

III: AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND - THE EARLY YEARS, 1915-1920

"He the best player!" cries Partridge, with a contemptuous sneer. "Why, I could act as well as he myself. I am sure, if I had seen a ghost, I should have looked in the very same manner, and done just as he did. ... The king for my money! He speaks all his words distinctly, half as loud again as the other. Anybody may see he is an actor."

Henry Fielding, Tom Jones (Bk.xvi, ch.5)

Allan Wilkie's career in Australia had an auspicious beginning, for his first certain engagement was with Nellie Stewart (1858-1931), Australia's most popular actress at that time. In January 1915 she completed a successful run of revivals which showed her in some of her best-loved roles: Nell Gwynne in Paul Kester's *Sweet Nell of Old Drury* (1900), Dorothy Vernon in *Dorothy o' the Hall* by the same author, and the title role in David Belasco's *Du Barry* (1901). George Musgrove, who managed her career, organised a company to tour New Zealand with these popular productions, and Wilkie was taken on as "heavy man". It was the last time that Nellie Stewart was to tour New Zealand, and it proved to be a highly successful venture." It gave Wilkie ample opportunity to observe theatrical conditions in that country, where he was later to tour with his own company six times. His memoirs comment on the well-equipped theatres which even the smaller New Zealand centres seemed to possess, unlike many towns in Australia.<sup>2</sup>

The tour, which opened in February 1915, ran for about four months, and the company then returned to Australia to play a two-week season in Adelaide which opened on 5 June. As English

imports, Allan Wilkie and Clarence Blakiston, who was engaged as leading man, were naturally featured prominently in the advertising for the productions, although Wilkie was rather curiously referred to as a "leading character actor from the Garrick Theatre, London". The Adelaide *Advertiser* (7 June) gave Wilkie his first personal notice in Australia, yet also found cause to be critical of his performance in *Du Barry*: "Mr Allan Wilkie emphasised the brutality and wickedness of Comte Jean du Barry, but seemed to forget that he was supposed to be a polished and seductive villain." Villainy was the common link between all three of the characters he played, the others being Sir Malcolm Vernon ("a double-dealing scoundrel") and the harsh Judge Jeffreys. Managers frequently cast him in such roles, perhaps because of his build - he was a large man, over six feet tall - and his forceful style of delivery.

The company was disbanded after the brief Adelaide season, but within a month Wilkie found an engagement with the J.C. Williamson firm. He was given the role of Sir George Crandall, Governor of Gibraltar, in *Inside the Lines*, an American spy play by Earl Derr Biggars. The play opened in Sydney at the Criterion on 7 August with two imported stars, Ian Maclaren from England and Charlotte Ives, an American actress, but it was not well received by critics or audience. As the *Bulletin* commented (12 August 1915): "the importing habit of J.C.W. Ltd. reaches its height of unwisdom when it brings us in war time a war-play from a foreign, unallied country." Not only did it offend in this respect, but it simply was not a good play, and it was withdrawn after only two weeks.

The monthly *Theatre Magazine* noted Wilkie's performance:

Allan Wilkie has a fine voice for Sir George Crandall—deep, round and musical. But it isn't too deep. He has, too, the height for the character, and the requisite military appearance. With such natural qualifications for the part it need hardly be added that it is more than a good performance [1 September 1915, p.14].

Although this gives no indication of Wilkie's acting ability, it does concentrate on the two features of Wilkie that are most frequently singled out for praise or condemnation - his voice and his physical appearance. Wilkie's performance passed unnoticed by the *Bulletin*, which did, however, draw attention to the fine work, in a small role, of Gregan McMahon. This was one of the few occasions on which the paths of Wilkie and McMahon, both destined to make major contributions to theatre in Australia, were to cross directly.<sup>4</sup>

Williamson's sent the company out on tour, pairing *Inside the Lines* with an American comedy by James Forbes called *The Travelling Salesman*. In this play, which starred Shep Camp, an American comedian, Wilkie was cast as Martin Drury, "a shoddy plutocrat of the shark type", whose sole function was to place difficulties in the path of the heroine. This part he played "with aplomb and reserved force", according to the *West Australian* (9 October). The company played in Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth, but by the time it reached this third venue, *Inside the Lines* had been withdrawn, to be replaced by another war play, *The Man Who Stayed at Home*. This British play, by Lechmere Warroll and Harold Terry, was much more acceptable to audiences and critics alike. It was advertised

as "a bright, amusing and thrilling play, seasoned with all the sensations of the moment." There was apparently no part for Wilkie in this production, but his wife, who had joined the company on its visit to Brisbane, took the role of Mrs Miriam Lee, and gave what the *West Australian* (4 October) called "a clear, forceful and natural presentation of a woman of the world." The tour ended shortly after the conclusion of the Perth season, and the Wilkies were left without employment for several months.

This enforced period of "resting" was broken in December through Wilkie's slight acquaintance with Walter Bentley, an old Scottish actor resident in Australia. Bentley, who at that time was secretary of the Australian Actors' Association, was organising a benefit matinee and farewell to the stage for George S. Titheradge. This popular actor, whose health was failing, was celebrating fifty years in the theatre, thirty-two of which had been spent in Australia. Bentley's own contribution to the programme was a one-act play he had written, called *Kultured War: A Tale of the German Invasion of Belgium*. He invited the Wilkies to appear in this play, suggesting that it would be a good means of bringing themselves to the notice of theatrical managements. Accordingly, they appeared on 10 December 1915 as "Madam Stormberg" and "Colonel Herts" at Her Majesty's Theatre, Sydney. It was at about this time that the Wilkies gained an invaluable contact in the person of George Marlow, "the chief purveyor of melodrama in the commonwealth".

Wilkie had written to Marlow, hoping for the offer of an

engagement with one of his drama companies. At that time, the Marlow firm specialised in what the *Bulletin* nicknamed "Marlowdrama" \_ sensational plays featuring greatly-wronged and nearly-seduced heroines - for which there was a considerable demand.<sup>12</sup> The prospect of an engagement for one of these plays was by no means congenial to the Wilkies, but prolonged unemployment held even fewer charms. As a means of introduction, Wilkie's letter had enclosed some circulars of his Shakespearean tours in England and Asia, and this reaped unexpected benefits:

My delight can be imagined when he made an appointment and suggested organising a Shakespearean company to be headed by my wife and myself to open the following month [January 1916] in Melbourne. [13]

What prompted Marlow to take this unusual step is not clear, though perhaps he was encouraged by the excellent business to which Oscar Asche had played his last season of Shakespeare in 1913. *The Lone Hand* (1 May 1916, p.352) later provided its own colourful explanation of the event, in a short article obviously designed to excite public interest in the forthcoming season at the Sydney Adelphi. According to this effusion, Marlow had been visiting Manchester on business, and happened to drop into a theatre where *The Merchant of Venice* was being played. In his own words:

I am a keen Shakespearian [sic] student, ... and know my Shakespeare from cover to cover. But never have I seen or imagined such a reading as this man gave [as Shylock]. I sat enthralled throughout the play. ... I was carried away by the superb acting and magnetism of the man. Not one of the great stars of the theatrical profession. ... Just a man of ordinary reputation, playing an ordinary season of Shakespeare. But if that man could come to me now ... I would stake all I possess on a

Shakespearian season. It would be an investment, not a gamble. The man had genius. Australia would go mad over him. I know the Australian public so thoroughly.

The man, to Mr Marlow's reported delight, turned out to be Allan Wilkie, and a season in Melbourne was immediately arranged. Whether or not one is prepared to believe this publicist's fantasy, the fact remains that Marlow and Wilkie agreed to terms for an initial try-out of four weeks in Melbourne, at Marlow's Princess's Theatre. Wilkie was to select the plays, cast them and rehearse them. He was given a free hand in the production and in the selection of costumes and sets, always provided that salaries and "did not exceed a stated and not excessive figure." The<sup>14</sup> costs company was to be called the George Marlow Grand Shakespearean Company, and Marlow's firm was to provide the theatre, the financial backing, and the publicity.<sup>15</sup>

Wilkie's first task was to build a company for the season, and immediately he encountered a difficulty. He and his wife were, of course, to play all the leading roles, but the difficulty lay in finding - in a fairly short time - enough actors able to cope with the demands of Shakespearean verse. This problem had been largely created by Australian theatrical conditions, the normal practice being for managements to import entire companies from overseas, with the result that local actors had little opportunity to develop the skills of classical acting. For Wilkie, the problem was compounded by his own sense of standards for Shakespearean acting, an art which could only be attained by long

and arduous practice, "and even then only if the actor possesses the necessary emotional and temperamental equipment." Nevertheless he made the best of the situation, drawing actors from all sources. For example, Elwyn Harvey (Marlow's sister-in-law), whom he engaged for such roles as Jessica, Maria and Celia, had done most of her training in melodrama, while John Cosgrove had some Shakespearean experience. He had appeared, for instance, as one of the lovers in George Musgrove's 1903 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and had played Claudius in Walter Bentley's 1909 production of *Hamlet*. P. Vincent Scully, who was engaged as assistant stage manager, and who also played minor roles (Tubal, old Adam, the Second Player), had worked for a time with George Rignold, and had apparently acquired some Shakespearean background. With these and others, Wilkie noted,

one way and another I managed to get together a good working company and as I found the Australian actor very keen, adaptable and intelligent, I managed by dint of strenuous rehearsals to assemble a presentable company.[17]

The first production to be staged by the George Marlow Grand Shakespearean Company ("every individual member of which is a prominent artist") was *The Merchant of Venice*, with Allan Wilkie ("the Distinguished English Actor") as Shylock and Frediswyde Hunter-Watts ("the brilliantly clever exponent of Shakespeare's heroines") as Portia. This opened at the Princess's Theatre on 22 January 1916, and it was to be succeeded by five other Shakespeare productions. These were *Othello*, which opened on 5

February, *Hamlet* (19 February), *Twelfth Night* (4 March), *As You Like It* (18 March), and *Romeo and Juliet* (25 March). All of these were comparatively popular choices, and all of them had been staged Melbourne within the preceding ten years. 19 in

*The Merchant of Venice* opened to a half-empty house, and two reasons may be put forward to explain this relatively poor attendance. In the first place, the company was competing for an audience in that week alone with five other live theatrical entertainments, in addition to a number of silent film programmes. Williamson's was presenting its annual pantomime at Her Majesty's (*Mother Goose*, still running at the end of February), and another of its "great war plays" at the Theatre Royal, entitled *Under Fire*. Vaudeville was on offer, as usual, both at the Tivoli and at Fuller's Bijou Theatre, where the programme included a "topical musical burlesque" called *Hello, Saint Kilda*. Still further competition came from the King's Theatre, where the Bailey-Grant management were presenting Ethel Dane in *The Chaperon*, soon to be followed by a revival of Brandon Thomas's popular farce *Charley's Aunt* (1892). But a more important reason for poor attendance seems to have been distrust of the unlikely combination of George Marlow and Shakespeare. Marlow's reputation was for sensational melodrama at "popular prices", and the public was apt to view with this new offer of "cut-price" Shakespeare. Advertising<sup>21</sup> suspicion sought to overcome this barrier. The public was offered a chance to see "a high-class production at the very bedrock of expense",<sup>22</sup> but since the two stars were unknown in Australia, it may well



have been assumed that, just as admission charges were about half that for a Shakespeare production by Oscar Asche or H.B. Irving, so the standards of the Marlow Company would also be halved.

Nevertheless, the first-night audience greeted the start of this new Shakespearean venture enthusiastically, and George Marlow was sufficiently pleased with its launching to speak at the end of performance of his gratification at its success. <sup>23</sup> the success had yet to be confirmed, however, and during the two-week run of *The Merchant of Venice*, reluctance to attend was only gradually overcome.

If the public was hard to convince, the press, at least, was prepared to be generous in its initial support. Marlow was to be congratulated for taking the financial risk of presenting highbrow theatre, while Wilkie merited praise for his careful, anything, it was the <sup>24</sup> scholarly productions. If they lacked quality of theatrical splendour and spectacle which would enrich Shakespeare's texts. Such a quality had been provided by the Shakespearean productions of Oscar Asche, with which he had toured Australia in 1909-10 and in 1912-13, and memories of the more recent tour, in particular, were vividly retained by most reviewers. Consequently, Wilkie's productions had to face direct comparison with those of Asche throughout these early seasons, often to the disadvantage of Wilkie. The *Age* reviewer, for example, was to make the following comment on Wilkie's production of *Othello*:

In appraising Mr Wilkie's *Othello* it is impossible to withhold it from comparison with the towering figure presented by Mr Oscar Asche. Mr Wilkie does

not thrill with the same intensity of acting  
... [7 February 1916].

Similarly the *Bulletin* noted that "where the rich voice and clean enunciation of Oscar Asche were most effective, Wilkie was least impressive" (10 February). Asche had last staged his revival of *Othello* in Melbourne in March 1913. At the same time, the critics were prepared to welcome any honest effort to stage Shakespeare at a time when most theatres were filled with a diet of pantomime, vaudeville, light comedy and musicals.

*The Merchant of Venice* had last been staged in Melbourne in an Asche revival at the Theatre Royal in March 1913. Asche's portrayal of Shylock was described as that of a "grunting, red-headed Fagin ... unduly repulsive and mean in character" [*Bulletin*, 30 December 1909). Wilkie's Shylock, regarded as the antithesis of that performance, was described by the *Age* reviewer as "one that secures rather than alienates sympathy" (24 January 1916, p.6). The reviewer also commented that Wilkie's portrayal was clear, consistent, and possessed of "a certain dignity of bearing", but that it raised few questions about the character, preferring to tread the path of tradition. The moment of greatest audience sympathy for Shylock (in this reviewer's opinion) was gained during a piece of business interpolated into the text. After Jessica had eloped with Lorenzo (II.vi), Shylock made an entrance, discovered the absence of his daughter, and from within his house presumably in heartbroken tones,<sup>25</sup> was heard to call "Jes-si-ca!". An entrance for Shylock at this point was a fairly common addition, which Tree had certainly used in his production of the play.

Another piece of business copied from earlier productions came in the trial scene (IV.i), when Wilkie's Shylock was seen whetting his knife on the sole of his shoe in anticipation of his victory, while later he approached the kneeling Antonio, knife poised to latter move was condemned by<sup>27</sup> cut into his exposed chest. This the *Age* reviewer as "a thoroughly melodramatic touch that mars the picture." Wilkie further maintained a sense of tradition in his costume, which copied the one Irving had worn. The *Argus* (24 January, p.6) summed up Wilkie's portrayal as "a straight-forward, sensible delineation ... that reaches an audience far better than the high tragic methods of former times." The remainder of the cast was largely dismissed. Miss Hunter-Watt's interpretation of Portia was briskly disposed of by the *Bulletin's* reviewer, who described her as

merely a pleasing brunette qualified to shine at a charity bazaar. Her style is essentially modern and her casual, flippant manner in the trial scene is excusable only on the supposition that she knows from the start that Shylock has not Buckley's chance of getting his knife into Antonio ... [27 January, p.8].

This assessment of her performance was shared by both the *Age* and the *Argus*. However, although her Portia left much to be desired, her Desdemona, Rosalind, Viola, and Ophelia were all to be received with favour.

The biggest success of the season appears to have been the production of *Twelfth Night*, with Allan Wilkie as Malvolio. The Popularity of the play was indicated by the fact that it drew the

largest opening-night audience to date in the season - a fact which may also reflect the growing reputation of the George Marlow Shakespearean Company. Wilkie had added a great deal of comic business to the play, and this was commented upon by reviewers in the *Age* (6 March, p.9), the *Argus* (6 March) and the *Bulletin* (9 March, p.8). Their attitude to these additions was generally favourable, and can be summarised in the comment made by the *Age's* reviewer:

Allan Wilkie has built from the text of *Twelfth Night* a comedy to fit the modern stage, but has not introduced an entry, an action or an exit that is not richly Shakespearian [sic].

Much of the business was built around Malvolio, whom Wilkie portrayed as "a solemn ass, a man so crusted over with the observance of his own outward dignity that he had nothing kindly or human left" (*Argus*). Although the Melbourne reviewers were apparently unaware of the fact, much of Wilkie's interpretation of Malvolio (and the comic business that surrounded him) stemmed from Beerbohm Tree's production of the play, first staged at Her Majesty's, London, in 1901. Wilkie had been able to observe this production at first hand when he played minor roles in the 1904 revival, and he recalled Malvolio as "quite the most effective performance that Tree gave in Shakespeare although he rather burlesqued it. I daresay [sic] my performance owed a lot to him, his exaggerations." Much of the business<sup>28</sup> though I toned down that Wilkie brought to his own production was designed to emphasise the comic pretentiousness of the steward. His first entry was made to the accompaniment of a special musical motif, to the beat

of which he strutted on in a stately walk. This motif was played whenever he appeared, and it provided an accumulated comic effect. He was accompanied on to the stage by "four comic minions with black tights and thin legs" (*Age*), who carried his signs of office. This was a variation of Tree's Malvolio, who had been attended by "four smaller Malvolios, who aped the great chamberlain in dress, in manners, in deportment."<sup>29</sup>

For Malvolio's final appearance, Wilkie again turned to Tree for inspiration. The *Argus* reviewer noted that Wilkie's exit was very different from those of the two Malvolios last seen in Melbourne. W.H. Denny (who played the part at the Princess's Theatre in January 1904), avoided pure buffoonery, while George Titheradge (at Her Majesty's, Melbourne, in October 1908) gave a performance that was humorous but lacking in pomposity. Both actors, according to the *Argus*, finished upstage with the words "I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you" coming from a broken and discredited man. Wilkie, following Tree, decided to end the play on a happy note. After his final line, there was

a contemptuous laugh from the assembled spectators, on which Malvolio turns and silences them with a look, slowly removes his chain and badge of office and flings it at Olivia's feet, then slowly makes for the exit upstage. Olivia taking pity upon his fallen state beckons to Fabian to run and call him back. Malvolio slowly returns and Olivia picks up the chain of office and motions to him, he kneels and she places the chain around his neck. He kisses her hand and stands erect, his old self, and goes off with his pompous walk and head in air.<sup>30</sup>

All this was carried out to the accompaniment of a slow, mournful version of the Malvolio motif, until the moment of his re-instatement,

when it became triumphant. Wilkie went on to say "... how much of this business I owed to Tree and how much I evolved myself I don't know. Probably a combination of the two. However, it was most effective."

Wilkie's production of *Romeo and Juliet*, which completed the Melbourne season, proved to be a misguided choice in some respects, largely owing to the fact that Wilkie chose to play Romeo opposite his wife. He was at that time thirty-eight years old, and apparently was neither physically nor vocally acceptable as an ardent teenage lover. Of course, an aging Romeo was by no means without precedent. Irving had undertaken the role in 1882, aged forty-three, and in Australia in the 1880s W.J. Holloway had played Romeo to the Juliet of his step-daughter Essie Jenyns, nearly twenty-five years his junior. Yet the critics were united in suggesting that Wilkie had made an error of judgement in allotting himself the part. Rather than being an impetuous boy, he gave the impression of being "a rather morose, secretive, and nature lover of thirty" (*Argus*, 27 March 1916) - or as the *Age* succinctly put it on the same day, he presented "Hamlet in an orange doublet". The *Bulletin* was blunter:

In rage, despair or amorous mood ... Wilkie was obviously not the man for the part. He has no youthfulness of speech. His sombre and somewhat lumpy voice has no caresses in it (30 March, p.8).

Miss Hunter-Watts also received some criticism for the age of her Juliet, but was excused for the sake of her charm and her "artistic interpretation". Seeking to praise, the *Argus* commented:

One point for admiration was the really beautiful manner in which she entered into the minuet at the dance at Capulet's house [I.v], She danced it and the other ladies walked it. Touches like this make for art in acting.

Another possibility, of course, is that there was insufficient rehearsal time to teach the "extra" ladies the steps of the dance.

For this play only, Wilkie obtained the services of Clara Stephenson, who took the role of the Nurse. This actress had played the same role in a production which starred Miss Tittell Brune and Arthur Greenaway as the lovers, at Her Majesty's, Sydney, in November 1904. At that time, it was reported that Miss Stephenson was making her re-appearance after nearly twenty years' retirement from the stage, so Wilkie's decision to cast her again in 1916 created a pleasing link with Australia's past history of Shakespearean performance.

Despite the complaints of the critics, *Romeo and Juliet* ran to its full twelve performances, and evidently did good business, probably because the Wilkies had by now succeeded in establishing a reputation. This had been aided by the fact that they had gained the patronage of the Governor-General and his wife, Sir Ronald and Lady Helen Munro-Ferguson (later Lord and Lady Novar) . They attended several performances and also made available the grounds of Government House, during the last week of the season, for an open-air performance of *As You. Like It*, on behalf of the French Red Cross - an effort which raised a large sum for the cause. This was the first of a number of open-air performances Wilkie was to give in Australia, emulating the work of Ben Greet, though generally

for the novelty value, and for charity. It was an astute move on Wilkie's part to cultivate the help, patronage and sympathy of the Governor-General, since this conferred social status on the company and its productions, and therefore helped to swell attendances and the prestige of the Shakespearean actors. Throughout his career in Australia, Wilkie was to pursue associations of this kind.

The original agreement with the Marlow firm had been to run an experimental Shakespeare season of four weeks. So successful had this venture proved that it ran to a total of eleven weeks in Melbourne, in which time Wilkie presented six of Shakespeare's plays and proved that they could make money.

This, as indicative of our success, was gratifying enough in itself, but my wife and I had the further satisfaction of knowing that we had firmly established ourselves in the good graces of the Melbourne public ... and we could look forward with confidence to repeating the process throughout the Commonwealth. [34]

Certainly, on the basis of the success of this initial season, the Marlow firm was quite prepared to back further runs of Shakespeare, and a Sydney season was arranged, to play at Marlow's Adelphi Theatre. According to Wilkie's memoirs, Marlow carefully timed this Sydney season for Easter, in order to take advantage of the expected influx of visitors for the annual agricultural show. The season opened on 12 April 1916 with *Hamlet*, and over a period of ten weeks the Melbourne repertoire was repeated. Sydney critics received the productions much as those in Melbourne had done, though at times they gave the impression of being a little harder to please. For example, while the *Bulletin's* Sydney reviewer approved



of Wilkie's simple, direct interpretation of Hamlet -

Instead of portraying an incomprehensible individual in an inky suit, Wilkie presents a Hamlet who is vital; instead of a stagey, attitudinising abstraction, a man with breath and blood in him [20 April, p.8]

\_ he also said that Wilkie's company and *mise en scene* let him down to some extent:

The supporting players range from fair to medium and awful; and the production is on a scale of magnificence equal to anything yet attempted at Wagga Wagga.

Wilkie added one new play to his repertoire for the Sydney season. This was *Richard III*, which commenced a two-week run on 13 May, using the Colley Cibber adaptation. It met with a mixed reception. Wilkie in the memoirs asserted a preference for this version: for all its crudities, it represented, in his estimation, a better and more compact stage play than the wordy and diffuse original by Shakespeare. But another reason for his choice of Cibber for Sydney emerges also. *Richard III* had formed part of Wilkie's repertoire in his years as an actor-manager in England, and his memoirs record the fact that he had been advised at that time to use the Cibber text, with which audiences in the north of England were more likely to be familiar, since this was the version they would have seen during the tours of Barry Sullivan, Osmond and Edmund Tearie. He offers as an excuse "... not having the necessary leisure during my busy Sydney season to study the correct Shakespearean text, I again fell back upon Cibber."

The *Bulletin* reviewer considered Wilkie's interpretation of Richard of Gloucester to be the best thing he had done, and further commended him as a producer, reflecting that he had "secured remarkable results in marshalling what is really a weak support" (18 May, p.8). Again and again, it was the lack of classical experience in the company that drew criticism and complaint in this initial season. This reinforced Wilkie's appreciation of the difficulties he faced in training an adequate company to present Shakespeare's plays. Perhaps it is unfair to suggest that Wilkie looked impressive on stage because he was surrounded by such inadequate support. In any case, not all critics were inclined to praise Wilkie's effort, or his acting abilities. One critic who put up a contrary opinion was "Jack Point", who wrote a survey of the Sydney season for *The Theatre Magazine* (1 June 1915, p.32). He insisted that Wilkie's performances lacked subtlety, that his style was too heavy, his voice too inflexible, his introduced business dubious, and his interpretations of character without solid foundation. His criticisms of Wilkie's mannerisms of speech were also quite severe. Speaking of Wilkie as Hamlet, "Jack Point"

While the "Rogue and peasant slave" speech was well delivered, another important one, the "To be or not to be" soliloquy, which Mr Wilkie uttered while gazing into the fire, was quite feeble. One can never imagine any of these famous lines coming from Mr Wilkie's lips spontaneously; his style is too heavy for that, and his voice too unwieldy - so unwieldy, indeed, that he is obliged, or imagines himself obliged, to speak frequently in a staccato, in which the words are uttered in such a way as to be indistinct. ... There are no soft cadences in Mr Wilkie's speeches, and few, conspicuously few, contrasts

of light and shade. The nearest approach to anything of the sort I heard was in the Yorick reflections.<sup>36</sup>

While this entire criticism may have been written with mischievous intent, designed to balance the more favourable reviews, I have quoted this section of it in full because it seems to summarise the impression one gets of the qualities of Wilkie's voice, and it echoes the dissatisfaction of a number of critics. The reference to Wilkie's speaking "in a staccato in which the words are uttered in such a way as to be indistinct" is especially interesting, because it brings to mind some of the criticisms made of Henry Irving's delivery a generation earlier. Irving had many vocal mannerisms, some of which were described by Gordon Craig:

He would say "Gud" for "God"; "Cut-thrut dug" for "Cut-throat-dog" (Shylock); "Tack the rup frum mey nek" for "Take the rope from my neck" (Mathias in *The Bells*); "Ritz" for "Rich" (Mathias).<sup>38</sup>

The effect of all this, Craig claimed, was to "enrich the sounds - to make them expressive rather than refined." Those<sup>39</sup> or words who have seen Wilkie acting have commented on the forced vowels and the frequent strain in his voice when he was performing in the

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classics. It is not impossible that he was trying to imitate -he style of Irving, but lacked the spark of genius which might have justified it. Having seen nine performances by Irving around -he turn of the century, he would have had ample opportunity to his theatre idol. It remains that there<sup>41</sup> absorb the mannerisms of were certainly shortcomings in Wilkie's delivery of lines, and this underlines the fact that he was best suited to roles that called for a "big" delivery, or a measure of broad humour. To such parts -

Bottom, Parolles, perhaps Mathias - his voice was well adapted.

The Sydney season ended on 23 June, after ten weeks of performances. The pattern of attendance had been roughly similar to that established in Melbourne, though apparently with fewer full houses - according to Wilkie, the Sydney season was not a financial success. Nevertheless, the Marlow/Fuller firm remained undaunted. The Wilkie Company was sent next to the Marlow-controlled Theatre Royal in Adelaide, for a season which opened on 8 July, following brief appearances at country centres, such as Ballarat, en route. The Adelaide season was given the usual advertising build-up, with *Richard III*, the opening production, being described as "the immense historical tragedy ... upon a scale of exceptional magnificence, sumptuous scenery, brilliant costumes ... being true and historically correct, acted by a largely augmented company with a host of supernumeraries."<sup>42</sup>

Despite the falsehoods of this advertising, the season was successful. The review of *Richard III* in the *Adelaide Advertiser* ('10 July 1916, p. 9) was favourable, although when confronted with its report of Wilkie's performance, one cannot help agreeing with *The Theatre Magazine's* "Jack Point" that it lacked subtlety:

The Crookback as depicted by him was always and completely a callous and heartless brute. He even introduced a vicious kick at the prostrate body of Henry VI, whom he had just murdered [the Cibber text; incorporated this scene from *Henry VI Part III*], and at no part of his portrayal was there any approach to an ingratiating smile. He was in all his scenes a dictatorial, resolute, and merciless scoundrel, while even his cunning was of the brutal kind ... .

Evidently, Wilkie's performance was always forceful and vigorous, designed to stir the audience's emotions where possible: "... his desperate fight with Richmond, the swords flashing fire, aroused the audience to a great pitch of excitement and enthusiasm, which ended in repeated calls before the curtain." His physical strength as a performer was clearly one of Wilkie's greatest attributes, as is evident from this and other reviews. In an interview recorded in *Everylady's Journal* (6 February 1917, p.76), Wilkie himself made the point:

"I do everything in my power to keep physically fit," explained the earnest actor; "yet I always make everything subservient to my work. I play golf, tennis, and lacrosse, and I find fencing is a good thing to make an actor graceful and light on his feet."<sup>43</sup>

One critical lesson at least Wilkie had taken to heart, and the Adelaide season of *Romeo and Juliet* saw the part of Romeo taken over by Walter Hunt, the company's current romantic lead. Although this was doubtless a wise move, Hunt was dismissed in reviews as being an insufficiently realistic lover, especially when set beside the Juliet of Miss Hunter-Watts. Wilkie contented himself with the smaller, "showy" part of Mercutio, which he would continue to play for some years. The Adelaide programme, lasting only three weeks, saw a number of quick changes of production - something which was to become a hallmark of Wilkie touring seasons in the future. This season ended with *As You Like It*, on 28 July, and immediately the company prepared to sail to New Zealand, the Fullers' homeland, for an extension of the Shakespearean tour, still under the Marlow

banner and hence with the same policy of popular prices.<sup>44</sup> The tour was designed to cover all the major centres on the north and south islands of New Zealand, as well as visiting a number of the smaller towns for one- or two-night stands - the start of a policy that Wilkie was to follow consistently throughout his subsequent career.

Wilkie's first New Zealand tour at the head of a company opened in Auckland at His Majesty's on 8 August 1916 with the production of *Hamlet*, and the original repertoire of six plays was run through, *Richard III* being omitted from the programme. Seasons of two or three weeks were given in each of the major cities - Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin - so that every play had two or three performances in each venue. The New Zealand critics - and their public - were doubtless sensitive to the idea that they might be offered second-rate goods, and they were certainly unwilling to be impressed by the Australian company until they had proved their merit. Ignoring the publicity, which indicated that this was the first visit to New Zealand by the distinguished Allan Wilkie, the Wellington *Dominion* (9 September 1916, p.11) recalled his participation in the Nellie Stewart tour of the previous year, and remarked laconically that he had "proved a sound enough actor", effective on broad, blustering lines.

The *Dominion's* view of *Hamlet* (11 September, p.3) clearly indicated this suspicious viewpoint, while it also shows how Wilkie succeeded in winning over his audience:

The sophisticated went doubtfully to the Grand Opera House [in Wellington] on Saturday, but without exception they remained interested throughout, and came away with a respect, not unmingled with admiration, for Mr Wilkie and his players. ... Mr Wilkie, without possessing that divine afflatus that is given to the very few, was an interesting Hamlet, and one entirely without mannerisms. ... His style inclines to the robust and melodramatic, his broad methods being assisted by a full round voice, effective over a good range  
... .

The review went on to single out some of the faults and merits of his performance and the production, in terms very much in line with the criticism of different Australian critics, and this general uniformity of opinion underlines Wilkie's limitations as an actor. It was the vigour of his performance that won the largest measure of praise. The *Dominion* review gave an interesting picture of Wilkie's interpretation of Hamlet in a sequence designed to provide an exciting climax to the first half of the play:

He reached the topmost bent of his powers in the famous play scene [III.ii], in which he showed fine dramatic power. The scene is arranged on traditional lines, but as the mock murder is played Hamlet not only wriggles towards the King in his excitement, but advances to the throne, repeating the lines of Lucianus, louder and louder until he shrieks them into the ears of the wilting King, and as the latter calls for lights and [,] panic stricken, leaves the throne, Hamlet in an extasy [sic] of triumph at the success of his ruse, tears the sheets of the play in a frenzy, and throws them into the air.

This is a useful description, not only of Wilkie's particular talents as an actor, but also of his clear-sighted control of audience emotions as a producer. Time and time *again* he showed a sure touch in creating this kind of effect. Melodramatic it may have been, but in theatrical terms it was highly effective, as the reviewer on

this occasion attested: "Right through this scene Mr Wilkie held the audience fascinated, and the solid applause that followed was his right and due." Ngaio Marsh recalled this production as her first experience of Shakespeare on the stage, and remembered this scene as being particularly stirring, even when recalled at a distance of forty years or more - further independent proof of the theatrical excitement that Wilkie's production style was capable of achieving at its best.<sup>45</sup>

Wilkie's memoirs confirm that the opening stages of the 1916 New Zealand tour suffered because of the policy of cheap prices. "The public held aloof for the commencement of the season in every town while on our last nights we were turning hundreds away".<sup>46</sup> While this was no doubt frustrating, the end result of the tour was a remarkable profit, proving once again that a diet of Shakespeare without spectacle was capable of surviving in the commercial theatre. The New Zealand tour ended at His Majesty's Theatre, Dunedin, on 24 October 1916, and the company returned to Australia, after an absence of three months.

A second season was held at the Princess's Theatre, Melbourne, opening on 4 November, to coincide with Melbourne Cup Week. Wilkie was careful to plan a varied programme for this season - a wise move, since past experience had shown that there was only a limited demand for Shakespeare. Frequent changes of programme were necessary to entice audiences to return to the theatre, and acceptance of this fact became one of the bases of Wilkie's production policy for the remainder of his career in Australia. On this occasion



having previously established a reputation in Melbourne, and coming direct from his successful tour of New Zealand, he had little difficulty in filling the theatre, and managed a long run of eighteen weeks. During this period he staged ten productions. Five of them, including *Richard III*, which he now presented in Melbourne for the first time, were drawn from his existing repertoire, while the other five, although they had formed part of his repertoire during his tours of England and the Far East, had not previously been staged by him in Australia.<sup>47</sup>

The season opened with *The Taming of the Shrew*, the starring roles of Petruchio and Katherina naturally being allocated to the Wilkies. In some respects, the *Shrew* was an unfortunate choice. Of course, it had all the ingredients for a commercial success, but these were offset to some extent by the fact that Wilkie's production once again had to face comparison with an Oscar Asche version, first seen in Melbourne in July 1909 and revived in February-March 1913. The popularity of Asche's production is indicated by the fact that it ran in Melbourne for five weeks in -309 - a considerable achievement for a single Shakespearean production. The Asche company had played Shakespeare's full text (with some bowdlerisation), including the then rarely-played Induction, in which Asche himself took the role of Christopher Sly,

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doubling it with that of Petruchio. The acting in this production was widely admired, with Asche and Lily Brayton making a fine leading couple. The most outstanding feature of Asche's production, however, appears to have been the sets and costumes, which were

imported with the company from England: "The mellow perfection of some of these pictures is absolutely charming. ... The clothing is *rich*, accurate and always appropriate, and the settings are admirably composed" (*Bulletin*, 29 July 1909, p.9).

In the eyes of the *Bulletin* reviewer, Wilkie and his wife were seen as poor substitutes for the fiery Asche and Brayton. Miss Hunter-Watts in particular suffered by comparison, since her attempts to make a screeching virago of Kate were most unsuited to her vocal range:

Neither Wilkie nor his wife appear [sic] to best advantage. ... Her attempts at violent, viragoic rage were exaggerated tantrums. Her shout was a scream with a crack in it. ... She is clever, and so of course acts the part correctly enough, but it is quite out of her line of impersonation [*Bulletin*, 9 November 1916, p.9].

The *Age* reviewer suggested that, however unsuited this interpretation of the shrew was to the actress, it was a necessary consequence of the production style that Wilkie had decided upon. There was no room for subtlety in the production:

Seizing on the one essential fact that the play is plainly the story of the taming of a shrew, he makes the taming of that shrew as broad, as obvious and as entertaining a process as brute force and the cracking of a whip can do [*Age*, 6 November, p.10].

This was to be Shakespeare for the masses, filled with traditional knock-about humour and bullying. For example, after Petruchio's and kiss me, Kate: we will be married a Sunday" (II.i.316), the stage direction for Wilkie's production indicates that Katherina should "cross L., throw water, and exit screaming". The whip

which Wilkie flourished was a standard piece of stage equipment for Petruchio, dating back at least to the time of Kemble.<sup>51</sup> Asche had also carried a whip, as had his predecessor in Australia, an American actor named Henry Kolker, who acted the part like "a self-respecting cowboy from Texas" (*Bulletin*, 1 October 1908). This production, based on Garrick's adaptation of the *Shrew*, had starred the American actress Margaret Anglin as Katherina. Other business designed to increase the effect of knock-about humour in Wilkie's production included the "coarse acting" of minor characters like the Tailor in IV.iii. This individual was endowed with

a stutter and a kick, [and] also contributed his full share to the general mirth before he was suddenly extinguished in a capacious basket.<sup>52</sup>

The Induction was not used in Wilkie's production. Instead,

The curtain went up on Tranio and Lucentio in clever dumb show arranging for a drink at a table in a street of Padua.<sup>53</sup>

Most of the other cuts made by Wilkie were designed to bowdlerise the text. Inevitably, the sexual punning of the first confrontation between Kate and Petruchio was cut (II.i.199-207; 210-16; 218-32), as were other "questionable" passages. Cuts for other reasons occurred, for example, at the end of Acts III and V, in each case to ensure a strong exit - and curtain line - for Petruchio.<sup>54</sup>

To give new interest to the season, Wilkie decided to add to his repertoire the most popular of the eighteenth-century comedies - Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* and *The Rivals* and Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*. (He had produced all three of these plays earlier in his career.) This proved to be an astute

move, attracting excellent houses. Despite the fact that the company contained many members new to the demands of "classical" acting, it appears that adequate justice was done to the demands of posture and the accepted highly-mannered style of delivery. However, the *Bulletin* did note that, as Charles Surface in *The School for Scandal*, Vivian Edwards was "a rough and rowdy rake with manners at least a hundred years more recent than his garments" (7 December 1916). An interesting light is cast on Wilkie's production methods by another report in the *Bulletin* (1 February 1917), which discussed a minor controversy arising from the fact that Wilkie had injected a great deal of business into the play. Objections were raised, for example, when he resurrected some traditional business which required Moses to mis-hear the name of Trip, the servant of Charles, and to call him "Tripe" (III.ii). Wilkie responded to this in a letter sent to the press, in which he protested that he was not "catering for an audience of dryasdusts", and that in his opinion:

At least nine out of every ten of the laughs which are heard throughout the progress of the play are evoked by the gags. Without the gags and business introduced, the play would not run three nights.[55]

This answer might also be applied to some of Wilkie's productions of Shakespeare.

From time to time, however, laughter was evoked inappropriately - or so the *Age* reviewer felt. When Wilkie revived *Hamlet*, the *Age* took him to task for the crudity and carelessness of the production. In that reviewer's opinion, poor use was made of the stage, so that

scenes which should have impressed were "played on five feet of stage, close up against the footlights, in front of an untidy 'drop'" (20 November 1916, p.9). Worse was to follow:

The appearance and conduct of the ghost - he wore an electric light on his hat and a mosquito net over his face - were simply ridiculous. It is an unforgivable sin to make an audience laugh at anything that Shakespeare intended to be impressive. There are admittedly difficulties in the way of stageing [*sic*] a ghost, but they have been overcome by stage mechanism these 20 years. If a third-rate illusionist can do it in a vaudeville turn, it is surely worth Mr Wilkie's while to do it in a Shakespeare play.

The attitude of the *Age* to Wilkie and his company from the start of his venture is worth noting. From the outset, the newspaper had commended Wilkie's good intentions, summarising his first Melbourne season as "Shakespeare ... honestly and carefully played" (27 March 1916, p.9). Extraordinary acting ability was never attributed to the company - it was "a very ordinary but honest stock Shakespearian company" (6 November 1916, p.10), with a leading actor whose talents lay in the field of elocution. This point was noted again and again. His Othello was "rhetorical rather than a figure of great passions" (7 February 1916, p.13); his interpretation of Romeo "in elocution ... was almost faultless, but it was undoubtedly lacking in the fire of youth" (27 March, p.9); while as Hamlet, only twice did he offer "something more than an impressive voice reciting lines" (20 November, p. 9). These criticisms help to evaluate the style and capabilities of Wilkie as an actor.

The second Melbourne season concluded with a farewell

performance of *Hamlet* on 9 March 1917. Wilkie considered that the long run of chiefly "non-commercial" plays had done well.

But this was not enough to satisfy the comparatively young and very ambitious Fuller firm, who had now taken over Marlow's interests, and at this juncture I found myself at the dividing of the ways.<sup>56</sup>

The Fullers decided that classical theatre was not sufficiently profitable, and so the company was transferred to the Sydney Grand Opera House, where it opened on 7 April 1917 with a production of *The Story of the Rosary* by Walter Howard. The choice of this play, ironically, had been made by Wilkie himself. He had suggested that the Fullers obtain performing rights to it from J.C. Williamson's, failure. Wilkie was convinced that,<sup>58</sup> for whom the play had been a given the right production, the piece had great potential, but was somewhat disconcerted when it was suggested that he himself should produce it.

Not being in a position to continue the Shakespeare enterprise at my own risk[,] and loth as I was to give it up, I had no alternative but to accept the proposition, in which they most generously endorsed my belief in the play by giving me an equal partnership in the profits without any responsibility for the problematical losses. [59]

Far from making a loss, the production had a highly successful run of ten weeks, after which Wilkie was permitted to present *Hamlet* for one week only. This was to be the usual pattern for the next three years, with Wilkie being obliged to subsidise Shakespeare with more popular melodrama.

It should not be assumed that Wilkie found the production of melodrama distasteful. On the contrary, he seems to have entered

into it with relish - with the proviso that he intended to return to a diet of Shakespeare when this should prove a financial possibility. In fact, Wilkie as an actor seems to have been particularly well suited to the demands of melodrama. In *The Story of the Rosary*, for example, he allotted to himself not the role of the hero (which was played by Vivian Edwards), but that of his friend, Karl Larose, an ex-officer with an alcohol problem. This more showy part let him indulge in displays of drunken despair, deep contrition and active heroism, garnished with the spirit of self-sacrifice. Such a part allowed him to give full reign to his vigorous style of delivery. It is interesting to note that, while his voice was often criticised in productions of Shakespeare, this was never the case in melodrama; which leads one to the conclusion that he adapted more easily to the style of melodrama. Of course, critics were now quick to suggest that Wilkie had lowered his standards and that public taste was to blame for this. The *Bulletin*, for instance, produced a typically astringent review of *The Story of the Rosary*, concluding with the statement that the plot and characters "were all compliant tools in the conspiracy to make an eminent Shakespearean actor look foolish" (28 June 1917).

Despite initial signs of critical hostility, melodrama continued to hold sway. After a highly successful season in Melbourne, where the play was transferred, the Fullers negotiated with Williamson's for the rights to present another piece by Walter Howard, "the realistic submarine play" entitled *Seven Days' leave*. Since Walter Howard clearly provided a recipe for popular success, it is hardly surprising that two more of his plays were

chosen to fill out the repertoire - *For the King* and *The Lifeguardsman*. The company continued to supply an exclusive diet of Waiter Howard until October 1918. Until February of that year, performances had been confined to Melbourne and Sydney, but at that time the Fuller firm sent the company on tour to other centres, including three months in New Zealand. By the time the company reached Perth where the tour was to conclude, they had performed Howard melodrama for nineteen months - the clearest of all indications of where the tastes of the theatregoing public lay. Curiously enough, Hal Porter in *Stars of Australian Stage and Screen* describes this period of Wilkie's career as "initial unsuccessful ventures", and refers specifically to the seasons of *Seven Days' Leave* and *The Story of the Rosary* as "fairly disastrous". These comments bear little relation to the true state of affairs.

While Allan Wilkie was engaged in presenting melodrama, a further reversal of expected roles had occurred in Melbourne. At the King's Theatre in August 1917, the Bert Bailey and Julius Grant management sponsored a season principally of Shakespeare, which starred the English actor Ian Maclaren. Grant and Bailey had made their reputation (and their profit) by staging melodramas, often with an Australian flavour. Their most successful piece was Bert Bailey's *On Our Selection*, which received numerous revivals. The firm had had ample opportunity to observe the success of the Wilkie-Marlow Shakespearean venture, and may well have considered this sufficient justification to follow suit. During the four-month season Maclaren chose to present himself in four of Shakespeare's



plays. These were *Much Ado About Nothing*, in which he played Benedick, *Julius Caesar* (Mark Antony), *Hamlet*, and *As You Like It* (Orlando), in which the poet Hugh McCrae played the small role of Charles the wrestler. Maclaren also produced the trial scene from *The Merchant of Venice* (taking the role of Shylock), as a prelude to Tom Robertson's *David Garrick*. Perhaps taking a cue from Marlow, Bailey and Grant advertised the season at "popular prices", though without any apparent cost-cutting in the productions. Three of these plays had been produced by Wilkie in Melbourne within the preceding eight months, but curiously, the *Bulletin*, while comparing Maclaren's work to that of Asche, Brough and Boucicault, does not draw the obvious comparison to Wilkie. This suggests that Wilkie had yet to establish his reputation as a Shakespearean producer.

The Perth season at the end of 1918 marked a new stage in Wilkie's career in Australasia. The format of productions which he commenced here became the basis of his work for the next two years. He laid the foundations of the teamwork that was to develop in his company, and which was to be invaluable in the years to come, when during periods of intense activity the company might play eight different Shakespeare plays in the course of a single week - an astonishing achievement for a small independent touring company. In Perth, all tastes were to be catered for. Having opened with a fortnight of Walter Howard, Wilkie then presented a programme which ranged from Shakespeare [*Hamlet*, *Twelfth Night*, *As You*

*Like It*, *The Merchant of Venice*) to eighteenth-century comedy (*The School for Scandal*, *She Stoops to Conquer*), and to

popular melodrama [*The Silver King, David Garrick, The Silence of Dean Maitland, Camille*). In December, Wilkie presented *Mrs Warren's profession* for four nights - a controversial move, all the more remarkable because Shaw was very infrequently produced on the professional stage in Australia at that time. The close of the Perth season, in January 1919, signalled the end of the "quasi-partnership" (as Wilkie described it) with the Fuller firm.

Wilkie next reached an agreement with the J.C. Williamson firm, under which he was to run a stock season at the Theatre Royal in Sydney. The Allan Wilkie Dramatic Company opened there in May 1919, with a policy of weekly changes, presenting a mixture of modern and classical drama. The fourth production of the season was to be the first classical piece. It was *The School for Scandal*, which opened on 14 June. The *Sydney Morning Herald* began its review of the play with the following comment:

Old playgoers who visited the Theatre Royal on Saturday did so in some fear and trembling, realising the improbability of a good performance of an old English comedy from a company otherwise devoted to melodrama throughout an entire season. But again the unexpected happened [16 June 1919].

It is startling to realise that, whatever Wilkie's aspirations, he was no longer regarded as a "classical" actor. Of course, this becomes more understandable when it is recalled that Wilkie had not been seen to perform Shakespeare in Sydney since the middle of -315, if one discounts four performances of *Hamlet* in June 1917. Yet it puts an interesting perspective on Wilkie, whom one tends to regard at all times as primarily a Shakespearean actor. As

the *Sydney Morning Herald* reviewer went on to note, Wilkie was still able to produce a successful classic-Mr Allan Wilkie may now claim the credit of welding into an effective comedy combination an ensemble of stock character actors evidently well practised in many branches of their art.

It seemed that Wilkie and his wife held a fairly rigid notion of acting. Once they had established a character type, they would always play similar parts in this fashion, disregarding the idea of experimentation. Peter Brook might call this a branch of the art of "deadly theatre", but of course such concepts would never have been entertained in the 1920s.

At the conclusion of the Williamson stock season (4 July 1919), Allan Wilkie took a major step in his Australian theatre career by becoming a self-employed actor-manager once more. That he had an essentially independent frame of mind was observed by a "Poverty Point" gossip-writer: "Allan Wilkie likes to have a finger in the managerial pie, which keeps him out of some theatres, but permits him to give full rein to his versatility" (*Bulletin*, -0 July 1919). As an actor-manager, Wilkie immediately organised a tour of New Zealand, which was to occupy him for a full year. The repertoire for this tour was made up of modern plays and melodrama, with a sprinkling of eighteenth-century comedy. The tour proved extremely successful and remarkably lucrative. At the end<sup>64 to be</sup> of the New Zealand year, Wilkie made arrangements to return with his company to Australia, with the renewed purpose of playing the classics:

... as I had now accumulated sufficient capital, I was anxious to organise my own Shakespearean Company. For this purpose I had sent to England for my Shakespeare wardrobe which had been stored there since 1913, and while waiting for its arrival and making other preparations, I returned to Australia and took the Princess['s] Theatre, Melbourne, where meanwhile I produced *The Rotters* and *Hindle Hakes*.<sup>65</sup>

*The Rotters: A Tale of a Respectable Family* (1916) was a successful comedy by Wilkie's old friend H.F. Maltby, and Wilkie had astutely obtained its sole performing rights in Australasia. The company opened in this play on 31 July 1920, and at the end of the first performance, Wilkie announced his policy for the forthcoming season. This was simply to present English plays, in contrast to the flux of American material which was then particularly popular in Australia. In addition to modern comedies, he intended to present a "new arrangement" of *Macbeth*, though he made no further mention of his aim to begin a season of Shakespeare. Interestingly enough, he also promised a series of matinee performances of plays by Shaw, Galsworthy and others; but nothing further was heard of this.<sup>66</sup>

Following four weeks of *The Rotters* came *Hindis Wakes, or fanny's Saturday to Monday* (1912), a play by Stanley Houghton with a mildly controversial theme. At the conclusion of this production, on 10 August 1920, Allan Wilkie was to turn his back on modern plays for the next ten years, choosing instead the difficult path of the classics, and working as an independent actor-manager.

### CHAPTER THREE: FOOTNOTES

1. Marjorie Skill, *Sweet Nell of Old Sydney* (North Sydney: Urania, 1974), p. 107. A "biography" of Wilkie is given on pp.105-7.
2. Wilkie, p.217.
3. This claim was made in publicity for the Adelaide season. In New Zealand, advertising in the Wellington *Dominion* (3 April 1915) described Wilkie as being "from the principal English Theatres".
4. McMahon was to appear with Wilkie's company in *The School for Scandal* (December 1916) as Crabtree. For information on McMahon's work, see D. Douglas and M.M. Morgan, "Gregan McMahon and the Australian Theatre" (in three parts), *Komos*, II (1969), pp.50-62 and 127-39, and *Komos*, III (1973), pp.33-43.
5. The *West Australian*, 9 October 1915, p. 12.
6. The *West Australian* amusements page, 1 October 1915.
7. Wilkie, p.224, states that his wife had been "playing the leading roles in a season of modern comedies in Brisbane", though I have been unable to find any record of this.
3. Titheradge had been brought to Australia in 1883 to play Wilfred Denver in the Australian premiere of *The Silver King* (1882), by H.A. Jones. In subsequent years, his more famous roles included Aubrey Tanqueray in Pinerio's *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* (1893) and Malvolio in a 1908 production of *Twelfth Night*. He died early in 1916.
9. See *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 December 1915, amusements page, which lists the cast of *Kultured War*. The benefit was reviewed on 11 December, p.10, and it was noted that "Miss F.H. Watts acted with force and intensity as the high-spirited wife of the old German, General Stormberg [Bentley]." In his memoirs (p.216), Wilkie mistakenly describes this performance as the first stage appearance that he and his wife made in Australia. The date (December 1915) makes this impossible. The theatre remained Her (rather than His) Majesty's throughout the 1920s.
10. Melbourne *Punch*, 8 May 1913, "People We Know" column, p.764. An article on the theatrical career of George Marlow (ne Marks), born c.1870, who rose from scene-shifter, low comedian, stage manager, etc. to become "the head of one of the most powerful theatrical organisations in the Commonwealth".

11. Although Wilkie does not mention the fact, George Marlow had some connection with the Titheradge benefit, for which he was to "arrange contributions" (*S.M.H.*, 7 December). Possibly it was at this time that they made contact.
12. "Marlowdramas" staged 1912-15 at Marlow's Sydney Adelphi and Melbourne Princess's included *Brought to Ruin* (May 1912), *No Mother to Guide Her* (July 1913), and *Her Forbidden Marriage* (February 1915).
13. Wilkie, p.225.
14. Wilkie, p.227.
15. By 1916, Marlow was leasing theatres in conjunction with the firm of Ben and John Fuller, who were soon to take over his interest.
16. Wilkie, p.226.
17. Wilkie, p.227.
18. *Argus* amusements page, 21 January 1916.
19. See below, Appendix B, "Shakespeare in Australia, 1900-1930".
20. See *Argus* amusements page, 22 January 1916.
21. Marlow's "popular prices" at that time were 3s., 2s., 1s., and 4s. for reserved seats. These were the low prices he charged for his melodramas, which were now to be applied to Shakespeare.
22. *Argus* amusements page, 22 January.
23. *Argus* 24 January, p.6.
24. For example, see *Age* (7 February, p.13); *Argus* (6 March) which states that Marlow's venture "deserves the best of public support"; *Age* (6 March, p.9); *Bulletin* (27 January, p.8).
25. This business was reported to me by Miss Irene Webb (an actress with Wilkie's company in the years 1923-24), in an interview in Melbourne on 17 October 1980.
26. Madeleine Bingham, "*The Great Lover*": *The Life and Art of Herbert Beerbohm Tree* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1978), p.176. See also A.C. Sprague, *Shakespeare and the Actors: The Stage Business in his Plays (1660-1905)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1948), pp.22-23, where the versions of Irving, Mansfield and Goodwin are described.

27. See Sprague, *Shakespeare and the Actors*, pp.27-29. The business of whetting the knife is indicated by the text:
- Bass.* Why dost thou whet thy knife so earnestly? *Shy.*  
To cut the forfeiture from that bankrupt there. *Gra.*  
Not on thy sole, but on thy soul, harsh Jew ....
- (IV.i.121-23)
28. Letter to Sprague, 7 April 1969.
29. Sprague, *Shakespeare and the Actors*, p.4.
30. Letter to Sprague, 7 April 1969.
31. *Ibid.* In the same letter, Wilkie noted that Malvolio was his favourite comedy part in Shakespeare.
32. See Holloway, *Playing the Empire*, pp.46-48. Irving's performance is described by Madeleine Bingham in *Henry Irving and the Victorian Theatre* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1978), pp.170-74. A gossip columnist commented (p.173): "Dear me, Mr Irving is 43 and Miss Terry 30 - they are old enough to know better."
33. An issue of *the Bulletin* in November 1904, reviewing the Brune-Greenaway *Romeo and Juliet*, noted that Miss Stephenson was said to be making her reappearance after 18-20 years' retirement from the stage. The reviewer noted that she was "rather scratchy" in the part of the Nurse. In 1920, Wilkie was to take a similar step, employing the veteran actress Fanny Wiseman (then aged 75) as the Third Witch in *Macbeth*. (See below, Ch.IV, p. 107.)
34. Wilkie, p.228.
35. Wilkie, p.233.
36. cf. the *Age*, 21 February 1916, p.9:
- [Wilkie's] method of playing Hamlet is to go through the play, taking each speech as it comes, and declaiming it to the top of his bent. ... He has a voice strong and capable of an octave of inflection. ... He may at times be a robust, excitable, almost a noisy Hamlet, grinding out such lines as "The croaking raven doth bellow for revenge," yet he has always taste to linger over words of "sweet philosophy".
- Though cf. below, p.81.
38. Edward Gordon Craig, *Henry Irving* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1930; reissued 1969), p.62.
39. Craig, p.63.

40. This was remarked upon by Miss Irene Webb, who recalls that he "pumped out his words in quite a curious fashion", and by Mr Keith Jarvis, interviewed by me in Hobart, 5 September 1980.
41. Confirmed by Wilkie in a letter to Marie Ney, 3 February 1968: "I saw [Irving] in eight of his characters, but bitterly regret that I missed *The Lyons Mail* and *Louis XI*." In a letter to A.C. Sprague, 12 May 1953, Wilkie noted: "I saw Irving nine times in eight parts, all in the latter part of his career." The parts included Mathias in *The Bells* (Wilkie also saw H.B. Irving in this part), Corporal Brewster in *Waterloo* (noted in Wilkie, p.315), and two Shakespearean roles: Shylock and Coriolanus. See above, Ch.II, pp.30-31.
42. The Adelaide *Advertiser*, amusements page, 1 July 1916.
43. Clipping kindly supplied by Mrs E.F. Heritage of Sandy Bay, Tasmania. Mrs Heritage is the daughter of Bradshaw Major, who was for many years Allan Wilkie's musical director.
44. It is remarkable that, despite the additional costs of transporting the company and its sets and costumes to New Zealand, the prices remained on exactly the same level as they had been in Australia.
45. Ngaio Marsh made this comment in the preface she wrote for Wilkie's memoirs, p.1.
46. Wilkie, p.237.
47. The Melbourne season of *Richard III* marked the first appearance with the company of Lorna Forbes, playing Queen Elizabeth. A highly competent and popular actress, she was to remain almost continuously in Wilkie's company until 1930, as second female lead. In *Stars of Australian Stage and Screen*, Hal Porter records that she was delighted to join the company: "the magic I had always believed in came true" (p.145).
48. In April-May 1903, George Musgrove's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* ran for seven weeks at the Princess's Theatre, Melbourne. No Shakespeare production (up to 1930) was able to surpass this.
49. Playing Sly gave Asche the opportunity to create an outrageous make-up and character: "He is a heavy, dishevelled boozier ... with a parched mouthful of decayed teeth, a lack-lustre eye, and a faint sense of his supposed dignity" (*Bulletin*, 22 July 1909).



50. Stage direction supplied to me by Miss Irene Webb from her own rehearsal script. Although Miss Webb did not join the company until 1923, review evidence suggests strongly that Wilkie's productions, once set, rarely varied in their business, even though the actors might change.
51. See Sprague, *Shakespeare and the Actors*, p.57.
52. From a review in the *Otago Daily Times* (Dunedin, N.Z.), 30 June 1921.
53. *Ibid.*
54. Cuts noted from Irene Webb's script.
55. These comments were reported by the *Bulletin* (1 February 1917). I have been unable to trace the letter sent by Wilkie.
56. Wilkie, p.241.
57. Formerly the Adelphi. It was re-named in August 1916, following a season by the Gonzalez Opera Company, which Marlow had imported in a continuation of his policy of "high class theatre at popular prices".
58. J.C.W. had opened the play in Melbourne on 5 August 1916, but had withdrawn it after only three weeks.
59. Wilkie, p.242.
60. Hal Porter, pp.146, 167.
61. See *Bulletin*, 23 August 1917.
62. *Arms and the Man*, starring Julius Knight, was the first professional Shaw in Australia, in Sydney in 1910. This was followed by *You Never Can Tell* (1912), *Man and Superman* (1913) and *Fanny's First Play* (1913). At an amateur level, Shaw received better treatment, notably from Gregan McMahon (who staged seven or more of the plays for the Melbourne Repertory Theatre), and from the Adelaide Literary Theatre.
63. See Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (Harmondsworth: Penguin edn, 1972) , Chapter I.
64. Ngaio Marsh toured with the company in New Zealand in 1920. She described her experiences in her autobiography *Black Beech and Honeydew* (London: Collins, 1966), pp.129-54.
65. Wilkie, p.252.
66. The *Argus*, 2 August 1920, p.5.

67. The production of *Hindle Wakes* was the closest Wilkie came to producing a "repertory" play in Australia's eastern States. The Ian Maclaren Company had given the play a brief airing in Sydney and in Melbourne (at the King's Theatre, December 1916) in a production which was agreed to be "a striking achievement" (*Bulletin*, 14 December). Publicity material for Wilkie's production tactfully suggests the play's subject matter: "A brilliant comedy-drama, dealing with the eternal problem - shall there be one law for the man and another for the woman?" (*Argus*, 16 August 1920). Perhaps this was the reason for the many vacant seats at the opening performance, reported by the *Argus* on 30 August.