"H.B." AND LAURENCE IRVING

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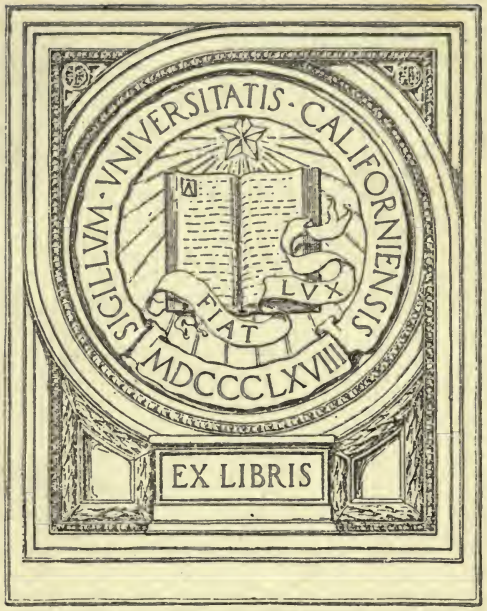
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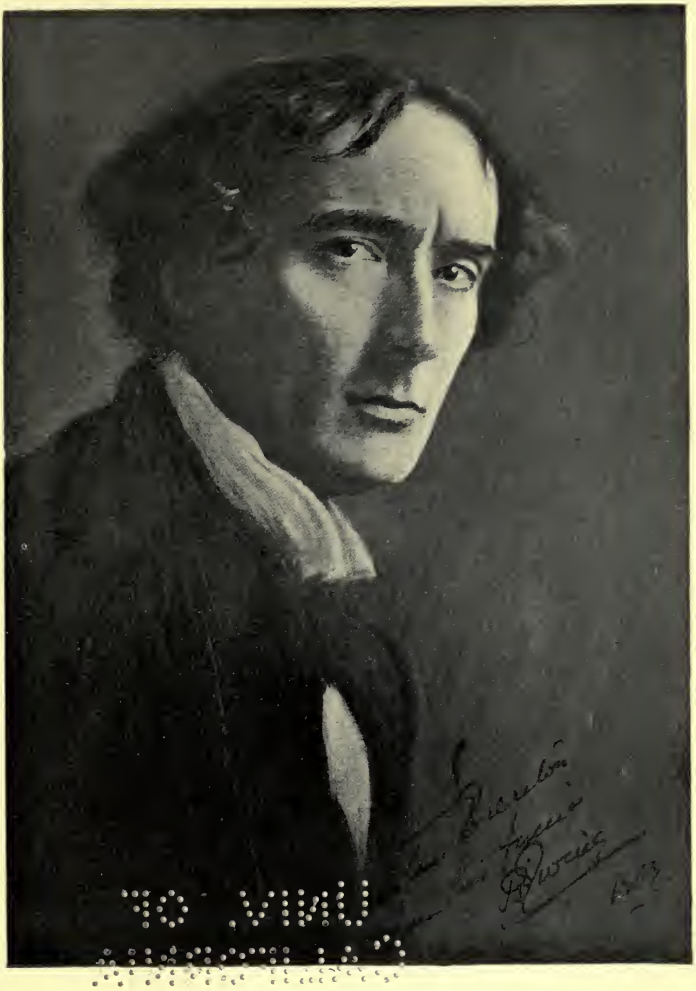

"H. B."

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

"H.B." and Laurence Irving

By

Austin Brereton

With Eight Illustrations

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UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

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The portrait of "Harry" is from a photograph by Elliott and Fry, that of The Brothers by Window and Grove, of Laurence Irving by J. Beagles and Co., of Laurence as Charles Surface by W. and D. Downey, of Laurence as Richard Lovelace by Norman May and Co., Cheltenham.

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

Introduction

ON the afternoon of a summer day, nearly thirty-nine years ago, a lonely man sat in his study awaiting the arrival of his two sons. He was at the zenith of his career. He had surmounted vast difficulties, he had conquered where thousands of other men would have been discouraged and failed. The old world was at his feet. He was on the eve of winning triumph after triumph in the new. But his thoughts just then had a tinge of sadness in them. His great victory in the world, his pride of place—for he was at the head of his calling—had been purchased at a price that cannot be estimated. Despite his achievements, although the adulation which he constantly received would have turned the brain of one of lesser calibre, he was then, as ever, a lonely man. Even his very rooms, his abode for over a quarter of a century, situated as they were in the heart of the most fashionable street in the world, were dull, though artistic. The sun hardly ever touched them, and what daylight there was had to find its way in through windows either heavily curtained or of stained glass. Suitable though they were to the occupant, they would now be considered extremely uncomfortable and somewhat depressing. Their unstudied richness, their artistic profusion,

typical of those Bohemian days, were wanting in something which struck the visitor strangely—that is, the visitor who came in the morning or afternoon. At night, when the curtains were drawn, the gas and candles lit, the host was at his best—in his element, so to speak. The feeling that then permeated him and communicated itself to his guests was eminently one of cheerfulness, of brilliancy, of satisfaction. In the daytime, the dominant manner of the inhabitant of these Bond Street rooms kept off, to some extent, the feeling that would creep in upon the friendly and sensitive visitor. It was the absence of a woman's hand. The rooms were distinctly a man's rooms. There was no sign or token that a loving woman ever crossed the portal. There was no feminine touch about them.

On that afternoon in 1883, Henry Irving was in the hey-day of his career. He had just terminated a season of marvellous success at the Lyceum Theatre. *Much Ado About Nothing* had enjoyed a run of eight months, over two hundred performances, and farewell weeks at the Lyceum, devoted to répertoire, in preparation for the first tour of America, had drawn admiring crowds to Wellington Street. The actor had entertained the Prince of Wales (afterwards Edward VII.) to supper on the stage of the Lyceum. The Lord Chief Justice of England had presided at a banquet which was attended by over five hundred of the distinguished men of the day. Yet was Henry

Irving a lonely man. As he waited for the coming of his boys, his mind went back to his struggling days, when he married the brown-haired girl, with the Irish grey eyes, who became the mother of Henry and Laurence, his only children.

When Henry and Laurence came to their father's rooms on that June afternoon, although they were welcomed and made much of—what curious feelings, what sad memories, must have surged through the breast of the father!—they were somewhat constrained in their manner, a little, perhaps, disdainful. So it seemed to one who, by a curious chance, was a spectator at this strange meeting between the father and his children. The manner of the boys is not to be wondered at, for they only knew of their father by name and by the echo of his fame which reached them in their schoolroom. This glimpse of him could have given them but little insight into his real nature; for it was only a glimpse, a brief visit of formality to a parent who was far removed from their own lives.

The reason for this unhappy state of affairs is to be found in a story which, unfortunately, is a common one—an ill-assorted marriage. Henry Irving married, on 15th July 1869, Florence O'Callaghan, daughter of Surgeon-General O'Callaghan. For reasons which need not be entered upon, and may be put down to "incompatibility of temper," the husband left his domicile shortly after the birth of his younger son and lived for a while

with his manager, the father of the Bateman family, first of all at Kensington Gore and then at Rutland Gate. He subsequently, for a little while, occupied chambers in Bruton Street, Bond Street. He then took the rooms in Grafton Street, Bond Street, which he occupied for many years, until 1899, when he was advised by his doctors to remove to sunnier quarters, in Stratton Street, Piccadilly. It was not until 1879, when a deed of separation was entered into between the actor and his wife, that the final parting came. The mother had the care of the children until they went to college. Harry resided in her house, whenever he was in London, until his marriage. Her house was also the home of Laurence whenever he was in England.

The boys grew up without intimate knowledge of their father, but, happily, they came in due season to recognise his worth. At the time of my meeting them in their father's rooms, I was just finishing the first biography of Henry Irving, a volume which, with all the ardour and courage of youth, I had conceived and written with a view to publication simultaneously with his first appearance in the United States. Strangely enough, after the lapse of twenty-five years, a much more ambitious undertaking, my *Life* of my great friend, was published. Still more strangely, it has fallen to my lot to write the lives of his sons, who were also friends of mine. I knew Harry Irving,

the public's beloved "H.B.," better than Laurence, for, by a chain of curious circumstances, I became his guide, philosopher, and friend for three years, during his management of the Queen's Theatre, seeing him daily and nightly during almost all that time. Again, during the last year or so before his death, we had many long meetings, when we discussed the subjects in which he was most interested. Although I was not brought into such continuous contact with Laurence, he was a simple character and was easy to know and understand. It was my good fortune to be able to do him a signal service in connection with *Typhoon*, and in that way I was brought closely into his life.

I had no personal acquaintance with Lady Irving until after the death of Harry. It then became necessary for me to consult her about his childhood. Later on, when I decided to tell the story of Harry and Laurence, in lieu (as originally intended) of the memoir of the elder brother only, it again was necessary for me to see the mother of the boys. It would be extremely ungracious if I did not acknowledge the willingness with which Lady Irving acceded to my request. On two occasions, when she placed at my service all the treasured souvenirs of her children, I spent many hours in her house at Folkestone. And her memory, wonderfully keen and correct, helped in many ways. For she was the only person who

could enlighten me about the early years of Harry and Laurence. Putting all else aside, she considered that I was the friend of her sons, and, in that spirit, she received me with frank courtesy and an open mind. I am grateful.

Lady Irving was present in Westminster Abbey when the incinerated remains of Henry Irving were interred in Poets' Corner. Had she been there two days later, she would have heard Canon Duckworth say of her husband: "We can thank God from our hearts when a man of noble nature attains the summit of the actor's calling, and from that summit to which rare natural gifts and unceasing toil have raised him invited the world to share his enlightened aims, to give its patronage only to what is intellectually good and morally sound in the art he loves. . . . He had the magnetic charm which drew and held men of every rank and vocation. In him the scholar's fastidious taste and aversion from inferior work was combined with a character of peculiar loftiness and refinement, which gave its consistent preference to whatever is lovely and of good report in human conduct." Such was the father of Harry and Laurence Irving.

Part I

"H.B."

CHAPTER I

CHILDHOOD

THERE are many examples in stage history, so far as it applies in what, without offence, may be called the second rank of actors, of heredity. In modern times especially there are many families which could be cited in this connection. Conspicuous examples are to be seen in the Farrens, the Batemans, the Comptons and so on. The great actors of the past did not leave any descendants equally great. Betterton and Garrick were childless. Edmund Kean's son was a good archæologist, but not a great actor. Macready's son is a soldier. It looked, for once, after the death of Henry Irving, as though his sons would be, although not so great as he, worthy successors. So they were until death cut them off. His elder son inherited talent from both his parents, and there can be no question that had he devoted himself entirely to literature he would have made a name for himself bigger than he did. On the other hand, Laurence had not so much the literary gift as that of the player.

Their maternal uncle, who was, in some literary respects, the forerunner of Irving the second, was John Cornelius O'Callaghan, who died, at the age of seventy-eight, in 1883.

He was a tall, dark, strong man, "who spoke a dialect compounded, apparently, in equal parts from Johnson and Cobbett, in a voice too loud for social intercourse. 'I love,' he would say, 'not the entremets of literature, but the strong meat of sedition,' or, 'I make a daily meal on the smoked carcase of Irish history.'" So wrote Charles Gavan Duffy. Apart from much journalistic work, chiefly in the columns of *The Nation*, John Cornelius wrote two books, both of which involved an almost superhuman attention to detail and a marvellous capacity for mastering facts and incidents and marshalling them in due order. In historical knowledge of everything concerning Ireland, it is doubtful if he had a rival. It was supposed that he knew the whereabouts of every historical manuscript in Europe, and it was said of him that, "living as he did amongst the ancients, he had their sayings always on his tongue, and would walk into a friend's drawing-room quoting Hannibal in such a way as to give the impression that he had just left that General at the gate." His first important volume, *The Green Book, or Gleanings from the Writing Desk of a Literary Agitator*, in which he controverted many of the statements made by the Orange Party against Irish Catholics, created such an interest that Daniel O'Connell, at a meeting of the Repeal Association in 1841, proposed that "six copies of the book be purchased in order that, being stamped

with the seal of their approbation, the attention of the public might be called to it and it might thus obtain the circulation which it so eminently deserved. His other most learned book was *The History of the Irish Brigades in the Service of France*, from the Revolution in Great Britain and Ireland under James II. to the Revolution in France under Louis XVI.

The author of these historical volumes, like all true Irishmen, had a mighty pride in his ancestry. In a footnote in *The Green Book* he tells us that among the chief in rank of the great Catholics of the counties of Cork and Kerry "were the O'Callaghans, descended from the celebrated conqueror of the Danes, Callaghan Cashel, King of Munster, who died about A.D. 952." John O'Callaghan, the father of John Cornelius, was one of the first Catholics who were admitted to the profession of attorney in Ireland after the partial relaxation of the penal laws of 1793. His youngest son, Daniel, the maternal grandfather of Henry Brodribb and Laurence Irving, served in the navy, and then joined, in 1842, the East India Company. He saw service with the field hospital of the army of the Sutlej, and was engaged in the Chinese War of 1860. Three years previously he was surgeon in chief medical charge of foot artillery at the Siege of Delhi, and received the medal and clasp. In 1872 he retired, with the rank of Surgeon-General. He married Elizabeth Walsh,

daughter of George Walsh, of the Foreign Office, of a King's County family. His wife was "remarkable for her intellect, no less than her personal beauty." The Surgeon-General died in 1900, at the age of eighty-five. He was a frequent contributor to the Press in India, and at one time was on the staffs of the leading Calcutta papers.

Young Henry Irving had, like his distinguished uncle, the capacity for quick assimilation. This was shown in the days of his childhood in a marked degree. Those days were mostly passed in the neighbourhood of Hyde Park and Holland Park.

He was born on Friday, 5th August 1870, at 5 Linden Grove, Bayswater; his brother was born in the year following, on the 21st of December. The boys were educated together and did not part until they had reached man's estate. In 1879, they were at a preparatory school in Hereford Square, South Kensington, the master whereof wrote to their mother a report which is of interest because it foreshadows the coming years. It is dated in April, when Harry, as he is called in it, was not nine years of age:

"Harry has continued to give, in all his lessons, daily proofs of his great cleverness; by very few boys can knowledge be acquired so easily and rapidly as by him. He is consequently a great favourite with all his masters. Upon the whole, however, Laurence has this term done even better

than Harry. He has a thoughtfulness, quiet ambition and a determination which are gradually carrying him to the front, and will, I think, help him there. With his fellow-pupils he is not only a great favourite, but a great authority."

How strangely this reads and how it tells the after-life of the brothers! The writer of the report deserves credit for his discernment. It is evident that young Harry had been well grounded at the girls' school to which, when a mite of three, he had been sent. This was at 4 Coleherne Road, not far from 14 Wharfdale Street, the birthplace of his brother.

From Hereford Square, the boys were sent to Linton House School, 11 Holland Park Avenue, the director of which was the late James Hardie. Harry and Laurence were pupils here from 1879 to 1882, going through the usual routine and winning the average number of marks. During this period their mother's home was at 10 Gilston Road, The Boltons, which, after the death of Sir Henry Irving, became the residence of Mr and Mrs Laurence Irving, Lady Irving removing to Kent. Harry always took a keen interest in the school at Linton House. Within three years of his death he distributed the prizes there. As he stood on that occasion he was able to see the bedroom which he and his brother had occupied, and his speech was full of affectionate regard for those days of his boyhood.

In those early days Harry and Laurence used to entertain their headmaster and fellow-boarders with their acting. On one occasion they went farther afield than Linton House in the display of that histrionic talent which they had inherited. On the 30th of June 1882 there was an entertainment for the purpose of endowing a cot in a Chelsea hospital for sick and incurable children. Appropriately enough, children provided a large part of the performance, although they had the support of their elders—Mrs Kendal, Arthur Cecil, and John L. Toole being the best known. The chief part of the children's contribution was the screen scene from *The School for Scandal*, acted by a "Lilliputian cast" trained by a grand old actress, Mrs Chippendale. There was a female Sir Peter, Josephine Webling, whose sister, Peggy, was Lady Teazle. Even before he was twelve years of age Harry was marked down for villains, for to him was allotted Joseph Surface, Laurence being the Charles. On the next day the representation was repeated twice by the precocious youngsters. The Knightsbridge performance was the first public one of the brothers. They had previously taken part in *H.M.S. Pinafore* at the house of their father's friend, Edmund Routledge, in Clanricarde Gardens. The characters were taken by children—six Routledges, three Beerbohms, and the Irvings. Master Harry was cast for the part of Captain Corcoran. He retained a vivid recollection of this

childish effort. "It is said," he related in later years, "that I was lazy and quite incompetent, and for those reasons I was discharged during the rehearsals of the piece. However, I remember experiencing a feeling of great satisfaction when I was asked to come back into the part, owing to the fact that they couldn't find anyone else to play it. There was another amateur dramatic performance a short time later at St George's Hall, and in this I played Master Bardell, the play being *Pickwick*. I was a somewhat weedy child and had to be padded for the part." From Linton House the boys were sent to Marlborough, where they passed some five or six useful, if uneventful, years.

Among her most treasured memories of these days of childhood and youth the mother cherishes that of the affection which the boys had for each other—an affection, be it said, which lasted until the end. They literally went hand in hand together. Laurence looked up to his brother with awe, as well as affection. At a party from which some ailment had prevented Harry from attending, Laurence was given some sweets. With a solemn face, he carefully divided them. "I shall keep some for Harry," he said. On another occasion, when spelling-bees were the rage, the mother took the boys to a theatre, where questions on the all-important topic were asked from the stage. The answers were not very satisfactory. Laurence

got so excited at the dullness of the replies that, jumping on his seat and waving his arms frantically, he shouted out, "Harry can spell," a brotherly tribute which drew forth the admiration of all around him.

Not only were the children instructed in dancing and music—Harry danced a sailor's hornpipe at the age of three on the stage of the Haymarket Theatre, and he excelled in a minuet in which he had been taught by the elder D'Auban—but they revelled, strange to say, in mock trials. These chiefly took place at the house of the vicar of Leigh, the Rev. Hugh Collum, near Tunbridge, where the mother, with her sons, visited in the holidays. The wife of the vicar was a friend whom she had known from girlhood. The most favoured of these mock trials was one in which a man was supposed to have been knocked down by a carriage. The boys were in turn counsel for the prosecution and the defence. It is remarkable that thus early in life Harry should have been interpreting a line of thought which developed strongly in later years. It is also a curious coincidence that he should have gone to a fancy-dress entertainment at the Mansion House as Hamlet, a character in which he was profoundly interested throughout his career. At Leigh, the boys, assisted by the vicar's daughter, Miss Rita Collum, and Rowland, a son of J. B. Buckstone, performed scenes from Shakespeare and Sheridan. In 1884 "Mr Henry Irving, Jun.,"

as he appeared on the programme, recited *The Erl King* and Laurence recited *The Fall of Poland.*

The boys had some experience in real acting. They were taken on occasion to the Lyceum Theatre and here they formed a friendship which remained unbroken. In the year 1880, their father revived Dion Boucicault's version of the weird story by Alexandre Dumas, *Les Frères Corses.* The melodrama was preceded by a new one-act play, the author of which was Arthur W. Pinero. The manager of the Lyceum was much commended in the Press for having abolished the old-fashioned, noisy farce which generally preceded the principal piece of the evening. Mr Pinero, an actor at the Lyceum from January, 1877, to July, 1881, was then making his first essay as a dramatist. His third play, *Daisy's Escape,* an "original comedietta," had been brought out at the Lyceum in September, 1879. His second Lyceum play, *Bygones,* which preceded *The Corsican Brothers* a twelve-month later, "not only pleasantly opened the evening with a pretty surprise, but the applause that greeted the young author must have assured him that whenever he makes a bolder bid for fame he will receive the sympathetic encouragement of those who have watched his brief career with interest, and who see far more than average merit in his well-considered and conscientious work"—prophetic words. Mr Pinero played a simple old

gentleman in *Bygones* and Alfred Meynard in *The Corsican Brothers.*

Sir Arthur Pinero's earliest memories of Harry and Laurence Irving are connected with this period of his career. They "used to come 'behind the scenes,'" he recalls in a letter to me, "and hover about the wings, two manly little chaps in Eton jackets and tall hats." Henry Irving and Arthur Pinero always retained their mutual esteem and friendship. Just after his father's death (13th October 1905) Laurence, in writing to Sir Arthur Pinero, referred to the days of *The Corsican Brothers* as the time "when Harry and I were rather forward and impish boys." The recipient of the letter, however, is unable to recall "anything 'impish' in Harry's manner or behaviour as a boy. On the contrary he struck me as being a particularly staid and orderly lad, and I recollect receiving his earnest moral support on the occasion of my bringing pressure to bear on Laurence to induce him to apologise to Arthur Matthison—a not too lucky actor who played the elder Irving's 'double' in *The Corsican Brothers*—to whom he had been unfeelingly cheeky. But perhaps that was a bit of sly mischievousness on Harry's part—a more subtle form of impishness than Laurence's, inherited from his father. Laurence and I often talked and laughed over the dreadful Matthison business in after years. Sitting with me in my dressing-room one night, watching me 'make

up '—for the old gentleman in *Bygones*—Laurence remarked that he supposed the little piece, which he had not seen, was based upon a classical theme. I asked him his reason for the assumption and he replied, 'The title.' This puzzled me until I found out that, on studying the playbill, he had read *Bygones* as *Biggoneese.* Which showed that Laurence, impish as he was, had at any rate a decided taste for the classics."

CHAPTER II

OXFORD

FROM Marlborough we pass to Oxford, and here, for the purpose of this part of the story, we must deal with Harry only. To be correct, we must call him by his father's first name, for it was Mr Henry Irving, jun., who went up to New College in 1889. Soon afterwards, Laurence, who had decided leanings towards the diplomatic world, went to Russia, and did not return until 1891. A very old friend of those first Oxford days was Mr W. J. Morris, M.A., of Jesus College, and Recorder of the Oxford University Dramatic Society. Mr Morris has given me his reminiscences of the coming to Oxford of H. B. Irving and his stay there. We can readily understand that he was "a striking figure as an undergraduate." But "a man with a white bowler hat at the 'Varsity causes young men to say 'Who is that fellow?' But it was not alone the white 'bowler' that caused them to stop and look back at the passer-by. No, it was something much more than this. It was the striking personality, and the wonderful resemblance to his distinguished father, that occasioned more than a momentary glance. He was, though, terribly 'ragged' on account of this white 'bowler,' which seemed to

affect undergraduates in much the same way as a red rag annoys the proverbial bull. Indeed, after a time they 'went for it' literally, and it was abandoned in favour of a black hat. I should not say that he was popular at the 'Varsity, by which I do not mean that the converse is to be inferred, or, in other words, that he was unpopular. Far from it. But he never courted popularity. Amongst the members of the O.U.D.S. he was greatly liked, though to some he appeared to have a certain 'aloofness' which a few—a very few—misconstrued as 'side.' Freshmen, however, were apt to be alarmed by those penetrating eyes, and the judicial manner, which seemed to suggest 'six months without the option of a fine.' He was a man who took some knowing; but when one won his confidence, one soon became proud of the friendship it implied." Mr Morris considers that although, as we shall see, Harry Irving made a hit as King John, "undoubtedly his greatest histrionic success at Oxford was as Strafford, admirably stage-managed by Alan Mackinnon, a very old friend of both Irving and myself, with whom it was a real privilege and happiness to be associated in our dramatic ventures."

Canon Meyrick, of Norwich, sends me an anecdote which is an interesting revelation of character. He recalls the incident vividly: "It so happened that he and I—he a fourth year man and I a freshman—were 'haled' before Dr Spooner, of

New College, for 'cutting' college chapel. As the senior man, he was interviewed first, while I waited. Dr Spooner was sitting in a low chair, with his eyes a few inches off his book. Irving was towering above him, carelessly leaning on one elbow on the mantelpiece. At length, Dr Spooner looked up with the words: 'You seem, Mr Irving, to be very regular, very persistent, in your absence from chapel.' Irving's answer and manner struck me forcibly, and still remain a vivid impression. There was no playing to the gallery, no striving to be clever. It was all so natural that it disarmed criticism. In anyone else's mouth, the reply would have been sheer insolence. Dr Spooner knew his man too well, and was far too generous to be offended. He probably enjoyed the joke as much as I did. 'Believe me,' was Irving's answer, 'I've never been regular, never been persistent in my life.' It is quite impossible to express in words the voice and manner and bearing with which the reply was made."

It was only to be expected that the elder son of Henry Irving, stamped as he was by his own individuality, should be welcomed into the ranks of the Oxford University Dramatic Society. He, however, had gifts of his own which, after his first essay with the O.U.D.S., marked him out for difficult parts—Strafford and King John. Even his first part at Oxford, although not a chief one, called for the display of that fine intelligence and

subtlety which afterwards were so observant in his acting. Decius Brutus is a character that is often spoiled on the professional stage by actors who imagine that they should be playing Marcus Brutus or Antony. Here was an amateur, making his first appearance, doing his work modestly and with effect. Peculiarities of form, voice, and gait associated with his father were noticed, but young Mr Irving had "a distinctness and roundness of utterance for which our leading actor has not been so strikingly renowned." He attracted attention, not only "because he is the son of his father, but because even in so small a part as that of Decius Brutus he showed himself a true actor, his facial expression and his gestures being alike good. His delivery of the lines in the scene in which he persuades Cæsar to repair to the Capitol in spite of Calpurnia's fears was one of the best features in the whole play. In form and countenance he is wonderfully like his father: I hope he may live to succeed him and to take rank among the first of English actors." Thus wrote one of the leading critics of the day.

He had not been twelve months at Oxford ere he was strongly tempted to go on the stage forthwith. Happily for his future, he had the courage to resist an offer which it must have been somewhat difficult to decline. Be it borne in mind that Henry Irving had then, as in other days, many enemies, in and out of his calling, and, thus early,

some of them sought to set up the elder son as a rival to his father. Others, guided by commercial instincts and in view of the success attained by the representative of Decius Brutus, made bids for the services of the amateur actor. One of sundry suggestions was made on behalf of Mrs Langtry, who, in the autumn of 1889, was making arrangements for her revival in the February following of *As You Like It* at the St James's Theatre. The following letter, written by the student of New College, on 27th October, is an interesting sidelight on this subject:

"DEAR MOTHER,—The great visit has come off, and was in a way of note. He came to see me principally to make me an offer, if I wished by any chance still to go on the stage, to go and play *jeune premier* parts with Mrs Langtry, when she comes to the St James's, at probably about £12 a week. I told him that unless anything unforeseen happened to H.I., I had no present intention of taking such a step. Mrs L. appears very keen to get me, and he asked me for my photo to show her, and he said it was certainly a grand chance for me if I cared to take it; and so it is, but cannot be. He also paid me many compliments, and said that, apropos *Julius Cæsar*, people were saying that I had all H.I.'s powers without his mannerisms, etc., etc."

Who "he" was, I know not, but the temptation failed, and Mrs Langtry found another Orlando.

The Oxford performance of *Julius Cæsar* was followed a year afterwards by *Strafford*, in which Mr Irving, jun., was invited to take the character first impersonated by Macready, to whom Robert Browning dedicated the drama. Macready, who produced *Strafford* at Covent Garden on 1st May 1837, never liked the play, and was convinced "that it must fail—if, by some happy chance, not at once to-morrow, yet still, at best, it will only stagger out a lingering existence of a few nights, and then die out—and for ever." He was right. His own acting and that of Helen Faucit could not save it. It was performed for five nights in the month of its production, and then disappeared from the stage until 1886, when a society of dramatic students gave a representation of the tragedy in London. Browning himself had no great admiration for this early work, his first tragedy, written at the age of twenty-five. "Two or three years ago," he said, "I wrote a play, about which the chief matter I much care to recollect at present is, that a pit full of good-natured people applauded it: ever since I have been desirious of doing something in the same way that should better reward their attention." Mr W. L. Courtney, our hero's first master at Oxford, prepared a version of the play, and, by judicious condensation, made it as actable as possible. The drama is a turgid one at best. The title rôle was taken by young Irving, and one paper noted not

only the power, but the grace of the actor in the character in which Macready had exerted himself to no purpose. He showed, according to another critic, a real ability in interpreting the various moods of the enigmatic Wentworth, and there was "a combination of fire and finish about his presentation" which was a happy augury for the future. Yet another critic was struck not only by his power but by that "easy grace" which was always his.

With *King John*, which was the Oxford play for 1891, came an even greater trial than *Strafford*. That young Irving should have been selected for the part shows the effect already created by his acting and the estimation in which he was held by his fellow-students. King John is a character that has called forth some of the greatest efforts of the famous players of other days. Garrick, John Philip Kemble, Macready, Samuel Phelps, all had acted King John. It was a bold undertaking for an amateur, not yet twenty-one years old, to attempt such a part. The endeavour was a meritorious one at least. It was received with sympathy and ready appreciation. The London critics witnessed the performance, and lengthy notices were published in the leading papers. A thoughtful essay appeared in *The Illustrated London News*. The writer pronounced Mr H. B. Irving—this was the first time that he was so called—to be "an actor of real power and of great

promise. Earnest, intelligent, imaginative, and gifted with a rich voice and graceful person, Mr Irving bids fair, should he ever adopt the stage as his profession, to add fresh lustre to the name he bears. His conception of King John is noteworthy for its consistence and force. He makes him, above all, royal, proud, remorseful, swayed by temptation, smitten by ill-fortune, cool-brained, cold-hearted, but never lacking the grace and generosity and personal charm which we always associate with such men as Edward IV. and Charles II." The writer singled out for special praise the death scene, "a piece of acting which for delicacy and restrained power deserves the special commendation it has received from enthusiastic audiences." Note once more the allusion to the grace and delicacy of the young actor.

Among the many celebrities of the day who went to Oxford to see Henry Irving's son as King John was Mrs Bancroft, the Marie Wilton of the sixties, afterwards Lady Bancroft. Her letter, written on the 12th of February, is a charming tribute from the older generation of actress to the young student-player:

"DEAR HARRY" (it says),—"I am so busy with some tableaux that I am getting up or I should have written sooner to tell you how truly delighted I was with your performance of King John. You have a handsome presence, a good voice, and clear,

distinct delivery of words. Your movements are easy and natural, which is a wonderful and most rare achievement, and to think that you have only appeared now and again in your young life upon a stage makes it all the more astonishing. I consider your acting as King John one of the most remarkable things I have ever seen. Believe me, with my kind love and best wishes, yours affectionately, M. E. BANCROFT."

"Dear Harry" was wise in his generation, or his head would have been turned by all the adulation which his King John brought forth.

These performances of *King John* enabled "Mr H. Irving, of New College," as he appeared on the programme, to consolidate some Oxford friendships and to make some new friends. Alan Mackinnon, of Trinity, who arranged the play for representation and planned its grouping, was a college friend; so also was W. H. Goschen, who acted the King of France. The Countess of Radnor conducted her own ladies' string band. She became a fervent and sincere admirer of the young actor. Her friendship, a lasting one, was a valuable aid in the early London days to follow. Mr E. H. Clark, New College, who designed the scenery and appeared as Hubert de Burgh, was—and is—Mr Holman Clark, who became a lifelong friend, and was associated with the King John of these Oxford days throughout his London life.

The father showed his interest in his son's performance by lending the chain-mail and tapestries.

Decius Brutus, Strafford, and King John were not the only parts which Mr Irving, of New College, acted at that time, albeit the biographical dictionaries are silent on the point. During the *Julius Cæsar* year, the Oxford amateurs went over to Totteridge, Herts, where, in the grounds of Copped Hall, they gave a performance of *Love's Labour's Lost* in aid of local charities. Mr William Archer, the critic of *The World*, a paper which was an authority on other matters than those of "society," wrote that "Mr Henry Irving, jun., made a young and handsome, instead of an old and formal Boyet, but spoke with good discretion. Youth, too, was the most obvious drawback to Mr Laurence Irving's performance of Sir Nathaniel." The representation of the comedy was a light-hearted affair over which the Oxford amateurs enjoyed themselves as hugely as did the audience. On another occasion, while H. B. Irving was at Oxford, the cause of charity drew forth an interesting effort. In January, 1890, an entertainment was given at Tottenham, by "past and present Malburians," on behalf of the building fund of the Marlborough College Mission. Young Mr Irving recited *The Dream of Eugene Aram*, and afterwards gave some humorous recitations. Called upon for a speech after the first part of the programme, "he thanked his hearers in a few well-chosen words."

Before he left Oxford, it will thus be seen, he had gained experience not only as an actor but in the gentle art of speech-making, in which, even in these young days, he was an adept. He made excellent speeches at the Union and political clubs. His acting was invariably distinguished by the grace and charm which, in later years, was a dominant characteristic of the man as well as the actor. He endeared himself to his teachers and his fellow-students alike. Here is a letter, which tells its own tale, written to the mother by Mr Courtney :

"DEAR MRS IRVING,—I will get leave for your son with pleasure, and I do not think anyone will make any objection to his going. He has given no one any trouble : and he has been especially nice to me."

He had three hobbies at Oxford—the drama, criminology, and speaking at the Union Society. He was on the committee of the Union, and had he so cared, he would have attained the honour of the president's chair. Even then, according to Mr Morris, he was an effective speaker, "not so much from any power of oratory—mere rhetoric he despised—but from a clear-cut, logical appeal that went home to his hearers." Even then "he loved to talk about criminals and to analyse the case for the prosecution and the defence, as though the Law Courts had been his lifelong environment.

I lent him some valued books of mine, which recorded all the famous trials for the past two hundred years, and in these volumes he fairly revelled. I remember one night in my rooms discussing Eugene Aram, and I was amazed at his wonderful knowledge of the ' scoundrel,' as he called him. Unlike a good many *in statu pupillari*, he really enjoyed his work for the ' schools ' ; so that the excellent ' record ' which he took in the history school was not a difficult task for him. Indeed, the only wonder is that he missed a ' first class.' He wrote admirable essays for his college tutor, his style being, like that of his books, terse, arresting, thoughtful, suggesting at once the scholar and the student, and breathing a freshness far removed from the midnight oil. He was never idle. If not discussing the drama, he was either reading some book thereon, or some legal tome—generally the latter—while of ' recreations ' in the ordinary sense he seemed to have none."

During his last year at Oxford, although he was studying all the time, his mind had a strong bias towards acting. In the course of a letter written in May to the Countess of Radnor he says: "I have been doing little work and how I shall fare in the schools is a prospect I hardly dare to dwell upon. It is not altogether my fault that I have been remiss: the weather and incipient influenza have oppressed me terribly ; but I am better now, and long to make another start. I want to act

more and more every day!!" In the same letter there is a pleasant allusion to Laurence: "My brother comes back from Russia in a day or two—a great event for me; one seems to have almost lost recollection of him after nearly two years' absence; and I have missed him very much."

Allusion has been made, in connection with *King John*, to the friendships then made. Perhaps the most fortunate of these friendships was that of Helena Matilda, daughter of the Rev. Henry Chaplin, and wife of the fifth Earl of Radnor (who was Treasurer of the Household for some years before his death in 1900). It was fortunate not so much for the high position of Lady Radnor—although that was of inestimable advantage to one who had to make his way in the world—but her motherly affection for the youth was of even greater value than the advantages of her place in society. It helped in guiding him aright, in directing his thoughts into a noble channel. He was a welcome visitor in her home for some years, until, indeed, he went on tour as an actor and she was abroad. Countless letters were interchanged between Lady Radnor and the young student. Those written by Lady Radnor were carefully preserved by the recipient. It has been my privilege to read them. They are, indeed, in my keeping. All who care for the memory of the second Irving should be grateful that he came

under such inspiring influence at an age when a man is most in need of good counsel.

At Lady Radnor's country home, Longford Castle, near Salisbury, he frequently played in amateur theatricals, his favourite part being Walker Chalks, the milkman, in a famous farce, *The Area Belle*, by William Brough and Andrew Halliday, in which Henry Irving's great friend, the comedian, John Lawrence Toole, was the original Pitcher. Elderly playgoers still recall Toole's singing of E. L. Blanchard's mock-sentimental ditty, *A Norrible Tale*, in this piece. Another part which he acted at Longford was that of the young man, Philip Graham, in Sydney Grundy's masterly condensation from *Une Chaîne*, of Eugène Scribe, called *In Honour Bound.* Hence, in writing at this period to Lady Radnor he signed his letters "Philip Chalks." That most gracious lady retains the tenderest and happiest recollections of those days of thirty years ago. Her first impression of H. B. Irving, of a man of "jest and jollity" and with "a love for quips and cranks," yet of earnest and most delightful nature, is one that has not been impaired by the passing of time.

CHAPTER III

THE STAGE OR THE BAR

THE most famous pictures of players are those by Sir Joshua Reynolds—of Mrs Siddons as the *Muse of Tragedy* and of *David Garrick between Comedy and Tragedy.* O that there had been a Reynolds in modern times! H. B. Irving would then have been depicted between Law and the Stage. Well might he have echoed Captain Macheath's "How happy could I be with either, were t'other dear charmer away." The law beckoned him one way, the stage the other, in the nineties. He was very undecided. His father, he knew, did not wish him to adopt the theatre as his calling. Yet, I think, his instincts were all that way. He was longing to "act" when he wrote to Lady Radnor from Oxford, and when he came down he sought out his father's actor-friend and the friend of his own childhood, and begged for advice as to his future.

Sir Arthur Pinero tells me that "his inclinations were divided—or he imagined they were—between the Bar and the stage, and I had no hesitation in urging him to choose the Bar. Having conformed to custom by reminding him of the precariousness of the actor's calling, I pointed out to him that his

histrionic gifts, if he had any, allied to his educational advantages, would be of as much value to him in the solid profession as in the lighter one, and I told him I truly believed that, while his father's commanding public position would be of assistance to him at the Bar, it would assuredly overshadow him in the theatre. Finally, I expressed the opinion that a man, in his choice of a profession, should always make the circumstances in which it is likely to land him in later life his first consideration, and I entreated him to remember that a barrister of fifty is still young, and that an actor of fifty—especially a romantic actor—is a veteran. He listened to me with the deepest attention, and seemed impressed by my arguments. Not long afterwards I heard that he had decided to entrust his fortunes to the stage."

His father and his father's friends were important factors in connection with his first engagement in London. The Bancrofts were much concerned in it. As far back as May, when he was still at New College, they were helping to advance his aims. On the 30th of that month Mrs Bancroft wrote to him :

"DEAR HARRY,—Many thanks for the photograph—it is most excellent. I hear it is all settled with Mr Hare for September, and I am very pleased. He was here late on Sunday afternoon and wondering who he could get for Lord Beaufoy,

when I immediately said, 'Why not ask Harry Irving? I feel sure he would like to do it.' Mr Hare seemed very pleased with the idea and Mr Bancroft advised him to see your father about it without delay. I consider it a fine opportunity —the part is a charming one and poor Harry Montague was the original. Good luck to you, dear Harry. All things happen for the best! Yours affectionately, M. E. BANCROFT."

Mrs Bancroft, modern playgoers may be told, was the original Naomi Tighe in *School* (16th January 1869), and thus knew all about the play and the part of Lord Beaufoy. "Dear Harry" replied at once to her kind letter, asking for the benefit of the advice of the actress, a request that brought an immediate and cheering reply.

In the middle of September, 1891, on a Sunday, he wrote to the Countess of Radnor in answer to a letter from her. He snatched the time from "a quiet morning; only a quiet morning, for this afternoon, at four o'clock, to the ruin of my soul, I have a dress rehearsal! However, Mr Hare is responsible, for it is to suit his convenience we thus imperil our futures; he can only get up from Manchester, where he is playing, for the day, and so we bow to his wishes." Alluding to the coming ordeal, he continues: "O terrible night! Let us not think of it. Last Friday night I went to Birmingham to have a last talk over things with

my manager. He told me (between ourselves) that if I was not too nervous I ought to make a 'great success.' It is very cheering to hear this, and I know will give you pleasure. May it be true!"

His first appearance as a member of the actor's calling was by no means auspicious. On Saturday evening, 19th September 1891, there took place at the Garrick Theatre a revival of T. W. Robertson's play, *School*, perhaps the most successful of all the pieces produced by the Bancrofts at the old Prince of Wales's Theatre. As Lord Beaufoy, Mr H. B. Irving, as he then was called in the bill of the play, followed in the footsteps of two of the best-looking and most experienced of younger actors of the English stage, the fascinating H. J. Montague and handsome H. B. Conway. Although he had done good work at Oxford, H. B. Irving had had small experience of facing the public, and, more in his disfavour, he knew next to nothing of the art or the artifices of the actor. Even at this period, he would probably have acted the schoolmaster, Mr Krux, to perfection (the manager's son, Mr Gilbert Hare, played that part, and won unstinted praise in it). But he was not then, and indeed he never was, a *jeune premier*, the easy, self-satisfied, worldly beau-ideal of the miss in her teens. It is to be supposed that he was nervous on the first night, and his first appearance before the footlights drew forth such rounds of applause that he

was momentarily nonplussed. His voice was monotonous and too highly pitched. His manner, it was said, was "stilted and ultra-priggish; he is cold in his love-making and particularly hard in the closing scene"—all of which it is easy to understand. Again, he was greatly handicapped by the name and fame of his father. That ban of "heredity" cropped up then, and it seldom was absent from the dissertations upon his acting. It certainly was a severe drawback in those early days. As he grew in years, he found that it was a distinct advantage to be Sir Henry Irving's son. When he was but twenty-one, this "heredity" was against him. Three or four years after his début in London he was asked if he found that being Henry Irving, jun., cut both ways. "I do, very keenly," he answered. "And do you think that the advantage of bearing such a name outweighs the disadvantages of the great expectations the public must have of you, and of the very high standard by which they must necessarily judge you?" "I suppose it does," was his reply, "just as one adverse criticism often makes one forget the kindly ones."

The revival of *School* was followed, on 2nd January 1892, by *A Fool's Paradise*, a play by Sydney Grundy, which had been originally acted under the title of *The Mousetrap*, under which name it was given in America. In this he appeared as a husband, Philip Selwyn, who believes that his

wife is faithful, whereas she is endeavouring to cause his death by poison so that she may be free to marry a former lover. The character proved to the advantage of the young actor, who was commended for his sincerity and naturalness. The engagement at the Garrick Theatre did not last very long, nor did it lead to offers elsewhere.

Thus discouraged in his first attempts to become a regular actor, he abandoned the stage for the law, and for the settled study of his *Life of Judge Jeffreys*. He had a room in the Temple, at one time, crammed full of the books which he had accumulated at Oxford and after leaving there. He lived with his mother, at her house in The Boltons, at this period. He spent the summer of 1892 in the quiet of a village inn at Heddon's Mouth, Barnstaple. Instead of indulging in the usual pastimes of a young man of position and some little celebrity, he was hard at work upon his first book. This, as we have seen, he had begun at Oxford. Its preparation occupied several years, off and on, for it was not until 1898 that the *Life* was published. In the meantime, he had been called to the Bar by the Inner Temple in 1894. But his thoughts never went far from the theatre. He reappeared on the stage in London at the Comedy Theatre on 3rd February 1894, as Dick Sheridan in a play of that name, written by Robert Buchanan. This was an even greater trial than that of Lord Beaufoy. Lacking in the necessary

experience and technique, totally different in appearance, manner, and temperament, he was the very opposite of the brilliant, devil-may-care author of *The School for Scandal.* In the next month he appeared in another part for which he had little or no qualification, the lover, de Valréas, in *Frou-Frou,* that ultra-sentimental drama by Meilhac and Halévy. If he had not been his father's son, the embryo actor would not have made such a false start. As John Hare and Henry Irving were friends of old, so it was with the manager of the Comedy Theatre, Joseph Comyns Carr, who, but for Henry Irving, would never have dreamed of giving important parts to one who had little in his favour but an inherited name and high intelligence.

Fortunately that high intelligence, which was one of his supreme gifts, came to the rescue of H. B. Irving at this critical moment. He realised that experience of the stage was vital to him if he was to succeed in a calling which he had now resolved to adopt. He was fortunate in obtaining an engagement with Mr Ben Greet, an actor and manager of sound principles, whose touring companies interpreted Shakespeare and other standard plays in a careful and adequate manner, due to the training of their leader. Whether it was wise for an actor who really wanted experience to begin at the top instead of the bottom of the ladder is an open question. But for H. B. Irving there was no

drudgery, no playing a succession of small parts. Excepting, it may be argued, that it was experience of a kind, he could not have gained much by appearing in such parts as Sir Charles Pomander in *Masks and Faces*, Julian Beauclerc in *Diplomacy*, Claude Melnotte in *The Lady of Lyons*, Alfred Evelyn in *Money*, Young Marlow in *She Stoops to Conquer*, and Charles Surface in *The School for Scandal*. However, he learned something of the technique of the stage. London lured him back in 1895, and on 9th February, almost exactly a twelvemonth after his first appearance at the Comedy Theatre, he acted the part of a Member of Parliament in a play by an unknown author, *A Leader of Men*. The piece was a failure. It was succeeded in March by a revival of *Sowing the Wind*, in which he acted Lord Petworth.

After this, his third excursion on the London stage, he returned to Mr Greet's company, and in April, at Stratford-on-Avon, played the leading male part, Leontes, in *The Winter's Tale*. This was a big undertaking for one who was not yet twenty-five. Without delving too deeply into old history, it may be recalled that some giants of the stage have impersonated Leontes—Kemble, Charles Mayne Young, and Macready among them. The jealous king is an exacting part, one that calls for power and passion. Yet here was our young actor playing it and playing it well. He also acted Digby Grant in *Two Roses*, and three more chief

Shakespearean characters—Othello, Benedick, and Hamlet. It was a bold step to thus follow so absolutely in his father's footsteps. Henry Irving was the original impersonator of Digby Grant, the impecunious father of Lottie and Ida, the two roses of the comedy by James Albery, which was first acted at the Vaudeville Theatre on 4th June 1870, two months before the birth of Irving's elder son. As we all know, Digby Grant was the stepping-stone to the Lyceum. Irving the first had acted Hamlet at the Lyceum in 1874, Othello in 1876, Benedick in 1882. To many playgoers, therefore, the memory of those impersonations would not, in 1895, be very vivid. Again, if not, perhaps, the most desirable of experience, still it was something to have thus early played Leontes and Othello, Benedick and Hamlet. When Macready first acted Leontes he was only two and twenty; five years later he played the part at Drury Lane.

If the subject of this biography had not been imbued with that highly conscientious feeling, that innate sense of honour, that was always his, he might have thrown the bugbear, stage experience, to the winds thus early in his career. Although his father's friends had helped him in his London engagements, his father was not enthusiastic in his son's choice of a calling. During one of the Oxford vacations there was an exhibition of fencing at the Lyceum, at which the Prince of Wales (Edward VII.) was present. The son was pre-

"HARRY"

sented to the Prince by a father who looked askance at the idea of his boy becoming an actor. "What is he going to be?" inquired the Prince. "Poor boy," was the father's reply, "he wants to be an actor." "Well," answered the Prince, "if he wants to be actor, why shouldn't he?"—an observation that cheered the heart of the disconsolate youth and was recalled by him with gratitude when success as an actor had come to him.

"I think my father felt that one ought to be in a more settled vocation than that of an actor," he said, when interviewed after the death of his father, "something that did not have so much uncertainty, so much anxiety connected with it. I know I feel the same way about my own son. I don't want him to be an actor. But I got bitten with the notion while I was at Oxford. When my father saw that one was determined upon a theatrical career he said, 'Very well, but I think you had better strike out for yourself.' I never played in my father's company, but I used to sit and study him in all his parts. Being his son and an actor, I think, perhaps, one got a better idea of his worth than one otherwise would."

Fortune certainly smiled on Harry Irving! His parentage meant that all London was open to the young actor. The distinction which he derived from his father was of priceless value. It placed him upon a sure footing in social circles. In 1895, Lord Rosebery's birthday list of honours contained

the name of Henry Irving. The knighthood conferred upon the great actor was the first official recognition in this country of the art of acting. Although this recognition was accepted by Henry Irving as an honour to his calling rather than a high compliment to himself, it was something to be the elder son of Sir Henry Irving. In addition, to have won honours at Oxford, and to have played important characters in Shakespeare at the age of twenty-five, was no bad start. Think of Edmund Kean and his long years of misery ere he played Shylock and shook the walls of Drury Lane with the plaudits of the multitude! In all theatrical history there is no record that has any comparison with that of H. B. Irving. That of David Garrick has some slight resemblance. Garrick had no training for the stage, yet, when he was only twenty-five, he drew the town to the far end of London, and his Hamlet, a few months later, won the approbation of Dublin.

"There was a star danced" when Beatrice was born. If ever a man was born under a lucky star, that man was H. B. Irving. His childhood was by no means gloomy; his schooldays were full of occupation. At Oxford, he gained success and won troops of friends. At twenty-five, he had the world at his feet. Fortunate in all other things that matter, he was most fortunate in meeting the right woman. At the most critical moment in his career, his star was in the ascendant and he fol-

lowed its course. To this day Oxford has tender memories of the beautiful girl whose first experience of the stage was acquired as an amateur with the O.U.D.S. Dorothea Baird, a daughter of John Forster Baird, barrister-at-law, and in private life a painter of no mean accomplishment, was born in 1874. She was educated at the Hampstead High School for Girls. At Oxford she played some minor Shakespearean characters, including Iris in *The Tempest*, and Galatea in the *Pygmalion and Galatea* of W. S. Gilbert. By good fortune that same lucky star, perhaps, was dominating the career of her future husband—Mr Ben Greet was present at one of the performances and offered her an engagement. In the spring of the year 1895, she was, owing to the illness of the principal actress, obliged to play Rosalind, with but scant preparation, at the Shakespeare memorial performances at Stratford-on-Avon. She made an excellent impression, so excellent, indeed, that she was next asked to appear as Hermione in *The Winter's Tale.* Certainly Mr Greet saw to it that his actresses had every opportunity to discover in what particular line their talents lay. It was but natural that a young and charming Rosalind should attract attention. That meant, amongst other advantages, the benefit of publicity. A portrait of the Rosalind appeared in one of the weekly papers. It was seen by the author of *Trilby*, and George du Maurier was so struck by the resemblance which

it bore to his own drawings of Trilby O'Ferrall that he instantly said that the one and only Trilby for the stage play was Dorothea Baird. Herbert Tree lost no time in seeing the fair original of the picture of Rosalind, and, to the disappointment of at least one member of Mr Ben Greet's company, the lady who was soon to delight all London by her impersonation of Trilby, left her old associates.

CHAPTER IV

"YOUNG HAMLET"

"THERE'S a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will." The divinity that was shaping H. B. Irving's course at this period mapped out a pleasant path for him. The London production of *Trilby* did not take place until the end of October, and it so happened that the towns in which the piece was played during the preliminary tour coincided sufficiently with that of the Greet tour to enable the young actor and actress to meet at brief intervals, with the result that their sincere friendship became firmly established, and, in a few months, developed into a lasting affection. While the fair Trilby was winning great approbation in London, her future husband was working hard and appearing in a round of characters which gave him an experience that was of much value. He was acting seven times a week, not in one part only, but in several. Even if the young actor of to-day was capable of such a feat, he would rebel against acting in a single week Romeo, Hamlet, Benedick, Othello, Leontes, and Claude Melnotte. Such was the routine work of this tour. The Shakespearean parts were varied by one of his father's original characters, Digby Grant, and by Armand, a some-

what priggish character in Sydney Grundy's Haymarket drama, *A Village Priest.*

For relaxation he indulged, with other members of the company, in those mock trials which had always interested him. He had no time to resume his writing about Judge Jeffreys ; he had, indeed, left his notes for that important work in his room in the Temple. He was, however, studying incessantly while in the provinces. The latter part of the tour was occupied by preparations for Hamlet. As for the words, he was a quick study and took that part of the business lightheartedly. On the other hand, he spent many hours in research and in the endeavour to give an earnest rendering of the character. He was in luck's way. He had profited by his learning at Oxford, he had no monetary troubles, his mother's house in London was always open to him. In Mr Greet he had the assistance of a sound actor, well versed in Shakespeare, and one who was a friend as well as manager. Mr Greet understood his leading juvenile and handled him with sympathy. This was another stroke of good fortune for Harry Irving, who, when he was rehearsing, got a bit overwrought. It cannot be said of him that he was "splenitive and rash," yet, like Hamlet, he had in him something dangerous at moments, due to the excitement of a sensitive nature. In later years, he was able to check this impetuosity, this quickness of temper. The excitement

was transient, but, in those first years on the stage, it certainly existed. These outbursts frightened those who were not used to them, dismayed all around him, especially his friends. Happily, the sun shone ere the cloud had disappeared, and the beautiful smile, inherited from the father, but more lavish in the son, banished alarm and discontent on the instant. To those who knew him, it was not surprising that the young actor, who had studied Hamlet deeply, should have come to grief at the first rehearsal. He was very angry with Mr Greet, who, as I have said, understood his man, and was patient with him. The storm-in-a-teacup passed as rapidly as it had arisen. Manager and actor were soon reconciled. It was well, otherwise "young Hamlet" would not have made, thus early in life, an artistic success which was of vast importance to him.

It was at Sunderland that, on 29th September 1856, Henry Irving made his first appearance, speaking, as Gaston in *Richelieu*, the first line in the play, "Here's to our enterprise!" At Sunderland, on Thursday, 21st November 1895, his elder son appeared for the first time as Hamlet. A few hours before he went on the stage in that character, he received a cablegram conveying the good wishes of his father, who was then acting in New York. He again played Hamlet in Edinburgh, the city where his father spent some two and a half years (1857-1859), acting

in that period four hundred and twenty-eight parts.

It was another fortunate circumstance that H. B. Irving should have had the opportunity of acting Hamlet in the northern capital, inasmuch as *The Scotsman* published a lengthy criticism on the performance. In passing let it be noted that the hard work of the tour was never relaxed. There were constant rehearsals, seven performances a week, and tedious journeys on the Sunday. On the afternoon of Saturday, 7th December, what was described as "a beautiful performance" of *Much Ado About Nothing* was given to a well-filled theatre. As Benedick, we learn: "Mr Henry B. Irving showed a fine appreciation of the dramatist's pure comedy and brilliant repartee, the impersonation being characterised throughout by dash and verve." In the evening, he played Hamlet.

In all the Shakespearean drama there are not two more widely contrasted characters than Benedick and Hamlet. The transition was accomplished without apparent effort and with masterly success.

"On Saturday night," the notice in *The Scotsman* began, "the announcement of *Hamlet*, with Mr Henry B. Irving in the title rôle, brought out a large audience, who were well repaid for their attendance by the excellent character of the performance. It is the ambition of every young actor to play the Prince of Denmark. If

an actor can get through Hamlet with credit, the probability is that he is good for a great deal else besides. Mr Henry B. Irving, both on this and his previous tour, has shown much promise as an actor, and on his success in this great part on Saturday night—the second occasion only upon which he has essayed it—he may be heartily complimented."

After this graceful and encouraging opening, the article proceeded:

"His Hamlet was an excellent piece of work—thoughtful, scholarly, and well sustained from the rise to the fall of the curtain. It was not perfect, but it was more than promising, for in every act there was great achievement in it. He attempted no fantastical new readings; on the other hand, there was no blind following of tradition. Mr Irving had brought to the reading of the part his own cultivated intellect and imagination. His Hamlet was a living and vital personality, which from the first commended itself to the intelligent sympathy of the audience. His view of the character of Hamlet is the one which has been adopted by most scholarly men. The keynote of the impersonation was struck in the mental excitement and unsettlement of thought which results from the message of the ghostly visitant. The commission he receives to avenge the 'foul and most unnatural' murder is one which Hamlet feels is too heavy a task for him. The times are out of joint,

and it is a 'cursed spite' that it has fallen upon him to set it right. He is the philosophising, excuse-seeking, mentally unhinged Hamlet, working under the domination of what to him is a monomania which colours his thought and action, and which leads him to sacrifice even his love for Ophelia, lest that passion should interfere with his purpose of revenge. This was the Hamlet which Mr Irving consistently worked out with admirable dramatic and elocutionary effect. He looked youthful and picturesque in his 'suits of woe,' and caught the eye of the audience. Many of his poses were easy and very pictorial. The ear of the house he reached by his well-studied and pleasing elocution; the intelligence of the spectators by the general appropriateness and convincing character of the impersonation, and by his well-attuned accord between voice and action. A wide range and variety of expression characterised his elocution, and it was notable, as showing the resources of this young actor, that he was not less successful in his reading of the pathetic and tender passages of the text than in declaiming the more frothy and hysterical outbursts in which Hamlet indulges, and which Mr Irving emphasised, as essential to the development of the true character of the Prince. This was very noticeable in that wordy outbreak of passion beginning, 'O what a rogue and peasant slave am I,' which rounds off the second act. In this and similar passages Mr

Irving showed that he had well studied the advice Hamlet gives to the players, for in the 'very torrent and tempest of passion' he had acquired 'a temperance that gave it smoothness.'

"The play opened most auspiciously. Everyone seemed to follow it with the keenest interest. It is not often that so quiet and attentive a Saturday night's gallery audience is seen in the Royal. Mr Irving carried through the first act so well, and so roused the enthusiasm of the spectators at this early stage of the drama, that they accorded to him a double recall. It was a well-deserved compliment, which apparently had upon him a stimulating influence. All the great scenes were enacted with similar effect. The soliloquy was beautifully and simply rendered; the great interview with Ophelia was listened to with breathless interest; the play scene was intensely dramatic, and the closing scenes were full of spirit and dignity. A fine vein of comedy, such as everyone knows is in his father's art, was developed by Mr Irving in the course of the evening in his satirical and bantering interludes with Polonius, and especially in the scene with Osric, which was treated with a dainty touch. All through the play there were many well-studied and interesting bits of 'business,' well calculated to elucidate the text. Only one or two can be referred to. In the end of the second act, for example, when Hamlet ultimately makes up his mind that 'the play's the thing,' as the curtain

falls the spectator sees him at a table beginning to indite the lines which are to be spoken by the first actor, 'Thoughts black, hands apt,' etc., and great point was given to the play scene by Hamlet closely following, on his own copy of the manuscript, the convicting lines which are to catch 'the conscience of the King.' An excellent effect was secured in the chamber scene with his mother by the treatment of the two portraits, and he contributed greatly to a natural way of getting the room into partial darkness, and preparing it in that manner for the visit of the ghost, by smashing the small portrait of the King over the lamp. All through there were equally sensible and well thought-out 'business,' which showed how thoroughly the part had been studied. Mr Irving will by and by give the performance, when he has had more experience, with greater finish. Some of the shorter dialogues were a trifle abruptly spoken; a little more repose will come from increased familiarity with the text; the 'pale cast of thought' will suffuse other passages, and from the splendid basis which he laid on Saturday night will be developed a performance of Hamlet by Mr Irving which one may be safe to prophesy will soon take its place among other great representations of the part. Those who are interested in the drama are often heard wondering where the actors of the future are to come from. By his performance on Saturday night, Mr Irving distinctly

marked himself out as one of the most promising young actors at present on the stage."

The tour closed in the middle of December. By this time the affection of the young actor and actress, both of whom had now their feet upon the ladder of fame, had become somewhat ardent. Miss Baird was then residing with her sister, the wife of Mr (afterwards Sir) E. T. Cook, in Tavistock Square. There she was visited by Harry Irving, who shortly after his return to town went to Seacox Heath, Hawkhurst, Surrey, the home of Mr W. H.—"Willie"—Goschen, one of the friends of Oxford. There he spent Christmas, preparing his plans for the future, and writing, incidentally, to Tavistock Square.

CHAPTER V

MARRIAGE AND LONDON

H. B. IRVING and Miss Baird saw in the New Year together at the house of mutual friends, with a happy result. On 16th January 1896 they became engaged to be married, an announcement which was received with showers of congratulations, not only from those in their immediate circle, but from the public. On the other hand, the young actor received a rebuff before January was out. London had a special charm for him just then, and he was tempted to appear at a theatre wherein he experienced a considerable disappointment at that time. At the same house, less than six years later, he made one of the most memorable successes of his career. At the Duke of York's Theatre, on 30th January, there was produced a melodramatic farce called *The Fool of the Family*. The cast was excellent. Charles Cartwright, an admirable actor, was the "Fool," but Mr Robert Pateman, Miss Gertrude Kingston, Miss Lena Ashwell, and other good players, as well as Mr H. B. Irving, who acted an adventurer, could not prevent a dismal failure. Three representations saw the end of this piece.

His next experience was a happier one, from the point of view of prosperity. For some months

before the year which had just begun, all play-going London had heard of the praise bestowed in America and the English provinces upon Wilson Barrett as Marcus Superbus in his own play, *The Sign of the Cross*. The piece was brought out in London, at the Lyric Theatre, on the fourth night of the New Year, and with such success that it subsequently attained four hundred and thirty-five consecutive representations. "Innumerable clergymen, a famous Dean, and at least one Bishop" were reported as having bestowed their benediction upon it. Despite the blessings of these dignitaries, the actor who had won his laurels in Shakespeare did not relish the idea of following another player in a somewhat showy part. Still, when it came to the point, he accepted the engagement and for some months toured the country as Marcus Superbus. In April, however, he had the satisfaction of acting Hamlet, Romeo, and Jaques in *As You Like It*, at the Metropole, Camberwell, a new and handsome theatre, which has since been diverted from its original purpose. During that week he played Hamlet five times and Romeo twice, and appeared, at an afternoon performance, in scenes from *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *As You Like It*. On the evening of Shakespeare's birthday Mr Archer saw *Romeo and Juliet* and found the Romeo of H. B. Irving "a gallant and picturesque performance, bearing too evident traces, however, of haste and overwork,

which is not to be wondered at. Although he frankly recognised the "unmistakable gifts" of the actor, he noted that his voice was wanting in "tenderness, intensity, passion." Nevertheless, continued the critic, "the performance was interesting and attractive." Mr Archer gave some sound advice to the young player. "If only Mr Irving could find time and opportunity to cultivate his very real talent," he said, "instead of going Marcus-Superbussing about the world!" Mr Archer was quite right, but how many of us, alas, have to go "Marcus Superbussing" against our will!

The marriage of Mr. H. B. Irving and Miss Dorothea Baird took place at the parish church of St Pancras on the 20th July. "Not only outside the church," it was chronicled, "but in front of the residence of the bride's brother-in-law, where the reception was held, an immense crowd assembled to do honour to the two, and would not disperse until they had appeared on the balcony." Sir Henry Irving was taking a holiday in the north of England. He was visited at Bamborough, Northumberland, by his son and daughter-in-law. On their return to London, Mr and Mrs H. B. Irving occupied a flat in Southampton Row, whence, on many occasions, the former made expeditions to the Reading Room of the British Museum in pursuance of his studies for his books and literary essays. He was always faithful to

Bloomsbury. He had a delightful house for some years at the corner of Upper Woburn Place. After that he had another corner house, No. 7 Gordon Place. Indeed, it is curious that, until failing health drove him to the comparative seclusion of Harrow-on-the-Hill, so much of his time was spent within the sound of the bells of the church where he was married and within a few yards of the house wherein, on that Sunday in 1895, he became engaged.

The next period marks the real beginning of his London career. It began in August 1896, when he joined George Alexander's company and appeared at the Grand Theatre, Islington, as Captain Hentzau in *The Prisoner of Zenda*. In this character he made his first appearance at the St James's Theatre in October. This was a happy and prosperous engagement; for the St James's Theatre was in the front rank of London playhouses, and its management was conducted on sound principles of commerce, as well as art. It was excellent for the young actor who desired experience, as he was called upon to create many parts. I have often thought that this side of the management of George Alexander has not received the recognition which is due. The English plays produced at the St James's are a highly creditable feature in the stage career of the late actor-manager. Apart from the value of the plays, the advantage to the members of his company was inestimable.

In the case of H. B. Irving, he originated a dozen characters at the St James's, some of which were of the first importance. The majority of the plays of those times have passed out of general recollection. As all the pieces in which H. B. Irving acted are enumerated in the list at the end of this book, it is not necessary to dwell upon them in this chapter. Some of those performances won immediate recognition and stamped him as a young actor of unusual talent. His first original part here was Edward Oriel in Pinero's *The Princess and the Butterfly*. He had previously acted Oliver in the revival of *As You Like It*, in which his wife played Phebe. His first success came when he acted Loftus Roupell in the five-act play, *The Tree of Knowledge*, on 25th October 1897. Loftus Roupell is a young, wealthy, cold-blooded, cynical man-about-town, a heartless and calculating scoundrel. A dog that has never been known to growl does so at Roupell—he kicks the dog. He fishes and catches one fish that gives him "quite a delightful amount of trouble." But having caught—and killed—the fish, it no longer interests him and he throws it away. "Most kind-hearted people are a little tedious," he languidly remarks. He is a cruel, bizarre figure in an English country home. He carries off another man's wife—a fast, vicious creature, who knows her fate and is content to abide by it. As Loftus Roupell, the actor had a clever make-up, in which a monocle and a mous-

tache were conspicuous. The character disappears from the later part of the play, but it was stamped with so much individuality, and was so exceedingly clever, that it stood out conspicuously. The thorough excellence of the impersonation was recognised on all sides, and by no one more readily than Mr Carton. "It contributed," he says, "in no small measure to the success of the play, and earned the lasting gratitude of its author."

Loftus Roupell was followed by Don John in *Much Ado About Nothing*, an incisive, telling impersonation of that villain. Later on, his Roger and Lewis Dunster in *The Man of Forty* and his Paul Digby in Barrie's play, *The Wedding Guest* (at the Garrick Theatre), enhanced his reputation and gave good promise for the popular, as well as artistic, success which was soon to be his. From George Alexander, the St James's, and other theatres he passed, under engagement to that most admirable of American managers who have held sway in London, Charles Frohman, with whom he remained at the Duke of York's Theatre from January 1902 until the spring of 1904. During this period he acted three characters of distinct kinds, and with effect in all. As Orlando, in *The Twin Sister*, he had a picturesque, romantic part in which there was a grim vein of irony.

CHAPTER VI

CRICHTON AND JEFFREYS

HIS great chance came with the production, on 4th November 1902, of *The Admirable Crichton.* His impersonation of Mr Crichton won him immense and lasting popularity. The chief advantage, however, was that it proved that he could get out of the beaten track of stage villains and other disagreeable characters which he had so often been called upon to play. It has been well and truly said, in connection with a revival of *The Admirable Crichton,* that "it is a curious and suggestive fact that few, if any, of Sir James Barrie's characters are ever so well acted as by their original exponents."

The characters in the plays by Sir James Barrie are, in the majority of cases, so original, so out of the common, that you must have exceptional exponents for them. And if the characters are not actually written with certain performers in view, the original representation may be taken as representing the views of the author. I cannot imagine that there would ever have been an *Admirable Crichton* if there had not been an H. B. Irving and an Irene Vanbrugh—an actress of personality, if there ever was one—to endow the author's pen-portraits with flesh and blood.

H. B. Irving himself felt strongly on this subject of the original exponents of particular parts. When he was in management he more than once expressed a wish that it could be possible to revive this particular play. "Ah," he said to me, "even if one could get Irene, it couldn't be done without 'the Beetle'"—the nickname for Henry Kemble, who had very heavy eyebrows and at one time wore a large brown cape. His Lord Loam was admirable. The quiet power, the dignity, the majesty, and the prevailing charm of the first Mr Crichton have not been equalled by any of his successors. It was not difficult to imagine that such a man had indeed been a king in Babylon.

He was greatly interested in the character and loved to act it. "Of all the modern parts I have played," he said, in 1909, "'Crichton' is undoubtedly my favourite, and though I played it over three hundred times, I never grew tired of him. There was a charm about the part and the play which prevented it from becoming wearisome. Perhaps the reason for this was that one felt that, though the setting of the play was fantastic, it was very real, and there was a great inherent truth in the character of Crichton. That curious mixture of fantasy and realism is, if I may say so, part of Mr Barrie's genius. There were a few people who could not appreciate the humour of the play. On the other hand, it made an undoubted appeal to most. So strong was that appeal that I knew a

man who bought seats to see the play four nights running. The part was delightful, as every sympathetic part is, and it had the additional charm that it was sympathetic to the audience without being either mawkish or sentimental." After Crichton, the modern part which up to that time had made the greatest appeal to him was Loftus Roupell, and he confessed to a liking for playing that part.

During the run of *The Admirable Crichton,* the father and son appeared for the one and only time together on the same stage. On the afternoon of Tuesday, 14th July 1903, a performance of *The Merchant of Venice* was given at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, in aid of the Actors' Association. Henry Irving was the Shylock, H. B. Irving the Salerio. The only part of the play in which these characters appear on the stage at the same time is the trial scene. Salerio has not much to say, nor does he address the Jew. He is a kind of door-keeper, or, at any rate, he is used for that purpose by Shakespeare. He shows in Shylock, also Nerissa :

DUKE. Go one, and call the Jew into court.

SALERIO. He is ready at the door : he comes, my lord.

. . . . . .

SALERIO. My lord, here stays without
A messenger with letters from the doctor,
New come from Padua.

DUKE. Bring us the letters : call the messenger.

The cast was a most remarkable one. It would be impossible nowadays to assemble such a company. Old playgoers will like to see the record :

Shylock . . .	HENRY IRVING
Bassanio . .	GEORGE ALEXANDER
Duke of Venice .	J. H. BARNES
Antonio . .	CHARLES WARNER
Prince of Morocco .	OSCAR ASCHE
Salerio . .	H. B. IRVING
Salanio . .	HERBERT WARING
Salarino . .	H. B. STANFORD
Gratiano . .	BEN WEBSTER
Lorenzo . .	MARTIN HARVEY
Tubal . . .	JOHN ARCHER
Launcelot Gobbo .	NORMAN FORBES
Old Gobbo . .	CYRIL MAUDE
Gaoler . . .	LIONEL BROUGH
Leonardo . .	HOLBROOK BLINN
Balthazar . .	SEYMOUR HICKS
Stephano . .	EDWARD TERRY
Clerk of the Court .	DION BOUCICAULT
Nerissa . . .	LILY BRAYTON
Jessica . . .	EVELYN MILLARD
Portia . . .	ELLEN TERRY

Many other distinguished members of the actor's calling "walked on." Alas how many of them have left us !

The third part in the modern drama in which he

made a striking success was that of the degenerate Nevill Letchmere in Pinero's drama, *Letty*, at the Duke of York's Theatre, on 8th October 1903. Nevill Letchmere comes of "a family of wasters and divorcées, a vicious crew, rotten-bad to the core," not a "nice" part by any means. He made a pronounced acting success in it with the public, although the character was not one in which he could either please or obtain the sympathy of the audience.

The opinion of the author of the play in regard to the impersonation of Nevill Letchmere is expressed in a letter written to me by Sir Arthur Pinero, who says: "H. B. Irving's performance in *Letty* was of the kind that is more satisfying to the author than to the public. Essentially, it was beautiful. But he was, in the highest sense, as his father was before him, a 'character' actor; in 'straight' parts, as they are called in the theatre, he was hampered by a personality which always had in it something of the quality of grimness. And so, though his understanding of Nevill Letchmere was perfect, the man became in his hands too determined a libertine. A lesser—a merely charming—actor would have been more in the picture. But for sheer intellectuality, Harry's performance of Nevill was comparable—if small work may be mentioned in the same breath with great—to the fine Hamlet he was to give us later on."

The ten years, 1895 to 1905, were very busy and

important ones. Beginning with Hamlet, the acting life alone would have satisfied many workers. Loftus Roupell, Mr Crichton, and Nevill Letchmere were three original characters which brought him popular as well as artistic recognition. In this period, in addition to other parts, he created no less than fifteen other characters. During this time, he played twenty-nine characters in London, a record of industry which in itself is remarkable. But he did not spare himself. He was, during every possible hour, pursuing his literary studies. Every morning that was not occupied with rehearsals found him either in the Reading Room of the British Museum or at the Record Office, completing his research for the big book which he had begun at Oxford, continued at Hunter's Hill, and put aside while he was on the country tours. London gave him the opportunity to complete his labours. *The Life of Judge Jeffreys* was published in the spring of 1898. The preface marked the innate modesty with which he took his literary work. "This book," he said, "is an attempt, however imperfectly executed, to fill a gap in the biographical literature of the seventeenth century, and to reproduce the general features of a period during which the proceedings in the courts of law were intimately associated with the history of the nation. After consulting all accessible authorities, both printed and manuscript, some of which have not been hitherto made use of, I have formed a

rather different estimate of Jeffreys' life and character from that generally accepted. I venture to hope that my reasons for arriving at such an estimate may not appear unjustifiable." His "accessible authorities," of which he gives a list at the end of the *Life*, are formidable. The mere contemplation of them would have appalled the ordinary mind.

The research involved in *The Life of Judge Jeffreys* was enormous. He had the happy ability to grasp a multiplicity of details, to marshal them in due order, to separate the wheat from the chaff, and to produce a lucid, fascinating story. He had his reward in the widespread recognition which he obtained for his first book. Its high literary merit and its understanding of character were readily acknowledged. So, also, was the sense of humour which it possessed, although that sense of humour was not fully developed. *The Spectator* devoted three and a half columns to *The Life of Judge Jeffreys*, and concluded its review with a high tribute to the writer: "We have read Mr Irving's book with the greatest interest and pleasure, and if we have made it rather a 'peg' for a dissertation of our own than a subject of particular criticism, it is because we, to a considerable extent, accept his conclusions, and have so little fault to find with the details of his work that we have preferred to pay him the compliment of an independent testimony to the general soundness of his presentation

and estimate of this extraordinary man." The book at once gave him a literary position. There can be little doubt that if the author of *The Life of Judge Jeffreys* had been able to devote all his time, all his vivacity to writing, he would have made a lasting name for himself in literature. A year before his first book was published, he had become a happy father, and, having already achieved considerable success in the theatre, he felt that, while literature was a good prop, there was safer support in the stage.

At the same time, he never relaxed in his purely literary work. His second book, *Studies of French Criminals of the Nineteenth Century*, published in 1901, a massive volume of three hundred and fifty closely printed pages, deals, it is true, with criminals who are unknown to the majority of English readers. Here, again, we see the same grasp of detail. The reading-up for any one of these seventeen studies must have meant many hours of concentrated work. The French books and records which he cites as having been consulted form a small library in themselves. Here he pursued those studies of character for which he had a special facility. "The annals of criminal jurisprudence," wrote Edmund Burke, "exhibit human nature in a variety of positions, at once the most striking, interesting, and affecting. They present tragedies of real life, often heightened in their effect by the grossness of the injustice and

the malignity of the prejudices, which accompanied them. At the same time real culprits, as original characters, stand forward on the canvas of humanity as prominent objects for our special study." The last sentence in this passage applies directly to the cases dwelt upon in the volume. The studies are of real culprits. "As Mr Goldwin Smith has pointed out," he added, in the preface, "the persistent criminal has his status in nature and society, as an organism to whom 'altruistic pleasure' simply does not appeal; who, for his own satisfaction, pursues 'a congenial, though conventionally reprobated, walk of life'; and whom, it may be added, society has a perfect right to destroy by its own superior strength and for its particular convenience."

In April 1901, at the O.P. Club, he read a paper on "The Art and Status of the Actor," a thoughtful dissertation, lightened up by many a touch of irony. Here again he proved himself a master of his subject, and his trenchant delivery gave point to one of the finest expositions of the actor's calling ever penned. Three years later, again invited to give a lecture before the members of the O.P. Club, he chose Colley Cibber's *Apology* for his subject. He began with an allusion to a writer in one of the evening papers who had said that if a conspiracy of silence could be arranged by which the theatrical world—players, play-makers, and play-critics—were, like the good little

boy, seen and not heard of for a while, the rest of humanity would gain immeasurably, while the stage and the drama would certainly not lose. "Indeed," he continued, "it seems almost impossible to open any newspaper or review without lighting on criticisms, reflections, strictures—mostly strictures—on the condition of the drama, the poverty of our dramatists, the unfitness of our actors, the vulgarity of the public taste. Wise and unwise utterances, some earnest and impartial, some bearing all the marks of spleen and disappointment, meet one at every turn, all proceeding from those advisers, professional and unprofessional, who, ever since the theatre began to have a history, have been gathered round the bed of the sick drama, which, however, in spite of the many remedies that are being perpetually administered to it, continues to live after its own fashion, really far less hindered than might be supposed by the attentions showered upon it by well-meaning outsiders." Proceeding in this strain, and taking as his text Colley Cibber's *Apology for his Life*—"one of the most brilliant and entertaining autobiographies in our language"—he proceeded to deliver a most dignified and witty exposition of the actor's calling, itself "brilliant and entertaining," imbued with sound common sense and earnestness.

"We actors," he said in conclusion, "must not look to all men for sympathy, nor expect it from

them. As some men of high ability, of refined taste in many things, are deaf to the charms of music, it has no appeal to them, the sense of it is lacking in their natures, so are there men of culture and attainment, men of genius like Rousseau, to whom the art of acting makes no appeal, who have no sympathy with the actor's work. Such men have, no doubt, at different times been called on to write about the theatre, and that they should write with little sympathy is all that we can expect; nor should we resent what we cannot correct. But we have at least the right to ask that such a want of sympathy should be the strongest reason for making any man pause and consider before he proclaims himself to be the constant witness or judge of what, if it be true that to act unmans a man, must be a degrading spectacle, before he ever suggests, however ingeniously, against any section of his fellow-men that, in comparison with himself, in comparison with those who watch and enjoy their achievements, they are impaired and unmanly citizens. In all times and ages since the theatre has been established, and never more so than at the present day, the actor, to succeed and hold his own, to encounter the difficulties, the chances, the, at times, cruel anxieties of his calling, has required, shall I say, a greater mastery of his fate, a higher captaincy of soul than many another man is called on to exercise whose work is done in more peaceful and secure surround-

ings; and when I look around on the careers of those who are at the head of my profession, I feel that, whatever the varieties of their artistic achievement to reach the positions which they have attained, they have had to exercise those same qualities of endurance, pluck, determination and self-control that we look for in all men who have made their mark, in however modest a sphere, on the history of their time." This essay was published in *The Nineteenth Century*: that on "The Art and Status of the Actor" in *The Fortnightly Review*.

In the latter magazine his lecture on "The Calling of the Actor," given to the students of the (now Royal) Academy of Dramatic Art, in the early part of 1905, was printed. These articles were subsequently published in book form in a volume entitled *Occasional Papers*. His preface to the volume was brief and, as usual, almost self-depreciatory: "I have ventured to publish these occasional papers in the hope that the few who did me the honour of hearing or reading them may care to possess them in book form, and that to the many who have neither heard nor read them the subjects of which they treat may be sufficiently interesting in themselves to help to while away a leisure hour." In the preliminary preparation for these *Occasional Papers* many hours must have been spent before a single line was penned. In addition to those mentioned, they include his Royal

Institution lectures, delivered in 1906, the "True Story of Eugene Aram," and a particularly interesting and informative article on the "Early Life of Chief Justice Scroggs" (a hard drinker, who was knighted after the Restoration and became Lord Chief Justice of England in 1678). His study of this character, although not so lengthy, is just as masterly in its way as was that of Jeffreys. It is evidence not only of his great industry in reading up, but of his insight—a kind of intuition which he possessed in a marked degree—into personality. It is lightly written and has many a flash of humour.

His purely literary work occupied a vast amount of time, but his labours in that direction did not detract from his acting. From the Duke of York's Theatre he proceeded on a country tour in *Letty*, and on returning to London played his final engagement as a member of Mr Frohman's company. But Captain Dieppe, in the play of the same name, and Sir Montague Martin, in a revival of *His Excellency the Governor*, did not afford the opportunity for distinction which he found in Crichton or Nevill Letchmere.

CHAPTER VII

IN AMERICA

THE year 1905 was a strenuous one in some respects. The beginning of it saw his first appearance in playgoing London proper as Hamlet: with the autumn came the death of his father and added responsibilities. He impersonated Hamlet in three revivals of the tragedy in London—at the Adelphi Theatre, under the management of Mr Otho Stuart and Mr Oscar Asche, on 4th April 1905; at the Shaftesbury Theatre, on 8th February 1909; at the Savoy Theatre, on 26th April 1917. On the two latter occasions, the revivals were under his own management. It may, therefore, be more convenient, for purposes of comparison, to discuss his interpretation, which varied considerably, in a later chapter.

The death of Henry Irving, which came without warning, on the 13th October, was a shock which was felt very deeply by his sons, who had now grown to love and revere their father. There were also certain burdens to be borne and serious contingencies to be met. Sir Henry Irving, in the period of his management (31st August 1878 to 10th June 1905), took over two and a quarter millions of money, in pounds sterling, from the

playgoers of Great Britain and America. Notwithstanding these colossal receipts, his heavy expenditure in the theatre, his lavish hospitality, and his immense charities, administered in private and of which the world knew nothing, left him a poor man. He was literally worked to death, and he died in harness, the result of an endeavour to pay his way. Some six years before, he had been forced to sell the greater part of his dramatic library. After his death it was necessary to dispose of his effects by auction, the net result of which was a sum of over fourteen thousand pounds. By the terms of the will, this sale was necessary, and by these same terms the plays in which Sir Henry Irving had a property had to be realised for their monetary worth. This was a paramount reason for the appearance hereafter of his elder son in certain of his father's characters. He did not, out of respect for his father's name and reputation, desire the plays to get into the hands of strangers. When he came to play these pieces he explained this. What he did not explain, however, was that he paid certain agreed fees to the estate for the right of acting these pieces, the money therefrom being divided in equal proportions between the parties concerned. He was the soul of integrity, and he carried out his father's intention to the full, in a spirit, indeed, which emulated that father's generosity and charity.

The details and thought ensuing upon his

father's death were enormous. But he fulfilled an engagement which he had made to appear at the Waldorf Theatre (now the Strand), in *Lights Out*, a drama which he had translated from the German, on the 25th of October. It was a sad time for him, and the play was a sad story of love and death. The pathos of his rendering of Lieut. von Lauffen, and the touching performance of the heroine by Miss Eva Moore, secured a run of one hundred nights for *Lights Out*. Indeed, this must have been a trying period in his career. He had no theatre of his own and he was, therefore, still in the position of a salaried actor, without the ability to give full play to his ambitions.

The year 1906 began with an invitation to lecture at the Royal Institution, a distinction rarely accorded to an actor. His two lectures were delivered in February. He chose for his subject the history of the English stage in the eighteenth century, upon which he was well qualified to speak. Generally speaking, he knew his ground thoroughly, but the amount of research required for these lectures can only be appreciated by those who, from time to time, have to delve into the past. The research occupies much time, and, in matters of stage history, vast care has to be exercised in regard to facts and dates, the truthfulness or otherwise of statements. The evolution of a clear, consistent, interesting story requires that particular kind of brain which,

fortunately, he possessed. In these lectures he traverses the period of James Quin, Colley Cibber, David Garrick, and the rest, in a light vein, yet withal in a pointed manner and with many a satirical hit at those who attempted to belie his calling. In this respect he followed in the footsteps of his father, who was ever ready to defend himself and his fellow-players from the charges which have too often been aimed at the actor. "The history of our theatre has been as glorious," he claimed, "as it has been brief. For the three centuries of its existence as a part of our national life our stage can point, with justifiable pride, to a record, splendid in its achievement, in some respects unsurpassed, a history that may well rank in quality and distinction with those of literature and art, and compare worthily with the annals of any of the European theatres." The lectures were immediately reprinted in *The Fortnightly Review*, and subsequently formed the opening chapters of his volume of *Occasional Papers*.

His literary work was accomplished amid all that entailed by the arduous life of the actor. From the Strand he went to the Shaftesbury Theatre, where he acted Réné Delorme in *The Jury of Fate*. An engagement at the Lyric Theatre followed. There he played in a drama, *Mauricette*, which he translated from the French. *Jeunesse* is a peculiarly Gallic piece. Roger d'Autran is a middle-aged husband, who imagines himself

in love with a charming young girl and argues out his passion. It was not a good or convincing part. A fortnight after the production ot *Mauricette*—the heroine was acted by Miss Dorothea Baird—the principal piece of the evening was preceded by *Markheim,* an extremely sombre one-act drama. adapted by Mr W. L. Courtney from a short story of the same name by Robert Louis Stevenson. The character of Markheim is a study in the remorse of a man of education who commits a dastardly murder for greed of gold. Markheim is a half-sentimental, half-philosophic person, with a great facility for argument. There was nothing in these characters, Roger d'Autran and Markheim, to enhance the art of the actor. He had now been playing serious, and sometimes gloomy, parts for six months and the change to Iago was welcome. The late Lewis Waller, then the manager of the Lyric, began a series of matinées of *Othello* on 17th May, appearing as Othello. Miss Evelyn Millard was the Desdemona, Mr Henry Ainley the Cassio. The Iago of the occasion was " alert in action, incisive in his humour, persuasive in his easy bearing and cold-blooded in his resolute craft, rejoicing in his highly intellectual villainy." The performance did not satisfy certain austere critics, who wanted a more ambitious kind of a rendering, something super-subtle and indicative of deep-dyed villainy proceeding from constant thought and keen intention. His Iago was

too light and careless in bearing for some people, who could not understand this swaggering scoundrel, whose villainy was "as easy as lying," first, not even second nature, a joyful scamp. The "intellectual" actor is such a scarcity that when he is found even his admirers are disappointed if he does not remain on a high plane—just when they think that he should do so.

From this point onwards he became his own manager. Unfortunately, as I think, he had not a theatre of his own. For there was no one to carry on the traditions of his father's theatre, which he certainly would have done had he not been forced—as was his father—to travel out of London in order to fulfil his obligations. He accordingly organised his own company, with his wife as leading lady, Frank Tyars, an old member of the Lyceum company, to help him with his experience and sound acting, and Mr Tom Reynolds as comedian and stage manager. Mr Reynolds was an actor at the Lyceum and he was of invaluable service to his new manager, with whom he remained until 1918. *The Lyons Mail* was revived at the Prince's Theatre, Manchester, on 13th August; *Charles the First* at the Court Theatre, Liverpool, on 10th September. But H. B. Irving did not rely entirely upon his father's old plays. He took with him *Paolo and Francesca*, the four-act tragedy by Stephen Phillips, which had been produced at the St James's Theatre, some

four years previously, with so much success that it ran for over a hundred nights. On literary grounds, as well as dramatic, he was justified in this procedure, for the play had been acclaimed by the critics, one and all, as a work of great worth. Mr William Archer declared it to be "a thing of exquisite poetic form, yet tingling from first to last with intense dramatic life. Sardou could not have ordered the action more skilfully, Tennyson could not have clothed the passion in words of purer loveliness." Giovanni Malatesta—first played by George Alexander—is a fine part, from the actor's point of view. It is strong, essentially dramatic and calls for cleverness, in order to avoid tediousness as well as intensity. For all that it is "against the audience," as actors say, the sympathies of the spectators being with "Il Bello" Paolo.

It was in this play that, on 1st October, at the Amsterdam Theatre, New York, he made his first appearance in America. He went there without preparation, or propaganda, as the term now is. The Americans knew him not, and they had seen his father not long before (Henry Irving's last appearance in America was on 25th March 1904). He was not too kindly treated by the Press. He made many private friends, and in some cities he was warmly received. He was virtually a stranger, and he did not have the time to establish himself in favour. It was in Chicago that, on the

18th December, he made his first appearance as Mathias in *The Bells*. It was in this character, twenty-three years previously, in New York, that his father made his début in the United States. In England, "H.B." was recognised for himself and his own abilities. In America, the same old arguments of heredity continually stood in his way. Some papers, however, were quite fair. One of the most influential of them observed: "There is no longer much room for reasonable doubt that he has inherited a considerable share of his father's fine acting instinct and ability—it is a little too soon to talk about genius yet—or that he is capable of great development. He is no mere copyist, although in voice, intonation, facial expression, attitude and gesture he frequently offers a faithful, if somewhat faint, image of his sire. In the case of a personality so striking it is not surprising that the physical traits inherited from it should be clearly marked. But the intelligence of the younger man is as individual as it is bright."

He rather dreaded the American interviewer. As the tour progressed, however, he became familiar with that important personage in the journalism of the United States. One interviewer in Philadelphia was successful in obtaining quite a long talk with him, and was much struck by that modesty which, from first to last, was a notable characteristic of him, both as man and as actor. He almost invariably repressed the personal pro-

noun and spoke of himself as "one," a peculiarity which the writer, Mr Walter R. Linn, in the Philadelphia paper, was quick to seize upon. Moreover he touched, lightly and cleverly, on the disadvantage of being the son of a man who was famous on both sides of the Atlantic. "It was just like interviewing an ancient portrait of Sir Henry Irving," he said; "the resemblance between the great English tragedian and his son is startling, in voice and mannerisms, as well as in features. I refrained from mentioning it in the young man's presence, because I felt sure he must be tired hearing about it. Sons of great men are under a serious handicap in this world. When they are still in knee-breeches they are expected to be as smart as their fathers were in their prime. If Ulysses S. Grant, junr., wasn't qualified to thrash Lee before he quit riding velocipedes, he was a failure in the public's estimation. If Robert Lincoln does not make all his legal briefs as thrilling as the Emancipation Proclamation, he is not worthy of Abraham. Mr Irving's attitude was almost apologetic," he continued. "He was anxious to assure the American people that he didn't consider himself as great an actor as his father and that he is now appearing in his father's plays more through force of circumstance than from choice." He then gave the reason, which has been already stated. "The son of Sir Henry almost invariably refers to himself as 'one.' It is an English idiosyncrasy which

he carries to such extremes that his avoidance of the personal pronoun sounds like self-abasement."

The entire interview was delightfully done, and it introduced some charming touches concerning "the other one"—Mrs Irving, who was acting with her husband—and the children.

"'Laurence is at school, and, of course, one couldn't have brought him, but Elizabeth—I tell you,' said 'the other one,' 'that was tugging at the heartstrings! I have never been away from them before. I left them in July and won't see them again until February. I get a letter every mail telling me how they are and everything that they have said since the last letter.' 'I've been away from them when I was on tour,' chimed in Mr Irving, 'but never so far that one couldn't get home to see them on Sunday.'" Towards the end of the interview the actor said: "One doesn't like to have the public think that one is trying to give a slavish imitation of one's father. That doesn't mean that one doesn't appreciate one's father, that I am not proud to follow his general methods, but one likes to have a little personality of one's own. Unless one has, one cannot amount to much."

The graceful observations with which Mr Linn concluded his article are well worthy of record:

"The deluge of deprecatory 'ones'; the gentle, almost pathetic air with which he referred to his father and to his own struggle against the weight

of a great name; the beautiful gentility of the man; his charitable reception of some harsh criticism that he has received in the United States; his ingenuous delight in his children; his fondness for his wife and her fondness for him; their unaffected pleasure in everything that is new and strange to them in this new and strange land; the cordial manner in which they expressed their appreciation of the hospitality that has been accorded to them here; the merry laugh with which Mr Irving said that they had been warned against the terrible American interviewer, and that they had been amazed to find the operation quite painless —all these things made my heart go out to the descendant of Sir Henry and to his wife."

CHAPTER VIII

HIS OWN MANAGER

ON returning from America in the spring of 1907 he took a little rest prior to going on tour once more. Then, and in the autumn, he played *The Bells*, *The Lyons Mail*, and *Charles the First*, and on 26th September, at the Theatre Royal, Manchester, acted a fourth part identified with the name of his father, Louis XI. As a relief from the more serious side of affairs, he played a comedy character, King Charles II., in *The Lion and the Unicorn*, a one-act farce, written by his brother and old and esteemed fellow-actor, Mr Tom Heslewood, at Bolton, on 28th August. At Edinburgh, on the 21st of November, he brought out a new play, by Mr Justin Huntly McCarthy, *Cæsar Borgia*, a tragedy in four acts, written in unrhymed verse.

The play, according to *The Scotsman*, was "an excellent piece of literary work, and for stage representation certain thrilling incidents in the life of this notorious member of the great Roman family are set forth in attractive form. Into his dialogue the author has imported something of the mediæval spirit of the period to which the play belongs. There are romance and intrigue, colour and crime, and that varied presentation of

human nature which is essential in a good play where characters of historic association are for the time awakened into new life "—altogether, then, a worthy play. Cæsar Borgia, however, although he appears as an ardent, Romeo-like lover in the first act of Mr McCarthy's play, is not a sympathetic character. He has many interesting scenes and is eventually killed in a desperate combat. The staging and the general interpretation were admirable. The principal character, said the authority already mentioned, was " splendidly acted. Mr Irving played the lover with Southern fervour ; in the other acts he carried himself with splendid nobility of mien and interpreted the varying moods of the despotic prince with convincing power."

He received a significant honour, on the 16th of March 1908, in his election to the Athenæum Club. This was a tribute to his work as a literary man, inasmuch as he was elected in the ordinary way. His proposer was the late Mr Justice Lawrance, who took the place of his father, the late Mr J. B. Atlay being his seconder. The late secretary and librarian of the club, Mr Henry R. Tedder, has " a very warm recollection of Mr Irving and of his personal charm and amiable character. He was a constant visitor in the library, and in this way," he writes, " I was in frequent association with him and was able to appreciate his wide reading and lively interest in many and diverse literary

questions." His father had been also a member of the Athenæum, having been elected in 1882 by the committee under the special rule which permits them to elect "each year nine persons of distinguished eminence in science, literature, the arts, or for public service."

In 1908, very fortunately, the days of extortionate rents for London theatres had not dawned. Longing to establish himself in town as his own manager, he seized the opportunity to rent the Shaftesbury Theatre for a brief period, hoping that the event would turn out prosperously and enable him to occupy that position which he felt he had a right to own. His experiment was justified. *The Lyons Mail,* with which, on 15th October, he began his London management, had such a favourable reception that it was acted for one hundred and twenty-eight consecutive times, the longest run in the history of the play, a success that was vastly encouraging for the young actor-manager. *The Lyons Mail* was succeeded, on 8th February 1909, by *Hamlet,* after which came *Charles the First* and *Louis XI.*

The experiment was a bold one. It was characteristic of H. B. Irving that, once having come to a decision, he adhered to it. To play characters in which his father had been so vastly admired by thousands of persons who were still alive, and in whose memory the old performances were vivid, needed courage of a rare order. "H.B." had that

courage, and he was well rewarded. The first night of the Shaftesbury season was a memorable one. An impression of it and of the chief actor of the evening was written by Mr H. M. Walbrook, one of the most thoughtful and sympathetic critics of the drama and of the art of the player of his day. This is what Mr Walbrook wrote in *The Pall Mall Gazette*:

"In the graceful little speech which Mr H. B. Irving made to the audience at the Shaftesbury Theatre at the end of an exciting evening with *The Lyons Mail*, he said: 'If any of those present have seen this play before, we hope we have recalled pleasant memories to them'—and from several parts of the auditorium came cries of 'You have!' The mere recalling of such memories, however, was facile enough. The simple announcement of the play on a poster would have done it. The important fact of the evening was that, even with vivid memories of Henry Irving pressing upon one all the time, one could sit through the performance with genuine pleasure. Obviously, it could not have been from those memories only that the gratification came: for, had the acting of Mr Irving been seriously in conflict with them, the evening would have been one of torture. The general cheers, however, that followed the descent of the curtain after each act, and particularly after the second and third, proved that the audience had been moved to real admiration; and, with the

memory of his father's performance still so vivid, the evening must be chronicled as one of triumph for the son. We are not going to say that either the new Lesurques or the new Dubosc has the magnetism of the old. The one has not that pathos that really tore at the heart ; the other does not set one shivering with horror as Henry Irving's did in the garret scene, in which his aspect and his acting combined to compose one of the most appalling figures seen on the English stage since the days of Edmund Kean. But we saw quite enough to convince us that there is only one man before the present playgoing public who has the artistic right to play the two parts, and that man is Henry Irving's elder son.

" Mr Irving's Lesurques is brisker than his father's and walks and talks more rapidly. When first we meet him, he seems gayer. He bears himself like a gentleman prepared to enjoy the bottle of wine for which he pays his five francs to the boy at the Lieursaint inn ; and he has the prompt air of a man who has made a fortune while still in the prime of life, and has risen to distinction from somewhat obscure beginnings. Henry Irving's Lesurques seemed haunted from the first with tragical premonitions ; not so the Lesurques of last night. Consequently, when the crash came and he found himself confronted with witness after witness charging him with robbery and murder, his bewilderment and horror were no less dramatic. At

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the Lyceum we were shown a dreamy, deeply religious idealist suddenly brought face to face with something revolting. At the Shaftesbury we saw a man full of the joy of life brought low, a man happy in his daughter's affection and in his love for her, proud of the fact that he had been able, as he thought, to secure a competency for his aged father, and, above all, an honest and successful merchant. The Lyceum Lesurques, driven almost to despair by the damning evidence of his own father, was wont suddenly to pause, and then, his face lit with almost saintly rapture, to cry, 'God sees us both and knows it is a lie.' At the Shaftesbury there was no pause, and the words came rushing forth with the energy born of a pride that had been cut to the quick. The effect was different, the consistency was the same. As the scene proceeded, the earnestness of the actor deepened. The haughty repudiation of the idea of suicide was one of the finest things of the evening; and the attitude and look of the man as the curtain fell —standing pale and alone, with eyes directed upwards and a hand stretched to heaven as if for help—made a figure of memorable beauty.

"We should have said that of the two parts the Lesurques was the harder to play, yet Mr Irving was more completely successful in it than as Dubosc, though here, too, his acting was full of interest. The husky voice was well done, so also was the curious, jaunty walk which was such a

piece of horrible grotesque in his father's impersonation ; and there was an ugly evilness in the narrow oblique eyes and the thin flexible lips. We missed, however, the awful strength with which Henry Irving made the garret scene so appalling, the diabolic power which seemed to add feet to his stature and make him gigantic, a terrifying figure with a livid face that had Hell in every line of it. At the Shaftesbury the drunken wretch seemed for a time to have lost his power with his sobriety. At the same time, we think that this effect may possibly have been caused by the fact that Mr Irving was not quite so audible early in this scene as he had been through the preceding part of the play. It is important that every word even of his bemused mutterings should be distinctly heard ; and no doubt in future performances this defect will be remedied. When that is done the full value of his acting will be attained, and his Dubosc should be a worthy artistic complement of his exceedingly fine Lesurques."

As the weeks wore on at the Shaftesbury, the performance was improved in many respects, for the younger Irving was never satisfied, never content with merely letting well alone. He had strongly developed the faculty, which he inherited from his father, of improving upon an early interpretation. As the run of the play progressed—an original season of six weeks was extended to five months —his Dubosc became stronger and more brutal,

especially in the garret scene, his Lesurques more and more charming. Irving the first, in the accusation scene, became a saint upon earth. His Lesurques was an ideal creature whom no one could, by any possible weight of evidence, imagine guilty of a diabolical murder. "In the case of the son," as I wrote when the impersonation was fresh in my mind, "the audience, who know that Lesurques is innocent, do not blame the magistrate for doubting that fact. This effect is due to a difference of treatment. It may yet come to pass that the son also will idealise Lesurques. At present, and it is a perfectly correct view of the character, he keeps Lesurques as a man of ourselves, one upon whom such a blow might fall at any moment. He does this without any loss of dignity or sympathy. The father idealised: the son is quite natural. This observation does not detract from the merit of the father. Henry Irving applied to drama the same method of idealisation which made him ever a distinguished figure on the stage, even in parts which were entirely unsuited to him. He did this in Lesurques, in the second act particularly, whereas the son, laying stress upon the purely domestic side of the character, makes us feel the cruelty of the accusation, although we must be in accord with the justice of the condemnation. His affection for his daughter and his horror at his father's belief in his guilt are fine touches in a performance of great

beauty." The scenes between Lesurques and Julie were extremely beautiful, tender and natural, charged with depth of feeling, yet expressed with simplicity.

His Louis XI. and his Charles I. resembled his father so much in appearance that it seemed as though the father himself was on the stage. The most striking difference, however, was apparent in the voice, that of the son being much stronger, more vibrant. "H.B." rejoiced in acting that terrible creature, Louis XI. He found the part "most delightful and fascinating. It may sound humorous or incongruous," he said, "to use such a word as 'delightful' in speaking of Louis, but there is everything in the part that the actor can desire from point of view of effect. On the other hand, in opposition to the ease of Louis, I should put the strain of Mathias. The emotional stress of the part, and the fact that he is more or less on the rack all during the play, impose a severe tax on one's energy and involve a serious intellectual strain as well, although the interest I derive from that character is very great indeed."

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

CHAPTER IX

MATHIAS IN LONDON

THE effect of this season at the Shaftesbury Theatre showed the wisdom of the venture. A new public was created, for, be it observed, there were many who viewed askance the idea of the son appearing in parts made memorable by the father. The warmest admirers of the latter, however, found much to praise in the performance of the son.

It is impossible for the present generation of playgoers to understand the affection and reverence in which Henry Irving was held. He was loved, as no other actor ever was, by the public, while individuals of all sorts revered him. Immediately after his death—so anxious were many people to show their acquaintance with him—a whole crop of "intimate friends" came suddenly into being, which was very amusing in the case of a man who in the whole course of his life had no more intimate friends than could be counted upon the fingers of one hand. Henry Irving was a sealed book to all, save to some three or four men to whom he sometimes drew aside the curtain which, to the world, veiled his heart. On the other side of the picture, I have in recent years been brought into contact with many people to

whom Henry Irving is a memory which will be treasured by them so long as life lasts. Women, as well as men, who had but seen him act, loved him as they would a dear father. One of these admirers whom I have in my mind as I write, a keen, clever, business man, simply worships the memory of the man and the actor, and can describe every detail of his impersonations. Yet he never so much as shook hands with Henry Irving. I do not want to insist too much upon this point, but it is necessary to note the wonderful feeling which existed, and still exists, for the elder Irving, to show the nature and the courage required for the son to invite comparison in London with his father. He did so reverently, modestly, not as a challenge, but as a matter of necessity and because he had the inward feeling that he was not unworthy, either as man or actor, to follow in his father's footsteps. Had he approached his task from another point of view, with a flourish of trumpets and a blazoning of his own intrinsic merits, the happy result would not have been attained. His charm of manner, as much as the excellence of his acting, won the day. He did not have to sweep prejudice aside. He had a far more difficult task. He had to get over the footlights, not only as an actor—that would have been easy enough—but as the son of a man greatly reverenced. This he did. He won the old generation by his ease and grace, the new by his admirable acting.

So far, then, he had acted three of his father's plays in London—*The Lyons Mail, Charles the First,* and *Louis XI.* A more severe ordeal was in store for him. This was his first appearance in the metropolis in *The Bells.* Before that event he went from the Shaftesbury to the country, playing in the chief towns and being received with increasing favour. At Newcastle-on-Tyne, on 28th April 1909, a supper was given in his honour by the Pen and Palette Club. It was the first time, he said in reply to the toast of the evening, that a great city had so honoured him, and the memory would ever remain with him as one to be cherished. It was all the more pleasing, he added, that Newcastle should be the first place to thus entertain him, because he had many close ties with the north of England. He had kindly remembrances of North Country places and people, and there was one debt he owed to Northumberland—the gift of a wife—which nothing could cancel.

Mr W. Waite Sanderson, in his speech of welcome, recalled the circumstance that six years before the Club had extended its " homely hospitality to one whose brilliant genius did more to elevate the English stage than every other force combined. That night is to all of us a sacred memory. We hold in grateful recollection the fact that Sir Henry Irving came among us and talked, as only he could, of his art and of the great aims and aspirations which were bound up in his life and dominated his

work." Mr Sanderson gave a most interesting review of the work of the guest of the evening. By good fortune he had been present at the Garrick Theatre on the occasion of the revival there of *School*. The first scene in the play is a forest glade; "presently there entered a tall, dark, boyish figure. We turned to our programmes and read, 'Lord Beaufort—Mr H. B. Irving,' and underneath this note, 'His first appearance on the stage.' What a shout of welcome went up, not inspired by the youth that stood before us—he had yet to win his spurs—but because he was the son of the revered head of the English stage. Brethren, it was not long before we learned to value Mr Irving for his own inherent qualities." He closed his address with a fine appreciation of one of the most remarkable traits in the character of the actor: "I speak of him as one who has not yet reached the zenith of his fame, because his is a nature which will never rest content with the success of to-day, but must ever look forward, with the true artistic temperament, to the strenuous work and greater triumphs of the morrow." In his reply, "H.B." made some trenchant and witty remarks upon the subject of the National Theatre, a project that was then being much discussed.

The autumn of this year witnessed the reopening of the Queen's Theatre, Shaftesbury Avenue, with Mr H. B. Irving as lessee and manager. This

theatre had not been noted for its prosperity, and it was an uphill game to bring it into favour. For the only time in his management he had the support of a syndicate, so that he was relieved of pecuniary worries. He had, moreover, a loyal staff, in the " front of the house " as on the stage. As at the Shaftesbury, he decided to once more rely upon a play made famous by his father. On the 22nd of September the house was opened with *The Bells*. In deciding upon so important a step, he had to consider many arguments on both sides of the question. It was Mathias that enabled Henry Irving to make his first great advance on the ladder of fame. The miserable state of the Lyceum Theatre when, on 25th November 1871, *The Bells* was played for the first time is an oft-told tale and one that need not be repeated here. It is only necessary to state that the Lyceum, then in a condition bordering on complete failure, in every sense, was suddenly raised to absolute success by the thrilling impersonation of Mathias by Irving the first. All London rang with his praises and the public flocked to the Lyceum. The prosperity of the theatre and the success of the actor were established from that moment. *The Bells* remained in the répertoire of Henry Irving until the end. His fame as Mathias was world-wide. To follow his father as Mathias was an even bolder step than the revival of *The Lyons Mail* at the Shaftesbury. That play was open to anyone, for

other actors had impersonated Lesurques and Dubosc, though none so well as Henry Irving. Mathias, however, was distinctly and peculiarly his own. The subject was pondered well, the decision was announced, not without some misgivings on the part of the pessimists, and, on that eventful night in 1909, H. B. Irving appeared for the first time in London as Mathias. In undertaking so great a venture he had derived encouragement from a leading article which had appeared in *The Liverpool Daily Post* in May. It is not easy to express the value of this article and just what it meant to the young actor-manager. It was no ordinary criticism, hastily penned after a first performance. On the contrary, it was a well-considered essay by one of the finest and most thoughtful critics of the day, a man of vast experience in acting and one who was noted for his sound judgment. Moreover, and this is the chief value of the article, it was written by one of Henry Irving's best friends, Edward R. Russell (afterwards Sir Edward Russell, and then Lord Russell of Liverpool), who, if he did not exactly "discover" Henry Irving, was one of the first of the leading critics to recognise his supreme gifts. Russell's essays on Irving as Hamlet, as Macbeth, and as Mephistopheles are masterpieces of analysis. He was a profound admirer of the genius of the father. Being a man who was eminently just, he recognised the talent of the son. His comparison

of the acting of Mathias by the two Irvings is so illuminating that I make no apology for printing it in full.

"No one can see H. B. Irving in *The Bells* without being asked the question: 'How does he compare with his father?' This is a compliment to the elder Irving which would be paid whoever were to undertake the part of Mathias—a compliment which is all the greater when we consider that the original Mathias of the Erckmann-Chatrian play was not Irving, but Coquelin, the great exponent of the great French school, now, alas! also dead. No one is more flattered at being compared to the elder Irving than the younger, and, for many reasons, we all should go and see him play his father's plays. It is a delicate thing to make comparisons, but we feel that the more we can say of Sir Henry Irving's Mathias, the more will H. B. Irving be pleased, such are his feelings as an artist and a son.

"Now in both performances there is this common element: the transformation of a melodrama, by sheer force of magnetic histrionic power, into a psychological study of the finest and most subtle order. What is *The Bells* as a play to read? An interesting case of a crime and its mental consequences, which Mr H. B. Irving, expert as he is in criminology, would read with interest and no more. What is it as a play? It is drama itself—but only when played by an Irving. No wonder the part of

Mathias so fascinated Sir Henry Irving that he chose to appear as Mathias rather than anything else before the great American public on the first night of his first tour in the United States. He wanted to do something which nobody else could do—at that date. Now, however, H. B. Irving can do it. It is worth noting that most playgoers have seen *The Bells* only after their expectancy of something great and uncanny has been raised to its utmost level. And not many have been disappointed—only those who are young enough, childish enough, or ignorant enough of art to expect to be kept from sleeping at nights, or to wake in terror whenever a hansom passes the door. This attitude is not the greatest tribute one can pay the artist. What we should think of is the composite emotions passing through the guilty Mathias's brain and the difficulty to the actor of portraying them. We have always, for instance, regarded the second act as the finest of the elder Irving's work in this part. The domestic humanity, the gradual yet rapid wrecking of his nerve system, the keen and clever encounter with Christian about the limekilns, the counting of the dowry, the hysterical snarl at the maid who reads about criminals—all these incidents and aspects of the character one looked for and appreciated more and more at every performance of the elder Irving's, which improved, in this act, to the day of his death. His son plays this act on the same

lines, and one point more remarkable in his than his father's performance is specially notable. When the Jew's coin turns up in the dowry the fine pause which follows the words, 'No, no, not for them—for me,' suggests a burden too heavy to be borne. This middle act in H. B. Irving's earlier days was played too quickly—or it seemed so—but now we find him filling out the part with all the charm, all the soul and all the ghastly nervous symptoms which have lifted both performances on to the highest plane.

"The last act—the dream scene—is the one most talked of, but the best only to those who appreciate the more obvious efforts in powerful acting. H. B. Irving's physique is more equal to this act than his father's was during the last few years of his life. It is all played up stage, and this means a corresponding strain on the voice, which began to tell on him. Just now in this act, however, the son is probably at his best in a magnificent performance. It used to be said by the unthinking that Irving was always Irving. Of course he was, just as Michelangelo and Rubens were always Michelangelo and Rubens. This comparison is all the more just and all the more applicable because these artists worked with pigments and tools common to all other artists; whilst the actor works with physical attributes common to no one but himself. The truth is, Henry Irving had a personality so great, so grand, so majestic,

that it was impossible to efface. So it is with H. B. Irving. He has enough of his father's magnetism to play every part in his own way and yet convey the same impression that in that part nobody could excel him."

During the run of *The Bells*, Mr George Ashton came to the theatre with the pleasing intelligence that the King had commanded a performance of *The Lyons Mail* at Windsor Castle. The compliment was a marked one, for Edward VII. was an ardent playgoer and a keen critic. Moreover, he was entertaining some guests of unusual distinction and his choice of a dramatic programme was made with special care. The performance took place, in the Waterloo Chamber, on Friday evening, 19th November. For the benefit of the foreign visitors, a synopsis of the story of the play was printed in French.

A few days later, "H.B." was the recipient of a charming letter of thanks—not by any means a stereotyped document—which, with the boyish impetuousness which never deserted him, he sent on immediately to his mother. "Enclosed, from the Master of the Household, will interest you," he wrote to her. "It certainly is a very nice letter and the play did go wonderfully well—made quite an impression, from all I hear. When we meet you shall hear all about it. Frightfully busy at the moment."

He was "frightfully busy" with the rehearsals

of a new play, written by a friend of the Oxford days, Mr Perceval Landon (the Earl of Pembroke of *King John*), entitled *The House Opposite.* Unfortunately, the piece did not hit the public taste, being possibly too morbid or too psychological. Nor was there any capital to be made out of the character of Richard Cardyne. In order to strengthen the bill a one-act play, *For the Soul of the King*, translated from the French by Mr Landon, was brought out in December and played as a first piece. It was a sad little play, and although there were one or two fine moments in it, it did not call for much more than the mournful appearance made by the impersonator of the Stranger.

A change of bill was imperative. The success which attended *The Lyons Mail* may have induced a second essay in dual impersonation. Joseph Comyns Carr, art critic, theatrical manager, and playwright, had prepared a version of *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Robert Louis Stevenson's gruesome story, published in 1885. It was in an adaptation of the same story that the American actor, Richard Mansfield, made, on 4th August 1888, his appearance in London at the Lyceum Theatre, which he had rented from Henry Irving. Mansfield had succeeded in America, if not in England, in making money out of the drama, and there was no apparent reason why H. B. Irving should not succeed in the same

direction. Money was badly needed at the Queen's. Not that the shareholders were ungenerous, but it mortified "H.B." to feel compelled to draw upon their funds. Therefore, redoubled energy was put into all the preparations. The title was shortened to *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, and the play was produced on 29th January 1910.

The end of the first month in the year was not, perhaps, the most opportune moment for the acting of a new and strenuous play, but there was no other course open. Unmitigated horror is not acceptable to the English playgoer, and there was little to mitigate the horror and brutality of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. It obtained, nevertheless, a run of four months, the greatest strain upon the actor, physically and mentally, which he ever endured. The effort was much greater than it had been in *The Lyons Mail*. Incessant was the study for the impersonation of the good and evil characters; perpetual was the drag upon bodily and mental strength in the acting. He went below the surface of things and tried to get at the heart of the idea as expressed by the novelist in the words of Jekyll:

"I saw that, of the two natures which contended in the field of my consciousness, even if I could rightly be said to be either, it was only because I was radically both. . . . I learned to dwell with pleasure, as a beloved daydream, on the thought

of the separation of these elements. If each could be housed in separate identities, life would be relieved of all that was unbearable. . . . I began to perceive . . . the trembling immateriality, the mist-like transcience, of this seemingly solid body in which we walk attired. Certain agents I found to have the power to shake and to pluck back that fleshy vestment, even as a wind might toss the curtains of a pavilion. . . . I not only recognised my natural body for the mere aura and effulgence of certain of the powers that made up my spirit, but managed to compound a drug by which these powers should be dethroned from their supremacy, and a second form and countenance substituted, none the less natural to me because they were the expression and bore the stamp of lower elements in my soul."

Of all the psychological parts that he played Jekyll taxed him most. For an actor of his ability the change to the revolting murderer, Hyde, was an easy transition, and the playing of that part, although it demanded constant effort, mild by comparison. By his idealism of Jekyll he elevated the character and raised Stevenson's story to a height which no ordinary reader of the book could imagine possible. The Dr Jekyll of the novelist is " a large, well-made, smooth-faced man of fifty, something of a sly cast, perhaps, but with every mark of capacity and kindness." The Jekyll of H. B. Irving was pale, æsthetic, refined, the

essence of gentility. From the first he bore the look of intense suffering. As the play progressed this expression of mental pain, of yearning, of striving after the good that was in him, became almost unbearable to the spectator. It was infinitely pathetic. Would that it had not been so! I saw him act Jekyll many times and was always relieved beyond measure when the death scene was over. Never can I forget that white, upturned face, the yearning agony of it, the soul of a good man longing, entreating for mercy.

Another study in psychology followed, happily not so exacting. On 28th May there was a "double bill" at the Queen's—*Judge Not* and *Robert Macaire.* In the former, a two-act French drama, he impersonated a magistrate who, all unconsciously, has committed a murder. The magistrate examines the witnesses in the case and it is gradually brought home to him that he is the culprit. He is, in short, an epileptic. Here was need for skill, incisiveness, and intensity. From this dramatic part he turned, lightly and with a grace all his own, to Robert Macaire, in a condensed version of the old French melodrama, rendered famous by Frédéric Lemaître and acted at various times by Henry Irving.

L'Auberge des Ardets, the original of *Robert Macaire,* was written as a serious piece of blood-curdling melodrama, the basis of its story being a murder at a roadside inn. But the great Lemaître,

quickly seeing the absurdities and conventionalities of the piece, turned it into a farce, with just a touch of tragedy. George Henry Lewes, who regarded Frédéric Lemaître as a performer of genius, said that there was invariably something offensive to good taste in his acting—" a note of vulgarity, partly owing to his daring animal spirits, but mainly owing, I suspect, to an innate vulgarity of nature. In his great moments he was great ; but he was seldom admirable throughout an entire scene and never throughout an entire play. In his famous character of Robert Macaire the defects were scarcely felt, because the colossal buffoonery of that conception carried you at once into the region of hyperbole and Aristophanic fun which soared beyond the range of criticism. It disgusted or subdued you at once. . . . He sang, took snuff, philosophised and jested with an air of native superiority, and yet made you feel that he was a hateful scoundrel all the while. You laughed at his impudence, you admired his ease and readiness, and yet you would have killed him like a rat. He was jovial, graceful, false, and cruel." This grandiose creation of Macaire became more farcical as time passed, and the part, in the compressed English version of the French play, was not so elaborate as in Lemaître's day.

The Macaire of H. B. Irving was distinguished by its grace rather than its eccentricity. He wore the threadbare, patched pantaloons of tradition

and indulged in much of the old stage "business," such as the use of the snuff-box with the squeaky lid, the sound of which sets Jacques Strop quivering with dread of the guillotine. It was a performance that was all the actor's own. It did not "disgust" or "subdue." On the contrary it elevated. It was conceived on a high plane of jocosity, of airy humour, of thorough enjoyment. It was all nonsense, but such nonsense! The personality of the actor was at its best in this brilliant impersonation. There was nothing "false" or "cruel" in his Macaire. Far from wanting to kill him like a rat, one wished him a long life. He had an admirable foil in Mr Reynolds, who played the cowardly Jacques Strop, the miserable accomplice, who is obsessed by the exploits and mock grandeur of his chief, with a subdued note which was in excellent contrast to the gaiety of Macaire. It was a happy combination of two actors who understood each other perfectly and played up to his fellow.

"H.B." was keenly alive to his surroundings, depressed or aided by them as the circumstances varied. He had invaluable help in the Jacques Strop to his Macaire. He was still more happily situated, the play being a long one and the undertaking more important, in his next production. This was a dramatisation of Mr A. E. W. Mason's novel, *Clementina*, made by "George Pleydell" (Mr G. P. Bancroft) in conjunction with the

author of the book. The general company was well chosen and the drama, as a whole, was presented with a remarkable degree of efficiency. The success of the piece, however, depended upon the representatives of Wogan and Clementina. If these characters had not become real live people upon the stage the play could not have secured any degree of popularity. The Clementina was Miss Stella Campbell, the daughter of Mrs Patrick Campbell. She was young, she was charming; not only graceful and pretty, she had wonderful delicacy of manner. Her Clementina, simple, natural, free from all affectation, entirely devoid of all appearance of stage technicality, was an ideal princess, well worth the winning. Charles Wogan was a companion picture, though on a higher scale. As represented by H. B. Irving, he was a real figure of romance. The spectator felt that he was capable of performing all the heroic deeds which were set down for him. He was no swaggering, blustering stage hero. Always a soldier and a gentleman, he got into the part a depth of seriousness which raised it beyond ordinary drama. I cannot recall any scene of its kind in the acted drama of greater beauty than that in the lonely hut on the hilltop on the road to Bologna. The sense of mystery, the note of expectation, the suggestion of impending tragedy were conveyed by the scene itself, by the lighting, by the stage management. But it was the acting that triumphed

and made this love scene one of the most exquisite that our stage has known. It was full of sincerity, of tenderness beyond words, of absolute purity of motive as of love. It touched the heart and brought out the best of one's nature. It ended just at the right moment, with Wogan's exultant cry of renunciation, "You are for the King." I do not think that it could have been played with such human and artistic effect if the protagonists had not been so well matched—girlish grace and modesty on the one side, the chivalry of a great gentleman on the other. For me, the memory of this scene, acted with sweetness and pathos, with grace and gallantry, can never be effaced. One can only regret that H. B. Irving did not impersonate more characters of a romantic nature. His Charles Wogan showed him as a perfect lover. It is a pity that Fate cast him so often before the public in less picturesque and charming characters.

"H.B." was in a happy frame of mind during the run of *The Princess Clementina*, which, produced in London on 14th December 1910, was acted for over a hundred nights. Jekyll and Hyde depressed him, physically and mentally. Wogan raised his spirits wonderfully. He himself had the chivalry of a Wogan and he rejoiced in playing a part which came naturally to him. I supped with him and his wife many times during the run of *The Princess Clementina.* They were joyous occasions, so gay, so free from care. His work done,

he was in the airiest and most captivating of moods on these delightful nights. His eyes sparkled with merriment as he drank his favourite beverage at supper, a weak decoction of champagne and water. He was more like a happy schoolboy than the man, the real man, he was. I remember on one of these happy nights some question arising about the heroine of Mr Henry Arthur Jones's play, *Dolly Reforming Herself.* Half fearing that I might say something derogatory about the lady of the comedy, he held up a finger and, with a warning, merry eye, said: " Be careful, Dolly is a name that is very precious in this house ! " There was a world of love and tenderness in the words. " Dolly " herself could not repress a tear of gladness.

CHAPTER X

HAMLET

TO *The Princess Clementina* period belongs one incident in his public life which must not go unrecorded. On the 5th December 1910 the statue of Henry Irving in Charing Cross Road was unveiled. The speech of the son was remarkably brief, but it was wonderfully eloquent. It came from the heart. It was simple, eloquent, and infinitely more affecting than any learned essay, such as he might easily have permitted himself. As I write, I recall the clear, bell-like tones of his voice. He spoke quickly, but his earnestness was such that every syllable was heard by the dense mass of people around him. This was the speech :

" I gladly express, on behalf of my father's family, our deep gratitude for the honour you, his comrades, have paid to his memory to-day, and the affectionate eloquence with which Sir John Hare has spoken to you of his old friend. One cannot help feeling that, on such an occasion as the present, it is rather to all men than to his own kith and kin that a great man belongs. Yet, at the same time, for those few of us who bear my father's name, there must be in our hearts to-day a feeling of pride and rejoicing—pride, that the profession he

respected and loved should, with unexampled generosity, have erected this noble emblem of their love for him—rejoicing, that for those of us who bear his name there will stand here for all time this splendid token of his great place in the history of the theatre and in the hearts of men, to encourage, stimulate and inspire those who may seek to follow him in his high endeavour.

"There is one quality in my father's character, known best, perhaps, to those closest to him in life, which the noble poise and grave dignity of this statue seem to me to finely express. I mean his steadfast courage, his calm, continual self-control. He was fond of repeating Goethe's saying that 'Self-possession is the art of life.' Certainly my father had, in a rare degree, that great quality of possessing his soul in patience and meeting fate with calmness and resolution. He had his share, especially in the last few years of his life, of the difficulties and anxieties, as well as the glories, of his art. But he bore all—storm or sunshine, fair weather or foul—with unflinching courage, steadfast resolution, and faith in the cause he served. If ever man was 'master of his fate and captain of his soul' it was my father. And it seems to me that it is as 'master of his fate and captain of his soul' that the sculptor has graven his image to-day.

"On behalf of my father's family, I beg to assure you of our deep sense of the signal tribute his

profession have paid to him whose memory we cherish with love and reverence. If my father's spirit is here to-day, he would be glad that the work of his life should be crowned by you, his brothers and sisters in art, by this memorial, which adds yet one more leaf to the many laurels that he won."

We come now to the consideration of the Hamlet of H. B. Irving, for it was during this happy time that he gave his best and most typical performance of Hamlet in London. All actors of Hamlet should be judged by their best performance of that character, especially in the case of an actor who is easily affected by his surroundings. There was nothing mechanical about H. B. Irving. Not only is it true that he did not rest upon his laurels, remain content with what he had accomplished. He was in acting a man of temperament, artistic in every sense. By nature happy, he wanted others to be happy. Unlike his father, however, he could not put aside or trample down with iron will the littlenesses of life, especially those of the theatre. They affected him in a terribly adverse manner. By the same token, smoothness in small things helped him vastly. All went well in 1910 and 1911, with one admirable result—his Hamlet was a beautiful rendering of the character. He felt this himself, albeit he did not use the word "beautiful" of it, and insisted that he should begin his forthcoming Australasian tour in the

character. His first Hamlet, as we have seen from *The Scotsman* criticism, had much to commend it. That was in 1895. Unhappily for myself, being then in America, I did not see that early Hamlet, or that at Camberwell in April following. I have, however, received from a trusted playgoer, one who has studied the art of the actor and has made notes of all that has interested him in the theatre, his impressions of this first Hamlet. Mr A. E. Hanford has seen the important performances on the London stage for some thirty odd years and retains a recollection, which is as accurate as it is in other respects remarkable, of those which have pleased him. This is how he describes the performance at Camberwell:

"It appeared to me at the time a very arresting and beautiful performance, and the impression I had was, and I remember remarking on it to an old playgoer very much older than myself who went with me on the second occasion, that I should think 'H.B.' had always had the part of Hamlet in mind from his very earliest youth, because there were so many fine pieces of, to me, quite new business. The tenderness of his scene with his mother, and his awestruck attitude on first meeting with the Ghost, were quite remarkable. He had a very interesting way of giving the 'To be or not to be' soliloquy. He entered from the back of the stage reading a book, which he carried in his hand, and was so wrapped in what he was doing

that he walked into the table in the centre of the stage. He then seated himself sideways on the table, swinging his leg, and held his hand out over a brazier which contained a live coal, still absorbed in the book. After warming and withdrawing his hand two or three times, he became more absorbed in the book, and withdrew his hand very hurriedly from the brazier, having been brought to a sense of his surroundings evidently by burning his hand. He then sighed, and resting the book on his knee, began the soliloquy.

"He gave a very thoughtful reading of the scene with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and when one of them (I never can distinguish one from the other) held out his hands in a protesting way to him, he struck them down on the words 'Nay, nay, by these pickers and stealers.'

"The scene with his mother at the moment when the Ghost entered was managed very well. Most actors have generally boldly faced the difficulty, and have had the lights lowered to enable the Ghost to enter. Others have carried through the scene without a visible Ghost. 'H.B.' worked himself up to a fine pitch of indignation in Hamlet's comparison between his father and his uncle, and on the passage:

> 'A cutpurse of the empire and the rule,
> That from a shelf the precious diadem stole,
> And put it in his pocket!'

he banged his uncle's portrait, which he held in his

hand, down on the table, extinguishing the light. Down went the footlights, and on came the Ghost.

"The pathos of his scenes with Ophelia was very marked indeed. The struggle in his mind between love for Ophelia and the necessity of breaking off the intercourse to follow the injunctions of the Ghost was very clearly indicated, and at certain moments, to my recollection, were quite heart-rending.

"I saw him when he played Hamlet about ten years afterwards at the Adelphi Theatre, and whether I had become blasé, or he had become blasé, I do not know, but it did not seem to me to be nearly so fine a performance. There is a tradition that there is no Hamlet so fine as one's first Hamlet."

The Adelphi performance of Hamlet was a tremendous ordeal. Many people, especially writers for the Press, remembered — or believed that they did! — the Hamlet of the father and could not bring themselves to imagine that the Hamlet of the son could approach that of Irving the first. But for that feeling, the Hamlet of 1905 would have been a much more tender impersonation than, in fact, it was, and if H. B. Irving had not been, to a great extent, overshadowed by the reputation of his father as Hamlet, he would have received a fairer hearing. I do not mean to infer that either playgoers or critics were unjust,

consciously or otherwise. Had "H.B." been a stranger, had he not borne such a striking resemblance to his father, it would have been to his advantage in this case. He looked so like the Hamlet of another generation that it was impossible to avoid comparison.

An old student of the stage, one who went to the theatre for sheer love of good plays and good acting, one who paid his way and had no axe to grind, has printed the record of his theatre-going days, in which his impressions, noted at the time, are set down "without fear or favour." Mr Richard Dickins, in his *Forty Years of Shakespeare on the English Stage, 1867-1907*, says of the Adelphi Hamlet:

"In appearance he was quite startlingly like the great Hamlet of 1874, and while free from his father's mannerisms, he fortunately inherits a good deal of his personal charm. Throughout the play he never failed in strength; the more exacting the scene, the finer and stronger was his acting. He was, indeed, almost too self-reliant, and his impersonation lacked the gentle sweetness, the yearning for sympathy and love that made the Lyceum Hamlet so irresistibly affecting. Nevertheless, his Hamlet is an achievement of which 'H.B.' may well be proud. All the first three acts were so good that it is difficult to particularise, but I may, perhaps, specially praise the manner in which he indicated the depth of his love for his

father, his conduct of the whole scene with the Ghost (a fine touch being his groan of shame and horror when he hears of his mother's faithlessness), his delivery of the long speech beginning 'Now am I alone,' the scene with Ophelia, and the whole of the play scene. In the graveyard scene, too, he was admirable."

Mr Dickins thought the killing of Laertes "too rough," and he disapproved of the death scene. The latter scene was spoilt by some new "business," for which, however, "H.B." was not responsible. This criticism of Mr Dickins represents the opinion, not only of a profound student of Shakespeare, but of one who was, and, happily, still is, a fervent admirer of the art of Henry Irving. Therein lies the inestimable value of the praise of the son. Mr Dickins, it will be noted, misses "the gentle sweetness" of the Hamlet of the elder Irving. The professional critics also dwelt upon this defect. Mr Ernest A. Bendall, the doyen of dramatic critics, had been writing about plays and players for thirty-five years when he saw the Hamlet of "H.B." at the Adelphi. One of the "old-fashioned" critics, who wrote for his readers, and not for himself, Mr Bendall—who gave up criticism when, in 1912, he became Examiner of Plays for the Lord Chamberlain—was honest, unbiassed, and the possessor of an extensive knowledge of acting. Although he freely recognised the value of the work done by Henry Irving, he was always sober

in his judgment and measured in his praise of the actor-manager of the Lyceum. From all points of view, therefore, his opinion of the impersonation of Hamlet by H. B. Irving is one that is worthy of respect and consideration.

"Just at the right moment in a career which has long been watched with expectant interest by all lovers of our stage, Mr H. B. Irving has come forward to undergo the test recognised as supreme by all young actors of his nationality and his ambition. For the maturing by thoughtful work of his powers and methods he has waited patiently, but not too long; and the brilliant success which came to him with his Hamlet at the Adelphi on Tuesday evening arrived as the legitimate and well-deserved result of artistic impulse guided in its development by finely studied art. Hamlet is a character so many-sided, and capable of such varied interpretations, that it has been said to ensure nearly all of its representatives against complete failure, while on the other hand a complete success in rendering and harmonising all of its phases must inevitably be very rare, if indeed it be possible. Such a triumph as this need not be claimed for Mr Irving, even by those who appraise most highly the extreme cleverness and undeniable effectiveness of his performance. It may be granted that there is less of heart than of brain in his work, less of poetic beauty and charm than of intellect and grip, less to move profound feeling than to excite vivid

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interest. But to admit so much is merely to confess to a length of memory which recalls from some bygone Hamlet some melody of rich-voiced elocution, some touch of ineffable tenderness, or some exercise of indefinable fascination such as, for us at any rate, could hardly be repeated.

"What is certain about Mr Irving's Hamlet is that he rouses sympathy not less lively, appreciation not less enthusiastic, and interest even keener than any won by any other Hamlet since that whereby his father's first took London by storm just over thirty years ago. To begin with, the new Hamlet has the inestimable vitality and fervour of youth; he is a real living human being, and no mere abstract of philosophical suggestion. His impersonator, moreover, has no doubt whatever about the qualities, intellectual, emotional, sentimental and cynical, wherewith he means to endow him, and there is no hesitation or fumbling about methods whereby he seeks to realise his conception. He speaks every line and every syllable of every line with delightful clearness and with perfect precision of rapid emphasis. He brings out with easy certainty the exact meaning that he desires to convey; he employs no trickery in his reading, and he suggests none of the devices of the crank, of the faddist or of the deliberate innovator in his conception. He aims throughout at a wholly natural bearing, and he hits this mark so accurately that he sometimes verges on the modern and

casual, as, for example, in the ironical banter of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and in the advice to the players, which latter he gives after the manner of the shrewd stage manager who knows his business rather than that of the cultured Prince elaborating as a connoisseur his instructions to the strollers for their 'command' performance. His spirit throughout is less that of inevitable tragedy than that of almost melodramatic romance, and in this respect as in others his reading is very near akin to Fechter's. His nervous excitement in his scene with the Ghost, his passionate pity for his father, his indignation and his inception of a scheme of vengeance are all most vividly illustrated; so also is his contempt for his own infirmity of purpose as recognised by him in the soliloquy—very finely delivered: 'O what a rogue and peasant slave am I!'

"There is, of course, no hint of real insanity in the 'antic disposition' which this spirited young fellow puts on for the purpose of cloaking his designs. He is as sane in the execution of his plot as in its conception, and he is as much master of himself in his scenes with Gertrude and Ophelia as in his passages of arms with Claudius and Polonius. He makes it, indeed, a cause for wonder that, being the man he is and having convinced himself of the King's guilt, he does not 'kill him pat' long before the time comes for the general slaughter which closes the play. There is little trace of

weakness, whether lovable or otherwise, in his attitude towards either his mother or to the unhappy lady-love whom he suspects of unworthy strategy. To both women he is occasionally almost violent, and he generally suggests such mastery of the situation that he commands respect rather than pity. But until towards the end of the performance, when the young actor palpably tried, and thus minimised the effect of the graveyard scene and the well-managed final combat, he succeeded by his alert intensity, his incisive humour, his easy alternations of mood, and his admirably studied diction in holding fast the eager attention of the house. If he never quite wrung our hearts, he never failed to give our minds food for thought; and he was always interesting in his picturesquely persuasive personality."

Another critic of the Adelphi Hamlet discerned the keynote to the interpretation of the character by H. B. Irving.

"The new Hamlet is a most lovable person," he wrote. "An affectionate disposition turned awry by tragic events is the keynote of Mr Irving's impersonation. Of all the celebrated Hamlets that the stage has ever seen—and the accounts of famous Hamlets are most exact—that of Mr Irving is most calculated to impress by reason of this development on the part of the actor."

The accounts of famous Hamlets are, indeed,

exact. That is to say, we know in what particular the celebrated Hamlets have excelled. From Colley Cibber we get the idea that the Hamlet of Betterton was most effective in the scenes with the Ghost. In the beautiful speech which begins with

"Angels and ministers of grace defend us!"

"the passion never rises beyond an almost breathless astonishment, or an impatience, limited by filial reverence, to inquire into the suspected wrongs that may have raised him from his peaceful tomb! and a desire to know what a spirit so seemingly distrest, might wish to enjoin a sorrowful son to execute towards his future quiet in the grave. This was the light into which Betterton threw this scene: which he open'd with a pause of mute amazement! then, rising slowly, to a solemn, trembling voice, he made the Ghost equally terrible to the spectator, as to himself! and in the descriptive part of the natural emotions which the ghastly vision gave him, the boldness of his expostulation was still govern'd by decency, manly, but not braving; his voice never rising into that seeming outrage, or wild defiance of what he naturally rever'd."

Garrick, like Betterton, made his greatest effect in the scenes with the Ghost. His Hamlet was distinguished by the note of filial piety which he displayed in the opening scene with the Ghost. The fear with which he was filled on

the first appearance of the vision was so real and deep that it imparted the same feeling to the audience. The progress of the scene was interpreted with an admirable expression of terror and reverence. He also delivered the soliloquies with wonderful effect, but his scenes with the Ghost were by far the most remarkable in his impersonation. Fielding, in *Tom Jones*, described those scenes most graphically. Hannah More tells us that the Hamlet of David Garrick "never once forgot he was a prince, and in every variety of situation and transition of feelings, you discovered the highest polish of good breeding and courtly manners." But we hear nothing of tenderness in the Hamlet of Garrick, which, from all accounts, was the performance of a skilled actor who knew how to make his points. In the closet scene, when Hamlet sees the Ghost, Garrick followed tradition: "Mr Garrick, sir, always overthrew the chair."

The Hamlet of John Philip Kemble was a cold and studied performance, although not wanting in a beauty of its own. "There he was," wrote Hazlitt, "the sweet, the graceful, the gentlemanly Hamlet. The scholar's eye shone in him with learned beauty; the soldier's spirit decorated his person; the beauty of its performance was its retrospective air, its intensity and abstraction; his youth seemed delivered over to sorrow. Later actors have played the part with more energy,

walked more in the sun, dashed more at effect—piqued themselves more on the girth of a foil; but Kemble's sensible, lonely Hamlet has not been surpassed." One of the most popular Hamlets of the last century was Charles Mayne Young, an actor who had all the classic training of the Kemble school, yet had more fire and freedom in his acting than John Philip Kemble or Sarah Siddons. His chief effects were made in the play scene and in the fencing bout with Laertes, which were better suited to his nature than the scenes with Ophelia and the Queen. These were wanting in tenderness and had in them something of irritability. Some of the lines were delivered with undue passion. In brief, Young's Hamlet was fiery and impetuous.

The Hamlet of Edmund Kean, although not so effective with the audience as his Shylock, was, nevertheless, an impersonation of wonderful beauty. His grace and earnestness throughout, and the tender tones in his voice when addressing the Ghost, were particularly noted. The chief features of his Hamlet were tenderness for Ophelia, affection for his mother, reverence for his father's spirit, and an inflexible idea of revenge for his father's murder. Old Mrs Garrick, the widow of Kean's great predecessor, showed such interest in Kean's rendering of the character that she induced him to alter his reading of the closet scene. Kean always played this with an infinite tenderness. "Davy," however, was somewhat severe in his

treatment of the Queen. Kean adopted the suggestion, although against his convictions, but after two or three nights abandoned it and returned to his own view of the scene. The Hamlet of Macready was studied and correct, in accordance with his conception of the character; his portrayal was monotonous, harsh, and severe, which anyone who has read the Diaries of the actor can well understand. There was nothing of Hamlet in Macready's composition.

When Mr Bendall compared the Hamlet of H. B. Irving with that of Charles Albert Fechter, he must have had the naturalness and beauty of the impersonation by the latter actor in mind. Fechter's Hamlet was distinguished by several passages of exquisite beauty of thought and expression and, generally speaking, by high refinement and excellent taste. In appearance, though, there could not have been a greater contrast. Fechter's Hamlet was " a pale, woe-begone Norseman, with long flaxen hair, wearing a strange garb never associated with the English stage (if ever seen there at all)." He wore a medallion portrait of his father, swinging round his neck on a gold chain. In similar manner, the Queen wore a portrait of Claudius; so, also, did Guildenstern. Fechter made vast use of these portraits. Thus, for instance, as Rosencrantz did not wear a portrait, he was less hateful to Hamlet than his co-conspirator. Despite an infinity of stage

"business," the Hamlet of Fechter was "natural" and charming. His appearance and bearing were such that the eye rested on him with delight and the sympathy of the spectators was assured. "Intellectually and physically," said George Henry Lewes, "he so satisfies the audience that they exclaim, 'How natural!'"

It was inevitable that when H. B. Irving acted Hamlet he should be compared with his father in this character. In 1905, there were not many playgoers who could speak from their own remembrance of the Hamlet of Henry Irving. In this respect, however, as in the case of the other great actors of the English stage, the records are full. It is not necessary for me to eulogise that impersonation. The Hamlet of Henry Irving lives in the story of our stage and will, so long as history lasts, be one of the brightest chapters in connection with the English theatre. For two hundred consecutive times, 31st October 1874 to 29th June 1875, Henry Irving acted Hamlet at the Lyceum Theatre. Nor was there any of that "scenic embellishment," which blurs the vision of the ignorant, to aid him, and the Ophelia was just an ordinary actress, the daughter of the manager. There must have been something "uncommon good" about such a Hamlet! It had intensity of feeling, flashes of passion, above all, the quality of princeliness. This Hamlet was a lonely being. He was a prince in this respect, a man apart, one

whose courtly airs raised him above his surroundings. His air of separation was a dominant note. He was, all the same, very human. The tender beauty of his treatment of Ophelia was one of the most exquisite points in the interpretation. This Hamlet loved Horatio, relied upon him, did not treat him as a lay figure. His Hamlet was profoundly melancholy, infinitely sad, piteous in its absolute separation from all sympathy. Yet withal a sympathetic impersonation, a sad, lonely, introspective figure.

In 1910 and 1911, H. B. Irving gave two performances of *Hamlet*, during the Shakespeare Festival seasons, at His Majesty's Theatre. His Hamlet then represented the impersonation by which his interpretation should be judged. He was then free from care—or comparatively so, for the life of the real actor has many anxieties—and this settled frame of mind enabled him to act the character to the very best of his ability. He then brought out, more than he had ever done, the most charming, the most tender side of it. I know well all the descriptions of the famous Hamlets of old and I have seen all the Hamlets of note of my own time. And I have no hesitation in giving it as my opinion that in one quality the Hamlet of H. B. Irving transcended them all. He was the most lovable Hamlet that the stage has known. In the course of an article which appeared in *The Windsor Magazine* early in 1910, in which I was asked to

compare the acting of father and son, I wrote: "The Hamlet of the son recalls that of the father in many important respects. It, too, is full of fine feeling, it has its passionate note—as in the play scene—it has intensity of an order which, by comparison, is subdued; it has great tenderness for Ophelia. It is a much more youthful Hamlet than, I imagine, his father's ever was. And it is certainly extremely lovable. The Hamlet of our day has two paramount features, youth and lovableness. It has not the profound melancholy of the father, but it is a most engaging picture. Hamlet can be interpreted in divers ways and by actors of varying personality. Discussion on this or that point will last until the crack of doom. But so long as the actor brings home to us something of the nature of Hamlet, something of his distinction, something of that fine nature overburdened with a sense of terror sufficient to unseat the reason and impair the soul, we must be grateful. Irving the First did this by, above and beyond other means, his deep-seated melancholy. The son impresses us and draws us to him by the lovableness which dominates his Hamlet."

CHAPTER XI

AUSTRALIA AND HOME

A LENGTHY tour of Australia and New Zealand having been arranged for by the syndicate already mentioned, he opened in Sydney, on 24th June 1911, as Hamlet. In that city, where he attained more success, perhaps, than elsewhere in Australia, the tour closed, on 5th April 1912, with scenes from *The Bells* and *Hamlet*. A special compliment was paid to him soon after his arrival in New South Wales. On 18th July, at the invitation of the Chancellor and Senate of Sydney University, he delivered a lecture, "Some Thoughts on *Hamlet*," in the Great Hall of the University. He dwelt largely upon a point which his father had taken up on more than one occasion, that of Shakespeare, the actor, intending that his plays were for public performance, not merely for the seclusion of the study. As was to be expected, his remarks on *Hamlet* evinced research and clear reasoning. He afterwards amplified the lecture and delivered it in England. On his way home from Australia he received a handsome offer from Mr Arthur Collins to take the part of Nobody in a "modern morality play," of American origin, called *Everywoman, or The Quest of Love*, which had the advantage of being

adapted for the English stage by Stephen Phillips. It was produced at Drury Lane on 12th September 1912 and filled in the time lucratively between the Australian tour and one that had been planned for him in South Africa. From an artistic point of view there was nothing in the part of Nobody whereby to enhance his reputation. He wore a purple hood and bore a resemblance that at times was uncanny to his father as Dante on that same stage. The centenary of the opening of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane (the existing building, the fourth on the same site) was celebrated in October. An address, written for the occasion by Stephen Phillips, was spoken by " H.B." The South African tour began on 26th December following, with *A Maid of Honour* and *The Lyons Mail*, at Johannesburg. It was in the latter city that, in March 1913, he brought out *The Sin of David*, by Stephen Phillips, appearing as Sir Hubert Lisle. The tour ended at Cape Town on 24th May 1913. With it also ended his connection with the company which had supported him for two and a half years. Its chairman was Mr Edward G. Hemmerde, K.C., the other members of the board of directors being four of the most experienced theatre managers in England—Mr Milton Bode, the late James Macready Chute, the late Edward Compton, and Mr John Hart.

During the last five or six years of his life he gave some remarkable performances. One of these was

the gentleman burglar in *The Van Dyck*. It did not attract the attention that it deserved, partly because he was not the first representative of the character, partly because he acted it in the music-halls only. It was farce-acting of the highest order, easy, bright and excruciatingly funny, a strong contrast to the graceful Désiré in *The Grand Seigneur*. His last season at the Savoy was marked by much acting of a high order. His dignified Robert Blaine in *Searchlights*, the airy, fantastic Hyacinth Petavel in *The Angel in the House*, his clear-cut Harley Napier in *The Case of Lady Camber*, gave full play to his marked individuality. As for Beverley in *The Barton Mystery*, despite the humbug of the man, one could not help liking him for his calm effrontery as well as his underlying charm.

This period was also one in which he experienced a keen disappointment. Thinking that *Hamlet* might be made into a better acting play than in the versions in which he had hitherto appeared, and with a view to attracting war-time audiences to Shakespeare, he made some extraordinary excisions in his attempts to present the "story." It was his avowed aim to emphasise "the dramatic, as apart from the literary, interest." With this end in view the advice of Polonius to Laertes and Hamlet's address to the players went by the board. The omissions did not find favour with the public, and the reduction of the tragedy to a "story" drama failed in its effect. This strange

condensation of *Hamlet*, brought out on 26th April 1917, had only twenty-six performances. It was a mistake, one that the admirers of the actor could only regret. It was one which might not have occurred but for the physical illness then making itself felt, which, I have no doubt, affected his judgment somewhat in regard to this particular play.

His last part at the Savoy was that of Stephen Pryde, a weird character in *The Invisible Foe*. His last public appearance was made on 17th December 1918, when at His Majesty's Theatre, at a matinée in aid of King George's Pension Fund for Actors and Actresses, he played Sir Charles Pomander in an act from *Masks and Faces*. It was on that occasion also that a friend of his youth, Lady Bancroft, made her last appearance in public.

His health was on the decline in the spring of 1918. On 29th April he wrote to Mr Golding Bright, with whom he had been talking about a version of *Treasure Island*, saying: "I am afraid for the present I shall not be dealing in plays. I am going to the Intelligence Department at the Admiralty to-day. I give them all my time, and for how long I suppose depends to some extent on the duration of the war. At any rate, for the present I shall not be doing anything in our line of business." Those who were in the office where he worked at the Admiralty testify to his worn appearance when he joined the service. Never

robust, he was not fitted for the routine of an office, with its long hours of desk work and its close application to the perusal of a multitude of documents, which, although his keen brain mastered them, tired him. Although he was not employed at the Admiralty for five months—his services terminated with the Armistice — he suffered severely from the strain.

During the autumn of that year we met at lunch some half-dozen times. It was apparent that Disease had marked him for her own. Usually abstemious in the pleasures of the table, he ate and drank ravenously and, to my astonishment, smoked a large cigar at each meal with a feverish enjoyment. All this was unnatural and a sure mark of that illness which eventually caused his death. He was just wasting away. In the following summer he spent some months at his house at Whitstable in the hope of regaining his strength. It was not to be. From Whitstable he came to town occasionally for a few hours. On one of those days he had an appointment with me. He had to walk from the Savoy to the Adelphi. Knowing that he would be punctual, I was looking for him from the window of my office, which is on the street level. It was well that I did so, for I was appalled at his appearance. He had aged terribly, he was stooping and dejected in appearance, a shocking change from his old, alert self. The interval before I opened the door was

sufficient for me to recover my composure, so that I was able to greet him with a smiling face.

That was the last time that I saw him alive. He had no idea that his illness was so serious or that it could only end in death. Early in October, he wrote to me from a house which he had just taken in Cumberland Terrace, Regent's Park, suggesting a visit. The visit, unfortunately, never took place, as, not knowing how serious was his case, I did not go to see him at once.

It is now over two years since I wrote the following article. It was written at a time of great stress and amid surroundings which did not tend to the quiet mind. I see no reason to alter it in any way. It was my thought on that sad October morning in 1919. It is a thought that is unchanged now:

"With the death of Henry Brodribb Irving there passes a great spirit. A distinguished actor, a man of high honour and, best of all, a most lovable man. I have just looked upon him for the last time. Lying in his beautiful room, his face in death is that of a Roman emperor, clean-cut, firm, austere, yet touched in a strange way by gentleness. When one writes immediately after the death of a beloved friend one is apt to become sentimental, and sentimentality he despised. But there is nothing unduly sentimental in describing the elder son of Henry Irving as lovable. It was his chief quality, his great value in the world. It shone out

"H. B." AND LAURENCE
With the bust of their father

in his acting and made him loved by the people. To thousands who never knew him personally he was 'H.B.,' a tribute of affectionate regard which denotes character. He was not just 'Irving the actor,' but 'H.B.,' a personality, one who was something more than a mere player. Yet he, by some contrariness of nature, or by reason of his keen, penetrating sense of humour, preferred the uncanny, the weird, the whimsical. But when he did play a part in which he could win sympathy he acted to perfection. His father's Hamlet was the most princely Hamlet ever known. The Hamlet of 'H.B.' was the most lovable. What a charming performance was his Wogan in *The Princess Clementina*—how graceful, how pensive, how touched with sweetness!

"I dwell upon this lovableness of the man, not only because it comes uppermost to the mind at such a time, but because, not having acted recently, some people associate him with the playing of villains and persons of mystery. They think, too, of his studies in crime and imagine him to have been steeped in gloom, whereas his outlook on life was always clear and, through the years of the war, calmly hopeful. Perhaps it might have been better for him if he had been less studious and if he had not devoted himself so much to his favourite hobby. I have often thought that the constant delving into the past by way of tracing the motives of murders was not conducive to the best of health

and spirits. And although in the acting of such characters as Lesurques and Dubosc, and Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, the good predominated in his impersonations—who can ever forget the tenderness, the sorrowfulness of his acting in the scene in *The Lyons Mail*, where Lesurques is falsely accused?—it would have been better for him and for his art if he had not confined himself so much to the darker side of characters.

"He arrived at all his effects in real life, as on the stage, by simple means. Unlike his father, his ambitions were limited. Indeed, he was not ambitious in the ordinary way. He did not aspire to fame. On the contrary, he dreaded the limelight. He was never a *poseur*. With the inheritance of a great name, with the finest of scholastic educations—by which he profited immensely—he could have achieved a very high place in the world had he so wished. Had he devoted himself to the law there is no honour that he might not have attained. He preferred the simple life, and such distraction as he needed he found in the theatre. There he was happy—when he got before the public. But the littleness of the stage, its petty jealousies and artificialities he could not brook. Nor could he attend to the business side of affairs. The 'front of the house' was not to his liking. He loved to act to please the public. But his mind was not bent on the money-bags. If he had played light comedy, for which he had a genius, he would have

made a fortune. He soon tired of comedy and returned at the earliest possible moment to the serious parts with which his name as an actor is identified.

"It is curious—as showing what that tricksy sprite, Fate, can do against our own intent—that, after a life of labour, 'H.B.'s' last years were relieved from financial strain by the profits which he derived from the Savoy Theatre. And in this his inner nature and his high principles were shown. When he took up work in the Admiralty—work which tried his strength severely, and, as I believe, started the illness from which he never recovered—he let the theatre. Not, however, at a large profit, which he might have obtained for the asking. On the contrary, his own rent being small—thanks to the discernment and good offices of his friend, the late J. D. Langton, whose death was a blow from which 'H.B.' never recovered—he was content with a profit which he thought fair. It was sufficient to leave a handsome margin, but it was not exorbitant.

"Sir Henry Irving died in harness, for he had to struggle to the end in order to pay his way. His son died in easy circumstances and surrounded by every comfort that was necessary. His wife was by his side during all the months of his long illness, and, during these last sad days, was his devoted attendant. His son, Laurence, was constantly with him, and his daughter, Elizabeth, saw her father and cheered him by her presence not many

hours before the end. His death was eminently peaceful. His mentality triumphed over his frail body and enabled him to retain his consciousness to within a few hours of the sleep from which he did not awake. His intellect was clear, his brain penetrating to the last. In all his life he did his duty. His death was serene. He died beloved. Could a man wish for more?"

All in whom this wakes pleasant thoughts of me,
Know my last state is happy—free from doubt,
Or touch of fear. Love me and wish me well!

ROBERT BROWNING.

CHAPTER XII

AUTHOR AND CRIMINOLOGIST

IN his *Book of Remarkable Criminals*, published during the year before his death, dedicated "to my friend, E. V. Lucas," H. B. Irving begins his Introduction with an interesting reminiscence: "I remember my father telling me that sitting up late one night talking with Tennyson the latter remarked that he had not kept such late hours since a recent visit of Jowett. On that occasion the poet and the philosopher had talked together well into the small hours of the morning. My father asked Tennyson what was the subject of conversation that had so engrossed them. 'Murders,' replied Tennyson. It would have been interesting to have heard Tennyson and Jowett discussing such a theme. The fact is a tribute to the interest that crime has for many men of intellect and imagination. Indeed, how could it be otherwise? Rob history and fiction of crime, how tame and colourless would be the residue!" He then proceeds, with great skill and biting humour, to argue his point. "In the investigation of crime," he says in his conclusion, "especially on the broader lines of Continental procedure, we can track to the source the springs of conduct and character, and come

near to solving as far as is humanly possible the mystery of human motive. There is always and must be in every crime a *terra incognita* which, unless we could enter the very soul of man, we cannot hope to reach. Thus far may we go, no farther. It is rarely indeed that a man lays bare his whole soul, and even when he does we can never be quite sure that he is telling us all the truth, that he is not keeping back some vital secret. It is no doubt better so, and that it should be left to the writer of imagination to picture for us a man's inmost soul. The study of crime will help him to that end. It will help us also in the ethical appreciation of good and evil in individual conduct, about which our notions have been somewhat obscured by too narrow a definition of what constitutes crime. These themes, touched on lightly and imperfectly in these pages, are rich in human interest. And so it is hardly a matter for surprise that the poet and the philosopher sat up late one night talking about murders."

In this "mystery of human motive," in this "human interest" of crime, lay the attraction which caused H. B. Irving to devote so large a part of his short life to its study and exposition. This was his view in 1918. But was it always so? And it has often occurred to his friends, *Cui bono?* The first thought induced by the attentive perusal of his books is the immense amount of research which was necessary for some of them. In others,

his grasp of detail, his ready condensation of facts and his lucid style are particularly remarkable. From the purely literary point of view, his first and his last books are his best. *The Life of Judge Jeffreys*, published before he was twenty-eight, is a monument of industry, consisting of nearly four hundred closely printed pages, and although the writing was spread over a number of years, from his student days at Oxford until he had made some real success on the stage, the necessary study was enormous. His list of authorities relating to the life and times of Judge Jeffreys is a formidable one, and there is no doubt that he had consulted them all and mastered the contents of the more useful accounts. What is more, he produced a clear and eminently readable book, a sound and sometimes brilliant, if not entirely convincing, biography.

He had, indeed, a special facility in biography. Take, for example, a minor effort in comparison with the Jeffreys book, his lecture on Colley Cibber. Professedly a lecture on the *Apology* for the life of that worthy actor-manager, it is a fine essay on the period of the player, and, incidentally, it castigates with many a rapier-like thrust the prejudice against the stage which has prevailed since Shakespeare's day to our own. Masterly also is his account of the arch-burglar, Charles Peace, written some fourteen years later.

Some may think it a pity that he did not confine his literary studies to people of his own country,

even though they included a fair proportion of murderers. His second big volume, *Studies of French Criminals of the Nineteenth Century*, which came from the press three years after *The Life of Judge Jeffreys*, dealt with a number of foreign criminals whose misdeeds are best buried in oblivion. "They are studies of real culprits whose guilt is, in all but one instance, beyond the suspicion of a doubt. As studies of character, and as examples of the administration of criminal justice in France, they may be of some interest or value to those who look to the human document for specimens of human character as it actually is, or for suggestions on which to build some work of fiction." It will thus be seen that he was imbued at the outset of his studies in crime by the idea of their "human" interest. The careers of the bombastic and vulgar thief and murderer of 1836, Lacenaire, of the terrible Troppmann, who stabbed and battered to death a woman and her five children, of the Abbé Bruneau, who murdered his superior, an aged priest, in a particularly revolting manner, of Pranzini and others, have nothing "human" about them. On the contrary, "inhuman" is the only epithet that can be applied to these monsters. Two murders done in Algiers are included in this recapitulation of horrors on foreign soil, and there is a chapter on the notorious Ravachel and two others, "criminals first and anarchists afterwards," uninteresting creatures

whose crimes should not be recalled in fiction and to whom the word "human" was foreign. "Historically," the English writer admitted, "Ravachel and his fellows are passing nightmares, unworthy to be more than barely chronicled in the lifetime of a great people; but there are points in the characters of these criminals and the circumstances of their punishments which are not without significance to the better understanding of the French character and administration of justice."

To the healthy English mind this collection of the records of these seventeen French criminals seems superfluous, despite the plea that "the French system of criminal procedure"—the relentless examination of the accused at the Assize Court—"possesses one supreme merit from the point of view of the student of character." Are such people worth the attention of "the student of character"? If so, their doings are minutely chronicled in the *Gazette des Tribunaux* and other publications. In France, there is no end to the printed records of *Causes Célèbres* of murderers and other malefactors. H. B. Irving's second book was not a scientific work. It was simply the story of some of the most atrocious criminals ever known to the French law. It represents "human nature" in its utmost depravity.

Seventeen years were to pass before his third, and best, book was published (his *Occasional Papers*, noticed in a previous chapter, were issued

in volume form in 1906). *A Book of Remarkable Criminals* takes us to various parts of the world. Peace was English. The son of a man who was successively a collier, a lion tamer, and a shoemaker, he was born at Sheffield, "in the county of Yorkshire, already famous in the annals of crime as the county of John Nevinson and Eugene Aram." All his exploits were performed in England. Robert Butler committed his murders in Dunedin, New Zealand. Professor Webster, of Harvard University, committed, in 1849, a murder for the sake of pecuniary gain, a sordid crime, which is presented with abundant detail in *Remarkable Criminals*. The author of the recapitulation of the mournful story, in the course of his professional visit to America in 1906-7, visited the scene. Another American murder story dwelt upon at full length in this book is that officially known as the Holmes-Pitezel Case. H. H. Holmes, who will be remembered as the keeper of a place in Chicago which became known as "Holmes' Castle," killed, so far as is known for certain, about ten persons, including several children. And, as in the case of the Harvard Professor of Chemistry, for the purpose, primarily, of monetary gain. The story of Professor Webster is a melancholy one, relieved somewhat by its psychological interest; that of Holmes is revolting. A long account of a swindler and murderer of the latter part of the eighteenth century, one Derues, who was executed in the

barbarous fashion of those times, and of Dr Castaing, another French murderer, who met his fate a century ago, are included in this volume, together with accounts of other murderers of France whose misdeeds bear out, to some extent, the theory of suggestion in crime. There is a wonderful wealth of detail in the descriptions of these murderers and their crimes. But the question always arises, *Cui bono?* What purpose, good or otherwise, is served by their relation?

On the other hand, the memoir of Peace, the notorious burglar of forty years ago, is distinguished by its easy style, its lightness of touch, its bright humour, its occasional grim irony. Here our author was dealing with a popular subject, and although he was obliged to condemn his crimes, he admired the ability of the man.

"Charley Peace," he says, "stands out as the one great personality among English criminals of the nineteenth century. In Charley Peace alone is revived that good-humoured popularity which in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries fell to the lot of Claude Duval, Dick Turpin, and Jack Sheppard. But Peace has one grievance which these heroes have been spared. His name has been omitted from the pages of the *Dictionary of National Biography*. From Duval, in the seventeenth, down to the Mannings, Palmer, Arthur Orton, Morgan and Kelly, the bushrangers, in the nineteenth century, many a criminal, far less

notable or individual than Charley Peace, finds his or her place in that great record of the past achievements of our countrymen. Room has been denied to perhaps the greatest and most naturally gifted criminal England has produced, one whose character is all the more remarkable for its modesty, its entire freedom from that vanity and vaingloriousness so common among his class."

The biography of Peace is the leading, as it is the longest, essay in the book. It is a masterly production, the more so as H. B. Irving had to follow other writers who had dealt fully with the subject. Here, as in all this kind of work, his grasp of detail, his clearness as to facts, his power of selecting the essential, and discarding the unnecessary, incidents and statements in the mass of material upon which he worked, were invaluable. He contrasts Jack Sheppard with Peace in an amusing way:

"Sheppard loves to stroll openly about the London streets in his fine suit of black, his ruffled shirt and his silver-hilted sword. Peace lies concealed at Peckham beneath the homely disguise of old Mr Thompson. Sheppard is an imp, Peace a goblin. But both have that gift of personality which, in their peculiar line, lifts them out from the ruck, and makes them Jack and Charley to those who like to know famous people by cheery nicknames. And so we must accept Charles Peace as a remarkable character, whose

unquestioned gifts as a man of action were squandered on a criminal career; neither better nor worse than a great number of other persons whose good fortune it has been to develop similar qualities under happier surroundings. There are many more complete villains than the ordinary criminal, who contrive to go through life without offending against the law. Close and scientific investigation has shown that the average convicted criminal differs intellectually from the normal person only in a slightly lower level of intelligence, a condition that may well be explained by the fact that the convicted criminal has been found out."

His Introduction to *A Book of Remarkable Criminals* is a fascinating chapter. It is exceedingly clever, audacious, and, in some passages, buoyant and humorous. In it, also, he makes a departure from beaten tracks, and even finds scope for a comparison between Holmes, the Chicago murderer, and Richard III. Holmes was "completely insensible to all feelings of humanity. Taking life is a mere incident in the accomplishment of his schemes; men, women, and children are sacrificed with equal mercilessness to the necessary end. A consummate liar and hypocrite, he has the strange power of fascination over others, women in particular, which is often independent altogether of moral or even physical attractiveness. We are accustomed to look for a certain vastness,

grandeur of scale, in the achievements of America. A study of American crime will show that it does not disappoint us in this expectation. The extent and audacity of the crimes of Holmes are proof of it." He finds the "counterpart in imaginative literature to the complete criminal of the Holmes type in the pages of Shakespeare." Richard III. espoused "deliberately a career of crime, as deliberately as Peace, Holmes, or Butler." Shakespeare, he thinks, got nearer to the domestic, as opposed to the political, crimes of the historical criminal "when he created Iago. In their envy and dislike of their fellow-men, their contempt for humanity in general, their callousness to the ordinary sympathies of human nature, Robert Butler, Lacenaire, Ruloff are witnesses to the poet's fidelity to criminal character in his drawing of the Ancient." He considered the King in *Hamlet* "the most successful and therefore, perhaps, the greatest criminal in Shakespeare," the murder of his brother being "skilfully carried out by one whose genial good-fellowship and convivial habits gave the lie to any suggestion of criminality."

He takes the case of the murder of Duncan by Macbeth and Lady Macbeth as an example of a class of crime of which there are four modern instances cited in the book, the dual crime. In a number of cases "in which two persons have jointly committed heinous crimes," there is generally one who commits the deed at the suggestion of

the other. "In some cases these two rôles are clearly differentiated; it is easy, as in the case of Iago and Othello, Cassius and Brutus, to say who prompted the crime. In others, the guilt seems equally divided and the original suggestion of crime to spring from a mutual tendency towards the adoption of such an expedient. In Macbeth and his wife we have a perfect instance of the latter class. No sooner have the witches prophesied that Macbeth shall be a king than the 'horrid image' of the suggestion to murder Duncan presents itself to his mind, and, on returning to his wife, he answers her question as to when Duncan is to leave their house by the significant remark, 'To-morrow—as he proposes.' To Lady Macbeth, from the moment she has received her husband's letter telling of the prophecy of the weird sisters, murder occurs as a means of accomplishing their prediction. In the minds of Macbeth and his wife the suggestion of murder is originally an auto-suggestion, coming to them independently of each other as soon as they learn from the witches that Macbeth is one day to be a king." The criminals of Shakespeare, discussed in this Introduction, was the basis for a deeper study of the subject which, unfortunately, he had not the opportunity to elaborate. It would, no doubt, have been a valuable contribution to Shakespearean literature.

The final volumes in which he was concerned were published posthumously in 1921. *Last*

Studies in Criminology, issued without any preface or other preliminary matter, and wanting the references which he himself was so careful to supply, consists of the records in four cases of wrongful accusations. The only one of interest to English readers, from a legal point of view, is that of Adolf Beck, an unfortunate Norwegian, who, accused of crimes of which he was entirely innocent, was condemned to penal servitude and languished in prison for five years, only to be released when it was too late. He died a broken man and in penury at the end of 1909. It was a terrible case of mistaken identity. Beck was truly a martyr. His sufferings did, however, lead to certain reforms in our legal procedure, and his conviction proved the utter worthlessness of the evidence of so-called experts in handwriting. The research evinced in this record must have been enormous. In the three other cases dealt with in these *Last Studies*, the writer had an easier task. The story of the wrongful conviction of Joseph Lesurques, of Émile Clement de la Ronciere and of Peter Vaux, are good reading, but their interest is more for the French than the English. The story of Lesurques is well known through the various plays on the subject, *Le Courrier de Lyon*, *The Lyons Mail*, etc. In that case "H.B." had wealth of material, including the lengthy book, *L'Affaire du Courrier de Lyon*, issued in 1905, to work upon.

The other book published after his death was one of the "Notable Trial Series" (he had previously edited two of these volumes: *Franz Muller* and *Mrs Maybrick*). The editing of the report of the trial of Henry Wainwright, a sanctimonious humbug and callous murderer, whose crime, committed in 1875, created an enormous sensation, evidences just the same scrupulous care which H. B. Irving invariably bestowed upon his work. His Introduction is a clever and concise memoir of the Whitechapel murderer. The volume has a warm-hearted "Appreciation" from the pen of Sir Edward Marshall Hall, the eminent counsel, who relates the keen interest which the subject of his praise always took in the discussion of notorious crime. He was a member of "Our Society," or the "Crimes Club," originally an association of twelve, subsequently of forty, "members interested in criminology, who were to meet periodically at dinner and after dinner debate cases and matters connected with that subject. It has been very successful, and the meetings have been all the more interesting because members and their guests are pledged to absolute secrecy. Nowhere will Harry Irving be more missed than at the meetings of this club."

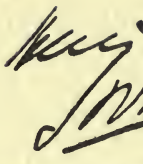
One of H. B. Irving's best friends was the late Churton Collins, one of the leading Shakespearean scholars of the day, Chairman of English Literature in the University of Birmingham, a tremendous

worker, a learned man, and a gentleman in the true sense of the word. He was held in esteem and affection by all who knew him. He was noted for the gentleness of his nature, for his lovableness. He was a perpetual burner of the midnight oil, rarely taking more than five or six hours' sleep, sometimes less. The study of criminology was one of his hobbies. In the pursuance of this study he made an exhaustive inquiry into the Merstham tunnel murder and into the Wyrley cattle-maiming outrages. He often sat up half the night discussing crime with H. B. Irving. Unhappily, he came to an untimely end, in 1908, at the age of sixty. "H.B." outwore his physical strength ere he was fifty. Would it have been otherwise if he had not so thoroughly and so constantly pursued such a morbid hobby as the study of murder? And could he not have put his fine intelligence and exceptional literary gifts to better use than perpetuating in print the deeds of criminals? In any case, although old gentlemen, be they poets or philosophers or otherwise, may sit up without doing themselves any harm once in a lifetime "talking about murders," the pastime would not seem to be a healthy exercise for a busy professor and an ambitious actor.

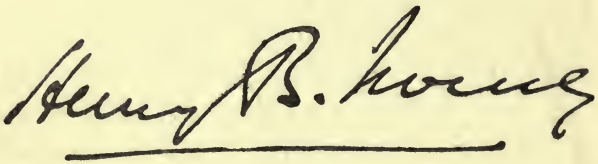
LAURENCE IRVING

Part II

Laurence



(6TH FEBRUARY, 1838—13TH OCTOBER, 1905)



(5TH AUGUST, 1870—17TH OCTOBER, 1919)

(21ST DECEMBER, 1871—29TH MAY, 1914)

CHAPTER XIII

MARLBOROUGH TO RUSSIA

THE path of Harry Irving was strewn with roses. For him, in his death as in his life, there was sunshine always. The clouds hung over Laurence almost to the end. Then they lifted, only to descend again with appalling swiftness, robbing him in an instant, even as he stood upon the threshold of great achievement, of wife, of life, of high attainment. Although his years on earth were short, he accomplished much, and his future was full of good promise. Ever working, ever striving, seldom coming within sight of success, he was never envious of those who, with lesser gifts, were more fortunate than himself. He was supremely happy in one thing, one priceless possession—he had a high sense of duty. That sense never failed him. Added to his natural simplicity of nature, and a touch of humour which, in the main, was genial, his duty to his fellow-men, his sympathy with those whose lives were sad and sombre, kept his intellectual activities alert and his spirits buoyant.

His affectionate and amiable nature was one of the characteristics most marked in his childhood. It is borne out by all who knew him in his youth

and as he grew to manhood. There is the testimony not only of his mother, but of early friends, the Rev. Mr Collum, the vicar of Leigh, his wife and daughters, who speak laughingly to-day of his untidy habits, although, with well-remembered affection, of his winning ways. How he came to be imbued with his love for Russia no one can tell. It may have been instinct; some chance may have opened the way. Certain it is that he had it quite early in life. His mother's house contained a "Russian library" of some fifty volumes which he formed for himself; and one of his earliest recitations at Leigh, in January 1884, when he had only just turned twelve, was proof of his sympathy with the oppressed. It was *The Fall of Poland* (on the same occasion, it will be remembered, Harry recited *The Erl King*). His leanings toward Russia and his desire to enter the Diplomatic Service were all of his "own inclining."

He was barely sixteen when he left Marlborough, with, be it noted, "an excellent character," albeit the report of his form master was "Not at all satisfactory—Bible lessons very poor," alas! Shortly afterwards he was sent to Paris, there to perfect his French, in which, at college, he had done fairly well. There he won the esteem of all around him, his French master writing in praise of his amiable character. From Paris he was taken by his mother to St Petersburg. He was

introduced by the Hon. Eric Barrington to the English ambassador, Sir Robert Morier, an introduction which was most valuable. He first lived with an English resident, and afterwards, so that his knowledge of the language of the country should be completed, with a Russian. In St Petersburg he received much hospitality from two ladies, the Misses Page, daughters of a clergyman. Here is an excerpt from a letter, dated December 1890, to the mother of the young student, from one of these ladies:

"Now we will talk about dear Laurence. Sweet boy, to-morrow is his birthday, and he will dine with us. You may be proud of him and never can praise him too much to me, for I begin to think there is not such a nice boy in the world (although he does lose and forget everything), but he can't help it, for his thoughts are always far away, and then how can he think of gloves, goloshes, and such things. Those clever as he don't think of those little things. . . . I often wish that he lived with me, for I would be better able to look after him. However, where he is, he has learnt to speak Russian well, for there they speak nothing else. His head is full of acting just at present."

Let it not be thought, from the concluding sentence of the letter, that the embryo diplomatist was turning his thoughts towards the professional stage. He had no such intention. No: some of the English colony in St Petersburg, bent upon

private theatricals, had asked Laurence Irving to stage-manage a performance and play the principal part. He wrote in fever-heat to his mother asking her to obtain books of (a) *David Garrick*, (b) *Two Roses*, (c) *The Bells*. He was most insistent about *David Garrick*. Charles Wyndham had acted that character, with superb success, in London in 1886, and he had played it in German in St Petersburg in January, 1888. It was a bold desire for an amateur to wish to follow in Wyndham's footsteps, only three years later, and in English, too! Yet David Garrick was the character which Laurence longed to essay. In a letter to his "darling mother" he says:

"Move heaven and earth, my darling, to get *Garrick*, as I think it is by far the most suited to our needs. I like Garrick. Turner, the father, and all the common people who come to dinner, I have got to the life. Garrick I can fairly well carry off on my shoulders if I act well, and the rest will have as small a chance as possible of spoiling it. Try, darling, for *D.G.*"

David Garrick was duly played, it being the first piece given in English in St Petersburg.

Laurence never forgot the ladies who were kind to him in St Petersburg. Years afterwards, the Misses Page were in London and in sore straits. Laurence made sure that they did not want, and provided a pension for the surviving sister until the day of her death.

Laurence spent some three years in St Petersburg, becoming proficient in the knowledge of the people, as well as in the language of Russia. Young as he was, his sympathies were with the people, not the aristocrats. He saw a great deal of the latter, going constantly to receptions, balls, the opera, and other functions. He had a joyous existence, for he was extremely popular, and was invited to many state and diplomatic affairs. I have read some dozens of his letters written at this period. They are all light-hearted, wonderfully affectionate. The mother loved both her sons, but there is no doubt that her heart was set upon her youngest born. Laurence was devoted to her all his life. His letters from Russia give evidence of one trait which was strong in him, and in which he differed vastly from his brother. Laurence loved animals, Harry did not. Laurence had a dog for companion almost always. There is frequent mention in his letters from St Petersburg of "Patch," a favourite dog which had perforce been left in England. As for "Lop," his dog of manhood, there are hundreds of people who can recall the mutual affection of master and animal.

I think those brief years in Russia must have been the happiest period ever lived by Laurence. They were, in any case, free from care and full of promise. Alas! his hopes of becoming a member of the diplomatic corps were dashed to the ground while he was still in his teens. The disappoint-

ment was not through any fault of his. He had studied hard, he was proficient in French and Russian, he was welcomed at the Embassy in St Petersburg. Happily, or unhappily, a considerable sum of money, as well as influence, was required for those who entered into the diplomatic service in those days. The influence was there, but the financial aspect was not roseate. Henry Irving could not supply the funds which were necessary to secure his son a position free from anxiety while he was on the first rung of the diplomatic ladder. He considered the subject very seriously and made careful inquiries into every possibility of helping his son in this early ambition. Unfortunately, although to the outer world Henry Irving was one of the most successful men who ever trod the stage, his finances in 1891 did not permit him to make the monetary settlement which was deemed the minimum for the would-be diplomat. He was drawing huge sums from the public, but spending the greater part upon his theatre. One of my trusted possessions is his private ledger, giving the receipts and expenses week by week, as well as other particulars of interest, from the beginning of his management of the Lyceum in 1878 until his death. That instructive "human document" shows me that the season August 1890 to July 1891 resulted in a loss of over four thousand pounds, while the seven months, December of the latter year until

the end of the following July, showed a further deficit, despite the receipts exceeding fifty-eight thousand pounds. In the autumn of 1891, a provincial tour enriched the treasury by a goodly sum, insufficient, however, to balance the London losses. He was not to blame for his inability to settle an income upon his son.

It may have been for the best. Who knows? If one of the brothers was by nature a diplomat, it certainly was not Laurence. Harry had much more intuitive diplomacy. Laurence was far too free and open, not to say explosive, for a career which has for one of its guiding principles the iron hand in the velvet glove. His was not the nature that would have led him skilfully through the tortuous, wily ways of what the man-in-the-street knows of diplomacy. As he was not fated to become a diplomat, he turned his attention to the career which was open to him and resolved to become an actor. It is to his credit that he was never known to rebel against a keen disappointment, such as this early one must have been, nor had he a harsh word to say of his father.

CHAPTER XIV

ACTOR AND AUTHOR

AT the age of twenty, as ever after, he was a man of instant action. In August 1891 we find him making his first appearance on the stage, in Dundee, as a member of the Shakespearean company directed by F. R. (now Sir Frank) Benson, thus starting his public career a month in advance of his brother. His opening part was not a lengthy or ambitious one. Snug, the joiner, is not exactly what actors call a " fat " part. The lion in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is, good Peter Quince says, " nothing but roaring." Snug has a few lines to speak, but he is one of the least important of the rustics, although " a very gentle beast, and of a good conscience."

Laurence Irving's experiences with the Benson company were not limited to those of acting. While on the stage at Belfast the shot from a pistol which was not known to be loaded came near to ending his career. In those times of piping peace the event caused a commotion which now seems disproportionate. The newspapers were eager in their ventilation of the news and bulletins were issued daily. The mother hurried from England to the bedside of her wounded son; the father sent a

surgeon from this country to confer with those in Belfast. The wound itself was not dangerous, but the escape was almost miraculous, for the shot penetrated the chest. Skill and a healthy constitution triumphed, and Laurence Irving was spared, at that period, a sudden death.

His next engagement was with his father's old friend and his own godfather, John Lawrence Toole (after whom he was called, his name, however, being spelled Laurence). He made his first appearance in London, on 26th March 1892, at Toole's Theatre (originally the Folly, a small house in King William Street, subsequently absorbed by Charing Cross Hospital). His opening part was Mr Augustus Cadell in *Daisy's Escape*, the little play by another friend of his father, Arthur W. Pinero. When the comedietta was acted at the Lyceum, the author, as we have seen, was a member of Irving's company. He appeared as Mr Cadell, the rude, bad-tempered creature with whom Daisy has run away. It is worthy of notice that Laurence Irving was thus identified at the beginning of his work in London with the theatre and the work of two men for whom his father had the highest esteem and affection. He remained with Toole for several months, playing, on tour, Andrew M'Phail in Barrie's *Walker, London*, and other parts. He appeared in minor parts at Toole's Theatre in *Dot*, a version of *The Cricket on the*

Hearth, and other pieces. Much of this uneventful sort of work followed, until, in 1896, he was selected by Herbert Tree to act Svengali in *Trilby* on tour. It was no small compliment that, with an experience of only five years, he should have been chosen for a character of such importance. It is satisfactory to know that he made an excellent impression as Svengali. He had, of course, to follow in the footsteps of the original. It is said by some that he bettered his predecessor. Be this as it may, it is certain that his performance was a worthy one.

A new phase began for him when he became a member of his father's company. He had, being the recipient of a regular and good salary, the leisure for the development of his talent for writing. His first play, a one-act drama, *Time, Hunger, and the Law*, had been acted at a charity matinée at the Criterion Theatre on 24th May 1894. It was a sad and sordid story of Russian life, affording strong evidence of the gloom with which Russia had affected him. He and his brother, Mr Cyril Maude, and Mr Tom Heslewood appeared in it—and Charles Wyndham gave a friendly hint to the David Garrick of St Petersburg. He, also, had been appearing on that afternoon, and, meeting Harry and Laurence immediately afterwards, he thus admonished them: "I dare say you're very clever young men, but you've got to learn your business as your father and as I did."

Shortly afterwards Harry, as we have seen, joined Mr Ben Greet's company, and Laurence, in 1896, was playing Svengali. Mr Heslewood remained a close friend to the brothers.

The little Russian drama was his first unaided effort in play-writing. Fifteen months before that representation at the Criterion, there was acted, also at a matinée, an adaptation of Sheridan Le Fanu's creepy story, *Uncle Silas*, in which Laurence Irving was associated with Mr Seymour Hicks. Both adapters appeared in their play, together with Miss Violet Vanbrugh and Miss Irene Vanbrugh. As there was already in existence a really excellent version of the novel, *The Dark Secret*, by John Douglass, an expert in such matters, it was a doubtful experiment for the young actors to try their 'prentice hands on the novel. Laurence Irving's third venture in writing was also an adaptation. *A Christmas Story* was an English version, in blank verse, of the *Conte de Noël* of M. Maurice Boucher, played at the Théâtre Français in 1894. *A Christmas Story* was acted as a first piece to *The Bells*, on 5th December 1895, in New York, a mark of paternal solicitude, for it never came into Henry Irving's regular programme.

Laurence was also indebted to his father for the production of his fourth essay in drama. This was a one-act play, *Godefroi and Yolande*, brought out in Chicago on 13th March 1896, and in New York on the 14th of May in the following year, with Ellen

Terry as Yolande. Laurence had a deep-seated regard for women and for the chivalry due to them from men. This feeling, strongly imbued in him, was the impelling force of this his first important essay as a dramatist. He had before him the noble sacrifice of Father Damien, who cast in his lot with the lepers of Molokai, living and working for them, ultimately dying of the terrible disease. The story of *Godefroi and Yolande* is one that is by no means ennobling. It did not appeal to the public, and, save that it was published in book form, in 1898, and performed once after the death of the author, as a well-meant tribute to his memory, it has disappeared.

LAURENCE AS CHARLES SURFACE

CHAPTER XV

SUCCESS IN SHAKESPEARE

THE year 1898 was a fortunate one for Laurence Irving. It brought him into much prominence as a playwright, and he gave one of the most admirable pieces of acting in his career. He had received the greatest encouragement from his father, who now gave a further proof of his affection. *Peter the Great* was an admirable work for a young writer, but it had the prevailing defect of all the dramas of Laurence Irving. It was entirely lacking in comedy. There was nothing to relieve the gloom. The turbulent emperor was not a character in which Henry Irving, his physical health then failing him and terribly burdened as he was by financial anxiety, could attract the public. Ellen Terry was the Catherine, and the support, it is almost superfluous to add, was the best that could be obtained. It was given thirty-eight times only at the Lyceum and was heard of no more.

Peter the Great was, however, a valuable asset for the young writer. It was something to have a five-act play produced by Henry Irving. It was also a privilege to take his place in the bill. This happened on a night when the Prince of Wales

(Edward VII.) had arranged to see *Peter the Great.* Unfortunately for some reasons, fortunately for others, the actor-manager of the Lyceum was too ill to act, and the Royal visit could not be postponed. Laurence took his father's part and was complimented by the Prince, who, this time accompanied by the Princess of Wales, came again to see *Peter the Great.* Henry Irving, who was acting on that night, was congratulated by the Prince upon the ability of his son, the Prince quoting a line from the play: "Emperors don't have sons, they have successors." Unhappily for our stage, the prophecy was not fully realised by either of Henry Irving's sons.

It was in the spring following the performance of *Peter the Great* that Laurence gave an impersonation which, if it had been seen in London, would have established his position as an actor. The records of his work published in his lifetime say nothing of his Justice Shallow, so that it may be assumed that he did not attach any importance to that feat. I do not find any allusion to it in the numerous biographical articles which appeared after his death. The memory of this fine achievement made a vivid impression upon a writer in *The Manchester Guardian.* That paper, shortly after the news had reached this country of the tragedy of the St Lawrence river, published a special article in which it dealt at considerable length with the actor. The revival of the second part

of *Henry IV.*, in which Laurence Irving appeared was given by Mr Louis Calvert (who, curiously enough, does not mention it in his own memoir) and was pronounced "the best performance of a play of Shakespeare—as far as the acting alone went—that has been seen in Manchester during the last quarter of a century." Falstaff was played by Mr Calvert, the producer of the play, "the best English Falstaff, at any rate, of our time." There was high praise for other members of the company, but "the most amazing of all was the Justice Shallow of Mr Laurence Irving, an actor then only known to most of us here—and a most dangerous way to be known—as a son of a great actor, the mere shadow, presumably, of a great name. You might really go to the theatre regularly for twenty years without seeing so singular a feat of creative imagination by an actor of a minor or middle-aged part. The figure of greedy, timid, boastful, leering, crackling dotage was so delightful and minutely worked out, so embroidered upon with curious, picturesque little traits, so elaborated into a kind of brilliant and humorous exposition of the whole psychology of senility, and it was all so supremely veracious and so perfect in its cohesion and unity, that the playgoer who saw it was sent back to read his text of the play with a new wonder at the genius of Shakespeare which, by a few broken scraps of speech, could convey to a player the material for such a picture. But it was also with

wonder and joy at the cunning genius with which the young artist had put hint and hint together, inferred a human quality or a deficiency from the rhythm of a sentence or the idle repetition of a word, and pieced out that grotesque and awful image of a weak mind's and soul's decay from the broken fragments of drivelling reminiscence in the text."

All this was highly complimentary, even if the writer of the article was a little too lavish in his praise of the invention of the actor. Justice Shallow is delineated with much detail by Shakespeare. Falstaff's description of him in his youth is a masterpiece: "I do remember him at Clement's Inn, like a man made after supper of a cheese-paring; when he was naked, he was for all the world like a forked radish, with a head fantastically carved upon it with a knife; he was so forlorn that his dimensions to any thick sight were invincible, he was the very genius of famine, yet lecherous as a monkey. . . . And now is this Vice's dagger become a squire, and talks as familiarly of John o' Gaunt as if he had been sworn brother to him." Shallow has been acted by some of the best players on the English stage. Thomas Doggett, whose coat and badge are still rowed for by Thames watermen, distinguished himself in this character in the days of Charles II. Colley Cibber thought so much of the part that he took it away from the actor to whom it had been allotted and made a

success with it that is historical. The house shook with laughter whenever he was on the stage. "Cibber's transition from asking the price of bullocks to trite but grave reflections on morality was so natural, and attended with such an unmeaning roll of his small pig's eyes, accomplished with an important utterance of 'tick! tick! tick!' not much louder than the balance of a watch's pendulum, that I question," says Thomas Davies in his *Dramatic Miscellanies*, "if any actor was ever superior in the conception or expression of such solemn insignificance." Shallow was long a favourite part with Cibber. Many other actors of note, including William Farren the first and Samuel Phelps, played it. Charles Calvert, father of Louis Calvert, revived the second part of *Henry IV.* in Manchester in 1874, when Phelps doubled the characters of the King and Shallow, as he had done at Sadler's Wells two decades before. His Shallow won the highest praise from the celebrated critic of *The Times*, John Oxenford.

To have followed such actors, and to have won unstinted praise as the doddering old fellow, was an achievement of considerable credit for the young player. During that same year he gave another performance, which impressed itself upon the writer of some recollections of Laurence Irving which appeared after his death, in *The Evening Standard*. "He could speak a few simple words so that they called up pictures before the mental

eye. There was an instance of his playing the rackety author in *Hedda Gabler*. When the fellow tells of throwing away his manuscript and seeing it flutter over the waters of the fiord, there is an image to be evoked. How Irving painted it to the imagination! One saw the lonely, haggard figure on the heights, sending his laboured leaves adrift on the wind—saw them flutter across the liquid stillness—and understood the agony the man wanted his hearers to believe in."

CHAPTER XVI

BRIEUX AND DOSTOIEVSKY

THE year which began with *Peter the Great*, and saw the two fine performances just alluded to, also witnessed the production of his sixth play, *Richard Lovelace*, in which E. H. Sothern, an American, and, subsequently, the author, appeared as the cavalier. All this meant hard and continuous work. He had, in addition, another play in preparation. This was a commission from his father, the translation of Sardou's *Robespierre*, which was brought out at the Lyceum on 15th April 1899. In this Laurence acted the part of Tallien, and, during the absence of his father through illness, that of Robespierre. He was now a regular member of the Lyceum company, and acted Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice*, Nemours in *Louis XI.*, Valentine in *Faust*, and other parts. He went with his father on his last three American tours (1899-1900, 1901-1902, 1903-1904).

His next six years were mainly occupied by touring the provinces, in theatres and music-halls, by visits to America, acting and writing incessantly. Until 1910, his visits to London were not many. At the Coronet Theatre, Notting Hill, he appeared in his own one-act drama, *The Phœnix*, at the Court

Theatre, in *The Incubus*, his own translation of *Les Hannetons*, by Eugène Brieux. His luck, however, was out, and he went on a tour of the provincial music halls, frankly, as he avowed, to gain the means whereby to live. He also admitted that the necessity for obtaining a rapid effect taught him much in the art of play-writing as of acting. He acted Triplet in a condensed version of the story of Peg Woffington, and appeared in other sketches, including *The Dog Between*, in which his faithful canine companion, "Lop," had a share of the acting honours.

His labours hitherto had met with little recognition or financial reward. Had he resolved to remain in London, the case might have been otherwise, and he would probably have come into his own. His roving disposition, however, took him across the Atlantic on his own account. He was already known there from having acted with his father, also as the author of *Richard Lovelace*, which, produced in New York in 1901, had been favourably received. Mr Sothern had also produced, during 1908, his version of *Crime and Punishment*. He toured the American music-halls playing Louis XI. in a version of *The Ballad Monger*. He appeared in New York in April 1909, in *The Incubus*. Only two performances were then given, but, returning to America in the autumn of the same year, he presented *The Incubus* under another name, *The Affinity*, in many cities. The

story of *Les Hannetons* is decidedly unpleasant and its characters are vicious. The acting won recognition, but the play itself was condemned. Nothing daunted, Laurence Irving returned to New York in the spring of 1910, and brought out a translation of yet another "unpleasant" play, also by M. Brieux, *The Three Daughters of M. Dupont.* Never politic, he made a hasty speech, on the eve of the production, at the Lotos Club, in the course of which he said that "one fourth of Shakespeare's words cannot be spoken in public," and he denounced *The Merry Widow* as "a highly deleterious entertainment." After-dinner speeches must not be taken too seriously, but there was no wisdom in this particular one. The story of M. Brieux's play is well known here and need not be dwelt upon. The piece was denounced in good set terms by more than one of the leading critics of New York, one of whom found it "representative of nothing except that which is sordid and base in human nature and domestic life, and remarkable only for one exceedingly disgusting scene, in which husband and wife, after abusing each other in coarsely recriminative language, some of which is unfit to be heard and should not be spoken, engage in a sort of human cat-fight, snorting and snarling, upsetting the furniture, and presenting an odious spectacle of vulgarity; the woman finally biting the man, and the man then hurling the woman upon a lounge."

It seems a pity that his mind did not run on the lighter side of life, strange, indeed. For Laurence Irving was by no means a sordid or lugubrious person. The tendency which in Harry worked itself out in the study of crime was seen in Laurence in the plays which he translated or otherwise had some share in the writing. They invariably deal in the seamy side and they have little comedy.

From New York, Laurence came back to England, and brought out, in July, a play by Walter Frith, *Margaret Catchpole*, founded on the story of the Suffolk girl as depicted in the tale by the Rev. Mr Cobbold. The part of the adventurous heroine was a showy and exciting one for her representative, and Laurence received much commendation for his vigorous and humorous portrayal of the amusing scamp, John Luff.

His first striking and enduring success in London was made in *The Unwritten Law*, his own version of the chief work, *Crime and Punishment*, of the Russian novelist, Fedor Dostoievsky. Written in 1868, the story found its way to the stage through the version of C. H. Meltzer, acted by Richard Mansfield in America in 1895. That actor, however, found the character of Rodion Romanytch unsuitable and he speedily ceased to appear in it. The realistic story made a strong appeal to Laurence Irving, who fashioned it into a play for E. H. Sothern, by whom it was produced for the first time in New York in March 1908. It did not

prove an attraction to that player, who, like Mansfield, soon discarded it.

Now called *The Unwritten Law*, it was brought, after a preliminary trial in the provinces, to London, and at the Garrick Theatre in November 1910 Laurence Irving, as actor and adapter, found an opportunity for his ability. The story is gruesome and there was not a touch of humour in the dramatisation. The whole thing is pitched in a minor key. The pall of despair hangs over all the sad story. Rodion is a half-mad enthusiast, a student impregnated with the sadness and horror which almost envelop him. He is constantly brooding over the wrongs of his country and its people, until at last, in a moment of wrath, he slays a man, thereby saving the honour of a girl, Sonia. This act he considers a just one, and he excuses himself on that ground. He is, nevertheless, suspected by the police and eventually subjected to a terrifying ordeal. The murder is re-enacted in his presence, with such detail that he nearly betrays himself. He goes through a world of torture, somewhat similar to that inflicted upon the unhappy burgomaster in *The Bells*. In the end his mind is restored by "the pious counsel and admonition of Sonia: and whereas, at first, he was strong in the opinion that there is no God and that every man is entitled to take into his own hands the execution of justice, he is at last persuaded that God reigns and that vengeance is a

province of Divine Power." He portrayed the anguish of the character very finely. His artistic success was fully recognised, but, as his predecessors in the part in America had found, such plays and such parts do not make for popularity. From the Garrick Theatre, he migrated to the Kingsway, where he gave a polished, incisive impersonation of the old scoundrel, the Comte de Marigny, in *The Lily*, which formed a remarkable contrast to the maddened Rodion. A few weeks later he was seen as the Governor in his own one-act play of Russian life, *The Terrorist*, and as John Luff, at the Duke of York's Theatre. Unhappily for Laurence Irving, the London public did not like Dostoievsky's drama, or the vicious picture of French life in *The Lily*, or the story of the Suffolk celebrity, Margaret Catchpole. Once more, there was a tour in the country, in the autumn of 1911, with *The Lily* and *The Unwritten Law*.

CHAPTER XVII

HAMLET AND SKULE

IN the course of that tour he made his appearance as Hamlet. Every serious actor longs to play Hamlet. Once an actor has determined upon that venture, nothing can prevent the attempt. Ambition is generally the motive, for has not every great actor of serious intention appeared as the Prince of Denmark, even though not always with success? *Hamlet*, moreover, is such an excellent play, viewed merely from the point of stage-craft, that, even if inadequately presented, it seldom fails. Laurence Irving was far above the average actor, in mentality and in individuality. There was no reason why he should attempt to follow in the footsteps of his father and other great Hamlets. He had his own idea of Hamlet, whom he represented as a very young man and a veritable spoilt child. He placed him among Elizabethan surroundings, as he "could not help feeling that the actual clothes, ornaments, weapons, and other things mentioned belonged to that period." By thus framing the tragedy in an old English setting, he gave the court scene of the first act, in particular, a novel air, albeit the appearance of the King dressed like Sir

Walter Raleigh or the Earl of Leicester seemed incongruous. This new decoration of *Hamlet* was novel, but not in keeping with the spirit of Shakespeare. It was, of course, in accordance with the Hamlet of the occasion, a picturesque and extremely youthful figure. Laurence Irving's Hamlet was that of an affectionate, rather impish boy, who shrank from the task of avenger in no uncertain manner. He was admirable in the emphasis which he gave to Hamlet's "antic disposition." His elocution was particularly good—thanks, maybe, to having the lines of Shakespeare to interpret—his variety and descriptive force enabling him to give a winning picture of the young prince. As was to be expected in one of his virility, the great scene between Hamlet and the Queen was most effective. It should be recorded that he acted Hamlet for the first time on 9th November 1911, in Edinburgh, where, it will be remembered, his brother had played the part six years previously.

Laurence Irving did not appear as Hamlet in London—the character, indeed, was soon dropped from his répertoire—and his Justice Shallow was not seen in the metropolis. To Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice* he gave a nobility which is generally wanting on the stage and very properly made him a less doleful person than he is generally represented. His Shakespearean characters, save the early one in which he appeared with the Benson

company, were very few—insubordinate ones with his father, then Shallow, Hamlet, and, in April 1912, Iago to the Othello of Herbert Tree at His Majesty's Theatre. The latter impersonation was highly intellectual, and helped in the impression that Laurence Irving would, if his lines had fallen in such pleasant places as those of his brother, have risen to a high place as an actor. Even though all the critics were not agreed as to the perfection of his interpretation, there was no variant as to his intention as Iago. "Here we saw," said a writer in *The Outlook*, shortly after the death of the actor, "not Othello's visage, but Iago's, in his mind. His was the very mental picture of the man; no honest, burly ensign, but a limber devil, a word-player, a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles. It was, above all, the verbal dexterity of the man which seized and caught the actor's fancy; he elaborated the portrait with the wealth of thoughtful understanding which was his own. It was in a net of true Shakespearean equivoque that this Iago did enmesh them all. He spoke the words trippingly, and built all the time a picture of a man who was the essence of cold, intellectualised malignity; seconding his imaginative understanding with that ability to place the figure corporeally before us which is always within the power of the natural actor. One remembers particularly his play upon the word 'angry' in that fourth scene of the third act; his cat-like

watching of Desdemona; his exit, at her request, to care for Othello. It was a fine performance, never melodramatic, completely well realised and at one with itself." On the other hand, in furtherance of being unconventional, he turned the blank verse into a kind of mechanical prose, a proceeding which caused censure.

The engagement at His Majesty's over, he was once more forced to find scope for his work in the provinces. His labours, it is evident, were unceasing. At Harrogate, two months after his first appearance as Iago, he produced a version, written by himself, of *The Barber of Seville*, in which he acted the libertine Count of Almaviva. Fortune, hitherto none too kind, was at long last about to bestow her favours, fleeting though they were, upon him. In the autumn of this year, at Newcastle-on-Tyne, he produced the one play which, in all his career, brought him welcome popularity, and, as a consequence, a certain monetary reward. This was *Typhoon*, by the Hungarian dramatist, Melchior Lengyl, a drama of Japanese life and character, which he fashioned for the English stage. Between the provincial and the London production of that piece he gave the finest impersonation that he ever accomplished. Dr Takeramo won him favour with the multitude. Earl Skule stamped him as an actor who bade fair to take his place in the front rank of his calling.

It was a misfortune that such an exceptional

LAURENCE AS RICHARD LOVELACE

performance should not have had the chance to win its way with the public. *The Pretenders* is a magnificent drama. Its production at the Haymarket Theatre (on 13th February 1913) is a brilliant feather in the cap of the present management of that historic house. It is no disparagement to that management when I say that such a play, to have had complete justice done to it, would have needed the combined efforts of a Henry Irving and an Arthur Collins, and a stage of far greater proportions than that of the Haymarket. It is a play that must have its proper scenic background, with space as well as imagination for its effects, and with stage crowds as well drilled as those which astonished London when the Saxe-Meinengen company came to Drury Lane forty odd years ago, when Irving himself followed the good example and gave, in *Romeo and Juliet*, such stage crowds as were entirely new to the English theatre. The pictorial accessories of *The Pretenders* are paramount. As for the acting, there is not one of the twenty characters that does not call for the very best that is possible. The minor parts are as clearly delineated by Ibsen as the more important and require careful handling. The three chief characters, King Hakon, Earl Skule, and Nicholas Arnesson, the Bishop of Oslo, demand a trio of actors of the highest ability. The Bishop is a character much resembling that of Louis XI., a cunning, wicked old man, who gloats even in the hour of his death

over the wickedness which he is about to do in order that he may perpetuate trouble in the land, a splendid "character" part which Henry Irving could have played to perfection. King Hakon, an honest, brave, open-hearted soldier, stalwart in mind and body, calls chiefly for a good presence, a robust and honest-visaged performer. It is a straightforward part which any sound actor, possessing the necessary and physical qualifications, could appear in to advantage.

Earl Skule is on an entirely different plane. He would be King, but kingship is not his by right either of birth or of noble qualities. There is much of Macbeth in him—the longing to be on high, but fearing the way—and of Hamlet, the doubter, the dreamer. He is led hither and thither by the schemes of the wily Bishop Nicholas. It takes mountains to move him to make the effort to which his ambition prompts him. It is not until he is rebuked for his want of kingly qualities that he resolves to carve his way to the throne. "You had been well fitted for a chieftain's part," Hakon tells him, "but the time has grown away from you and you know it not. See you not that Norway's realm may be likened to a church that stands as yet unconsecrate? The walls soar aloft with mighty buttresses, the vaultings have a noble span, the spire points upwards, like a fir-tree in the forest; but the life, the throbbing heart, the fresh brook-stream, is lacking to the work; God's living

spirit is not breathed into it; it stands unconsecrate.—*I* will bring consecration! Norway has been a *kingdom.* It shall become a *people.*" It is the King's idea to unite the Trönder with the Viken, the Agdeman with the Hordalander, the Halogalander with the Sogndalesman. "All shall be one hereafter, and all shall feel and know that they are one! That is the task that God has laid on my shoulders; that's the life-work that lies before the King of Norway. That work, Duke, I think you were best to leave untried, for truly it is beyond you." Skule is at first appalled by the idea: "To unite the whole people—to awaken it so that it shall know itself one! Whence got you so strange a thought? It runs like ice and fire through me." He finally resolves to steal the King's thought and himself to be King of Norway. For a time the battles go in his favour, but he has not state-craft or the power of command. He is at his best in defeat. He has taken sanctuary in the convent of Elgesæter. By a miracle, as it seems, he meets here his wife and daughter, his sister, and, afterwards, his newly found son, Peter. He has been out-generalled by King Hakon, and the end approaches. Margrete, his daughter, who is the wife of Hakon, says: "Oh, how pale you are—and aged. You are cold." "I am not cold—but I am weary, weary," he replies. "'Twill soon be time to rest." To his wife and daughter he says: "Have you loved me so deeply, you two? I

sought after happiness abroad, and noted not that I had a home wherein I might have found it. I pursued after love through sin and guilt, little dreaming that 'twas mine already, in right of God's law and man's." In this momentary happiness, he vacillates and would save himself, but is brought to his sense of duty through the uplifting of his noble sister, Sigrid. To his son he confesses: "You saw in me the heaven-chosen one—him who should do the great King's work in the land. Look at me better, bewildered boy. The rags of kingship I have decked myself withal, they were borrowed and stolen—now I put them off me one by one. The King's thought is Hakon's, not mine; to him alone has the Lord granted the power that can make substance of it. You have believed in a lie; turn from me, and save your soul." His wife implores him to flee and save himself. But he sees his duty and does it:

SKULE. To-night have I found you for the first time; there must fall no shade between me and you, my silent, faithful wife; therefore must we not seek to unite our lives on this earth.

SIGRID. My kingly brother! I see you need me not. I see you know what path to take.

SKULE. There are men born to live and men born to die. My desire was ever thitherward where God's finger pointed not the way for me; therefore I never saw my path clear till now. My peaceful

home life have I wrecked—that I can never restore. My sins against Hakon I can atone by freeing him from a kingly duty which must have parted him from his dearest possession. The townsfolk stand without; I will not wait for King Hakon. . . . See, look upwards! See how it wanes and pales, the flaming sword that has hung over my head. Yes, yes—God has spoken and I have understood Him, and His wrath is appeased. Not in the sanctuary of Elgesæter will I cast me down and beg for grace of an earthly king. I must into the mighty church roofed with the vault of stars, and 'tis the King of Kings I must implore for grace and salvation over all my life-work."

. . . . . .

SKULE (*as he hears the singing in the chapel*). Hark! They are singing loud to God of salvation and peace!

SIGRID. Hark again! All the bells in Nidaros are ringing——!

SKULE. They are ringing a king to his grave.

SIGRID. Nay, nay, they ring for your true crowning! Farewell, my brother, let the purple robe of His blood flow wide over your shoulders; under it may all sin be hidden! Go forth, go into the great church and take the crown of life.

Skule is indeed a great part, one of the greatest written in modern times. It is also the character that made what was formerly called an "Irving

part." In it Laurence Irving proved himself a worthy successor of his father as an actor. It was a wonderful embodiment. Unhappily, few people saw it, and the most notable performance of all that he ever gave passed out of mind. The Earl Skule of Laurence Irving reminded elderly playgoers of the subtlety and light and shade of his father's Macbeth, as his Comte de Marigny had made them compare that performance, and not unfavourably, with Henry Irving's Digby Grant.

CHAPTER XVIII

TYPHOON AND CANADA

FROM artistic and popular triumph to sudden death. That is the last phase in the story of Laurence Irving. Strangely enough, he had barely fulfilled his engagement as Earl Skule ere he was brought back to the stage whereon he had achieved so much. *The Pretenders* did not secure that commercial success which is necessary to a self-supporting theatre. Still, thirty-five performances of Ibsen's drama were given, a creditable result for all concerned in its production. The run terminated on 15th March and the Haymarket Theatre closed. The representative of Earl Skule left London once more, little dreaming that he was to return in a fortnight. He had great faith, a faith that was fully justified, in *Typhoon*. He felt sure of himself in it, and it had, as we have seen, been tried in the provinces with success. It is a happiness to me when I think of the share which I had in suggesting its London production. No sooner had Laurence Irving reached Birmingham than he begged me to come down and see the play. His request was made on the spur of the moment, for I had seen him but seldom since the death of his father. To Birmingham I went with-

out delay. Well do I remember my arrival on a murky afternoon at New Street Station. There was Laurence, untidy-looking, but smiling cheerfully, accompanied by his faithful dog, "Lop." Well do I remember the walk back to the hotel after the performance and the long and earnest talk in which Laurence and his wife confided to me their hopes and prospects, which were poor indeed at that moment, and their belief in *Typhoon*. If only they could get it to London, and to the Haymarket, now closed and in need of a play! Laurence Irving's impersonation of the Japanese, Takeramo, had impressed me greatly. I felt that the drama would have a good chance of success in London, especially if done at the Haymarket, with the artistic reputation and prestige of that house for discernment. I promised to intercede at once with the Haymarket manager, Mr Frederick Harrison, and left Birmingham early in the morning after the performance which I had witnessed. I was soon in touch with Mr Harrison, who lost no time in seeing *Typhoon*. His judgment confirmed mine, details were arranged with celerity, provincial engagements were transferred, and on 2nd April —eighteen days after the withdrawal of *The Pretenders* — Laurence Irving returned to the Haymarket Theatre.

It was pointed out by the critic of *The Times* that Laurence Irving as Takeramo appeared "more Japanese than the real Japanese who

appear here and there in the cast ; not merely in make-up, but in every trick of speech and gait and gesture, in his persistent suppression of emotion, in the calm, almost saintly, dignity of his demeanour." Here, indeed, was a contrast in acting. From the wild, excited student of *The Unwritten Law* to the mystery of Earl Skule and the dignity and nobility of the Japanese Takeramo. Great public success, as well as artistic, came to him at once. *Typhoon* soon became a paying attraction (which, as just suggested, was very important to the chief actor). After more than one transfer—it was played successively at the Haymarket, Queen's, Globe, and New theatres—it finished its London career with over two hundred performances to its credit.

We now approach the last scene in this eventful history, this story of constant endeavour, of long looked-for success at last, and of a tragic end. Haunted, as was his father at the close of his life, by the necessity of earning money, he accepted an offer to tour Canada for four months, beginning on 9th February, in Montreal, and ending on 18th May, in Winnipeg. In that short period he played in thirty towns from one side of the continent to the other. A letter to his mother, one of many sent from Canada, is characteristic : " There are a hundred and one things to do in this country," he writes, soon after his arrival. " More even than in England the natives seem to think that one's

chief concern in life should be meeting them, lunching with them, lecturing to them, and so on. Our most pleasant experience so far has been our lunching at Government House with the Duke and Duchess of Connaught. Mabel sat on the Duke's right and I sat between the Duchess and Princess Patricia. They were all exceedingly charming. After lunch the Duke came and talked to me for about a quarter of an hour in the drawing-room. This was on the Thursday afternoon. On the Tuesday evening the Royal party had been to see *Typhoon* again, and they sent round two aides to take us to the Royal box. As in Canada they have no Royal room attached to it, we, practically in our war-paint, had to pass through the audience, and any prying members of the audience could see the Royalties conversing with us. The Duke said that he thought *Typhoon* was just as well done as at the Haymarket. Sir Edward Worthington told Mabel that he would always come to any first night of mine, and could hardly stop talking about Takeramo. We had a filthy voyage, five days of continuous gale, but now, Heaven be praised, we are quite well, but we are certainly looking forward to getting home."

Early in this Canadian tour, on the 10th March, he delivered, before the University of Toronto, an address on *The Drama as a Factor in Social Progress*. The majority of addresses, or lectures, by actors on subjects connected with the stage are, as

a rule, dry reading. They rely for their acceptance upon the popularity, or personality, of the player, and after their delivery the mere words no longer interest. Laurence Irving's last " address " is a remarkable exception. It is typical of himself. It came from his heart in 1914, and its eloquence speaks to-day:

" Every child is a theatre-lover and every child is a born actor. I will not say that every child is born with the skill to act, but at least every child is born with the desire to act. From what does this desire spring? It springs, I believe, from the divine gift of dissatisfaction—from that quality of the human mind which has been very well summed up in a Russian proverb that says: ' Happiness is there where we are not.'

" What human creature is satisfied with the conditions and environment into which it is born? A certain inevitability reconciles us at an early age to our own particular father and mother, but otherwise it is, I am sure, a primary condition of human existence to envy the lot of others as contrasted with our own. We all know that a millionaire's son in his early years will probably above all things wish to be a tram-conductor, or an engine-driver, and an engine-driver's son will probably above all things wish to be a Lord Mayor's footman, or something equally resplendent. And the child of the millionaire, feeling himself trammelled by what appear to him, in the budding state of his

intelligence, as the inane and perfectly unpleasurable millions of his father, loves to get himself well grimed and to imagine himself heroically annihilating space on the footplate of an engine; whilst the son of the engine-driver, being bred up in an atmosphere of coal and machinery, finds no charm whatsoever in either. Both these young gentlemen no doubt in early years solace their disappointment, and as far as possible satiate their energy, by the art of acting—that is, by imaging themselves to be, and pretending to be the objects of their envy.

"With the growth of the body and the mind this projecting of the imagination into other states of being, and this dissatisfaction with the actual and compulsory conditions of the earthly lot deepens and becomes intensified in the heart of the adult; it is touched to even finer issues; and in the noblest of minds it finds its ultimate imaginative bourne in the sublime philosophy of religious contemplation and the transcendental visions of religious ecstasy. The burnt cork which the little boy of three or four years smears on his upper lip, whilst he tastes the reckless and ferocious joys of imaging himself a pirate captain, has no doubt often developed and sanctified into the tonsure of the monk. In such strange and mysterious ways does the wanton imagination of the boy change into the sublime and purified yearning of the full-grown man.

"It is the desire of the heart that draws after it

the imagination, and in its turn, the imagination saturates the desire of the heart. For the ultimate desire of the heart is bound at last in the final resort to turn towards religion. And I do not think I can better illustrate to you the exact meaning of my thought than by quoting what seems to me one of the most perfectly solemn and exquisitely phrased poems that I have ever read:

"'Dominus Illuminatio Mea

In the hour of death, after this life's whim,
When the heart beats low, and the eyes grow dim,
And pain has exhausted every limb—
The lover of the Lord shall trust in Him.

When the will has forgotten the lifelong aim,
And the mind can only disgrace its fame,
And a man is uncertain of his own name—
The power of the Lord shall fill this frame.

When the last sigh is heaved, and the last tear shed,
And the coffin is waiting beside the bed,
And the widow and child forsake the dead—
The angel of the Lord shall lift this head.

For even the purest delight may pall,
And power must fail, and the pride must fall,
And the love of the dearest friends grow small—
But the glory of the Lord is all in all.'

"Who can resist the sublime summons of those sixteen lines? And whoever has seen the famous mystery play, *Everyman*, will surely feel that a like supernal grandeur of sentiment has been borne in

upon him, with all the added vividness of human presentation, from the stage of a theatre.

"Perceiving this enormous power of influence, it has come about that in all ages the theatre has received its initial development at the hands of the priesthood, and under the ægis of religion. Those whose special pretension it has been to inculcate upon their fellow-men the higher standards of conduct and to safeguard them against backsliding by the promises of an after life, have never at the outset failed to realise that for the inculcation of the particular virtues set forth in their several creeds, and for the preservation of a fine and noble imagination, no channel is so direct and powerful as that of the stage. This is clearly exemplified in the religious origin of Greek tragedy, in the miracle and mystery plays of mediæval Christianity, and in what are known as the Buddhistic No dramas of Japan; we even see the same phenomenon amongst the nomadic tribes of Siberia, as Tolstoi has told us in his famous essay: *What is Art?* Which makes it the more pitiful to see how much of modern drama has become at the best trivial and at the worst salacious. A fact which calls for no demonstration—it is before the eyes of all of us.

"But there are manifold signs to-day that the theatre is returning—nay, has already traversed a great part of the way—towards founts from which it sprang; that it is becoming again a draught of

clear and life-giving water for the parched and thirsty imagination, as well as a stay and a stimulus to the loftiest emotions of our nature.

"There is no doubt that the stage presents, in common with every human impulse and every human activity, a power for evil in closest proximity to its power for good. One sees how a noble ambition most easily degenerates into a love of idle glory and conquest; how kindliness of disposition may gradually sink into a mere lazy toleration; how purity of conduct often leads to a hard self-righteousness of outlook; how love of one's family may gradually shrink into a narrow exclusiveness, and love of one's country into a mere purblind Jingoism.

"As it is with our moral qualities, so it is with the institutions which minister to our wants or supply our pleasures; and as is the case with all other arts, so it is with the theatre. The theatre can diffuse light and high imaginative sustenance, or it can pour forth streams of debasement and pollution. And many nobly zealous but unwise moralists have fallen into the terrible pit of banning all art, and most particularly the theatrical, as being the most vivid in its appeal, because of this duality of influence.

"In trying to eradicate the high pleasures of the theatre from the purview of their flocks, these good-minded people have set themselves a labour of Sisyphus; and, however estimable the motives

which actuate them in trying to curtail the imagination of one of its keenest pleasures, it behoves them to be warned that by depriving themselves of what should be a lofty and legitimate source of delight and inducing others to do the same they are simply abandoning the field of theatrical entertainment to be overrun with tares and leaving the laborious husbandman, who spends his artistic life sowing and trying to reap a harvest of worthy theatrical entertainment, by the abstention of these pious folk, to be gradually weighed down beneath neglect and disappointment; or, what is still worse, if he be not of very strong fibre, gradually forced to lower his work to the low standard of taste dictated by those who patronise the theatre only to degrade it. But such a warning is, I think, more necessary on our side of the Atlantic than on yours.

"Of this kind of degradation imposed on a great writer by the public of his time we have a very notable example in Dryden, who may induce our pity, but hardly our respect, when he pleads the low theatrical tastes of his day in exoneration of the grossness of his own plays. Nevertheless, in the age of the Restoration as in every other—the age which produced *The Pilgrim's Progress*—there must have been a vast public that could have found wholesome relaxation and the loftiest edification in the theatre. But, alas, libertinage had taken possession of the boards, and bigotry—certainly in this case very excusable—had written

up over the door of every playhouse—'Abandon Hope All Ye Who Enter Here.'

"And, unhappily, even to the present day that bigotry still holds its sway over the spirit of many an otherwise admirable person. The conflict between high and low—between evil and good, between the spirit and the flesh—must rage within the breast of every one of us, and therefore nothing that proceeds from our mental or spiritual activities can exist without it—but to say that Art, or any branch of Art, is wholly and irredeemably given over to the purposes of evil is surely a blasphemy against a function of the human spirit which, as I have pointed out, has received its earliest recorded form as a concerted and elaborate act of prayer and praise, as a means for inculcating acceptance of the dictates and obedience to revelations of the Heavenly powers.

"Granting, then, that the true function of the stage be to strengthen men in high resolves, to expand their sympathies and, in the case of comedy, to correct their foibles and to keep their minds healthily poised, how does the present-day theatre discharge this trust?

"For my part, though in a very obvious transition state, I think that the theatre is to-day in a period of lusty strength and bursting promise; and, without wishing to wound the susceptibilities of anyone present to-day—but since I am committed to express as candidly as lies in me my views regarding

the form of artistic activity by which I live—I cannot help saying that I feel that the religious feeling of the community at large is more thoroughly interpreted and more vigorously expounded by the work of our great writers and dramatists than by any other body of men. I think that in these days religion has, so to say, burst its bonds; it has ceased to dwell in the high places with its sacred fire guarded by some College of Ministers, or sacred sisterhood of Vestals; it has come down into the market-place; its fire burns on every hearth; it permeates and sanctifies the pages of such writers as Victor Hugo, Charles Dickens, Lyoff Tolstoi, John Galsworthy, Maurice Maeterlinck—nay, even on the pages of that laughing, but ever kindly humanitarian philosopher, George Bernard Shaw, and that relentless arraigner of social ills, Eugène Brieux; it likewise sends suffragettes to jail, and, when carefully examined, the religious instinct is undoubtedly at the root of that vast universally upheaving force which we loosely lump together under the vague term of socialism.

"To-day the individual cannot breathe without taking in draughts of socialistic tendency, and every vent of our much criticised and sorely troubled social order exudes the same balm, or, as some would call it, the same virus. It behoves the State—as at the present time it behoves us all—to take stock of and to resent the terrible waste of life, the misdirection of energy, the vast stagnant

pool of degrading penury that in my own country most flagrantly and pitifully assails the eye of anyone who late at night on a summer's evening walks by the railings of Hyde Park or by the polluted waters of the Thames—once the inspiration of poets and now the laceration of every sympathetic heart. Such a spectacle should stab one's patriotism, if it be a true patriotism, to the very core; and it should turn one's pleasures to gall if one's pleasures be of the kind that are worthy of a human being.

"A great cry for the draining of these social quagmires that pollute the air we breathe and the ground we tread on is going up in all lands, and from all manner of people. And the stage is rightly taking its share in riveting our gaze upon these evils.

"There is a great and, I think, a very right impatience of the quietistic injunction so comforting to the selfish well-to-do that 'the poor shall be always with us.' Perhaps they shall, but need they be with us in such enormous numbers or in poverty so filthy?

"The theatre has in a hundred and one directions sought to bring home to our consciences the preventability of much of the misery that darkens the world, and in doing so the modern theatre has incurred the stigma of being sordid, squalid, cheerless, didactic; many of the foremost dramatists have been branded as pamphleteers. Nor are

these charges false. And power that might have been devoted to the creation of works of beauty and exaltation has been diverted to purposes which were at one time served exclusively in the pulpit, and not in the playhouse. Perhaps the three most illustrious instances of this diverting of creative genius to social exhortation are presented in the cases of Ruskin, Tolstoi, and William Morris. As in every man of vast genius the primary impulse and the dominating force comes from what in figurative language we term the heart, it is for that reason that these three artistic giants, as well as many of lesser stature, did in the maturity of their powers to a large extent forgo the pursuit and creation of works of art to raise their potent voices on behalf of the outcast and downtrodden of Society. It is the ugliness of so much of modern life, its base and ruthless pursuit of money, its vulgar material standards, which are answerable for the dethronement of that joyous instinct from which works of the highest art spring. It is only the small singer or dramatist who is able to sit aloof and tune his pipe or manipulate the puppets of his imagination whilst hundreds of thousands are born into the mire, live in it and die in it.

"I do not think any great creative artist has ever been satisfied with the creed of 'Art for Art's sake.' The big men care first and last for the welfare of their own kind—pity ever wells up in their hearts, and from that divine sentiment are

born such terrible arraignments of modern conditions, such passionate pleas for amelioration as *Resurrection*, as many burning passages in *Fors Clavigera*, as *Les Misérables*, as Tolstoi's *Dominion of Darkness*; in drama, as the bulk of the work of Galsworthy and Brieux, and many more.

"Yet we must hold to the belief that the travail of unrest now permeating, one might almost say, the Globe, will eventually bring forth a state in which toil and leisure will be fairly adjusted between man and man; and that out of such a social redistribution there will re-arise a condition propitious and fruitful in the creation of great works of universal Art.

"Thus in the theatre, as in every other art, we must keep our lamps burning, so that when the cleansing fire of high passionate dramatic work or the pure clear flame of lucid comedy is again offered to us as it was in the days of Shakespeare and the days of Molière we may, as actors, be found ready equipped to interpret to the utmost finish of our art—fine diction, clear enunciation, appropriate gesture, eloquent facial play—the renascent genius of our writers.

"Not that I would for a moment suggest that most brilliant work is not being done, as well in the British as in the foreign drama. On the contrary, there is plenty of such work now to hand—finer, I think, than the actor has had presented to him for many decades, rich in clever character study and

fresh with wit and humour. But for the most part it is what I would call contentious work—the dust of controversy is apt to cake it, and the source of much of its inspiration came from that gloomy Scandinavian Titan, whose perspicuous and somewhat morose broodings certainly enveloped much of his work in what dear old Samuel Johnson characterised as 'inspissated gloom.' But, as I say, there is every sign of revival of a more joyous, a more care-free art, but our civic and social life is indivisibly bound up with our faculties for giving and receiving high artistic enjoyment, and only as we move forward along the path of social amelioration—that path that shall once for all dispel the false animosities of races and nations, which shall found distinctions of class on a basis of conduct and attainment and not of birth, which shall teach Science to follow its salutary labours without torturing the bodies of our humbler fellow-creatures —that is, when war, snobbism and vivisection are relegated to the shameful limbo of cannibalism, voodoo, witchcraft and other excesses of the barbarous state—when the divine teaching of Christianity as regards our conduct to one another, and the sweet tenets of Buddhism as regards our kinship to the animal world; when they shall have made our material progress what it should be, a source of wise peace, of lightness and of increased recreation for all, then again I think we shall enter into that palace of Art whose service has been very beauti-

fully described in a passage I lit on the other day from the writings of the Hindoo poet, Tagore:

"'My heart is full and I feel that happiness is simple
like a meadow flower,
We grasp it with a cruel eagerness and crush it;
we jump beyond it in our mad pursuit
and miss it forever.
I look around me and see the silent sky and
flowing water and feel that happiness
is spread abroad as simply as a smile on
a child's face.'

"Again, I think Samuel Taylor Coleridge has, with something of the simplicity the Hindoo poet so beautifully characterises, summed up the spiritual position of man in these two lines:

"'He prayeth best who loveth best
All things, both great and small.'"

CHAPTER XIX

A TRAGIC END

De mortuis nil nisi bonum. It is a royal rule for those who write about worthy men. Harry and Laurence Irving were worthy in every sense of the word. In other respects they were strongly contrasted. Both were tall, but Harry was so thin that one wondered how his emaciated frame ever stood the strain of his forty-nine years. He had no love for animals (he could "sense" a cat, although he did not see it, in a room). He was never a trencherman; and, like Cassio, he had "poor and unhappy brains for drinking." Laurence resembled in stature many of the Brodribbs who rest in Clutton churchyard, big, burly fellows, fine specimens of the yeomen of Somerset. His father used to relate the story of an uncle, a farmer, who, returning from the market-town where he had sold his stock, was set upon by ruffians, robbed and left for dead near the roadside. He was awakened in the early morning by his mare, who had escaped from the miscreants, licking his face. He managed to scramble on her back, and the faithful animal found her way home, with her master still stunned and his blood sticking him to the saddle. Laurence

was like that ancestor. He was just that physical type. He would have done the same thing. And his horse would have loved him in that same way. He enjoyed a good dinner and a good cigar. "I'm like my father about food," he said to me one evening at dinner during the *Typhoon* year. "I like good food—and," with a cheery smile at her, "Mabel sees that I get it!—and a cigar." Harry smoked but rarely, and then only on special occasions of hospitality.

Laurence was intensely fond of his home. It has been my privilege to read many of his letters. There is hardly one that does not contain some kindly thought for his home in London or an affectionate reference to his cottage in the country, and to his dog. Here is one, written in the train on his way from Exeter during his tour of the music halls:

"DEAR MOTHER,—Please excuse pencil, but your poor younger son has been rushing from one town to another doing flying matinées. They are over-trying, and at this time of year not profitable. Only sea baths have kept me up at all. . . . The little place at Hove is delightful. When I can, I always go down on a Sunday and work in the garden—which is full of all manner of fruit and vegetables. If it were not for the loneliness, it is wonderful what attractive and uncostly little places one can buy in the country—buy and

possess. I feel I never better invested money than in the —— I paid for the little house at Hove. There is for all time a roof over our heads."

A little later he writes:

"We take definite flight to the country on Monday. I hope we shall get a good four or five weeks in the cottage."

On reaching home from his visit to America in 1909 he wrote:

"DEAREST MOTHER,—So delightful to get your words of welcome on being back in this most comfortable of little homes. Ellen has wonderfully looked after everything, including Lop, whose only fault is that he has grown rather too stout in our absence. We had a bad crossing from the New World to the Old, but we have really had quite an overwhelming amount of success, and that without any extrinsic aid. We gave two matinées in New York of *Les Hannetons* during the last week, with the result that we are offered an autumn tour in the U.S. at £200 per week joint, and for ourselves alone. The difficulty is, can I shift my English autumn dates? If I can, in America I fancy we are really made. The papers were all loud in their praise of the play and of us. Well, I hung on to it despite disappointments here, and I am rewarded. And in the music-halls we were also a great success. So at the moment all smiles on my fortunes."

Ever cheerful, always hopeful, loving his home. "All smiles on my fortunes." Brave fellow, Fortune smiled upon him but seldom, and then not for long. As in life, so it was in death. Harry died not only in peace, but in the lap of luxury. I esteem it an honour that I was the only one of his friends who was asked by Mrs Irving to accompany his dead body from his house to the Church of St Margaret for the funeral service (his widow, mother, and children followed later). The way was prepared and cleared for us by the police; and, as we passed from Regent's Park to Westminster without a halt, it seemed to me that I was taking a prince to his resting-place. An hour or two later, as the last words of the Committal Service were read, the sun came forth in great brilliance, lighting up the masses of flowers which had been arranged around his grave, illuminating a picture of beauty and peace.

The last scene in this life of Laurence was one of vast gloom, and swift, terrible tragedy. It was due, without a doubt, to the home longing which he had always possessed. We have seen how this feeling was strong in him at the outset of his Canadian tour. "We are certainly looking forward to getting home." At the end of that tour, instead of returning with his company, as had been arranged, he journeyed from Winnipeg (where, on, Saturday, 23rd May, he made, in *The Unwritten Law*, his last appearance on the stage) to Montreal,

where he embarked in the *Empress of Ireland*, with the idea of reaching home two days earlier than if he had kept to his original plans. On the following Friday it became known that the vessel, one of the most magnificent of her kind, obliged to stop in consequence of a dense fog, had been rammed by a Norwegian collier. She sank in ten minutes, with the loss of eight hundred lives. Laurence Irving died nobly, as became him, in trying to save, and in comforting, his wife. This is the story of that last scene, the witness being a credible one, Mr F. E. Abbott, of Montreal, who saved himself by diving from the doomed ship and clinging to a piece of wreckage:

"I met him first in the passage-way, and he said calmly: 'Is the boat going down?' I said that it looked like it. 'Dearie,' said Mr Irving to his wife, 'hurry, there is no time to lose.' Mrs Irving began to cry, and as the actor reached for a life-belt the boat suddenly lurched forward and he was thrown against the door of his cabin. His face was covered with blood, and Mrs Irving became frantic. 'Keep cool,' he warned her, but she persisted in holding her arms around him. He forced a life-belt over her and pushed her out of the doorway. He then practically carried her up the stairs. I said: 'Can I help you?' and Mr Irving said: 'Look after yourself first, old man. God bless you, all the same.'"

As the ship went down, husband and wife were

clasped in each other's arms and Laurence was kissing his faithful friend and helpmate as the waters of the St Lawrence closed over his dreams and that ever-present longing for home whereby had come his tragic death.

The tragedy of his death was all the deeper because, before that unlooked-for calamity, Laurence Irving was apparently to be rewarded for his earnest work and his honest life of high endeavour. In the prime of manhood, in the best of health, physical and mental, he was coming home at last, home to success, well-won, and seemingly assured. Although Fate struck him this cruel blow, his death served one good purpose. It revealed, in regard to his brother and himself, the joyful fact that the sons had come, through all doubt and prejudice, to know their father as he really was. No actor on the English or any other stage suffered in his lifetime such malignity as Henry Irving. He was the butt of envious scrawlers, and was caricatured, in print and in the theatre, in a manner which it would be difficult for the present generation to realise. He lived all that down and came to be loved and honoured in the land. In that love and honour the sons shared. The death of Laurence evoked from Harry a beautiful letter written in reply to one sent by their father's old friend, and the friend of their boyhood, Arthur Pinero. Harry was on tour at the time. Very properly, he decided to keep faith with the

public and he continued to fulfil his engagements. This was the answer which he sent to the words of sympathy expressed by one who had known and revered his father:

"KING'S ARMS HOTEL,
"OXFORD,
"*June 3rd*, 1914.

"MY DEAR PINERO,—There is one letter of all I have received I am going to reply to now, for it has brought more comfort and given me greater heart and encouragement to bear my sorrow than any other—and that is yours—and so I just want to tell you that as best I can. To know at such a time that we two boys to whom you were so kind and good in those far-off days have not disappointed in our lives the hopes of so true and affectionate a friend is something to be happy about in the midst of so much that is dark and sorrowful, and please God, I will do my best to be worthy of a father and brother such as mine. There is plenty to contend against but a letter such as yours gives one heart and courage to bear and endure. Whether one succeed or fail, there can be no worthier endeavour than to try to do right in the eyes of those we love and respect. I know these words are poor to express what I feel, but your letter has made me face this awful tragedy with some touch of resolve to be the better and the stronger for it. It has all seemed so bewildering and cruel—why one is taken

and the other left—often the least worthy. This is the first time I have tried to write, but I had to open my heart to you—your letter called me to do it. It has meant, and will mean, something to me which I feel your words intended that it should. My love to you both—and oh! so greatly do I thank you, kindest of friends.

"HARRY."

We have seen, in connection with the unveiling of the statue in Charing Cross Road, the loyal words used on that occasion by "H.B." That was a public function, when it was only natural that a son should speak in praise of his father. Even so, sincerity was the keynote of the speech. Here, however, we have a private letter, written from the heart, and without any thought that it would be read in the cold light of publicity eight years after it was penned. "Please God, I will do my best to be worthy of a father and brother such as mine." The appreciation of their father was shown by the younger as well as by the elder son. To the same "kindest of friends," Laurence Irving, immediately after the death of Henry Irving, wrote as follows:—

"I remember the last conversation I had with you—how grave you then considered the state of my father's health: now the sad end has come. The grief remains with us; but for himself such a

weariness had come upon him lately, that one can hardly help feeling that the rest he craved for has come to him almost without struggle or suffering. I am very thankful that I was able to see much of him during his last years; to judge of my poor father, I think, fairly—which the unfortunate circumstances, you know, did not allow me to do when I was younger. I still feel sorrowfully that we were not all, I think, we might have been to one another: I think it was difficult for either of us to say what was in our hearts. I don't think you will wonder at my writing like this to you: I always felt how true an affection you had for my father and what a true and strong regard he had for you."

The story of Henry Irving and his sons is as wonderful as it is sad. It began in loneliness, in gloom, in mistrust. It ended in sadness, but in understanding. The father died ere yet the sons had come to their complete knowledge of him and their consequent reverence and affection. "I am very thankful that I was able to see much of him during his last years; to judge of my poor father, I think, fairly." There is a world of meaning in those simple words. It was death that called them forth, just as the passing from "life to eternity" of Laurence caused Harry Irving to let his own heart reveal the truth. Thus, were the father and his sons united at last. Thus, death dissolved all doubt and brought peace to Harry and Laurence

and true affection for the memory of the great man who had gone before them, his ambition accomplished.

Be patient and be wise! The eyes of Death
Look on us with a smile: her soft caress,
That stills the anguish and that stops the breath,
Is Nature's ordination, meant to bless
Our mortal woes with peaceful nothingness.
Be not afraid! The Power that made the light
In your kind eyes, and set the stars on high,
And gave us love, meant not that all should die—
Like a brief day-beam quenched in sudden night.
Think that to die is but to fall asleep
And wake refreshed where the new morning breaks,
And golden day her rosy vigour takes
From winds that fan eternity's far height,
And the white crests of God's perpetual deep.

WILLIAM WINTER.

Appendix

PARTS PLAYED BY H. B. IRVING

THE following is a list of the parts played by H. B. Irving throughout his career. Including the four characters acted by him while he was at Oxford, it will be seen that he impersonated ninety characters, during the thirty years of his life, at Oxford and as a member of the actor's calling. His Shakespearean impersonations were fifteen in number. Those parts marked with an asterisk * he acted for the first time. He created thirty-seven parts. The dates are those of the original performance of the various plays.

OXFORD, 1889-1891.
- Decius Brutus in *Julius Cæsar.*
- Wentworth in *Strafford.*
- King John.
- Boyet in *Love's Labour's Lost.*

GARRICK THEATRE, 1891.
- Lord Beaufoy in *School* (comedy, by T. W. Robertson, 16th January 1869).
- Philip Selwyn in *A Fool's Paradise* (play, by Sydney Grundy, 7th October 1887).

COMEDY THEATRE, 1894.
- *Dick Sheridan (comedy, of the same name, by Robert Buchanan, 3rd February 1894).
- Paul de Valréas in *Frou-Frou* (drama, by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy, Paris, 30th October 1869).

WITH MR BEN GREET'S COMPANY, 1894-1895.
- Ned Annesley in *Sowing the Wind* (comedy, by Sydney Grundy, 30th September 1893).
- Sir Charles Pomander in *Masks and Faces* (comedy, by Charles Reade and Tom Taylor, 20th November 1852).
- Julian Beauclerc in *Diplomacy* (the English version, by B. C. Stephenson and Clement Scott, of Victorien Sardou's *Dora,* 12th January 1878).
- Claude Melnotte in *The Lady of Lyons* (Bulwer Lytton's play, 15th February 1838).

Alfred Evelyn in *Money* (Lytton's comedy, 8th December 1840).
Young Marlow in *She Stoops to Conquer* (Goldsmith's comedy, 15th March 1773).
Charles Surface in *The School for Scandal* (Sheridan's comedy, 8th May 1777).

COMEDY THEATRE, 1895.

Louis Farquhar, M.P., in *A Leader of Men* (comedy, by Charles E. D. Ward, 9th February 1895).
Lord Petworth in *Sowing the Wind.*

WITH MR BEN GREET'S COMPANY, 1895.

Leontes in *The Winter's Tale.*
Digby Grant in *Two Roses.*
Othello.
Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing.*
Don Pedro in *Much Ado About Nothing.*
Orlando in *As You Like It.*
Biron in *Love's Labour's Lost.*
Orsino in *Twelfth Night.*
Sir Tristram in *King René's Daughter.*
Armand in *A Village Priest* (adapted by Sydney Grundy from the French, Haymarket Theatre, 3rd April 1890).
Hamlet.

DUKE OF YORK'S THEATRE, 1896.

Basil Lambert in *The Fool of the Family* (comedy, by Fergus Hume, 30th January 1896).

WITH MR BEN GREET'S COMPANY, 1896.

Marcus Superbus in *The Sign of the Cross.*
Jaques in *As You Like It.*
Romeo.

ST JAMES'S THEATRE, 1896-1901.

Captain Hentzau in *The Prisoner of Zenda* (adapted from Anthony Hope's story, 7th January 1896).
Oliver in *As You Like It.*
*Edward Oriel in *The Princess and the Butterfly* (comedy, by Arthur W. Pinero, 29th March 1897).
*Loftus Roupell in *The Tree of Knowledge* (play, by R. C. Carton, 25th October 1897).
Don John in *Much Ado About Nothing.*
Jean Beaudin in *The Conquerors* (drama, by Paul M. Potter, originally produced in America; St James's, 14th April 1898).

*Sir William Beaudevere in *The Ambassador* (comedy, by John Oliver Hobbes [Mrs Craigie], 2nd June 1898).

*Marquis of Monfero in *A Repentance* (drama, in one act, by J. O. Hobbes, 28th February 1899).

*Sir Ulick Beddart in *In Days of Old* (drama, by Edward Rose, 26th April 1899).

*Rupert of Hentzau in play of same name (one act, by Anthony Hope, Glasgow, 5th October 1899 ; St James's, 1st February 1900).

*Roger and Lewis Dunster in *The Man of Forty* (play, by W. Frith, Manchester, 27th October 1898 ; St James's, 28th March 1900).

GARRICK THEATRE.

*Paul Digby in *The Wedding Guest* (play, by J. M. Barrie, Garrick Theatre, 27th September 1900).

ST JAMES'S THEATRE.

*Lord Appleford in *The Wisdom of the Wise* (comedy, by J. O. Hobbes, St James's, 22nd November 1900).

Sir Bryce Skene in *The Masqueraders* (play, by H. A. Jones, St James's, 28th April 1894).

*Lord Reginald Dugdale in *The Awakening* (play, by C. Haddon Chambers, St James's, 6th February 1901).

TERRY'S THEATRE, 1901.

*Bellac in *The Lion Hunter* (comedy, by J. T. Grein and Martha Leonard, 10th March 1901).

IMPERIAL THEATRE, 1901.

*Col. Sir Philip Pangdon in *A Man of his Word* (play, by Boyle Lawrence, Imperial, 21st August 1901).

DUKE OF YORK'S THEATRE, 1902-1904.

*Orlando Della Torre in *The Twin Sister* (adapted by Louis N. Parker from Ludwig Fulda, 1st January 1902).

*Prince de Chalençon in *The Princess's Nose* (comedy, by Henry Arthur Jones, 11th March 1902).

Baron de Montrichard in *There's Many a Slip 'Twixt Cup and Lip* (play, adapted by Robert Marshall from Legouvé's comedy, *La Bataille de Dames*, Haymarket, 23rd August 1902).

*Mr Crichton in *The Admirable Crichton* (play, by J. M. Barrie, 4th November 1902).

*Nevill Letchmere in *Letty* (drama, by A. W. Pinero, 8th October 1903).

*Captain Dieppe in play of that name (by Anthony Hope and

Harrison Rhodes, first acted in America; Duke of York's, 5th February 1904).

Sir Montague Martin in *His Excellency the Governor* (play, by Robert Marshall, 11th June 1898; revived, Duke of York's, 12th March 1904).

ADELPHI THEATRE, 1905.

Hamlet.

WALDORF (now STRAND) THEATRE, 1905.

*Lieut. Von Lauffen in *Lights Out* (drama, translated by H. B. Irving from *Zapfenstreich*, by Franz Adam Beyerstein, Waldorf, 25th October 1905).

SHAFTESBURY THEATRE, 1906.

*René Delorme in *The Jury of Fate* (play, by C. M. S. McClellan, Shaftesbury, 2nd January 1906).

LYRIC THEATRE, 1906.

*Roger d'Autran in *Mauricette* (play, translated by H. B. Irving from André Picard's *Jeunesse*, Lyric, 31st March 1906).

*Markheim in a play of that name (adapted by W. L. Courtney, from a story of the same name, by R. L. Stevenson, Lyric, 14th April 1906).

Iago.

PROVINCES, 1906.

Giovanni Malatesta in *Paolo and Francesca* (tragedy, by Stephen Phillips, St James's, 6th March 1902).

Lesurques and Dubosc in *The Lyons Mail.*

Charles the First.

CHICAGO, 1906.

Mathias in *The Bells.*

PROVINCES, 1907.

*King Charles II. in *The Lion and the Unicorn* (farce, in one act, by Laurence Irving and Tom Heslewood, Bolton, 28th August 1907).

Louis XI.

*Cæsar Borgia in a play of that name (by Justin Huntly McCarthy, Edinburgh, 21st November 1907).

SHAFTESBURY THEATRE, 1908-1909.

[Lesurques and Dubosc, Hamlet, Charles I., Louis XI.]

QUEEN'S THEATRE, 1909-1911.

[Mathias.]

*Richard Cardyne in *The House Opposite* (drama, by Perceval Landon, 30th November 1909).

*The Stranger in *For the Soul of the King* (one-act drama,

translated from the French by Perceval Landon, December 1909).

*Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde (in a new version, by J. Comyns Carr, of Stevenson's story, 29th January 1910).

*The Examining Magistrate in *Judge Not* (from the French of P. G. Duchesne, 28th May 1910).

Robert Macaire.

*Charles Wogan in *The Princess Clementina.*

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE.

[Hamlet, 14th April 1910; 9th May 1911.]

[AUSTRALIAN TOUR, May 1911-May 1912.]

DRURY LANE 1912.

Nobody in *Everywoman.*

SOUTH AFRICAN TOUR, 1913.

*Sir Hubert Lisle in *The Sin of David* (play, by Stephen Phillips, Johannesburg, March 1913).

ST JAMES'S THEATRE, 1913.

Dazzle in *London Assurance* (comedy, by Dion Boucicault, 4th March 1841).

SAVOY THEATRE, 4th October 1913.

*Désiré in *The Grand Seigneur.*

PALACE THEATRE, 1913.

Arthur Blair Woldingham in *The Van Dyck* (he subsequently played the same part in the principal provincial music-halls).

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE, 22nd May 1914.

Wilfred Denver in *The Silver King.*

SAVOY THEATRE, July 1914.

[Sir Hubert Lisle in *The Sin of David.*]

STRAND THEATRE, September 1914.

[Wilfred Denver.]

PALACE THEATRE, MANCHESTER, November 1914.

Corporal Gregory Brewster in *A Story of Waterloo.*

COLISEUM, December 1914.

[Corporal Gregory Brewster.]

SAVOY THEATRE, 1915-1918.

*Robert Blaine in *Searchlights* (play, by H. A. Vachell, 11th February 1915).

*Hon. Hyacinth Petavel in *The Angel in the House* (play, by Eden Phillpotts and B. Macdonald Hastings, 18th May 1915).

*Harley Napier in *The Case of Lady Camber* (play by H. A. Vachell, 15th October 1915).

*Beverley in *The Barton Mystery* (drama, by Walter Hackett, 22nd March 1916).

Professor Goodwillie in *The Professor's Love Story* (comedy, by J. M. Barrie; first time in London, 25th June 1894; Savoy, 7th September 1916).

[Mathias, Hamlet.]

*Albert Mott in *Humpty Dumpty* (comedy, by H. A. Vachell, 14th June 1917).

*Stephen Pryde in *The Invisible Foe* (drama, by Walter Hackett, 23rd August 1917).

DRURY LANE THEATRE, 2nd May 1916.
Cassius in *Julius Cæsar.*

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE, 5th July 1915.
Cardinal Campeius in *King Henry VIII.*

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE, 17th December 1918.
[Sir Charles Pomander in *Masks and Faces.*]

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H. B. Irving: An Appreciation. By M. E. Wotton, with 21 illustrations. A 48-page pamphlet. 1912.

"H.B." AND HIS CHILDREN

H. B. Irving was the father of two children, Laurence Henry Forster Irving, born 11th April 1897, and Elizabeth Dorothea Irving, born 14th April, 1904. His son, who distinguished himself during the war in the Air Force, is now an artist. He was married on 19th April 1920 to Rosalind Woolner. His daughter made her first appearance on the stage, as one of the peasant girls in *The Bells*, at the Savoy Theatre, 22nd April 1917. She made her professional début on 4th December 1920, at the Court Theatre, as Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* Subse-

quently, she appeared in her mother's old part, Trilby, in August 1921, with the Old Stagers at Canterbury, again, in December, with the Windsor Strollers. Laurence had no children. The will of H. B. Irving was proved for £39,176. The estate of Laurence Sydney Brodribb Irving was valued at £937 gross, with net personality *nil.*

MRS LAURENCE IRVING

Mrs Laurence Irving, known to the majority of theatre-goers as Mabel Hackney, was overshadowed by her husband. She was, however, a good all-round actress, especially in parts which did not call for the display of the tender side of woman's nature. Yet she was by no means unsympathetic, and she made Laurence an affectionate and devoted helpmate, understanding his simple nature and tending him with solicitude, guiding him as best she could in his work in the theatre, seeing that his home and his comforts wanted nothing that her loving care could provide. He never tired, in public as well as in private, of testifying to her good qualities. Mabel Lucy Hackney was a native of Swansea. In her early career, she was at the St James's Theatre, and then, in 1900, became a member of Henry Irving's company. At the time of her marriage, May 1903, she was twenty-eight, three years younger than Laurence. She left £5761. A memorial service for Laurence and his wife was held at St Margaret's, Westminster, on 10th June 1914. The funeral service for his brother took place in the same church on 21st October 1919, seven years almost to a day (20th October) after the interment of his father's ashes in the Abbey near by. Harry was buried in the cemetery at Hampstead.

BARRIE AND THE IRVINGS

There is an interesting connection between the "Irving boys" and Sir James Barrie. "H.B." was the first representative of the Admirable Crichton; Laurence played in *Walker, London* (a three-act comedy, produced at Toole's Theatre on 25th February 1892), the play which brought the author into prominence. In his speech at the dinner given to him by the Critics' Circle at the Savoy Hotel on Friday, 26th May 1922, Sir James Barrie, describing his imaginary island, made a beautiful allusion to the three Irvings: "The dead are here also, and you can hardly distinguish them from the living. The laughing Irving boys arrive in a skiff, trying to capsize each other; and on magic nights there is Sir Henry himself, pacing along the beach, a solitary figure."

NOTE

THE criticism on H. B. Irving as Hamlet by Mr Bendall, quoted in Chapter X., and my own article, written immediately after the death of "H.B.," appeared in *The Observer*. I contributed to *The Times*, in 1921, six articles on Harry and Laurence Irving. Those memoirs met with such a sympathetic reception that I was encouraged to write this book.

A. B.

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