit of swilling huge quantities of cocoa. Charles Lamb always mistrusted people who professed to like minced veal. For my part I always associate a liking for cocoa with defaulting churchwardens. Apart from this idiosyncrasy, however, as I have said he was a good fellow. Frequently I have been astonished at the curious and out-of-the-way jobs some people will take on for a living. But perhaps the most amazing of all was the one-time occupation of this cocoa addict. He had the most immobile and expressionless countenance I have ever seen. It might have been carved of wood. It was the perfect poker face. Compared to his the countenance of the inscrutable Chinaman or the grave and stolid apache Indian would have been an open book. Never did he betray by even the flicker of an eyelid the slightest vestige of emotion or intelligence. Not that he was lacking in either.

When he had been with me for some months I ventured to question him as tactfully as I could on this peculiarity and said, "Excuse my being personal, Kuner - I daresay, however, you have had people make the same comment - but I have never met anyone in my life with such a total lack of any facial expression. From your blank face absolutely devoid of any emotion I have never the slightest clue of what is passing in your thoughts. Tell me, is it an acquired gift or were you born so?"

"It was definitely acquired," he said, "but not deliberately so. Some years ago I was engaged by John Lawson (this was the John Lawson of 'Humanity' fame to whom I have referred in an earlier chapter) to enact the 'Man in a Trance' and my job was to lie in an open coffin for several days at a stretch, in a small hall or an empty shop that Lawson would hire for the purpose. Usually Lawson would manage to smuggle me in some food during the night, but by day I lay exposed to the public view at a charge of 1/- admission, children 6d. Not only the ordinary public, ^{but} for even medical men who came to examine me used to be completely gulled or appeared to be. It often happened however that schoolboys, when Lawson was not keeping a careful watch, would stick pins into me, pinch me and even put pepper under my nose to see if they could arouse me from my trance ! Through it all, no matter how much they tormented me, I had to retain a mask-like countenance. It would have been fatal to make the slightest movement or show any emotion. After some years my face became set-rigid and expressionless as you now see it."

"What a ghastly occupation, didn't you hate it ?"

"No, I didn't mind it. Lawson used to pay me £4 a week which was pretty good money in those days and as I spent most of my time lying in my coffin where there was no opportunity of spending any money, my expenses were practically nil. In fact, I might have been doing the same job still but when we got to Cardiff, Lawson was offered by a showman, £20 if I would undertake

to be buried for twenty-four hours in my coffin six feet underground with a tube to the surface through which I could breathe. I was quite willing, but I wanted £10 for the job and Lawson would not give me more than £5, so we quarrelled and I left him." Imagine being buried under six feet of earth for a beggarly £10 ! Twenty million wouldn't tempt me.

The following experience may serve as a warning to embryo theatrical managers to be careful never to offend the susceptibilities of small town communities. Having a week vacant between two large Midland centres, I decided to fill it in at Cradley Heath, that being the only available date in that region. Cradley Heath was, and I suppose is still, the headquarters of the chain-making industry, and not only the whole of the male populace but even the women and children were employed in the work. It was, at that time at least, a most primitive not to say barbaric town, and my wife and I put up at what was, I believe, the leading, if not the only, hotel in the place owned by a gentleman rejoicing in the romantic and high-sounding appellation, reminiscent of both Shakespeare and the stage of Lorenzo St. Clair. Mr St. Clair treated us as honoured guests waiting upon us personally, and I am sure, did his best to make our stay comfortable. But as the dietary, if not indeed the only nutriment available in Cradley apparently consisted of pork chops or fried fish and chip potatoes, we decided that on our second visit to Cradley, where the chain-makers had on our first visit most unexpectedly filled the theatre

to overflowing, to lodge in the more congenial atmosphere of the neighbouring town of Stourbridge. This was our downfall ! The Cradley Heathians averred that "if their town wasn't good enough for the Wilkies to live in, they wouldn't go and see them." As we drove up nightly to the theatre from Stourbridge, in an old-fashioned two-horsed landau that we hired for the purpose, every man, woman, and child in the town assembled in a dense throng around the theatre to witness such a novel and unprecedented equipage in the streets of Cradley; but as soon as we entered the stage door, they silently dispersed, and we played to practically empty houses the whole week.

The Scots as a nation are noted for their reserve and the cautious manner in which they weigh out words of appraisal or condemnation, as witness when Mrs Siddons after having taken London by storm, was making her first appearance in Edinburgh, all her greatest efforts were received in stony silence until about half way through the play, after a particularly fine emotional outburst, a voice from the audience was heard to exclaim judiciously, "Come, that's no so bad." I had a personal verification of this national characteristic when playing at Greenock. Walking home on the opening night to my digs, I overheard two men in front of me discussing the performance at which they had evidently been present. Ignoring the old adage that listeners seldom hear good of themselves, and anxious to learn how we had impressed the Greenock public, I quickened my footsteps in order

to hear their verdict. I was rewarded by the following dialogue:

"Weel, Jock, what was your opeenion of the Shylock ?"

"Um !" replied the other after a long pause, "I've seen waurse !"

A better story, perhaps of a similar nature, is told of Walter Bentley, a Scottish actor, son of an Edinburgh parson, who was, for some time, a prominent member of Irving's company and afterwards achieved fame as a tragedian both in his native country and in Australia, where he died at an advanced age, many years ago in tragic circumstances. Playing Hamlet in some Scottish town where the price of admission to the gallery for the visit of "The eminent Scotch tragedian" had been raised from the usual fourpence to sixpence, a couple of galleryites were heard to sum up the merits of his performance in these words:

"And what did you think of Bentley's Hamlet, Sandy ?" To which Sandy sapiently replied: "Weel, it was nae so bad - but it was no a saxpenny Hamlet."

It was my custom for several years to wind up my tour in June with a season of three weeks at York where I would go through the gamut of my repertoire, producing a different play nightly. These seasons, preceding as they did a well-earned holiday, in that delightful old city with very appreciative audiences in the historic and charming atmosphere of the old Theatre Royal were most enjoyable. This theatre, built on the foundations of an old monastery, is said to be haunted by the ghost of a nun, who

as a punishment for some dire offence, is alleged to have been immured alive in a part of the building that now forms one of the dressing rooms. Although in the aggregate I have spent many months in the theatre it has never fallen my lot to make the unhappy lady's acquaintance.

Just before one of my York seasons,
~~The resignation of~~ Miss Carrie Baillie *resigned the* ~~from my~~ company *and* ~~took~~
~~place immediately prior to one of my York seasons when~~ my wife (Miss Hunter-Watts) took over her position, *and* her initiation as leading lady with ~~my company~~ necessitated her playing eighteen *major* leading roles in the space of three weeks. Notwithstanding the magnitude of the task it was her pride, as it was mine, that she never once missed a single word or omitted any of the accepted business of her eighteen characters.

It was during this York season that I gained a valuable recruit to my company in the person of Philip Gordon, who had been low comedian and stage manager with Osmond Tearle for fifteen years. He was I think, the finest Shakespearean clown I have ever seen. A tubby little man with a face like a full moon and a button of a nose on which his gold pince-nez could only retain a precarious hold he had all the physical attributes for a low comedian. He had been educated for the priesthood but forsook the church for the stage. Very precise and serious-minded he had, although a superb comedian, paradoxically enough, very little sense of humour in private life. But I have found many gifted comedians afflicted in this respect. Intuitively they seem able to seize upon all the comic possibilities of a character which, with

the aid of a whimsical personality they will interpret with the utmost finesse and humour. But then an intuitive theatre sense combined with the power to express emotion are the essential qualifications for the actor rather than mere intellect which, indeed, can be a serious handicap to him. An average intelligence is all the mental equipment he requires.

One of my most prized treasures is a letter I received from Lord (then Sir Edward) Russell, the editor of the Liverpool Daily Post, and also one of the most famous of dramatic critics, who, incidentally, was the first of the category to recognise and encourage the budding genius of Henry Irving when he was an unknown stock actor at the Prince of Wales' Theatre, Liverpool. Sir Edward was spending a holiday with friends in the neighbourhood of York and after witnessing our performance of Louis N. Parker's play "The Cardinal", he wrote me a most kindly worded letter in which he stated "The performance gave me unmingled pleasure". I felt that the unsolicited statement that we had given "unmingled pleasure" to the doyen of English dramatic critics after the satiety of over half a century of playgoing was praise indeed.

It was for this identical performance of "The Cardinal" that I asked the resourceful property man of the Theatre Royal if he could obtain for me a large gold cross which was a necessary property in one of the scenes. "Yes," he said, "I know where I can get you a beauty," and off he went to do so. He returned in a few minutes looking somewhat disconsolate with the astounding

information that he had gone to borrow the cross from the Roman Catholic church next door, and what bewildered him not a little was the fact that the justly indignant priest had chased him out of the sacred building. ^{The property man} He was evidently a staunch and bigoted Protestant from his muttered comment of "What can you expect from them Pagans ?"

Theatrical business in 1911 for the major part of the year was at its lowest ebb, primarily due to the phenomenally hot weather which lasted practically from Easter to October, so that when one day in my club I happened to ~~run against~~ ^{meet} a man who, as the representative of a theatre proprietor in Calcutta, had been instructed to arrange for an English Shakespearean Company to play a season in India coinciding with the visit of their Majesties King George V and Queen Mary in connection with the great Durbar to be held later in Delhi, casually asked me if I would care to take my company to India, I jumped at the offer. Not that the adverse conditions in England were the sole inducement. I welcomed the opportunity to explore fresh fields, particularly when the fresh fields were those of the romantic East as a contrast to the grimy industrial towns of the north of England. I little thought, however, when I entered into an engagement to go to India for a twelve weeks' season with an optional extension of a further six weeks, that having once contracted the wanderlust, I was destined to start on travels which would last for forty ~~hours~~ ^{YEARS} and take me round the globe; that I should carry the banner of Shakespeare

over the greater part of the British Empire and to many alien countries and peoples; that I should travel hundreds of thousands of miles by every conceivable method of transportation from ocean liner to little coasting vessel, by train and stage coach, by motorcar and sleigh, by rickshaw and sedan chair, on camel and horseback, and in every possible variation of climate from 130 degrees in the shade to 40 degrees below zero.

The voyage we had had through his intervention that our first visit to Gibraltar was a most unusual and impressive one such as does not fall to the lot of the ordinary tourist. Even the rigid and unyielding discipline of the P. & O. line was subservient to the wishes of our host; and we were desired to have a chat with the Governor, Sir Archibald Hunter, the then Governor of Gibraltar, who was sitting right under the shadow of the great rock at the railway end, and stay so for some time while Kitchener and the Governor exchanged mutual greetings.

Our next stopping place was Malta in whose beautiful harbour at Valletta we awoke to look out on what appeared in the morning haze to be a veritable fairyland as conceived by Deane. For all a delightful day on shore we were to spend the enjoyment of this fortunate isle with its picturesque buildings of Maltese style along the coast, while the women in their black gowns, white lace head-dresses, unique to Malta, lent a national atmosphere to the place.

Chapter VII.

We sailed for Calcutta by the S. S. Nubia on 11th September, 1911, a company of twenty with the usual impedimenta of theatrical wardrobe, scenery, etc., for a repertoire of about a score of plays. For fellow passenger in the earlier part of the voyage we had Lord Kitchener, en route for Egypt, and it was through his intervention that our first view of Gibraltar was a most unusual and impressive one such as does not fall to the lot of the ordinary tourist. Even the rigid and semi-naval routine of the P. & O. Line was subservient to the wishes of the great man, and as he desired to have a chat with his friend, Sir Archibald Hunter, the then Governor of Gibraltar, we steamed up right under the shadow of the great rock on the eastern side and lay to for some time while Kitchener and the Governor signalled mutual greetings.

Our next stopping place was Malta in whose beautiful harbour at Valetta we awoke to look out on what appeared in the morning haze to be a veritable fairyland as conceived by Dulac. Nor did a delightful day on shore ~~serve to~~ dispel the enchantment of this fortunate isle with its picturesque buildings and flower clad slopes, while the women in their black gowns, quaint huge head-dresses, unique to Malta, lent a medieval atmosphere to the place.

It was here that Kitchener left us to proceed by a destroyer to Alexandria, and we hied us to Port Said, that most unromantic and disappointing "gateway of the East", reminiscent only of a particularly sordid and dissolute White City, except that one could not help feeling that Imre Kiralfy would have made a so much better job of it in his palmy days at Earl's Court.

Occasional glimpses of camel trains, their backs laden with merchandise wending their way across the desert, as viewed from the Suez Canal had more the appearance of the real thing. Then the Red Sea in a fairly temperate mood, followed by a somewhat tedious voyage across the Arabian Sea and then the genuine East at last ! We arrived at Colombo, with its profuse tropical vegetation, its steaming heat and its dense hordes of babbling natives. There were the ^{Singhalese,} ~~Cingalese,~~ distinguished by the ornamental tortoiseshell combs worn on their heads like a reversed tiara, the Tamils from Southern India, and representatives of half the many peoples of Asia.

At Colombo my wife and I were met by Warwick Major, the lessee of the local theatre where I was later to play several very successful and enjoyable seasons. We dined with him that night at his charming bungalow on the Galle Face Road, overlooking the Indian Ocean, and my delight in my first meal in such novel surroundings was considerably lessened by the direful picture, happily not realized, which our host drew of the fate awaiting a Shakespearean Company having the temerity to visit

Calcutta, where according to him, the popular taste in entertainment lay entirely in Musical Comedy and the lighter side of the drama.

My first impressions of Calcutta with its handsome buildings, particularly those of the Chowringhee with the palatial hotels and shops facing the great stretch of open common known as the Maidan, which is bounded on its further side by the Hooghly river and on which are situated both the Eden Gardens and the Calcutta Zoo, were entirely delightful. Although I was to visit practically every town of importance in India from the Himalayas to Tuticorin in its southernmost point, no subsequent experiences ever succeeded in eradicating or qualifying my first love, and if ever I hear the East a-calling it is to Calcutta that my thoughts inevitably turn rather than to its picturesquely situated sister city of Bombay, the more subdued charm of the southern capital of Madras, the beautiful hot weather resorts in the Himalayas, or the unique fascination of Quetta, that lonely outpost on the Afghan frontier.

There was but little opportunity for sightseeing during our first few days in Calcutta as all our time was devoted to busy and anxious preparations for our opening night in "The Merchant of Venice".

The Grand Opera House at which we were to appear was a fine commodious building with a large stage, owned by a venerable looking old gentleman and his numerous sons of the name of Cohen.

They were I believe Armenian Jews, and I regret to state that my business relations with them very soon became, to put it mildly, somewhat strained, though to do them justice, they never allowed our business altercations to affect their suave and ever smiling demeanour in our social intercourse. But I soon learned that the more they smiled, the more cause I had to keep my weather eye open. Our differences were ultimately concluded in the law courts of Calcutta in which although I was triumphant, it proved on the financial side, at least, to be but an arid victory.

For the present, however, I was engrossed with rehearsals which in the October heat of Calcutta were distinctly trying despite a score of electric fans surrounding the stage. They were also trying to Joe, my Yorkshire Stage carpenter, though for other reasons than the heat. Native labour being absurdly cheap and equally inefficient, he was surrounded by a small army of coolies detailed to assist him in getting the scenery ship-shape after being tossed about in the hold of the Nubia for six weeks. Joe was continually exasperated by the inability of the coolies to understand English. In a day or two, however, they did learn to distinguish the names of certain stage properties and tools, but they only knew them parrot fashion and they were quite at a loss if the name of an article was varied in the slightest particular. One day while we were rehearsing, Joe was working at the back of the stage with a circle of about a score of his alleged assistants squatting on their heels intently watching him when suddenly he wanted a hammer. "'Ere," said

Joe, "'alf a dozen of you black bastards fetch me a 'ammer." This was so much Greek to his willing but non-linguistic staff and they gazed vacantly back at him. "'Ammer, 'ammer, 'ammer, 'ammer !" repeated Joe, in rising tones of impatience. Still no response, only more vacant looks, "FETCH ME MY BLUDDY 'AMMER," now fairly shouted Joe, thoroughly roused. "Aie ! bluddy 'ammer, bluddy 'ammer !" shrieked his gang who as one man dived across the stage and returned with the wanted instrument. "'Ammer, without Joe's usual adjective had conveyed nothing to them, but "bluddy 'ammer" was easily recognized.

This same Joe developed a strong antipathy to my stage manager, who had reddish-coloured hair. Once, when he was particularly disgruntled with some orders the stage manager had given him, he came to me and said, "Diden't that theer Judas Iscariot have red 'air, Guv'nor ?"

"So they say, Joe."

"Ay, I thowt as much," he replied, looking darkly across at the stage manager.

The fears aroused by my friend Warwick Major regarding the reaction of Calcutta to Shakespeare were allayed at once and for ever on the first night, by the most enthusiastic reception accorded us from a theatre crowded in every part. It being the invariable custom for all Europeans, no matter what their social status or circumstances, in India, and indeed throughout the East, to nightly don evening dress, even if dining in the privacy

of their own homes, the theatre presented the appearance of a fashionable audience in the West End in pre-war days, except that the gallery was filled with native students, and amongst the glistening shirt fronts and evening dresses of the Anglo-Indians in the Stalls and Dress Circle could be seen a number of Rajahs in their turbans and silken and bejewelled costumes together with Bengali magnates in their white Dhotis. The whole effect was a striking contrast to the last audience before which I had played only a few weeks earlier in England where the theatre was filled with beshawled and clogged Lancashire lasses and the men in their rough working garb.

By the way, the term 'Anglo-Indians', ~~in the preceding paragraph~~ at the time of which I write, denoted British residents of India only. An Eurasian, as the composition of the word indicates, signified anyone of a mixed European-Asiatic ancestry. Now, however, in order to save the susceptibilities of the Indian Eurasians THEY are described as Anglo-Indians, very often erroneously, as many so-called are the offspring of French, Dutch, Portuguese and other Europeans crossed with native blood. In this and succeeding chapters I am using Anglo-Indian and Eurasian in their original and, as I think, more accurate sense.

Owing to the climatic conditions it was the practice in India, and the East generally, to commence the performances at nine-thirty or nine-forty-five with the consequence that our labours rarely finished until well after midnight. I was surprised to find how strenuously and for what long hours the

average Anglo-Indian worked - at any rate, those engaged in the commercial life. Hitherto, I had imagined that he led a sort of dolce ^{far} niente existence and that after putting in a leisurely couple of hours at his office in the morning he then indulged in a lengthy siesta during the midday heat, followed by another hour or so of gentle labour in the late afternoon; whereas my experience tended to show that he worked longer hours and with more concentration than his black-coated brethren in England. Even the heads of firms were usually on duty by nine in the morning and instead of taking a couple of hours off for lunch it was frequently the custom to have lunch, or "tiffin", prepared and served in rooms on the office premises with the other members of their staff; the time allotted for the meal being about twenty minutes or half an hour, after which they would work straight on until about six o'clock. The day's work finished, they did then, however, genuinely relax, usually adjourning to their club for a whisky peg and a game of cards or billiards, where they would be picked up by their wives, who would in the meantime be enjoying a drive and the band in the Eden Gardens in the comparative coolness of the evening. This meant that they dined at about eight or eight-thirty, and hence the late hour at which all entertainments commenced. Matinees, which fortunately we did not often indulge in, commenced at four-thirty and were particularly trying. The usual application of powder between the acts to remove any traces of moisture that

penetrated one's make-up was quite useless in Calcutta and we had to provide ourselves with sheets of blotting paper to absorb the perspiration in which our faces were bathed on every exit. Playing in conventional modern costumes would not have been so bad, but the heavy robes and frequent changes of dress in such a character as Macbeth or the stifling pneumatic padding of Falstaff reduced one's body to a condition that would have filled the heart of a Turkish Bath attendant with joy.

Our first season in Calcutta, during which we played to invariably good houses lasted about six weeks, necessitating, however, frequent changes of programme owing to the relatively small Anglo-Indian population.

On several Sunday evenings we played at the Koh-i-Noor Theatre in the native quarter, to an audience comprised entirely of Bengalis who demonstrated their appreciation of our efforts in a naive and almost child-like manner. During the more pathetic and moving scenes of "Othello" (whose colour doubtless added to their sympathies) they would weep openly and unashamed, though this visible and audible testament to our histrionic powers was considerably marred in its effect by the rustling of hundreds of programmes with which in lieu of handkerchiefs they wiped away "The big round tears that cours'd one another down their innocent noses in piteous chase". And the realistic combat between Macbeth and Macduff aroused them to such a frenzy of excitement and panic that many of them dived under their seats and others made a mad rush for the doors.

The performance of "Othello" at the Koh-i-Noor Theatre was the occasion that my wife and I were subjected to an embarrassing if well-intentioned ordeal, when the leading actor of the Bengali Company attached to the theatre came on the stage between the acts and in the presence of the audience, after a highly felicitous and complimentary speech, presented us with two (allegedly) gold medals suspended on red ribbons which he hung round our necks. These insignia we were compelled to wear, in deference to the donor, for the remainder of the performance as Desdemona and Othello. That there should be no misunderstanding as to the donor's status, they were inscribed "From P. Bhose, No. 1 Actor". At a performance of a Bengali drama by this company that I witnessed I found both the acting and staging of a most primitive order. Any illusion that might have been created was completely nullified by the presence of two prompters stationed in the wings, one on each side of the stage, who besides being more than half visible to the audience, read simultaneously every word of the play with voices that were quite as audible as those of the actors.

At the request of the manager of the Koh-i-Noor Theatre I prepared for them an acting version of "She Stoops to Conquer", and am only sorry I did not have the opportunity of witnessing their conception of Goldsmith's delightful and essentially English comedy. Before my arrival in Calcutta they had already presented a modernized and Indianized version of "Hamlet", in

which the Prince of Denmark became the Prince of Cashmere, and as I understand made his first entrance in knickerbockers on a bicycle. This travesty anticipating by some years Sir Barry Jackson's freak production would doubtless have rejoiced his heart had he seen it.

One of the minor drawbacks of the Grand Opera House was its proximity to the Calcutta Market which was infested by hordes of monkeys from the Maidan, where they raided the vegetable produce. From the market they would cross the road and enter the theatre where they made their temporary dwelling in the fastnesses of the roof over the stage, perched aloft on the beams and girders. During rehearsals, when they were presumably gorging themselves in the market, we saw little of them, but at night they would return primed with food and mischief. It was then their pleasing custom to throw any available missiles in the shape of bolts, screws, etc., upon the heads of the actors; a practice that was always disconcerting and occasionally quite painful. Orders were given to the staff to remove anything and everything from the "flys" that might be utilized as ammunition by these sharp-sighted little devils. The resourceful beasts deprived of their former weapons then ripped open the shot bags with which the tableau curtains were weighted, and we were greeted by a hail of bullets. The crowning point of these really dangerous activities was reached during a performance of "The Merchant of Venice". With no weapons to hurl down upon us, all went well during the

earlier acts; even their protesting chatter had ceased, and by the time we reached the trial scene I thought they had settled down for the night until we got to Portia's famous "Mercy" speech and then, just as my wife pronounced the words,

"It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath ..."

whizz came a large spanner hurtling through the air, ~~which~~ almost grazing my wife's head, ^{and} fell with a heavy thud upon the stage. Although my wife pleaded it was only their simian method of expressing their criticism of her interpretation of the role, I considered that whatever their opinion of her performance, they should at least have some respect for the immortal William. If that was all they thought of Mercy, I would have none, and very reluctantly I had one of them shot, when the others, realising with Falstaff that discretion was the better part of valour, quickly disappeared to another, and I trust more suitable, roosting place.

On the conclusion of our season in Calcutta we went over to Bombay for a fortnight, ^{This} ~~which~~ gave us breathing space to prepare several additions to our repertoire for a return season at Calcutta commencing at Christmas, which was timed to coincide with the presence of Their Majesties, the King and Queen who, as I have stated, were visiting India in connection with the great Durbar which was being held ^{later} in Delhi, and would be making a preparatory stay in Calcutta.

The humid heat of Bombay proved to be even more exhausting

than the higher temperatures but drier atmosphere of Calcutta, and in my own case particularly so, as in addition to my ordinary work I had to take over temporarily the entire duties of my business manager, Harold Nuttall, who had developed latent tubercular trouble, on account of which upon medical advice, I shipped him to South Africa, where the poor fellow shortly afterwards died at Bloemfontein. It was not therefore until a later visit to Bombay that I was able to explore the wonders of the Elephant caves on the further side of Bombay's beautiful harbour or visit that most extraordinary and unique cemetery (if the term cemetery is strictly applicable) where on the Towers of Silence the Parsees leave their dead to be devoured by vultures. The sight of these scaly-headed monsters perched upon the neighbouring trees in their hundreds waiting for the arrival of a fresh corpse which they would descend upon and devour in a struggling, screaming mass, each one fighting for a toothsome, or should I say "billsome", morsel, was a loathsome spectacle. But the Parsees may at least claim that the process is hygienic in its way, even if revolting to Western sensibilities.

A picture that remains in my memory from my first season in Bombay is that of the lonely and rather pathetic figure of Prince Ranjitsinjhi, whom more than once I saw seated in solitary state in the lounge of the Taj Mahal Hotel where I was staying. Fêted and honoured and a popular idol in his great cricketing days in England, with the entree to the most exclusive society, here in India, where he was a great ruling Prince, he was debarred,

such was the strict line of demarcation maintained between the Anglo-Saxons and the Indians, from entering the fashionable Bombay Yacht Club and meeting his former friends and acquaintances, where I, as a mere strolling player, had the privilege of being a guest.

We returned to Calcutta to find it packed and thronged with countless hordes of visitors of all classes who had arrived from every part of India to welcome and testify their loyalty to the great King-Emperor and his consort, and the scenes of almost delirious enthusiasm which greeted them on every public appearance must have been extremely gratifying, if rather exhausting to Their Majesties.

The most magnificent spectacle I have ever seen on a race-course, beside which the brilliance of our English Derby Day or the Cup Day at Melbourne pales into insignificance, was on the occasion of Their Majesties' visit to the beautiful and splendidly appointed racecourse at Calcutta, when the principal event of the programme was the race for the Emperor's cup presented by the King. The enormous and densely massed crowds which included not only the whole of the Anglo-Indian community, but all the native Princes attired in their turbans and rich oriental dresses in the stands, the brightly dressed mobs on the flat, the guards of honour supplied by the kilted Black Watch regiment and the equally picturesque Indian troops, comprised a scene epitomising all the pomp and splendour of the East, which glittering in the clear atmosphere and blazing sunshine, provided

a glowing pageant that can never be forgotten by anyone who witnessed it, and now that India has cast aside its Empire status can never, of course, be repeated.

The word pageant conjures up another spectacle hardly less impressive that took place on the Maidan in honour of ~~and for the delectation of~~ Their Majesties; ~~which~~, although originally planned as a Grand Pageant depicting some phases of the varied and chequered history of India, ^{it} resolved itself in the end into what was practically a long procession, and therefore hardly realized its full objective. Yet the trains of gorgeously caparisoned elephants, the troops and retainers of the native Princes, many of whom carried most primitive weapons and wore medieval armour and helmets reminiscent of our antagonists in the Crusades, made up a colourful panorama that was both unique and memorable.

Matheson Lang, in Shakespearean repertoire, had arrived in India following upon a South African tour and was in opposition to me at another theatre in Calcutta, so that by an extraordinary coincidence the Shakespearean drama which had not been staged in Calcutta for a generation or more was now being presented simultaneously at two theatres. This unwonted surfeit of the classical drama was more than counterbalanced by the large influx of population to Calcutta, all of whom were on pleasure bent, and mostly potential patrons of the theatre, so that our audiences suffered no falling off as compared to our previous season. We also drew big houses at the New Year, particularly from the Scottish section of the community with a production of "Rob Roy"

for which, by permission of their C.O. we had the support of the Pipers and crack dancers of the Black Watch. I have to admit that their renderings of the National airs, sword dancing and Highland Flings won from their Caledonian compatriots much more applause than the efforts of the actors.

The weather in Calcutta during our second season, which concluded about the end of January, was ^{Very} quite pleasant; the two mid-winter months of December and January having a comparatively moderate day temperature while the nights were quite cold, frequently accompanied by heavy fogs, necessitating the protection of a heavy overcoat.

This more congenial atmosphere was now, however, to be exchanged for the sweltering and humid heat of Rangoon whence we sailed in a steamship, which in addition to carrying a horde of coolies who camped, cooked and slept on every available square inch of the lower deck, also had on board a large cargo of rotten meat. The combined odours or stinks as Dr Johnson would have more bluntly termed them, ("No, madam, you smell, I stink") of putrefying meat, sweating humanity and highly seasoned culinary operations were such that we were unfeignedly glad when the voyage across the Bay of Bengal ^{was over.} concluded.

Our stay in Rangoon of ten or twelve days was all too short to allow us to examine all the sights of that fascinating city which attain their apotheosis in that marvellous building, the temple of Shway-Dagôn. The Burmese are a charming people who

from their happy-go-lucky, pleasure loving nature are known as "The Irish of the East". They are greatly addicted to gambling in all its forms and this propensity, combined with their irresponsible nature, has led to their being largely ousted of both their trade and property by the Chinese. Rangoon was overrun by the Chinese who although they too were persistent gamblers were more astute and industrious than the native population. Even in their ordinary business dealings the Burmese were always prepared to indulge in a gamble. When making a purchase at a shop, after following the immemorial custom of the East of beating down the price of the desired article to about half $\frac{1}{2}$, or less $\frac{2}{3}$, than the sum demanded, the Burmese proprietor would always be willing to toss "double or nothing", and if the fall of the coin went against him he would wrap up the purchase and hand it across the counter with a pleasant smile and without a word of repining. They certainly have the first merit of good gamblers in being good losers.

We found the British population in Rangoon most hospitable folk, and it was quite impossible to accept one tithe of the invitations showered upon us. An incident at a little dinner party at which my wife and I were the guests of the proprietress of the local newspaper well illustrates the phlegm and sangfroid of the Anglo-Saxon race. These characteristics have played no small part in their process of Empire building, and demonstrate how they can adapt themselves and indeed become almost oblivious of conditions that are happily unknown in their own "precious isle".

As we were about to seat ourselves at the dinner table our hostess quite casually remarked, "Oh, by the way, just look under the table before you sit down. I was only just in time to-day to snatch my little boy away from a krait that was twined round one of the legs of the table. We have seen several about lately; I think there must be a nest of them in the compound." Now, as the dining room had french windows that, for the sake of coolness, were wide open and led on to the verandah, and the verandah on to the compound (garden), and as the krait is a particularly venomous little snake whose bite is almost certain death in about twenty minutes, my wife and I found it rather difficult to emulate the nonchalant attitude with which our hostess and her other guests accepted the situation, and which doubtless with them custom had made a property of easiness.

It was with great regret that we said farewell to Rangoon to recross the Bay of Bengal by a more southerly course and happily under more felicitous conditions than our previous voyage, our ship not being freighted this time with decayed meat and coolies in bulk. Our destination was Madras where we not only drew upon the Madrassians for our audiences but thousands of native students ~~came~~ from the universities of Trichinopoli and Tanjore, both situated about a couple of hundred miles to the south of Madras. On the night we were billed to play "Hamlet" when my wife and I drove up in our gharri to the Victoria Theatre we found it absolutely surrounded by a great crowd of excited,

under the most primitive conditions, which had gathered no more

gesticulating and yelling students, so that it was only with the utmost difficulty that we were able to make our way to the stage door, and then only by explaining to the impatient mob that unless they cleared a passage for us there could be no performance. When the doors were opened space could not be found for half of those assembled and, forgoing our pre-arranged programme, we had to repeat "Hamlet" for the two following nights in order to accommodate the overflow.

An unforgettable experience was our visit to the Aquarium at Madras. It was an absolute revelation of the wonders of the deep. Never had I conceived or imagined that the tropical seas contained such miraculous creatures. There were fishes of every colour of the rainbow; some so beautiful that they might have been creatures of a submarine fairyland; others of the most grotesque and even ludicrous shapes; while others were so repulsive and wholly unnatural that they might have been the offspring of a madman's nightmare. Although I have since visited the far-famed aquarium at Honolulu it does not, so far as my recollection serves me, compare with the marvels of that of Madras.

In both Calcutta and Bombay we had frequently been entertained by the itinerant native jugglers and conjurers, whose performances of the well-known mango trick and other exhibitions of their skill had never greatly impressed me, as they were all worked merely by a dexterous sleight of hand. However, while in Madras I saw one of them perform a trick in broad daylight and under the most primitive conditions, which has mystified me more

than any I have ever seen executed with the most elaborate paraphernalia and with all the illusion conveyed by the assistance of stage setting and lighting.

There were but three spectators of the trick, my wife, her brother and myself, and it took place on the verandah of our ground floor suite at the Connemara Hotel where, as we were enjoying a cigarette after our midday tiffin, there approached from the compound a middle-aged native accompanied by a youthful female assistant. He offered to entertain us with some tricks, and went through the usual repertoire with which we were already familiar, including the favourite one of making a small mango tree more or less visibly emerge and grow before our eyes. Having rewarded him with the customary few annas he then declared that if we would each give him one rupee he would show us "one very especial trick". Not having seen anything in his precious programme to warrant the payment of the rather extravagant sum of three rupees we told him we would only agree if he "delivered the goods". In response to this challenge he drew forward a closely meshed wicker hamper measuring about three feet six inches in length and about eighteen inches in width and the same in depth. He then proceeded to truss up his companion who was a slim but by no means diminutive young woman. Having tightly bound her with cord in such a fashion that her knees nearly touched her chin, he enveloped her in a rope net which was also securely fastened. He now lifted up the woman and apparently

with considerable difficulty crammed her into the basket; whereupon he closed and fastened down the lid. Then he took up a long and formidable sword which he handed me to examine and which was certainly genuine and possessed of a needle-like point.

Satisfied with my inspection that there was no fake about the sword I handed it back to him; he then immediately plunged it into and through the basket until it projected several inches on the opposite side. This action he repeated some twenty or thirty times with extraordinary rapidity, from every conceivable angle, through the sides, the ends, and the top of the basket. He then offered the sword first to me and then to my brother-in-law, and by a gesture suggested that we should thrust it through the basket ourselves. Not being willing to risk arrest for homicide we both declined, whereupon he unfastened the basket and the young woman having released herself from the net and bonds jumped out smiling and unscathed. That we neither of us had the courage to accept the invitation of the native has since been a matter of regret to me, as it would have quite disposed of the theory that by some method of collusion between the man and the woman and much pre-arranged practice she, by some means, in that very confined space managed to contort her body and elude his rapid and vicious sword thrusts; as in our case it would have been quite impossible for her to anticipate from what point the sword would enter the basket.

Although I have recounted the details of this trick - which,

as I have stated was performed on the verandah of our hotel in full daylight and within a few feet of where we stood - to a number of professional "magicians", I have never received an explanation which satisfied me.

From Madras we proceeded by the long and tedious train journey to Tuticorin and thence by the usual turbulent crossing to Colombo with which place we renewed our brief acquaintance in a most pleasant manner. We played for about ten days to large and delightful audiences, staying at the beautifully situated Galle Face Hotel, known to every traveller in the East. At that time it was managed by one Peters, who, allegedly of Swiss nationality, proved at any rate, to be of German sympathies during the war, and I believe was discovered to be transmitting valuable information by a secret wireless to the Emden during her predatory enterprises in the Pacific.

He was, however, an excellent hotel manager and I had reason to be grateful to him as he very considerately placed the excellent swimming bath attached to the hotel at my personal and private disposal in the afternoons, where with the members of my company and friends we had a number of very jolly swimming parties.

At Colombo the full term of my arrangement with the Cohens having expired I decided to continue the tour of the East for an indefinite period on my own responsibility, and in pursuance of that plan we shipped from Colombo to play a return season at Bombay.

Chapter VIII.

The theatre at which I played on my second visit to Bombay was situated in the residential quarter at the foot of Malabar Hill about four miles from the city proper, and was controlled by Maurice Bandmann, the son of the English tragedienne, Mrs Bandmann-Palmer. Bandmann was in those days the great theatrical impresario of the East, for in addition to controlling a number of theatres he permanently toured several companies mostly presenting musical comedy and light opera.

Although the native students attended our performances occasionally in very large numbers, the mainstay of our support was derived from the Anglo-Indian section of the community, and, as they were a mere handful in point of numbers, it was necessary to enlarge and vary my repertoire in order to make the prolonged tour of the East I proposed; so that from this time onwards I gradually added about a dozen modern plays to my list, until my repertoire numbered over thirty productions.

My secession from the Cohen alliance added considerably to the duties of my business manager, so that while we were in Bombay I advertised in the "Times of India" for a native Babu clerk to assist him in his secretarial work. In response to my advertisement I received countless applications, many of which

appended to the signatures M.A., B.A., or B.Sc., but the majority were dignified by a degree hitherto unknown to me, to wit - F.M. Seeking an explanation of this mysterious appellation I discovered it merely signified "Failed Matriculation" ! Such great importance does the native mind attach to a scholastic training that the fact that he has even entered for the matriculation examination, and failed, is regarded by him as an honour and a recommendation in itself.

At the conclusion of the Bombay season we proceeded north to ^{Karachi, now the capital of Pakistan;} ~~Kurrachee~~, that sun-baked sea port, where rain falls only at an interval of years, situated on the edge of the desert. ^{Karachi,} ~~Kurrachee~~, however, was but a jumping-off point for Quetta, and after playing there a couple of nights we undertook the long and infinitely exhausting journey across the ^{Sind Desert} ~~Scinde~~ desert where the thermometer mounted to 128 degrees and the sand, despite the tightly closed windows and triple shutters, penetrated and thickly covered every square inch of the railway carriages, adding to the discomfort engendered by the stifling heat.

As we left the desert and ascended into the hilly country of Baluchistan conditions became more tolerable. And the monotony of the journey was relieved at wayside stations by the sight of wild-looking bearded hillmen armed to the teeth, but kept at a respectful distance by the presence of native soldiers who patrolled the platforms with fixed bayonets. Without this safeguard the Baluchis would have indulged in their pleasant habit

of raiding the station premises, and, after slitting the throats of the station-master and his officials, returning to the hills with the contents of the till and other spoils of victory.

When we arrived at a station a few miles from Quetta all our native staff and servants were hauled off the train to undergo medical inspection and a brief quarantine. One of these fellows was a native of the small Portuguese settlement of Goa on the south-east coast of India. Now these Goanese, one and all, pride themselves immensely on their mixed Portuguese descent and give themselves airs accordingly when associating with a mere native. Their claim to white blood (to use the accepted but singularly inappropriate term) in their veins I suspect to be entirely mythical in most cases, and certainly this chap Manuel was as black as ink and much darker skinned than any of his fellow servants. I was therefore greatly tickled when on his arrival the following day in response to my enquiry, "Well, Manuel, how did you get on in the quarantine camp ?" he replied, "Oh, I had a dreadful time, sir, they put me in with all the damned niggers !"

Quetta, at the head of the Bolan Pass and but a short distance from the Afghan frontier, occupies a very important strategic position, which accounted for the composition of its population consisting as it did in 1912 of ^{only} about eleven civilians ^{but} and some 14,000 troops in addition to about 10,000 Baluchis and Afghans commingled with representatives of the multiple races of

India. The altitude being several thousand feet above sea level, the climate in late spring, with warm sunny days and cold frosty nights, was a welcome change from the heat of the plains, and we spent an enjoyable time rambling round the "thieves' market" and other picturesque if insalubrious spots in the native quarter. Our rambles, however, were limited to a radius of three miles from the cantonments, beyond which area it was considered unsafe to venture without an armed escort.

We played for a fortnight in the little Garrison Theatre, which, if rather primitive in its internal arrangements, made a charming picture from the outside, as it was simply embowered in masses of roses and wistaria which grow in Quetta in the greatest profusion. The custodian of the theatre, and his wife, who lived in adjacent premises, very kindly supplied us with liberal quantities of hot coffee between the acts to neutralize the effects of the cold nights to which by this time we had become quite de-acclimatized. Our audiences, which were drawn entirely from the British regiments stationed in Quetta, welcomed the unusual if not unprecedented appearance of a professional theatrical company in their midst, and were most appreciative, though it is true I did overhear one cockney Tommy complain, "Blimey, it costs more to see Allan Wilkie than I used to pay to see Beerbohm Tree at His Majesty's", ~~overlooking the fact that if my productions were on a much more modest scale than Tree's gorgeous spectacles, there was the expense and risk attendant upon bringing them over thousands of miles of ocean and desert~~

~~to this lonely outpost of Empire.~~

It was at Quetta that I first met General Blamey, Commander of the Australian forces in the second great war, but at that time he was Captain Blamey attached to the Quetta Staff College. When I renewed acquaintance with him many years later as Brigadier-General Blamey and Commissioner of Police at Melbourne, I reminded him how he offered to make a bet we should be at war with Germany within two years. We were all (the civilian portion of the party, at least) inclined to scoff at his offer, but although, as this was made in May 1912, he would have lost his wager by some three months, it was not at all a bad prophecy.

From Quetta we went to Lahore which besides being the capital of the Punjab is incidentally a large railway centre, and we gave our performances at the old Railway Institute, varied by a Pastoral performance of "As You Like It" in the beautiful Lawrence Gardens, known to all readers of Rudyard Kipling's "Kim", which the authorities kindly placed at my disposal for the occasion.

At Lahore my wife and I put up at Nedou's Hotel which was extremely comfortable in every respect, but it was not as yet equipped with the electric punkahs that so greatly tend to ameliorate the great heat in the East. It was therefore necessary to engage a punkah-wallah who, for the munificent remuneration of four annas (fourpence) lay on his back on the verandah throughout the night while attached to his big toe was a string which passed through a hole in the wall of the bedroom, wherewith

he gently swung a flapping punkah suspended over the bed, thus ensuring us a decent night's rest. The mild breeze induced by this method is I think more soothing and distinctly preferable to the more violent circulation of the air resulting from the electric punkah, the only drawback to the human agency was that the punkah-wallah would fall asleep two or three times during the night and one would wake up in a bath of perspiration which, however, was quickly remedied by raising oneself in one's bed and giving a violent tug at the punkah. The corresponding strain on the big toe of the punkah-wallah acknowledged by a subdued grunt would be followed by a resumption of the rhythmic swing of the punkah and the innocent sleep, balm of hurt minds (if not of hurt toes) would again overtake one, until a sudden cessation of the punkah would necessitate another tug at the string.

Staying at Nedou's Hotel during my visit to Lahore was a most remarkable character who for professional purposes called himself "Alastor". He was an Englishman from Norwich; so much he told me of his identity, though he never disclosed his real name. Dressed in long flowing robes of blue and yellow he presented a striking and picturesque appearance. An astrologer and mystic, he made his living by foretelling the future and had, I believe, a very profitable clientele amongst the rajahs and wealthy natives. He was a regular attendant at the theatre during our season where, although he doffed his professional robes and appeared in regulation evening kit, he was easily

He also predicted all the important events that would occur in

identified from his distinctive personality. Happening to meet him one day walking across the compound of the hotel, he accosted me and asked if he might, in a purely honorary capacity, cast my horoscope and foretell my future. I confess I was somewhat sceptical in such matters, but I was sufficiently curious, and also interested in his personality, to accept his invitation readily. Moreover, although business had been very fair throughout my tour, I may mention that my financial circumstances were, at this time, causing me a good deal of uneasiness. The expense of transporting over the length and breadth of India a large company together with the scenery and effects required for a repertoire of over twenty plays made enormous inroads upon my takings, and I was wondering whether I had better abandon my tour and ship my company back to England while I had still sufficient funds for the purpose; or whether I dare risk a continuance of the tour, with the Far East as my ultimate objective.

Had it not been for my meeting with Alastor I should probably have decided to return to England, but with the utmost confidence he asserted that from a certain date about five weeks hence my affairs would take a complete turn for the better and that, from then onwards, I should have a most successful tour. He also strongly advised me on the conclusion of my tour of India to go to the Far East, where he said, I would be even more successful. In addition to this highly welcome information, he also predicted all the important events that would occur in

my life for the next two or three years, including a particular misfortune which might have been avoided had I followed his advice; but, as he said himself, "it was written".

Let those who will, jeer and scoff, and lightly dismiss the sequel as mere coincidence, but the fact remains that everything fell out exactly as he had foretold. Five weeks later when my finances were at their lowest ebb the tide suddenly turned and not only was business consistently good for the remainder of my Indian tour but proved even better for the Far Eastern tour that followed. On my return to England, I lost all the money I had made just in the manner he warned me I should lose it and I was therefore debarred from undertaking theatrical management again for over two years. Other occurrences regarding my wife's fortunes as well as my own which he predicted proved equally accurate to the smallest details. I never saw him again, but while I was in Madras, a couple of months later, by some uncanny gift he possessed he was conscious of a certain legal problem with which I was faced and spontaneously wrote me advising me as to the course I should adopt.

That Alastor did possess most uncanny gifts and that his predictions regarding myself were not merely guesswork is confirmed by the following statement which I came across recently in a book of reminiscences by the Earl of Onslow entitled "Sixty-Three Years" ⁱⁿ which he recounts a very curious experience that occurred to his wife, ^{then} Lady Cranley, ⁱⁿ July, 1910. ←
 "While staying with Prince and Princess Dolgorouky for a fête,

among the other entertainments was a palmist fortune-teller named Alastor. Lady Cranley had her fortune told. He told her amongst other things that she and her husband were worried about money matters but they had no need to be as they would shortly inherit a considerable fortune and that she would have a son in 1913. These and several other remarkable things he told her all came to pass."

A further experience of a similar, though not quite so circumstantial a nature, which befell me in South Africa confirms me in my belief that though there are many charlatans who pose as fortune-tellers, yet undoubtedly there are certain people possessed of a genuine psychic vision which enables them to divine and foresee events that are yet to be.

Two characteristics which impressed themselves upon me regarding the Eurasian population of India ~~generally speaking,~~ were, firstly, a woeful deficiency of any sense of humour and, secondly, if their skin pigment left any doubt as to their being of mixed blood, a back-slapping, Christian-name-calling familiarity (~~if not severely discouraged~~) by which ~~means they seem to imagine they demonstrate that they are pukka Europeans,~~ but ~~only succeed in dispelling any lingering doubts as to their racial purity.~~

But, Though lacking in humour they can often be unconsciously very amusing. On the last day of my stay in Lahore I had a visitor at Nedou's Hotel; ~~in the person of~~ an Eurasian youth of about seventeen years of age, who informed me that he had been

working at the theatre throughout my season as one of the local stage staff and he now requested that I should engage him permanently for my tour. As my staff was already quite adequate, and the state of my exchequer did not warrant any unnecessary increase to my salary list, I told him it was quite impossible to accede to his request. He was apparently completely obsessed with the enchantments of stage life and implored me with tears to reconsider my decision, and when he found I was not to be moved by his entreaties he at length took his leave very woebegone and disconsolate.

When we arrived at Meerut, our next stopping place, the first person who greeted me as I stepped on to the platform was this Eurasian youth who, determined not to be balked of his ambition, had, by some means or other, travelled on the train from Lahore as a stowaway. It was impossible to resist such tenacity of purpose, and I put him on my staff at a salary of, as I remember, ten rupees a week (a little over thirteen shillings), with which remuneration he was perfectly satisfied and remained with me for a few months until we paid a second visit to Madras when he again called upon me at my hotel. This time, it was to inform me that he had just received a letter from his mother who as an ardent Roman Catholic was terribly upset at the abandoned life he was leading travelling round with a band of dissolute playactors and she commanded him to return home at once. "Could I therefore possibly release him from his engagement?" "Certainly," I replied, "you had better catch the

night train to the north and go back to Lahore."

Obviously amazed and not a little chagrined that I did not seem to consider his services indispensable he took his departure, but returned in an hour or two and proceeded to unroll to my astonished gaze the longest sheet of paper I have ever seen in my life. This was his bill of expenses which he confidently presented to me. The items numbering nearly a hundred, all equally ludicrous and extravagant, including his first class fare to Lahore now some two thousand miles away (as a member of my native staff he travelled "intermediate", equivalent to our former English third class) and a travelling allowance for meals en route of ten rupees a day (the amount of his weekly salary). But perhaps the gem of the items, recollecting the circumstances in which he had thrust himself into my employment, was the final item, "For breaking up my happy home - 500 Rupees."

At Meerut, whose only claim to notoriety lies in the fact that it was here the Indian Mutiny broke out, we played but two or three nights and then made a long trek to Nain-i-Tal in the Himalayas. The length of the journey was not so much a question of distance as of time. First we entrained for Kathgodam which is the railhead for Naini, then we were all conveyed up a zig-zag road for about a dozen miles in tongas, low-hung vehicles drawn by three horses abreast, and the scenery and baggage were carried in lorries. At the end of our drive where the road finished, the only means of approach to Naini was by a precipitous mountain track which ascended for a few miles and then dipped down into the

army struggled into Naini.

valley in which Naini is situated.

For this latter part of our journey ponies were provided for those who wished to ride and the others were transported in Dandys. A Dandy is a wooden hammock made exactly like an out-size coffin with the lid off. But well padded and cushioned, it is quite as comfortable as our last resting place is likely to prove. Each Dandy is staffed by no less than nine coolies. One man goes in front carrying a switch to dispose of any snakes that may be lying in the path. Four coolies hoist the Dandy on their shoulders and take turns with the other four who relieve them at short intervals. The motion is quite pleasant and can soon lull one to sleep.

For the transport of our scenery and baggage there was a small army of about three hundred coolies who each seized a piece of scenery or a hamper and began the toilsome ascent. I use the word "began" advisedly, for while the players all reached Naini about midday and confidently expected to open the same night, there was no sign of the coolies with the baggage. After anxiously awaiting the arrival of the effects until late in the afternoon, my manager and I rode back along the track to ascertain their whereabouts, and found all the coolies fast asleep only a few hundred yards from the starting point, with their loads by their sides, where they had promptly deposited them as soon as we were out of sight. All hope of starting our season that night had to be abandoned and, in fact, we had to postpone our opening for another couple of days until our sluggard and sleep-sodden army straggled into Naini.

Nain-i-Tal, the hill station, or Government seat, during the hot weather season for United Provinces, was quite the most beautiful place I encountered in my travels in India. Nestling between spurs of the Himalayas, the town is situated about 6,000 feet above sea level on the banks of a large and lovely lake, while from the further shore stretches a thickly wooded slope dotted with picturesque bungalows. From the hills beyond the town which we ascended one day to the height of 12,000 feet, we obtained an excellent view of the colossal peak of Mount Everest.

On our arrival at the theatre, we were greeted by a printed notice pasted on the stage door offering a reward of 500 Rupees for the destruction of ^a man-eating tiger which was roaming the neighbourhood !

My wife and I were never too happy about our nightly return to our hotel which was situated about a mile from the theatre, at the head of the lake, reached by a lonely path through the jungle. We were carried in Dandys, the usual mode of conveyance, and we had little faith in any aid from the bearers should the man-eating tiger happen to cross our path. All went well until the last night of our season in Naini. We had arrived at a point where we were still nearly half a mile from our hotel when suddenly there was a loud snarling noise some distance on our left; through the thick jungle we saw two large glowing eyes that to our fear-stricken imagination seemed to be as large as motor-lamps. The Dandy-wallahs with an united yell of terror

dropped their poles and deposited us on the ground with a fearful jolt that jarred every bone in our bodies. Yelling and shrieking they fled along the path towards our hotel. In retrospect I could not blame them for I confess I was never so frightened in all my life. My wife and I both followed their example with many a backward glance over our shoulders to see if we were pursued. Breathless and trembling at the knees we arrived at the hotel but a few minutes behind our bearers who, however, had already roused the entire hotel with the dire news that their sahib and memsahib had been devoured by the man-eating tiger !

Discovering that Richard Burn, an old schoolfellow of mine, (~~though only in the sense that his last term at the Liverpool High School coincided with my first~~) was Secretary of the United Provinces and was now in residence at Naini, I lost no time in calling upon him, and finding that his official quarters embraced spacious private grounds, I promptly commandeered them for a Pastoral performance of "As You Like It". I decided that the most suitable site for our stage was a natural platform slightly above the level of a large lawn which served admirably for the auditorium.

Our stage was backed by an almost perpendicular slope, up and down which the actors had to make their exits and entrances. Though the surroundings hardly corresponded to the usual conception of the Forest of Arden, the performance was a great success, but poor little, rotund Philip Gordon who played Touchstone, was neither in figure nor years adapted to hill

climbing. After having with some difficulty scaled the heights for his first exit, on the next occasion he had to withdraw from the view of the audience he deposited his bulk behind a convenient bush at the side of the stage, from which vantage point he made all his future exits and entrances. Like Bottom, however, it was a case of "When my cue comes call me", for, overcome by the hot sun and his unusual exertions, he fell into a sound sleep each time he found himself ensconced behind his friendly bush, and when his cue did come had to be aroused by the prodding of Rosalind's spear or the shepherd's crook of Corin.

From the idyllic scenery of Nain-i-Tal and the temperate climate of the hills we plunged for a week into the flat monotonous plains and a heat which was well-nigh insupportable. At Allahabad, the thermometer hovered round 125 degrees in the daytime, while at the coolest point of the night it never succeeded in dropping below 98 degrees. Fortunately we were giving open air performances only and those too at night, but even so it was most exhausting work in such conditions.

If there were no public gardens available for our performances our modus operandum was to drive round in a gharri until we espied a private house with a suitable compound. With true Anglo-Indian hospitality not only would the grounds immediately be placed at my disposal on request, but our host's servants would be ordered to erect tents for our dressing accommodation and also to keep us plentifully supplied with ices and cold drinks during the performance.

In the course of my professional wanderings I have played in many curious theatres, and dressed and made-up in all sorts of extraordinary places, but my strangest experience in the way of dressing accommodation occurred in Lucknow where we played a couple of nights in some public gardens in which were situated the tombs of the ancient Kings of Oude^h. These tombs took the form of huge catacombs consisting of many chambers connected by long narrow passages, and in these vast underground spaces haunted by the spirits of dead kings and fitfully illuminated by the light of a flickering candle which would not infrequently be dashed out by a frightened bat, plunging one into complete darkness, we were allotted our dressing rooms. I think we were all very glad when the performance was over and we were able finally to emerge from these eerie surroundings into the bright Indian moonlight.

At Cawnpore, as so frequently happens immediately prior to the rainy season in India, a violent dust storm arose just as we concluded an open air performance of "The Taming of the Shrew". The dressing tents were blown down and our garments scattered to the four winds of heaven were hastily retrieved by our native servants from the neighbouring undergrowth, while the audience made a hurried departure. During the long drive back to our hotel great trees, made brittle as matchwood by the intense heat and the long spell of dry weather, crashed down on all sides. One giant, which would have crushed us to pieces had we been a second earlier, fell across our path almost

brushing the startled horses' heads, necessitating a long detour before we at last arrived safely home.

We were naturally not sorry to exchange these fearsome and trying experiences for the peace and coolness of the hills again, whither we once more journeyed - this time to Mussoorie, the hot weather resort of the Calcutta civilians and their families. While playing in Allahabad a week before my opening in Mussoorie, I had been advised that I had won a comparatively small prize in the Calcutta Sweepstake on the Derby, of about a thousand rupees, and as my experience has been that for some occult reason good and bad fortune invariably comes to me in cycles, this stroke of good luck strengthened my hope that Alastor's prognostications would prove correct. Sure enough, our opening night in Mussoorie synchronizing with the date which he had predicted would show a change in my fortunes, we opened to a crowded house and from that night onwards I had no further cause for serious financial worry for the remainder of my tour !

Mussoorie is situated at an even greater altitude than Nain-i-Tal, being about 8,000 feet above sea level, and at this height, until one's heart and lungs gradually became accustomed to the rarefied atmosphere, any trifling physical exertion such as walking up a slight gradient had all the sensations of climbing up a mountain. But the effect was most noticeable to us in the delivery of long declamatory speeches upon the stage, when it was necessary, ~~as with poor asthmatic John Kemble,~~ to husband all one's resources for the climax.

My very limited experience of theatrical business in India had already clearly shown me that whereas even in England, where the tastes and habits of the public are fairly conservative in theatrical matters, it is not always advisable to be guided by precedent, in the East where theatrical entertainment was at best only intermittent and to a great extent in the experimental stage, it was little or no use to follow established custom.

Therefore, in defiance of the earnest advice of my professional acquaintances in India, who assured me that Calcutta during the rains was a socially and theatrically dead season, I went from Mussoorie to Calcutta at the end of July for a third visit to that city, where I had this time arranged to play at Bandmann's Theatre. It is true that I found Calcutta denuded of half its Anglo-Indian population; all those who could escape from their desks or could afford to send their families to Mussoorie or Darjeeling, having done so in order to avoid the exceedingly unpleasant prevailing conditions. So great was the humidity consequent upon the incessant downpour of rain in the tropical atmosphere that one's person, clothing, furniture and everything with which one came in contact was in a state of constant moisture. A pair of shoes left lying exposed to the air for two or three days would develop a covering of green mould, and it was necessary to keep delicate materials in air-tight tin cases to prevent them from rotting.

But while these conditions brought social life to a standstill with those who were perforce compelled to remain in

Calcutta, still ^{our visit} ~~it~~ made, as I had hoped and calculated it would, a welcome break in the monotony of this dead period, and my violation of theatrical custom was rewarded by the best business I had yet played to in Calcutta. My only regret was that my pre-arranged plans would not permit an extension of a comparatively brief season, but I had already engaged the theatre at Madras for another visit. From Madras we went to Bangalore, a delightful town about two hundred miles inland situated on a table-land 3,000 feet above sea level. The West End Hotel where we stayed in Bangalore had spacious grounds in the centre of which is the main building with dining room etc., while the guests live in separate suites of rooms in the form of little bungalows dotted about the grounds. Though the suite allotted to my wife and myself was but fifty yards or so from the main building, we had the novel experience of driving to and from our meals in a two-horsed gharri, as otherwise we should have been soaked to the skin, even in that short distance, by the torrential rains that fell without ceasing.

By this time my readers will realize that theatrical touring in the East, despite the compensations of novelty and the interest of visiting a strange country, was by no means a bed of roses either to the manager or the actors, but the greatest handicap with which I had to contend was the heavy tolls which the climate of India made upon the health of my company. I had left one actress in the Hills down with typhoid and several other members of my

company were at this time suffering from periodic bouts of dengue fever and other tropical complaints. On the morning of the day we were advertised to play "Romeo and Juliet" at Bangalore my forces were so depleted by sickness that it was quite impossible to provide the lengthy cast requisite for this play. I therefore decided to substitute "David Garrick", a comparatively short cast play. By the afternoon, however, one or two ^{more} had suddenly become hors de combat and again the programme was changed to a modern play in my repertoire with only six characters. Two of the actors playing important parts in this piece were then prostrated as they were making up in their dressing rooms, and our programme, changed yet a fourth time, all within a few hours, was now reduced to excerpts from our repertoire, assisted by two concert artists who happened to be in the town and who hearing of my predicament very kindly supplemented the abbreviated programme with some musical items. The audience, knowing from experience only too well the exigencies of the climate received both my explanations and apologies together with our make-shift programme with generous sympathy.

In a performance of "Romeo and Juliet", by the way, on another occasion when the strength of the Company was greatly reduced by illness, I undertook what I imagined to be the unprecedented feat of "^{trebling} ~~doubling~~" Friar Laurence, Mercutio and Prince Escalus. To those who are familiar with the acting version of the play the difficulties will be apparent.

Amongst the many instances demonstrating the almost fanatical enthusiasm and love for Shakespeare that I encountered in India, I regard an incident that occurred in connection with my visit to Bangalore as unique. Some half dozen Indian students living in a little up country village, who had formed a Shakespearean society for the mutual study of the poet's works, learning that an English Company was playing "Hamlet" in Bangalore determined not to miss this, the only opportunity they might ever have of seeing the tragedy enacted upon the stage.

Their visit to Bangalore for this purpose necessitated with the return journey over a week's travelling, as they had to walk through the jungle sixty miles to the nearest railway station, with a three hundred mile train journey to follow. When it is realized that they were all men in very humble circumstances and that the expense of such a trip would probably demand rigid economy of their finances for a year afterwards, one cannot but lament that such extreme devotion to our national poet is rarely, if ever, to be found amongst his fellow countrymen.

From Secunderabad, a military cantonment, where we played a couple of nights after our Bangalore season, we drove over one day to Hyderabad, a walled and entirely native town of half a million people, and the capital of the Nizam of Hyderabad's State. We viewed his vast but unbeautiful palace from which the Nizam, reputed the wealthiest man in India, and possibly the British Empire, had at the time discreetly withdrawn to the furthest point of his dominions as there had been one or two cases of plague in the city.

We now bade farewell to India and once more travelled via Tuticorin to Colombo where we played a season of three weeks which proved to be even more successful and enjoyable than our previous visit.

Sometime before this, and while I was playing in Calcutta, I had received a letter from Warwick Major, the manager of the Colombo Theatre, asking me to play "East Lynne" for one night and saying that he could guarantee me a full house from the Burghers, as the mixed descendants of the old Dutch colonists and the natives of Ceylon are termed, with whom this lugubrious and sob-compelling classic he assured me was a great favourite. I had no desire to renew acquaintance as a manager with Mrs Wood's masterpiece, which I had already met with on several occasions in my earlier days, and I wrote to him flatly declining, and at the same time pointing out that "East Lynne" would hardly assimilate with the rest of my programme. By return post I received a further communication entreating me to reconsider the matter, and once more assuring me what a wonderful draw it would be, and that there would be no loss of prestige by its inclusion because none of the English residents would attend the performance. It would be a Burgher night. I wrote to him again re-affirming my adamant attitude and informing him that it was, in any case, quite impossible to do as he wished as I did not possess a script of "East Lynne". His reply to this objection was immediately to forward me a script, (~~a particularly bad one, by the way~~) and

as I was playing in his theatre on sharing terms I felt I could not persist any longer in my refusal.

The result more than justified Major's prophecy. The enormous crowd that had assembled in their frenzied eagerness to witness this dramatic gem burst open the doors, and it was only with the utmost difficulty that the combined efforts of my manager and Major with his staff succeeded in restoring some semblance of order. The theatre was quickly filled far beyond its normal capacity, after which the poor misguided individuals who still clamoured for admission were allowed to stand, about ten deep, on the verandah which ran on both sides of the theatre where, though but a few of them could see even a corner of the stage through the open doors, they paid three rupees (4/-) a head for the privilege of standing and listening to the immortal words !

In 1926, fourteen years later, passing through Colombo, a desire to revisit the scene of my former triumphs took me to the theatre, where the old caretaker assured me that this memorable performance still held the record for the building. But, the pity of it, Iago !

It was in the course of this season at Colombo that I staged the most beautiful and effective scene I have ever seen in any theatre. I make this statement without any reservations regarding the artistic and magnificent productions of Cochran, Reinhardt and other famous impresarios, but lest I be thought

guilty of boasting, let me hasten to add that the design of the scene was purely accidental and entirely due to Nature's artful aid. The play was Wilde's "Salome", for which in the ordinary way I had a very simple but quite effective setting which was backed by a plain sky cloth. The theatre at Colombo had a very wide and fairly long passage running along a ramp from the centre of the stage to the back wall and ending in large folding doors through which the scenery was carried in and out of the theatre. On the night we were producing "Salome", just previous to the admission of the audience, my stage manager and I, inspecting the scene which was set ready for the performance, excepting the back-cloth, were absolutely entranced by the vista as seen between our two large bronze pillars set wide apart at the back of the stage. The doors at the end of the passage had been left open, and a glorious scene disclosed itself outside the Palace of Herod. Palm trees gently stirred against an indigo sky studded with stars and a bright tropical moon was shining, all with an effect of illimitable distance, provided ^{ing} a setting that was utterly beyond the arts of the scene-painter and electrician. We there and then decided that to use our painted cloth to the exclusion of this marvellous background supplied by nature would be little short of blasphemy. When the curtain rose on this enchanting spectacle it was greeted by a gasp of delighted astonishment, followed by such a prolonged and hearty round of applause as our histrionic efforts and the strange beauties of Wilde's exotic play never evoked.

Warwick Major suggested that on the conclusion of my Colombo season I should combine business with pleasure by playing for a couple of nights in Kandy, the ancient capital of Ceylon, and thus visit one of the most interesting and beautiful places in the island. He was careful to impress upon me that I would find the theatre at Kandy somewhat primitive, but I was convinced that it could not be worse than some of the theatres I had visited in my travels. In this, however, I was mistaken. The worst theatre I had ever previously struck was a Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, compared with that at Kandy. Immediately upon my arrival I jumped into a rickshaw and went to inspect the theatre, which I found was located on the outskirts of the town and was built on a partially cleared piece of jungle. The walls (!) consisted of long bamboo poles on which were stretched lengths of hessian, frayed, torn and patched. The roof was of like material and in the same condition. The seating in the auditorium was as provided in a travelling circus - some cane seats in the centre, surrounded by narrow backless benches built up in tiers on a sort of scaffolding. The lusty jungle growth had shot up underneath the stage and forced it into a series of waves and hollows so that it resembled a miniature switch-back railway. Bamboo trees had been allowed to penetrate the floors of the dressing rooms and with their branches trimmed served as clothes pegs. Fortunately the public of Kandy were not deterred by the obvious defects of this extremely primitive temple of the drama and

attended our performances in goodly numbers.

Major had assured me that there was no necessity for me to go to the expense of taking up my own scenery to Kandy for the couple of modern plays we were producing, as he had an ample stock in the theatre and a very clever native scenic artist who could fix up anything of a special nature that we might require. As we were anxious to do the sights of Kandy in the brief time at our disposal, my stage manager and I hurriedly explained to this man the scenery wanted for the first night, which included a drawing room with French windows opening onto an old English garden for the first scene. He confidently asserted that he would have everything ready at night. Being rather late in my arrival at the theatre, there was no time to take more than a cursory glance at the scene before the curtain rose, and on turning up stage to make my first exit which was into the "old English garden", I was horrified to be confronted by a cloth representing a tropical Eastern landscape, while crouching in the jungle grass were depicted two huge Bengal tigers. The inspired artist had further added to the realism of these beasts by affixing pieces of glittering tinfoil to the canvas to represent the eyeballs of these unusual intruders on the peace of an English garden.

The change in my fortunes during the past three months had justified me in making preparations for a tour of the Far East extending to Japan. Such information as I had been able to

glean regarding a suitable itinerary was rather vague, and for my guidance I was relying chiefly upon a map of Asia, and a list of P. & O. sailings. With only this limited data at my disposal we sailed from Colombo for Singapore in September of 1912. The island of Singapore, little more than two degrees north of the equator, is exceedingly hot and humid, but being the great waterway to the Far East it is full of life and colour. Its unique geographical position, contiguous to India, Burma, Siam, China, Java ----- and all the meeting place of all peoples of the East, both white and coloured. Seventy five per cent of its resident population consisted of the ubiquitous Chinese, the native Malays forming but a small proportion. Quite a number of relatives and associates of my family were engaged in the mercantile life of Singapore when I was there so I had a particularly happy time. At the Singapore Club I was first introduced to the delights of Malay Malacca, where it is to be found in perfect form. Of its spelling I am by no means certain, but of the delicious flavour of that Eastern dish I have sufficient evidence. It was here that I had the joy of witnessing the most extraordinary and ludicrous performance of a Shakespearean play, not excepting some of the productions to be seen in Europe of the ultra-actorn school, that has ever failed to attract a playgoer in any part of the world. It was a performance of "The Merchant of Venice", acted by a company of Malays and, of course,

in their native tongue. The medley of costumes was remarkable. Some of the actors were dressed frankly as Malays, but some of the most important characters were a grotesque travesty of Elizabethan persons, while Fortin and Barabas were attired in

Chapter IX.

The island of Singapore, little more than one degree north of the equator, is exceedingly hot and humid, but being the great waterway to the Far East it is full of life and colour. Its unique geographical position, contiguous to India, Burma, Siam, China, Borneo, Java and the Philippine Islands make it the meeting place of all peoples of the East, both white and coloured.

Seventy five per cent of its resident population consisted of the ubiquitous Chinese, the native Malays forming but a small proportion. Quite a number of relatives and connections of my family were engaged in the mercantile life of Singapore when I was there so I had a particularly happy time, and at the Singapore Club I was first introduced to the delights of Gula Malacca, where it is to be found in perfection - of its spelling I am by no means certain, but of the delicious flavour of that Eastern dish I have more confident memories.

IT WAS HERE THAT
~~In Singapore~~ I had the joy of witnessing the most extraordinary and ludicrous performance of a Shakespearean play, not excepting some of the productions to be seen in Europe of the ultra-modern school, that has ever fallen to my lot as a playgoer in any part of the world. It was a performance of "The Merchant of Venice", acted by a company of Malays and, of course,

in their native tongue. The medley of costumes was remarkable. Some of the actors were dressed frankly as Malays, but some of the more important characters wore a grotesque travesty of Elizabethan costume, while Portia and Nerissa were attired in modern European white muslin frocks reaching to their knees, with brightly coloured sashes round their waists, black stockings and a large number of silver anklets that jingled and clanked as they capered about the stage. All the characters made their entrances to the airs of popular English music hall ditties or patriotic airs. The Prince of Morocco, I recollect, entered to the appropriate tune of "The Rajah of Bhong". The native orchestra atoned for their lack of executive ability by a superabundance of noise and vim.

Shylock, whom Mr William Poel, the famous Shakespearean producer and scholar, contended was not designed to arouse our sympathy but to be "laughed at", certainly succeeded in this conception of the character, but hardly I imagine in a manner that would have met with Mr Poel's entire approval, for this Malayan actor played it as an out and out low comedy part on slap-stick lines. His principal laugh raiser was a short whangee cane which he carried throughout the play and with which he indiscriminately smacked the posteriors of any and every character that came within his reach. Neither did the great lady of Belmont disdain such adventitious aids to provoke mirth, one of her biggest laughs being on the discomfiture of Shylock in the trial scene,

when she put her thumb to her nose and spread out her fingers at him, in the street urchin's gesture of triumphant derision.

~~It would take too much space, nor will my memory allow me, to describe the performance in detail. Neither can I say, not being familiar with the language, what liberties they took with the text, but from the reactions of the audience I imagine it was a very liberal translation. Altogether a very entertaining performance.~~

After a very successful season in Singapore we ran up to Kuala Lumpur, (~~usually abbreviated to K.L.~~), the Federal capital of the Malay States and also the centre of the rubber industry. The planters drove in from a hundred miles round to visit the theatre and after the performance we all - that is to say, the male members of our audience and the actors - adjourned to the Selangor Club (affectionately and better known as "The Spotted Dog") in the centre of the Maidan, where the planters, a jolly and care-free crew, rubber being then at peak prices, sang their public school songs until we dispersed with the dawn. The Chinese club stewards must have reaped a golden harvest during our brief season, as there was a system of fines at the Club (from which we as guests were luckily exempt) whereby after the regulation closing time, every member on the premises was mulcted every hour in a gradually ascending penalty of so many Straits dollars, the sum accruing therefrom being divided amongst the stewards.

On returning to Singapore, preparatory to departing for Hong-Kong, we had several hours before the ship sailed, so instead of returning to the Raffles Hotel where we had previously stayed, we decided to go for lunch to the Van Wyck Hotel patronized by the Javanese Dutch and sample the far-famed King of Curries, known as Reis-Tafel. Curry and rice were served to us on a gargantuan plate; ~~and~~ then followed a seemingly endless procession of Chinese waiters each bearing a large dish divided into sections and each section containing a different and highly flavoured delicacy. After helping oneself to multitudinous spoonfuls from these dishes, one became aware that one's plate of curry had grown to mountainous proportions, but so delectable is the resulting mixture that it would require the utmost self-denial not to consume it to the last morsel. I confess, with some shame, that for my part I did not require another square meal until I arrived in Hong-Kong some four or five days later.

Hong-Kong (really Hiang-Kiang) signifies "Sweet Waters", which is a most poetic and, at the same time, apt description of the beautiful harbour which stretches between the island of Hong-Kong and the peninsula of Kowloon, and its natural charms were further enhanced by the handsome streets and houses of the city of Victoria, above which on the slopes and terraces of the Peak, towering over all, were to be seen the bungalows and lovely gardens of the English residents. Nor was the city less picturesque on nearer acquaintance with its Flower Street, where

masses of roses and more exotic blooms could be purchased at a trifling cost; its sedan chairs carried by stalwart coolies; its tall bewhiskered Sikh policemen, and its thoroughfares thronged with usually smiling and very likeable Chinese of all classes, the men in skirts and the women in trousers. Thus the fair sex of the East has anticipated her sisters of the West, as China has already done in countless instances, by many centuries.

Although it can be unpleasantly hot in the summer the climate in Hong-Kong in October was well-nigh perfect, and an excellent hotel, the freedom of the Hong-Kong Club, a comfortable theatre, coupled with delightful audiences, all combined to make our first introduction to China as memorable as it was enjoyable.

My chief memory of a visit to a Chinese theatre in Hong-Kong lies not so much with the entertainment ("for my part it was Greek to me") with its quaint conventions, the delightful informality of the actors and stage staff and the unholy and incessant din of the musicians, ~~so much~~ as with the curious customs and etiquette observed by the audience. There was a particularly unhygienic and disgusting practice, apparently intended to mitigate the stifling and fuggy atmosphere of the building, of which I was an interested spectator. An attendant perambulated the theatre carrying a towel and a pail of hot water. Stopping at the end of a row of seats he would dip the towel into the pail, wring it out, and hand it to the occupant of the end seat who would then proceed to wipe his neck and face very

thoroughly with it. Having concluded his toilet he would hand it to his neighbour who would repeat the operation and so the towel would pass to the far end of the row when it would re-pass along the next row back to the attendant who, after again dipping it in the pail and wringing it out would continue his circuit of the auditorium. As far as I could see, neither the towel nor the water were ever changed, so their condition by the end of the evening can be imagined. It is strange that a people whose clothing is always so immaculately laundered, even to the humblest coolie, should have so little regard for cleanliness in other respects.

Shanghai, which we next visited, possessed many fine buildings and a magnificent Bund or water front, but situated as it was on the banks of the river in the midst of a flat and uninteresting landscape, had none of the picturesque beauty of Hong-Kong. While I was still in the latter city I had written to an English shipping firm in Shanghai engaged in the coastal trade, inquiring what arrangements they could offer for the transport of my company and effects to Tientsin, which was to be my next port of call. Up to the time of leaving Hong-Kong I had not received a reply, but as the gangway was run out to our ship from the wharf at Shanghai the first man to come aboard called out my name. When I stepped forward he explained that he was the representative of the North German Lloyd Company; that he had learned (how I

don't know) that I wished to leave for Tientsin on the following Sunday week and leave Tientsin again on a certain date. In both cases they had a ship due to sail on the day previous, but if I would give his firm the contract for my transport he would undertake to delay the sailing at both ends to fit in with my arrangements. In five minutes and before I left the ship the matter was all fixed up. Three days after I had landed I received a reply to my inquiry by letter to the English firm. The North German Lloyd Company was at that time subsidized to the extent of annual payments equivalent to five per cent on their capital. The English line on the other hand had to subsist on their earnings. The difference in their business methods was therefore the more incomprehensible. ~~He displayed a souvenir of this period with some~~ ~~gold~~ Shanghai had an extremely cosmopolitan atmosphere - a sort of Europe in little - as all the great powers had their own little piece of territory conceded to them by the Chinese, with their own local government, police, courts of justice, etc. With its many restaurants, its rather hectic night life and ~~its~~ general air of gaiety it was dubbed "The Paris of the East". The bar of the English Club was said to be the longest in Asia, even as "The Spotted Dog" in ^{Kuala Lumpur} ~~K.F.~~ claimed to have the largest membership, but it was by no means too long for the crowds that assembled there at the cocktail hour. The Gaiety Theatre where we played was a delightful little building owned by the Shanghai Amateur Dramatic Company, but our first season had of necessity to be a brief one,

as otherwise it would not have been possible to visit Tientsin, the river Pei-ho on which it is situated being frozen up and closed to traffic later in the year.

We had an exceptionally enjoyable and comfortable trip in the little North German Lloyd ship across the Yellow Sea, the cabins being unusually spacious and the catering and service all that could be desired, while the voyage was agreeably broken by a day on shore at Chefoo and another at the German port of Tsingtao. But the chief source of entertainment was our captain, an extraordinary character, who with his huge nose and red face bore a striking resemblance to the old time picture of Ally Sloper. He had been in the German Navy and also for a time captain of the Kaiser's yacht. He displayed a souvenir of this period with some pride. It was a pair of handsome cuff links presented to him by the gentleman who a few years later was to seek sanctuary in Holland. The cause of our Captain's downfall from his former high estate was not difficult to gauge. He was possessed of ample private means, and the upper deck on which was situated his sumptuous cabin justified his alluding to it as his "Winter Garden" as it had the unusual ornamentation of a large number of shrubs and plants in tubs and boxes, and here he would hospitably entertain us with cocktails, champagne and other beverages. After dinner he played dominoes in the saloon with his bosom crony, the chief engineer, during which the Captain would roar out German drinking songs in a voice which seemed to make the whole ship

tremble and would have made the Bull of Bashan sick with envy. By the end of the evening both he and the chief engineer would be distinctly mellow, and indeed the boat seemed to be entirely, but quite efficiently, run by the First Officer and second engineer, who were fortunately of more temperate habits. There was a legend on the ship that no matter how inebriated the Captain might be, he could always be relied upon, even in a thick fog when it is a particularly dangerous piece of navigation, to pilot the ship into Tsingtao. I was none the less glad that we made our entrance in clear weather.

China had only recently passed through the throes of the revolution which had resulted in a Republican form of government supplanting the ancient Manchu dynasty. Tientsin had been the scene of a good deal of bloodshed and it was still the centre of much intrigue and conspiracy. At the hotel at which we stayed about a dozen Brass Hats - generals, staff officers and what not - of the Republican forces engaged a room for a midnight conclave; their selection of this meeting place being influenced, I imagine, by the fact that as it was situated in the English concession they were on safe neutral territory. The room placed at their disposal happened to be next to the bedroom of Arthur Goodsall, an actor in my company who was an eccentric and fiery tempered individual. Disturbed ^{at times} in his slumbers by the, ~~at times~~, heated arguments taking place in the adjoining room he leapt from his bed, rushed from his room and burst upon the astonished officers

demanding why the -- what the -- something, something, dared they interrupt his sleep with their silly something, something chatter? Whether the effect produced was a sheer triumph of personality, or whether it was merely due to the innate politeness of the Celestial, probably not one of whom could understand a word he uttered, though his tones and gestures were sufficiently eloquent, I know not; but at any rate, I have never witnessed a more ludicrous spectacle, as, called from my bed by the unwonted hubbub, I saw a small pyjama-clad figure put to rout an entire army staff who rose as one man and silently and stealthily issued from the room and crept in single file down the corridor on tip-toes, holding their swords up to prevent them clanking, whence they disappeared down the staircase and presumably out of the building.

Pekin is but eighty miles by rail from Tientsin and I was very anxious to pay a visit to that ancient capital; luckily the opportunity presented itself of doing so, and at the same time of combining business with pleasure, as I received an invitation from the English Club in Pekin to inaugurate the opening of a bijou theatre which they had just built in connection with their Club premises. As it was impossible to break the sequence of my season in Tientsin the only available night for a performance in Pekin was a Sunday. We arrived in Pekin about midday and had to leave again on the Monday afternoon which was all too short a period in which to explore a tithe of the wonders of that unique city, ~~which~~ was a city within a city, both surrounded by high

walls with many gates. The Sunday evening, of course, was taken up by our performance at the theatre, the first, I believe, ever given by a professional ^{European} company (~~European~~) in Peking. We had a most distinguished audience including all the Ambassadors of the Foreign powers and their suites with the exception, to my chagrin, of the English Ambassador, whose religious scruples would not allow him to be present at a theatre on a Sunday.

From Tientsin we returned to Shanghai for a short season, preparatory to taking ship for Japan. En route, we called at Nagasaki and then sailed through the beautiful Inland Sea to Kobe where we played for a couple of nights and then resumed our journey to Yokohama, which being the principal port of Japan had naturally the largest foreign population and where as a consequence we played for a correspondingly lengthy season. It was some little time before I could become accustomed to being classed as a "foreigner", as hitherto we had been on British territory for the entire tour; even in Shanghai and Tientsin, the concession areas in which we resided and acted were under the Union Jack. But while I had previously regarded all but Britons as coming under that denomination, I now found myself in Japan labelled as a "foreigner" for the first time, and could not avoid some feeling of resentment at a term being applied to me which, with true insularity, had formerly seemed to me to denote an implication of inferiority. It was also a new but rather amusing experience to find that I had to take out a licence for every actor in my ~~own~~ half a century earlier.

company before we were allowed to carry on our profession. The charge, however, was quite nominal.

The whole of the six weeks we spent in Japan was a sheer delight. That was thirty years before the Japanese revealed themselves in their true colours at Pearl Harbour. And though it is true they were for the most part intensely disliked and distrusted by the foreigners who resided in their midst and were brought into daily contact with them in their business dealings, we, as casual visitors to the country, were charmed with the novelty of their dress, their customs, their houses and their general way of life. I confess we found their national habit of perpetually grinning without the slightest provocation very irritating but we put it down to a natural courtesy and a desire to please and failed to realize with Hamlet "That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain."

Even then the country was highly industrialized and all the larger cities were undergoing a rapid process of Westernization, greatly to their disfigurement, architecturally and otherwise. This transition period was responsible for the most grotesque effects in their dress and the common sight of a would-be Japanese dandy in the regulation kimono wearing a bowler hat and stub-toed brown boots was enough to have made their much-revered ancestors weep. But one had only to get a little off the beaten track to recapture something of the feudal atmosphere and the national mode of living that were general to the country little more than half a century earlier.

Whatever their feelings might have been towards America, politically, there is no doubt the Japanese had a tremendous admiration for all American institutions and with their wondrous facility for imitation copied them in every way possible.

One of the many customs that the Japanese had adopted from America was a passion for interviewing, and from the time we landed in Japan until our departure both my wife and I were beset by an army of representatives of the Japanese press. Many of the questions with which they plied us were unconventional to the point of embarrassment and in this connection my wife used to tell a good story against herself. At the conclusion of an interview by a lady reporter in Tokyo, the latter paid her the dubious compliment of asking "Now, please tell me, Miss Hunter-Watts, in your own country are you considered beautiful or only peculiar?" In fairness to my wife let me hasten to state that the Japanese standards of beauty are very different to those of the West, for which reason, however, we were a little doubtful how to take a statement in a Japanese newspaper that "Miss Hunter-Watts has the beauty of the dove." And speaking of different standards I am reminded ^{of} ~~that~~ when my wife first joined my company and was filling the very humble role of a page in "The Merchant of Venice"; ^{we} ~~her~~ ~~landlady who came to see the play while we were at Brighton in~~ ~~response to my wife's query as to how she had enjoyed herself~~ ^{the performance,} said "Oh, all right, Miss, but YOU are much too good for Shakespeare, you ought to be in pantomime."

(Note that a forty foot opening is an exceptionally large stage in an English theatre.)

For our season in Yokohama we played in a theatre situated on the Bluff where most of the European population resided, a most friendly audience - many of whom, alas ! lost their lives in the great earthquake some years later which demolished half the Bluff and engulfed hundreds of their beautiful bungalows and also, I understand, the theatre.

Mr Thwaites of Yokohama who organized the whole of my Japanese tour was fortunately able to arrange a season of five nights for me at the Imperial Theatre, Tokyo, immediately following upon my season at Yokohama. Just as I regard the theatre at Kandy as being the nadir of my experience in theatres, so the Imperial Theatre, Tokyo, marks the zenith, being without doubt the most magnificent building I have ever played in. Japanese architects, I am told, were sent to examine the finest theatres in Europe and America, and then from their accumulated experience and observations drew their plans for the Imperial Theatre. These preliminaries, combined with a lavish expenditure, resulted in a theatre justifying the name bestowed upon it. The theatre was an enormous building with an auditorium capable of seating over 3,000 people and in addition to about a dozen spacious foyers, lounges, smoking rooms, etc., there were a number of cafés and restaurants each with accommodation for several hundred patrons. It also possessed a revolving stage of colossal proportions, the proscenium opening being no less than seventy feet in width. (For the benefit of the layman I might mention that a forty feet opening is an exceptionally large stage in an English theatre.)

An orchestra of sixty performers played our incidental music and during the entractes. Notwithstanding the vast extent of the auditorium the acoustics and the line of vision for every member of the audience were seemingly perfect, and the seating arrangements were so adapted that the playgoers could either sit cross-legged on a mat or on ordinary seats in the Western method. Two stock companies, played alternate seasons, one acting the old dramas, mostly based on the exploits of the Samurai and legendary themes with an all male cast, and the other producing modern plays including translations of Shaw ^{and} Ibsen, etc., in which the feminine parts were acted by women; and it was only during a slight gap between their respective seasons that I was able to secure the theatre for the brief space of five nights.

The foreign population of Tokijō being comparatively small, our audiences consisted almost entirely of Japanese and we found them most attentive and appreciative, although it is true I received a terrible shock on the first night, when at the fall of the curtain on the first act, I heard that sound, which the actor dreads beyond all others, in the form of a prolonged hiss which emitted from 3,000 throats unanimously ~~filled me with horror~~. I was quickly reassured, however, on learning that this was the usual method by which a Japanese audience conveyed their utmost approval, the intake of the breath by which this ominous sound is produced signifying that we were so wonderful that we took their breath away ! I had already met with this expression of adulation

in ordinary social intercourse with the Japanese, but was not prepared for it as a means of applause in the theatre. Moreover, I was further heartened later in the evening when at a particularly dramatic climax the audience broke into loud cries of "Banzai" and I knew that our success was beyond doubt.

From Tokyo we went to Kyoto, the most delightful of all Japanese cities, which until the civil war in 1868, culminating in the overthrow of the Shogunate, was the capital of Japan for over a thousand years. Western influences had not yet succeeded in destroying its old Japanese-world charm; ~~as reflected in its many temples and picturesque streets, encompassed by beautiful undulating country covered with autumn-tinted woods, of which a wonderful panorama view could be obtained on all sides from the felicitously situated Miyako Hotel at which we put up,~~ and we all rejoiced that I had selected Kyoto for our first and only holiday during our long and arduous tour, which I had arranged to follow immediately upon our season at the theatre. This theatre was over four hundred years old and also possessed a revolving stage, though unlike the one at Tokyo which was, of course, worked by machinery, it was of a more primitive kind and was turned by a sort of capstan underneath the stage manipulated by about a dozen stage hands. It is interesting to note, by the way, that when the revolving stage was installed at the Coliseum Theatre, London, about fifty odd years ago it was hailed as a wonderful innovation, though revolving stages had been in existence in Japan for centuries.

As is probably well known, it is the custom of the Japanese of all classes to take several almost boiling hot baths daily, and it was the practice of our local stage hands as soon as the performance was over and the scenery cleared to bring forth a number of large tubs or vats of previously heated water upon the stage, into which, having divested themselves of their scanty garments, they would plunge themselves until they were parboiled, and after they had emerged they would, while still stark naked, frequently go through a series of gymnastic exercises. In Kyoto this habit led to a very amusing if slightly embarrassing incident when, as my wife and I were crossing the stage in the act of leaving the theatre, one of the stage hands was still engaged in his exercises. One of his fellows standing by, who was evidently aware of Western conventions regarding nudity, drew his attention to the approach of my wife, at the same time remonstrating with him, whereupon he quickly and apologetically seized a towel which he twisted round his head and, ~~now~~ presumably imagining that he was ^{now} perfectly decent even in the eyes of these extraordinary foreigners, ~~he~~ smilingly resumed his exercises.

Our holiday in Kyoto was spent in visiting the numerous temples; the school for geishas where the novitiates were trained in the elaborate ritual which accompanies the serving of tea, the nice conduct of a fan and a thousand other details of geisha etiquette; the academy where, with a devoutness that partakes of the nature of a religious ceremony, the Japanese youth were

instructed in the old Samurai traditions including the use of the long two-handed sword. A day was devoted to a trip down the famous Shimizu rapids in long blunt-nosed flat-bottomed boats which, under the skilful guidance of the Japanese boatmen, negotiated the roaring waters and the jutting rocks with a deftness and certainty born of life-long practice. ^{Another day,} Watching the craftsmen engaged in the making of the artistic and beautiful pottery, porcelain and metal work for which Japan in general, and Kyoto in particular, is famous and of which we acquired several as souvenirs.

It had not taken me long to become familiar with the immemorial custom of bargaining in the Orient for even the smallest purchase. The habit is so ingrained and so enjoyed both by the salesman and customer that if the buyer is foolish enough to pay the price first demanded, the vendor is woefully disappointed at being deprived of the joy of bargaining and also not a little chagrined that he did not ask more having found such an obvious mug.

But my experiences in India and the other countries had hardly prepared me for the formality I encountered in Kyoto when my wife and I went to a leading Japanese store to buy some ornaments and souvenirs. The shop was kept by a very dignified and stately Japanese who spoke fairly good English. He welcomed us with a low bow at the door. After seating us in two very comfortable chairs he clapped his hands and from the factotum who

answered his summons he ordered tea. He engaged us in polite conversation until this was brought and we had refreshed ourselves. I had been coached by a local resident on the etiquette to be observed in making a purchase, so after a little more chit-chat I tentatively mentioned that we would very much like to ~~become~~^{buy} ~~the possessor of~~ one of his beautiful vases. Without making a verbal response he bowed his head in assent and continued the conversation. However, after a short lapse of time, to indicate, I suppose, that he was in no hurry to part with his beautiful wares, he again clapped his hands, gave some instructions to the boy in Japanese, who produced a fresh supply of tea and cakes; after which ~~he~~^{the boy} brought forward a tall ebony pedestal which he placed where it would catch the light to the best advantage, ^{and took} then ^{from} a cupboard ~~he took~~ a magnificent bronze vase ^{which he} polished ~~it~~ with a silk handkerchief and placed ^{on} ~~it~~ the pedestal. ^{As} The proprietor ignored these proceedings entirely, ~~so~~ I thought it was up to me to make the first advances, so after a little more tea and chat I expressed my admiration of the vase, to which again no attention was paid beyond a smiling agreement. Such a vulgar thing as money seemed so far beneath the consideration of this grand seigneur that it was with some hesitation that I dared to enquire what the price of this noble vase might be. More chat for some minutes, then as though he had just heard my enquiry he deigned to say the price was a hundred and fifty Yen. I replied that I was quite sure such an exquisite masterpiece was worth even more

than such an absurdly small sum, but small as it was unfortunately it was more than I could afford. The hand-clapping was repeated. More tea and cakes; more polite conversation. Then his lordship remarked that since we appreciated the vase so much he would be willing to part with it for One hundred and thirty Yen. Again I had to tell him reluctantly that even that preposterous low sum was more than we could afford to pay. He rose from his chair, and smilingly bowed us to the door and so the interview ^{ended} but not the negotiations, ~~ended~~. The next day we called again and after much the same rigmarole he brought the price down to a hundred Yen. On yet a third and final interview I bought it for eighty Yen. As eventually we bought quite a number of souvenirs of various kinds from him all our spare time was spent in his shop carrying on these high-flown negotiations. But had we attempted to depart from the time-honoured routine and do business in the usual Western style, we would have been courteously but finally shewn the door.

It was with no little reluctance that we concluded our all too short holiday to proceed for a season in Osaka. There are no two cities in Japan which could have offered a sharper contrast than Kyoto and Osaka, the former retaining the atmosphere of medieval times and the latter a highly industrialized manufacturing centre known as "The Manchester of Japan".

It is possible, however, that my impressions of Osaka were prejudiced, as I was badly smitten by a severe bout of influenza

for the major portion of my stay there. Determined not to break my record of being the only member of my company who had not missed a single performance throughout the tour, I played Shylock, Hamlet and Othello on three consecutive nights with a temperature hovering between 103° and 104° . Each evening I rose from my bed and wrapped in multitudinous blankets would clamber into the only available motor-car in Osaka, that invariably broke down about half way to the theatre, which was some four miles from my hotel, and then transfer my blankets and self to a rickshaw to complete the journey. The weather was bitterly cold and there was no other means of heating my dressing room but the mockery of a small lacquered bowl containing a few pieces of burning charcoal. The lines of my parts, firmly engraved upon my memory from oft repetition, fell mechanically from my lips, but I was so unsteady on my feet that I fear the audience, almost entirely Japanese, must have formed a very bad opinion of my personal habits. ~~I always feel grateful to the American medico who attended me; who~~ when I informed him I was determined to play, ^{he} did not waste time in vain argument as so many of his brethren would have done, but having done his duty by pointing out the risk I was taking contented himself with giving me the best professional assistance possible in the circumstances.

A lighter side to my Osaka experiences was a rather comic dinner which by the end of my season I was sufficiently recovered to give at my hotel to the gentlemen of the press. At the end

of the meal when cigars and cigarettes were handed round, instead of staying for a smoke as I naturally anticipated, they, one and all, following what I presume was Japanese etiquette, seized several handfuls from the boxes and having crammed their pockets to bursting point they hurriedly and silently stole away without any leave-taking.

A return visit to Kobe for a couple of nights concluded our tour of Japan and we once more sailed for Shanghai. It had been my desire to complete the circuit of the globe by proceeding from Japan to South America and the West Indies, en route to England; but finding it impossible to negotiate the theatres in South America by correspondence, I had decided to make a return trip through Asia and also to visit certain places I had omitted on my outward journey.

It was while this Arctic weather prevailed that a resident of Shanghai of the name of Gornishael, whom I had frequently met on my previous visits, very kindly invited my wife and myself together with two or three ~~persons~~ of my company to lunch at a little German restaurant, where he assured us that, though the conditions were a little primitive, the fare was exceptionally good.

Delighted to exchange the culinary efforts of the Chinese chef at the Astor House Hotel for an appetizing German meal, the solidity of which we had already experienced on the Tientsin ship, we all gratefully accepted the invitation. Our host escorted us to a small restaurant situated over a butcher's shop

Chapter X.

2

The Christmas of 191~~1~~² we spent in Shanghai, a great contrast to our last Christmas in Calcutta. In fact it was what would be termed in England as "a good old-fashioned Christmas". It was bitterly cold, with over a foot of snow upon the ground and a piercing high wind which seemed to come (as it possibly did) direct from the North Pole via the steppes of Siberia. ~~So keen~~ and penetrating were these icy blasts that although dressed in all my available underclothing, the warmest of suits, a heavy overcoat and muffler, all surmounted by a thick waterproof, I had ~~the sensation of walking about stripped to the skin.~~

It was while this arctic weather prevailed that a resident of Shanghai of the name of Carmichael, whom I had frequently met on my previous visits, very kindly invited my wife and myself together with two or three members of my company to lunch at a little German restaurant, where he assured us that, though the conditions were a little primitive, the fare was exceptionally good.

Delighted to exchange the culinary efforts of the Chinese chef at the Astor House Hotel for an appetizing German meal, the solidity of which we had already experienced on the Tientsin ship, we all gratefully accepted the invitation. Our host escorted us to a small restaurant situated over a butcher's shop

pleasingly heated by a roaring fire at each end of the room, down the centre of which ran a long trestle table that, to use a well-worn phrase, "groaned" under the burden of every conceivable German delicacy. True, it consisted entirely of cold dishes, which hardly seemed to be the most suitable meal for such weather, but then what a superabundant selection of good things ! Every variety of German sausage, soured and pickled fish of all kinds including at least half a dozen forms of the ubiquitous herring, smoked salmon, smoked ham, ducks, fowls, salads - a truly gargantuan feast. As the meal progressed the genial atmosphere induced by the warm room, the really luscious food washed down by plentiful supplies of excellent lager beer, and the kind attentions of our host, all ^{contributed} ~~conduced~~ to a most enjoyable repast, and, ~~when~~ ^{when,} having most thoroughly appeased our appetites, we were anticipating the enjoyment of a cigarette and coffee, ^{when,} to the horror and amazement of my fellow guests and myself - enter the soup ! The surfeit of delicacies, which we had surmised was the entire lunch, was merely the preliminary hors d'oeuvres, and there followed a most embarrassing period, when, to the chagrin of our host, we vainly toyed with the various dishes of fish, entrees, joints, poultry etc., which seemed as though they would stretch out to the crack of doom. ~~On a return visit to Hong-Kong I seized the opportunity of seeing Canton by playing for a couple of nights in the foreign settlement established on the island of Shameen, which was~~

connected with Canton by a small bridge, fortified with sandbags and barbed wire, and guarded by a small detachment of British troops in case the Cantonese in one of their periodic outbursts against the foreign devils should take it into their heads to endeavour to rush the settlement. Their prejudice against anything alien extended to the railway connecting Hong-Kong with Canton, necessitating a protection of the line by Chinese soldiers stationed at short intervals, as otherwise the natives were apt to disturb the railway time-table by tearing up the rails as a protest against this impious invention of the "barbarians".

Canton is a most fascinating place and I imagine that as a city it was unique even in that strange country. With a population of something over a million, a large number of whom live permanently in boats moored by the riverside, the winding, crooked streets are mostly but six feet in width, the main thoroughfares perhaps extending to eight feet. In this maze of narrow streets, all looking exactly alike to the uninitiated, one would be hopelessly lost if one strayed a hundred yards from the river bank unless accompanied by a guide. Vehicular traffic is, of course, out of the question in such narrow passages, hardly worthy of the name of streets, and congested as they are with the teeming populace. The stench that arises in these confined areas from sweating humanity, the unsavoury and weird comestibles exposed for sale, together with a complete absence of even the most rudimentary system of sanitation, may be but faintly imagined, but

once experienced is unforgettable. The fascination of Canton, apart from these minor drawbacks, lay in the fact that in walking through its streets you were transported back to China as it was and had been for the past thousand years or more, with no trace of Western influences or any reminder that you were in the twentieth century.

Both in China itself, and in other countries where I have met ^{the Chinese} them, in great numbers, my personal impression of ~~the Chinaman~~ ^{them} was that of a most likeable ^{people.} person. The upper classes were invariably men of culture and straight as a die. In their business dealings their word was literally their bond. Where many an Occidental might seek to shelter himself under some ambiguously worded clause of a stamped legal contract, a verbal agreement with a reputable Chinese merchant would be carried out to the letter even ~~though~~ ^{if} its fulfilment ^{should} entailed him in considerable loss. On the other hand, it must be confessed that from a Western standpoint, they often appeared as a race to be both cruel and callous. As an instance, I remember reading in a Hong-Kong newspaper an account of how the Governor in some province in the interior of China, regarding the lepers in his district as an unnecessary burden upon the community, had a large pit dug, and filled with faggots and pitch, into which the lepers were driven at the point of the bayonet and then burned alive. However advanced his views might be as to the elimination of the unfit, he might at least have carried out the job in a more humane manner. But in a country

where torture was a fine art, and where picture postcards could be bought depicting pirates kneeling in a row waiting their turn to be beheaded, with cigarettes stuck between their lips and countenances reflecting nothing but complete indifference, such an act doubtless aroused no protest.

Of all the hundreds of voyages I have made in every kind of craft, from large and sumptuously appointed mail steamers to small coasting vessels of a hundred and fifty tons or so, I cannot recollect a more unpleasant passage than the one we made from Hong-Kong to Manila. It did not begin too auspiciously. I had just undergone a slight operation on the throat which would require further medical attention, and I was rather disconcerted when, as we were leaving the port, I drew the attention of a steward to a man seated at the far end of the smoking room who was obviously in the first stage of D.T's, and was informed he was the ship's doctor; nor was I particularly reassured by the further information that he would be all right when we got out to sea. As a matter of fact I never ascertained whether the sea air did have this remarkable curative effect on the gentleman's complaint, for as soon as we left the harbour we encountered a terrific gale, and, to make matters worse, half way through the voyage the engines broke down and our small tub wallowed helplessly for many hours in the midst of mountainous seas. So I spent the whole of my time between my bunk and the floor of my cabin, where I was constantly pitched by the rolling and heaving of the boat.

Manila, however, made ample amends for the temporary discomforts of the voyage; soon forgotten in the novelty of that very attractive city which was a curious combination of old Spain and modern America. While its material efficiency in the shape of the magnificent hotel on the Lunetta overlooking the harbour, its up-to-date sanitation, electric tramways, etc. under the American regime were responsible for the bodily comforts of the visitor, the charm and interest of Manila were a bequest of the Spanish occupation.

The old part of the town was protected by stout walls and contained besides the old cathedral, churches and monasteries, many houses built in the Spanish fashion with their enclosed patios, in which beautiful tropical flowers and shrubs with fountains playing made a charming vista as seen through their massive wrought iron gateways, which when closed and barred could convert the private residence into a miniature fortress.

The Spaniards were but a small minority of the population but their influence was still to be traced in the retention of many of their customs, the most noticeable being ^{that} the shops, banks and places of business ^{were} ~~being~~ closed and everything ^{was} ~~at~~ a standstill from noon until two o'clock. The time thus lost was atoned for by commencing the working day at an unusually early hour. Even in the hotels breakfast was served from six a.m.

The American contingent, while adopting many of the Spanish traditions, of course brought their own habits and customs with

them to Manila, including their avid lust of iced water and ice creams; and I was frequently amused by the somewhat incongruous spectacle of crowds of sedate and elderly business men gravely discussing their commercial deals over their sundaes in the morning at Clarke's well-known café on the Escolta.

Amongst the plays announced for my season in Manila were "Salome" and "Mrs Warren's Profession", and as the advance booking for these two plays was fairly heavy I was very much perturbed when I received an intimation from the Attorney-General, whose functions embraced control of all places of entertainment and the censorship of the drama, that as neither "Salome" nor "Mrs Warren" were licensed for the English stage I could not be permitted to produce them in Manila. I immediately sought an interview with the Attorney-General in an endeavour to induce him to rescind his ban on the plays, in the course of which I pointed out that the conditions which might render certain plays being considered unsuitable for presentation in England, before an audience partly composed of susceptible juveniles, did not apply in the East where we played to a wholly adult audience, and that this view had been accepted in the various Dominions and Crown Colonies where I had already produced them, and frequently in the presence of His Majesty's Governors.

Although the latter part of my statement obviously impressed him, since he had like many good republicans, a great respect for the prestige and authority of the representatives of the

British Crown, he remained inflexible in his attitude, and expectorating into the ever-handy cuspidor by way of emphasis to his objections, said, "I am told that this 'Mrs Warren's Profession' is nothing but a damned whorehouse play, and as for this 'Salome' it is said to be sacrilegious to the last degree." As he thereby confessed that he was personally unacquainted with the plays, I gently suggested that he might perhaps read them and see for himself if perhaps this drastic summary of their merits was not, at least, a little exaggerated. "No," he replied, "^{I have} ~~he had~~ not the time." Then, as an alternative, I proposed that he should send a representative to rehearsals of the plays which would be even a better method of judging them. To this proposition he agreed, and a rehearsal of "Salome" two days thence was fixed upon for the attendance of one of his staff. There was evidently some misunderstanding as to the date we had arranged, as the following day while rehearsing "The Cardinal", a very excellent but quite impeccable drama by Louis N. Parker, there was a man seated in the empty auditorium engaged in taking notes, and as I imagined him to be a press reporter getting some preliminary details of the play for his criticism I took no further notice of him. However, when I had returned to my hotel and was sitting down to my lunch I was informed that the Attorney-General was on the 'phone and wished to speak to me. On taking up the receiver and announcing my presence, I was astounded to hear the Attorney-General say "My representative has just returned from the rehearsal

of 'Salome' and he reports it is perfectly innocuous - you may go right ahead with it."

I immediately did some lightning thinking. If I undeceived him he would probably be doubly annoyed. Firstly, because owing to the error regarding the date his representative would have wasted an entire morning, and secondly because the latter would be shown up as a blithering ass who could not distinguish between such totally different plays as "The Cardinal" and "Salome". So I simply replied, "Thank you very much, sir - and what about 'Mrs Warren's Profession'?" By this time, no doubt thoroughly fed up with my persistence, or concluding that as his objections to "Salome" had proved so groundless they would be equally so regarding "Mrs Warren", he replied, "Oh, that's all right, play them both."

The Manila papers having got wind of the Attorney-General's original ban on the plays had given considerable publicity to the subject; now when it was lifted they came out with double column headings with an announcement to that effect, and this gratuitous advertisement resulted in my playing both pieces to crowded houses without the Attorney-General or his staff being any the wiser as to the circumstances which had actuated his decision.

One of the sights of Manila which my wife and I were invited to view was the huge penitentiary, ~~which is~~ built on the plan of a gigantic cartwheel. The rim being the outer wall; the spokes the dividing walls that separate it into sections for the

accommodation of the various classes of prisoners; and the hub in the form of a lofty tower, constituting the administrative offices, and here on the roof a band played while we were entertained with afternoon tea and the spectacle of 5,000 prisoners simultaneously going through their drill and physical exercises with marvellous uniformity and precision.

The prisoners instead of being confined to the customary cells, lived in dormitories with a daily allowance of cigarettes besides many other unusual privileges, but even so 5,000 men imprisoned, however deservedly, was a gloomy spectacle which not even the bright sunlight, the strains of the band and the knowledge of their humane treatment were able to counteract.

From the Philippines we returned for yet a third, though brief, season in Hong-Kong. It was on this my last visit that, as on several other occasions later in life, I missed the chance of making a large fortune.

I had become acquainted with a well-known and prosperous merchant, a Mr Komor, who owned a number of large antique and furniture stores throughout the Far East. One day when I was chatting to him and gazing with envy at some of his priceless treasures, he suddenly asked me, "Have you a few hundred dollars to spare, Mr Wilkie?"

This query out of the blue was rather astonishing and had it been put a little more subtly and from anyone less likely to be in need of financial assistance than Komor could possibly be

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Here is the sequel. Two or three years ago I was a guest at a dinner party in Edinburgh at which were present the Secretary to the HONG-Kong Government and his wife who were home on leave.

Reminiscing to him about my experiences I mentioned the opportunity I had had in 1913 of buying a few acres on the foreshore at Kowloon for a mere song. Even as that astute old bird, Komor, had foretold, I was informed that much of that land was now covered with wharfs and warehouses.

"It must have turned out quite a valuable property." I remarked.

"Yes, it has indeed," replied the Secretary, "would you like to know what land in that area is priced at to-day?"

"I should be most interested."

"£400,000 an acre!!!"

Thus for an outlay of a hundred pounds or so I might have been a ~~millionaire to-day~~ millionaire to-day. I have missed several other chances of making large sums but never anything on the same massive scale.

I should have thought there was a "touch" coming. As it was I had no hesitation in replying, "Yes, but why do you ask?"

"Because Hong-Kong is going ahead by leaps and bounds. It can't expand much further on this side of the Strait, backed by the Peak. Therefore its future expansion lies on the mainland at Kowloon. Now, if you care to invest two or three hundred dollars on the water front there, in, say about, fifteen years it will be worth hundreds of thousands."

I thanked Komor for his advice and said I would consider it. Well, I was young (comparatively) and foolish (very) and fifteen years seemed to me an eternity to which to look forward, and I carelessly and ^{stupidly} foolishly let the matter drop. *insertion here*

~~Sure enough, even sooner than that astute old bird had foretold, on those few acres of ground that I could have then bought for a song there are now wharfs and warehouses.~~

The first of several chances missed of making a fortune. Would I have been any the happier? Very doubtful. My philosophic belief ^{is} ~~being~~ that seeming misfortunes are often blessings in disguise. A large fortune would certainly have directly altered the whole course of my life, and who can say whether that would have been to my advantage or possibly brought disaster in its train? The only other event in connection with this visit which I recall was being awakened one morning by what I imagined to be either a bombardment of the city or at the very least a revolt of the native populace, but which turned out to be nothing

more serious than the explosion of millions of enormous crackers with which the Chinese were celebrating the incoming of their New Year.

Back to Singapore once more and then another trip to the Malay States which this time included visits to the tin-mining centre of Ipoh and Penang. At Ipoh we were greatly disturbed at the theatre on the first night by the babel of noise arising from the adjacent native market, but the chief of police, a keen lover of the drama, wielding arbitrary powers unknown to his colleagues in England, promptly ordered the market to close down for the remainder of our season, and our further performances were given without interruption to the players or the audience.

Our tour was brought to a conclusion in Ceylon where we again had seasons in both Colombo and Kandy, and in the latter place we commemorated our last night by a "breaking up" supper at my hotel.

On the voyage home my wife and I left the ^{S.S.} "Medina" at Suez for a hurried visit to Cairo, ^{before} rejoining the ship at Port Said; and in the eighteen hours at our disposal ~~in Cairo~~ we contrived to crowd in a trip to the Pyramids at daybreak, where John Brownlee, then unknown to operatic fame, seated on the topmost pinnacle, entertained us with "Pale Hands", from the Indian Love Lyrics; ^{followed by} an inspection of the palatial State Opera House, and a tour of the markets in the native quarter, which were reminiscent of a scene taken straight from the Arabian Nights Entertainment.

Then we sailed on,

Through the beautiful Straits of Messina revealing traces of the havoc wrought by a recent eruption of Mount Etna - past Stromboli with its villages perilously nestling at the foot of the smoking volcano, and so to Marseilles, ~~and~~ then overland to Calais, the short crossing to Dover, and England at last.

covering the best part of Asia, in the course of which I transported my company some 30,000 miles or more by land and sea and produced over thirty plays, staging Shakespeare in many places for the first time and freely to alien eyes whose enthusiastic appreciation testified since more than not only to Shakespeare for all time but for all peoples.

Altogether it had been a remarkable and satisfying experience and after such a colourful and exciting year I could not reconcile myself to resuming the ordinary round of the northern manufacturing centre. I was seized by the spirit of adventure and was anxious to explore professionally other far-off countries, if only I could find an opening. While in this unsettled frame of mind I marked time by accepting stray engagements. One of these was in an ambitious but not very successful production of Ivanhoe at the Lyceum Theatre, and another being an engagement to play Volsteff for a couple of weeks in a production of the first part of Henry IV. This was at the famous little Repertory Theatre in Birmingham, which had not at that time entirely dissociated itself from the amateur society headed by Sir Barry Jackson and John Drinkwater that had