

IV: THE ALLAN WILKIE SHAKESPEAREAN COMPANY, 1920-1926

"Our True Intent is all for Your Delight."

In September 1920, Allan Wilkie announced his plans to establish Australia's first permanent Shakespearean company, drawing a parallel to Frank Benson's Company in England. The inaugural production by the new Allan Wilkie Shakespearean Company was to be a "new arrangement" of *Macbeth*, and Wilkie gave it as his fixed intention to produce all thirty-seven of Shakespeare's plays, some of which had never previously been staged in Australia." Advance publicity emphasized the potentially historic nature of the occasion:

When in future years this company will be counted one of the institutions of which Australia is proud, those who attend on the opening night will tell with satisfaction how they were present during the enthusiastic hours which saw the inception of the company [*Argus*, 9 September 1920].

Many cynics were quick to point out the unlikelihood of Wilkie's venture surviving for long, or even getting off the ground, in view of the history of Shakespeare production in Australia. His was by no means the first proposal to establish a permanent company, but lack of demand had ended all previous efforts.

In order to arouse audience curiosity, Wilkie advertised, as mentioned above, a "new arrangement" of *Macbeth*. His presentation was to have two novel aspects, which were to form the basis of his production methods in the years to come. They were interdependent:

first, a new method of scenic arrangement, and second, a new organisation of the play, made possible by simplified scenery.

Neither was by any means revolutionary in the history of Shakespeare production, but both were practical, and in some respects new to Australia.

To date, the prevailing practice had been to stage the plays in the most lavish manner possible. The presentations of Shakespeare by Oscar Asche were in many ways the epitome of this style of production in Australia - and he imported his plays, generally speaking, in their entirety, from successful runs in England. But English Shakespearean production in the 1920s was feeling the effects of a "revolution". During the nineteenth century, the trend had been towards increasingly spectacular productions of Shakespeare's plays. Charles Kean, for example, flourishing during the 1850s at the Princess's Theatre in London, presented versions of Shakespeare in which his quest for antiquarian accuracy in settings and costume became increasingly dominant, at the expense of the text. His work did not necessarily represent current thought about the presentation of Shakespeare - in his own time, he was disparagingly referred to as "the great from Kean's time, the tendency⁴ Shakespearean upholsterer" - but to "bigger and better" production values increased dramatically. For his 1853 production of *Macbeth*, Kean conducted detailed historical research into the buildings, clothing and customs of eleventh-century Scotland, in order to reproduce all those on the stage in detail. As Dennis Bartholomeusz points out, one of the dangers of such attention to "accuracy" was that Kean's own performance in the play was liable to suffer, and indeed, one

critic described his Macbeth as "ignoble - one whose crime is that of a common murderer, with perhaps a tendency towards Methodism".⁵

By the time Henry Irving had reached the height of his powers, spectacular productions of the classics were becoming a theatrical commonplace. Irving may well have been the greatest actor of his age, in his uniquely mannered style, but again, his concept of production tended towards the grandiose, especially in the period from 1878, when he first assumed control of the Lyceum Theatre, to 1902, when Irving and Ellen Terry made their last appearance there in *The Merchant of Venice*. It has been said that, for Irving, "it was the theatrical effect that mattered; and Shakespeare was useful or dispensable in so far as he lent himself to the effects of which Irving was a master." In 1888, he revived his production of *Macbeth*, portraying Macbeth as guilty from the outset. Reviews were mixed, but for at least one pro-Irving critic, Sir Edward Russell, the impression made by the production rested on the effective scene changes - with the principal sets painted by Hawes Craven - as much as on the acting of the piece.

By the co-operation of costumiers and scenepainters, each scene is a very noble picture. ... The banquet scene is very fine in the vein of a Cattermole picture, with a Burne Jones background. ... The cauldron scene is a triumph of bold invention by Mr. Craven, the cauldron being placed in a circular cavity of rock in a mountainous defile, with jagged steps on which Macbeth stands to consult the witches.

Long pauses were required between the many scenes, in order to re-set the stage for each magnificent effect. This was disruptive to the flow of the play, even though it may be argued that the audiences

of the day were perfectly content to wait for the revelation of each new spectacle. Although Wilkie had a high regard for Irving the actor, the enormous expenses involved prevented him from adopting Irving's approach to spectacle.

During the period of Wilkie's own training in the theatre, it was the work of Herbert Beerbohm Tree which largely dominated the standards of "West End" Shakespeare production. Here, one might expect to find a more direct influence on Wilkie's work, since he had actually had the opportunity to work with and observe Tree. In many respects, Tree's work was in a direct line from Irving's. In his production of *Antony and Cleopatra*,

the text had to be re-arranged to suit the scenery, the return of Antony to Alexandria, which is the occasion of one speech in the text, being illustrated by a tableau in which excited crowds and dancing girls were a prelude to the arrival to music, first of Cleopatra, then of Antony.⁹

Cutting of the text was commonplace. Tree's 1911 version of *Macbeth*, for example, eliminated the scene after the murder of Duncan, and III.iii, the scene of Banquo's murder, and chose to place on the banquet scene. According to Robert¹⁰ particular emphasis Speaight, the production opened with the witches flying on wires, while in the sleep-walking scene, Lady Macbeth was required to descend a steep staircase. [11] While purists may question the validity of textual adaptation of Shakespeare, it may be argued that the best of these productions were vividly and excitingly theatrical. The work of Oscar Asche - in England and Australia - can be seen to inherit directly the style and flavour of Beerbohm

Tree's productions, while Wilkie, although he admitted to having borrowed elements of Tree's interpretation of characters, turned elsewhere for his ideas on scenery and costume.

In 1895, a performance of *Twelfth Night* was given in Burlington Hall as the first official production of the Elizabethan Stage Society. Acted by a cast of amateurs, it was the work of William Poel, who was intent on restoring the plays of Shakespeare to the spirit of their time, unhampered by an excess of scenery and stage effects. Within the limits of existing buildings, Poel tried to give some sense of the conditions of sixteenth-century staging. Most importantly, he showed that the plays had a natural flowing rhythm, from scene to scene, which was inevitably disrupted by major scene changes. By using a simple arrangement of curtains, a Poel production left the scenery to the imagination of the audience. That this was, in general, Shakespeare's original intention is confirmed by the speeches given to the Chorus in *Henry 7*:

Suppose within the girdle of these walls Are
now confined two mighty monarchies,
Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts:
Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them
Printing their proud hoofs i' th¹ receiving earth

(I. Prol. 19-20, 23, 26-7).

By abolishing scenery, Poel made it clear that the play did not necessarily require cutting, since the playing time was automatically reduced, and it was almost possible to believe in "the two hours' traffic of our stage" (*Romeo and Juliet* Prol. 12).

In addition to his ideas on staging, Poel came to the realisation that, for Shakespeare and his audience, the plays were contemporary, and were played in "modern" dress. Poel therefore endeavoured to dress his actors in Elizabethan clothes, arguing that, no matter how precisely the details of (say) eleventh-century Scottish history and dress might be researched, this might have very little to do with the world of the characters as they were perceived by Shakespeare. It was therefore pointless to dress the production in elaborately-researched detail, which simply led it further away from Shakespeare. Of course, the desire to "restore" Shakespeare did not prevent Poel from imposing his own interpretations upon the text. In his production of *Macbeth*, in 1906, he introduced an innovation into the banquet scene in which the second appearance of the ghost was not as Banquo, but as Duncan, to which vision Macbeth reacted with intensified horror.

Poel's ideas had met with mixed reactions. George Bernard Shaw, after seeing *Twelfth Night*, commented that the actors were not necessarily any better than those at the Lyceum, but the setting of the play made them seem good; whereas at the Lyceum, "only the most gifted players can make any considerable effect, the other parts invariably seeming colourless and unduly performances of ^{12 subordinate} Irving - subordinate to the star and Terry. At the other end of the scale, William Archer, who was extremely conscious of the amateur status of Poel's actors had commented that

the true end to be aimed at is to make Shakespeare ... really live for the modern playgoer; and this end can never be attained by a form of representation which appeals only to the dilettante and the enthusiast. [13]

Such arguments as these might well be applied also to Allan Wilkie's company, in its quest for Shakespeare-without-scenery.

Undaunted, Poel continued with his work, presenting not only Shakespeare but, more unusually, the work of "forgotten" Elizabethan dramatists, like Marlowe, whose *Doctor Faustus* was to be his most¹⁴ seen in 1896. In 1901, Poel produced what was successful - and arguably his most important - production. This was *Everyman*, which, Poel claimed, had not been seen in its English version for 400 years. The play was staged first at the Charterhouse, and repeated in the quadrangle, of University College, Oxford, and was later taken successfully to America. One of Poel's artistic decisions was to cast a woman in the role of Everyman. Another "distinguishing feature" of the production was that the figure of Death, who carried a drum and a trumpet, ■"as made up to look like a skeleton, and - for reasons less immediately apparent - spoke with a strong Scots accent.

In Melbourne, during November 1919, the amateur Mermaid Play Society gave several performances of *Everyman*. [13] According to the *Bulletin* review (6 November 1919), the role of Everyman was taken by a woman, Rose Quong (who was later to make her name as a professional actress in London), costumed "on the lines of Richard III". The review singles out as particularly effective the scene in which Everyman confronts Death, a "raucous, gruesome

joker". This character, "with skeleton effects painted on his black background, introduced a kettledrum and a low-comedy gait into his entrances." These signs of borrowing from Poel can readily be explained by the fact that the play was produced by Arthur Goodsall, a former member of the Elizabethan Stage Society. Goodsall had been engaged by Poel specifically to work on the original *Everyman* production, and so he was in an excellent position to bring Poel's ideas on staging to Australia. In 1920, Goodsall was appointed as costume designer for the Allan Wilkie Shakespearean Company, and thus established a small but direct link between Wilkie's work and Poel's.

In September 1920, Wilkie emphasized the fact that the settings for his production of *Macbeth* were to be quite unlike anything seen previously in Australia. Instead of a series of cumbersome set pieces, the stage was to be draped with an arrangement of green curtains, which framed a series of small painted backcloths. These cloths were changed to indicate the various settings of the play (a blasted heath, castle ramparts, and so on), a task which could be swiftly carried out while actors played minor scenes in front of a curtain, thus ensuring a continuity of action. Some essential pieces of furniture were used, though elaboration was to be kept to a minimum: for example, a table, chairs and a throne were required for the banqueting scene, although few signs of festivity appeared on the table. The major advantage of this simplification was precisely the one "discovered" by Poel - that the play could be given a much fuller treatment, and could be

shown to have a flowing pace and clear development. Instead of having long waits between scenes, Wilkie was able to give the play in two acts, divided by a single interval of eight minutes, so that, in the estimate of the *Bulletin*, the entire performance of *Macbeth* lasted only two and a half hours, and included scenes that had been frequently cut elsewhere in the interests of saving time for set changes.

Wilkie expressed his views on the matter in an article appended to all his programmes for the first year of the tour, extracts from which appeared in many newspapers and journals at productions. I propose to quote ¹⁸at some the time of his first length from this article, as it best sums up Wilkie's attitude to the staging of Shakespeare at that time.

In my new system of presenting Shakespeare, I have striven to effect a compromise between the Elizabethan mode of representation and the over-elaborated scenic effects customary on the modern stage.

It has long been my opinion that realistic scenic effects, instead of assisting the spectator, are an undoubted hindrance to the full enjoyment of Shakespearean drama, tending to divert attention from the acting, necessitating a mutilation of the text, and destroying the continuity of the action.

The latter point is most noticeable in all modern representations of Shakespeare, with the four intervals between the acts, and the waits between the numerous scenes.

I do not agree with the Elizabethan Stage Society, which advocates that, as in Shakespeare's own day, all his characters should be dressed in clothes of the Elizabethan period. It is true that there are occasional lines and passages which are inconsistent if the play is dressed in any other period, but these lines can usually, if necessary, be eliminated. Now that the public is familiar from pictures and books with the dresses of different countries and periods, it would strike a far more jarring note, in a production

of *Julius Caesar*, for instance, to see Mark Antony dressed in an Elizabethan ruff, trunk, hose, etc., than to encounter an occasional line such as "their hats are plucked about their ears", if the characters were dressed in Roman togas, especially when such lines as I suggest can be easily omitted without any particular loss.

While avoiding pedantry of this description, my aim is to produce the plays of Shakespeare under conditions approximating to those of his own time, as far as the altered theatre structure and the change in our viewpoint will permit, and at the same time to take advantage of the lighting facilities, etc., appertaining to the modern stage.

It will thus be seen that my method of production is in no wise revolutionary, but simply a reversion, with modifications, to the conditions under which the plays were originally produced, and for which they were written by Shakespeare.¹⁹

It can be seen from this that Wilkie's attitude is one of compromise between the new ideas of William Poel, with regard to setting, and the traditional ideas of Irving and Tree, with regard to costume.

However, those elements which Wilkie appeared to have adapted from Poel were partly motivated by at least *one* other matter - that of finance. As an independent actor-manager, Wilkie simply could not afford to stage the plays elaborately, no matter how much he may have wished to do so, especially since he planned to retain low prices of admittance. In addition to this, since it was evidently planned from the beginning to tour the plays around Australia - they could not otherwise have been a paying proposition - it was an advantage to carry the minimum amount of stage equipment and scenery, not only because of freight costs, which were sizeable, but also because the productions were to be played in venues of varying dimensions. Curtains could be draped quite effectively in a space of almost any size, while a full-scale set would prove

much more intractable. Wilkie was therefore making a virtue of necessity, in part at least, in urging upon his audiences that "the play's the thing".

It was on 11 September 1920 that *Macbeth* opened at the Princess's Theatre, Melbourne, when it was "enthusiastically received by a large audience" as the *Argus* reported in its review on 13 September. There was a general agreement amongst the critics that Wilkie's powerful personality dominated the performance, though the *Argus* was moved to comment that he was probably "saving energy for later scenes when, in some of the earlier lines, he seemed rather matter-of-fact." It was on the subject of Wilkie's voice - as always, a matter for discussion - that reviews differed. For the *Argus*, "Mr Wilkie's voice is admirably adapted for work of this kind. The blank verse was impressively spoken, and the words must have reached everyone in the theatre. In the end, this seems to be saying that Wilkie's delivery was loud and "theatrical". In the opinion of the *Bulletin*, "considering how ill-adapted are his dry, uneven tones to Shakespearean speeches Wilkie does great things with his great part" (16 September). Clearly, the reviewers were prepared to be kind to the venture," though there are indications that Wilkie indulged in melodramatic gesture for the stage murders. When the play was subsequently produced in New Zealand, the reviewer for Dunedin's *Evening Star* noted that:

The impersonation was mostly in staring primary colours. For example, when Macbeth came from Duncan's chamber he was quite smeared with blood, the daggers

red to the hafts. Surely such luridness is not necessary. [20 June 1921].

At the end of the play, Wilkie/Macbeth arranged to die on stage, rather than having Macduff (Guy Hastings) return with his head. This slight re-arrangement of Shakespeare was very common with actor-managers who wished to take the final curtain - it was a practice which Irving had certainly adopted in his production of the play, thus giving himself a tragic death scene rather than off-stage slaying. 21 an

Opinions diverged with regard to the Lady Macbeth of Miss Hunter-Watts. The *Age* (13 September, p.8) noted that she was not robust, but that she still succeeded in bringing out the vicious, cold-blooded nature of the character. The *Argus* made a similar comment, noting that it was the best thing she had done in Australia. For the *Bulletin*, however, she lacked "the voice necessary to explain her Ladyship's influence over the warrior" (15 September). The picture which emerges is that she gave a performance of cold, classic gracefulness, somewhat weak in vocal delivery. However, the reviewer for the *Otago Daily Times* noted that Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene (V.i.) was "the triumph of the evening", and offered the following details:

The doctor and the gentlewoman spoke only in whispers, and Lady Macbeth's dread confessions were uttered with a low, hollow moan that told eloquently of the deep torture of her guilty soul [20 June 1921].

Here, the deeper register of her voice was clearly put to good use.

To add further interest to the production, Wilkie engaged

Australian stage" to play minor roles.²² "two veterans of the Newton Griffiths, aged 84, was given the part of an old man, while Fanny Wiseman, aged 75, played the third witch. Here, as on subsequent occasions, Wilkie made it a regular practice to cast men as some of the witches - in this case, Arthur Goodsall and Edward Landor, who presumably brought suitably harridan-like interpretations to the parts.

Although advertising for the first production states that scenery was by Mr George Lloyd - presumably he painted the backcloths - Goodsall had a hand in the design. It was reported in the *Bulletin* (7 October) that "one of his first jobs at the Princess's was to dye 500 yards of material a lively green to provide backgrounds for Macbeth, Hamlet, and the other heroes who are to follow". One may assume that it was from his associations with Poel that the suggestion of setting the stage with curtains derived. Goodsall's main job for Wilkie's productions, however, was to design costumes and to supervise their making. In this, he frequently let his imagination take him far from the Elizabethan world. The costumes he designed for the two principals in *Macbeth* were exotic, to say the least, particularly where headwear was concerned. Ngaio Marsh recalled Macbeth's crown as "a head-dress made of coffin-plates ... a morbid but enormously impressive item." [23] Lady Macbeth was similarly graced with a crown which a *Bulletin* writer accurately described as "a shocking example of the ancient taste in baubles. It amounts to a cross between a fancy basket and the framework of a birdcage" (16 September, p.40).

A later reviewer was blunt on the subject of costume:

At the very start Macbeth's "get-up" caused surprise for he is not usually arrayed so gaudily in red and black, nor made to appear so hairy and barbaric [*Dunedin Evening Star*, 20 June 1921].

According to the advertisements, *Macbeth* was "costumed in the authentic style of ancient Scotland", which suggests some affinity with the productions of Kean, Irving and Tree - and in fact, photographs of Tree and Wilkie as Macbeth show strong similarities in costume.

Wilkie had by now managed to assemble a group of actors who were by and large experienced in classical drama, thus reducing what had been one of the difficulties of his first Shakespeare season in 1916. The Scullys had been with the company since its formation, and their young daughter, Phyllis, virtually grew up in it, playing for years all the child roles - young Macduff, Edward Prince of Wales, and so on. Lorna Forbes had also been with the company almost continually, and was to remain with it to the last. Others who joined at this time were also to become long-standing members - Augustus Neville, William Lockhart (an English actor with many years of professional acting experience including appearances with Hermann Vezin, Lily Langtry, Ben Greet and Osmond Tearle) and J. Plumpton Wilson (another Englishman who had toured for six years with the F.R. Benson Shakespearean Company) . It was advertised that Allan Wilkie was the head of a company of forty artists, but it is more likely that thirty people, at most, were regularly employed. This exaggeration of numbers

seems to have been intended to lend weight to the strengths and capacity of the company, whereas in fact it was obviously in Wilkie's interest to keep salaries to the minimum. A number of members had a double function - it was very common for the stage manager (Vincent Scully), the stage director (Kingston Hewitt), the wardrobe designer (Arthur Goodsall), and other crew-members, to find themselves playing the smaller roles. In the Melbourne season, for example, Vincent Scully was required to play the Doctor in *Macbeth*, under the name of "P. Vincent" (his first name was Pat). He also appeared in this production as the third murderer. In *Hamlet* Scully played the third Player under his own name, while Edward Landor (Polonius) borrowed his pseudonym to appear as the second Gravedigger.

Both Vincent Scully and "P. Vincent" were listed as individual members of the company. Other pseudonyms which were to appear in Wilkie programmes for years to come were Mr J. Edgar, Mr H. Flynn, Mr H. (sometimes Charles) Martindale, Mr Duncan Rossmore (shades of *Macbeth*), Mr Henry/Frank/Horace Troedel (the name of a printer who produced some of the Wilkie programmes), Ronald Henley, and of course, the actor's traditional favourite, Walter Plinge. All these mystery performers would appear in the minor roles, and they were sometimes joined by such illustrious shadows as Mr B. Sullivan, Mr S. Phelps, Mr J. Kemble, or Mr W. Macready, in roles of third murderer, a mariner, a messenger, or an attendant. The doubling of parts in Shakespeare's plays was already a time-honoured custom: in 1966, Arthur Colby Sprague

published a study on the subject, having discussed it with Wilkie
corresponded with²⁴ and others. During the 1960s, Wilkie had

Professor Sprague with great enthusiasm on the topic, indicating, as
Sprague records in his essay (p.7), that the normal practice of the
earlier part of the century was to hide the fact, where possible,
that one actor was assuming more than one part - in many cases it
became a matter of pride to do so. Wilkie was surprised that no
one appeared to notice his tongue-in-cheek use of the names of the
great actors of the past on his programmes. As he wrote to Sprague,

I don't recollect any comments ever being made, and
I find that amongst the general public there is very
little knowledge of theatre history. Even 'Henry
Irving' means nothing to the majority of the present
generation.²⁵

Macbeth was given an initial run of two weeks, and was
succeeded by a further eight weeks of Shakespeare, during which six
other plays were produced. These included *Hamlet*, '*The Merchant of
Venice*, *Twelfth Night*, and *As You Like It*, in revivals which
differed very little from the previous versions other than in
certain cast changes and in the matter of the "new" set design. For
As You Like It (the sixth play of the season), Wilkie "lessens the
monotony of his green hangings by presenting a comparatively
handsome picture of the Forest of Arden" (*Bulletin*, 4 November 1920,
p. 34), this comment suggesting that the novelty of the scenic
arrangement had worn off for the audiences. The details of the set
were the closest approach to elaboration attempted during the
season. A large property tree was placed in the foreground, under

the boughs of which the actors could arrange themselves artistically. The backcloth was painted to depict a stream, "flowing between century-old oak trees", while the floor of the stage was carpeted with fallen leaves, for which "the property master spent some days of careful search. ... Not all dry leaves would suit, and the best ones were obtained with difficulty." As always, it was in the matter of costume that elaboration was most in evidence, particularly, of course, the costumes worn by the principals. For example, as Rosalind, Miss Hunter-Watts appeared first in

a gown of silver falling in straight lines from the bust decorated back and front with panels of flowered silk. The dainty outfit is completed with a smart beaded cap on her golden curls. As a youth in Arden she discloses slim russet-brown legs in long dove-coloured boots [*Bulletin*, 4 November, p.40].

As Rosalind, Miss Hunter-Watts won the approval of audiences and reviewers, although divergent comments made by the *Age* and the *Argus* on 1 November point to the danger of relying on reviews for an impression of any actor. For the *Age*, her Rosalind "must confirm the judgement that in such parts she is a much greater artist than when she essays a heavier emotion". For the *Argus*, however, "Miss Hunter-Watts seems 'happier' in tragedy than in comedy". Despite such obvious discrepancies, most reviews have sufficient corresponding points to merit some credence. For example, it was generally agreed that the characters of William and Audrey (played by Fred Patey and Mona Duval) were unnecessarily crude, being "endowed with the broadest bovine characteristics" (*Bulletin*, 4 November). This was to be a common criticism whenever the Wilkie company staged *As You Like It*. Indeed, when it had first been presented

in Melbourne on 18 March 1916, the *Age* had made a strong objection:

... how an experienced Shakspearian [*sic*] producer like Mr Wilkie ever allowed so jarring a note to be introduced into *As You Like It* as the Audrey of Miss Valentine Sydney it is difficult to imagine. Shakspeare [*sic*] "simple country wench" was grossly represented as the broad caricature of such half-witted creatures as have become popular as comedy relief in recent plays of Australian bush life.

Although the reviewer's sensibilities were clearly outraged by this portrayal, one can only assume that the broad humour had strong audience appeal, and that this was Wilkie's criterion in having fashion. Miss Irene Webb, who ²⁷ the part played in that Audrey in 1923, confirmed that Audrey was a gross creature at Wilkie's instigation. She had wanted to introduce some subtlety to the part, but her attempts to do so were castigated as "bloody awful", while outlandish caricature was met with smiles of approval.²⁸

The two remaining productions of the season, offered by Wilkie for the first time, were *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. The latter play had formed part of Oscar Asche's repertoire in 1910-12, when he had taken the role of Sir John Falstaff, for which he was physically well-suited. In typical Asche fashion, his rendering of the play had been supported by a great deal of scenic splendour, of which the most notable element was his decision to set the entire play in winter, so that the outdoor scenes were played in a snow-covered landscape, while the interiors were equipped with log fires. The snow - as in Henry Irving's famous version of *The Corsican Brothers* , in 1880 - was a

thick layer of salt, spread to great effect over the stage, in which the fairies sat with "unnatural thoughtlessness" (*Bulletin* 30 June 1910) while various characters appeared with noses reddened with the cold. The production was praised for its beauty, its strong teamwork, especially in the low comedy situations, and the performance of Asche, whose make-up was "a work of art in itself" (*Bulletin*, 22 August 1912). One of Asche's favourite production tricks was to have an actor eating on stage, and in this case, as Falstaff, he devoured an entire chicken, flinging the bones at Bardolph. Ngaio Marsh recalls seeing the production when it toured to New Zealand, but despite its general popularity, she found that the gimmicks of the piece stayed in her mind while the play did not - precisely the kind of argument which would support Wilkie's production methods.²⁹
[29]

Allan Wilkie's own version of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was received with general signs of favour. His make-up was considered effective, presenting "a large red face in a frame of white hair, and ... laughable legs waddling under the weight of the bulging tummy" (*Bulletin*, 11 November 1920). Perhaps significantly, the excellence of Wilkie's make-up was the only feature of his performance discussed by the *Age* (8 November, p.8), which noted that the play was as competently performed as it could be with so little rehearsal time. The broad comedy of the piece was emphasized, to the general enjoyment of the audiences. As an example of stage business introduced for comic effect, Wilkie recalled:

I had the wives conceal Robin in the buck-basket

prior to the commencement of the second buck-basket scene [IV.ii], so that when Ford tipped up the basket, out tumbled the diminutive Robin who made a derisive gesture to Ford and made his escape, adding to the discomfiture of Ford, the amusement of his companions, and the huge delight of the audience.³⁰

The Comedy of Errors, it was claimed, had not been seen on the Australian professional stage for forty-nine years. In itself, this presented a difficult challenge - the play's unfamiliarity made it less likely to draw large houses. In order to overcome this, the advertising was designed to emphasize the fact that the play was amusing - it was billed as "the only farce Shakespeare ever wrote". Despite this promise, there were many empty seats on the first night. The need to induce audiences to attend the lesser-known plays was to become a perennial problem for Wilkie, which accounts largely for the fact that his seasons relied on the popular pieces as much as possible. Since *The Comedy of Errors* is one of the shorter plays - lasting only about one and a half hours in performance, it was estimated - Wilkie decided on the experiment of preceding it with the potion scenes from *Romeo and Juliet*. This gave Miss Hunter-Watts, playing opposite Chris Olgar, the chance to demonstrate her talents in one of the parts that best suited her style; but in presenting it, Wilkie was obliged to take the risk that the audience would not be prepared to move from tragedy to farce in one evening. He must have considered the experiment to be successful, since he retained this combination almost every time *The Comedy of Errors* was played. For the *Argus* reviewer, "the contrast between the tremendous passion and the intense humanity of

the one, and the artificial dialogue and the frank buffoonery of the other, is such an object lesson in Shakespeare's limitless art as no text books or lectures could ever suggest" (18 October 1920).

Taking its cue from the word "farce", the company relaxed -he prescribed "Shakespearean" acting style for this piece - it was "played in a delightfully entertaining style, as if the company were enjoying a little light relief from the heavier going of the rest of the season" (*Argus*). Unfortunately, the *Age* did not share this point of view, describing the broad comedy as "a rabble of buffoonery for which there is no justification in the text" (18 October, p.8). According to Wilkie, one of the reasons for the play's infrequent appearance lay in the difficulty of finding two sets of actors sufficiently alike to pass as the two pairs of twins or. the confusion of whom the plot turns. On this occasion, reviewers agreed that he had come close to succeeding. As Antipholus of Syracuse, Wilkie paired himself with Guy Hastings, who was of a similar large build, while as the two Dromios he cast Edward Landor and Arthur Goodsall, who were apparently so well matched that

the audience, no less than Adriana's household, was kept in a state of continual confusion. The triumph of these two sets of twins was collective rather than individual, and they received a well-deserved ovation at the close of the performance [*Argus*].

Goodsall designed a series of Grecian costumes for the production which, intentionally or otherwise, added a further element of comedy - Wilkie and Hastings, for example, strutted "in knee-length Grecian draperies, with light stockings which make both sets of

legs look like pale, smoked sausages" (*Bulletin*, 21 October, p.40). The *Bulletin's* conclusion was that "the show, though it must have presented difficulties owing to the lack of tradition, is, viewed from various angles, the best Wilkie has given this season." Aside from the further indication that Wilkie's forte was broad comedy, this comment recalls the fact that Wilkie as director generally preferred not to depart from long-established stage business and interpretation in his productions.

At the beginning of this 1920 season, Wilkie had published a list of those who had signified their interest in his venture, and were prepared to stand as patrons to it. This was an excellent move, as it immediately conferred a certain social distinction and respectability upon the undertaking. The list was headed by the retiring Governor-General and Lady Helen Munro Ferguson, his wife, while the names which followed represented major spheres of influence. They included the Governor of Victoria (Sir William Irvine) and his wife; the Rt. Hon. W.M. Hughes, Prime Minister of Australia - who was to become a personal friend and a supporter of Wilkie; W.H. Lawson, Premier of Victoria; General Sir John Monash; Frank Tare, Victorian Director of Education; Sir John Grice, Vice-Chancellor of Melbourne University; the editors of the *Age* and the *Argus*; Dr E.H. Sugden, Master of Queen's College Melbourne and President of the Melbourne Shakespeare Society; Dr Archibald Strong (who was to be professor of English at Adelaide University from 1922 until his death in 1930); and numerous others. Strong, in particular, was a staunch advocate of Wilkie's work at this time,

being, as Wilkie later recalled, "a whole-hearted enthusiast for the drama in general and the Elizabethan drama in particular." [33] Such accumulated goodwill must have been of value to Allan Wilkie in his constant battle for the survival of his company.

The season at the Princess's Theatre closed on 20 November 1920, with a final performance of *Macbeth*. It appears to have been an artistic success, but financial worries had made it look as though the permanent Shakespearean company was doomed to failure. There had been many empty seats during the season, suggesting that demand for Shakespeare was indeed limited. Wilkie may well have also had to contend with the effects of the federal entertainment tax. This tax had been introduced on 1 January 1917, and it applied to all amusements charging more than sixpence for admission. The tax was levied at a rate of one penny in the shilling, so that a four-shilling ticket actually cost the purchaser four shillings and fourpence. Cinemas, which could offer entertainment for sixpence or less were at an advantage, and the live theatre in general quickly began to feel the effects of the tax. It was the type of entertainment offered by Wilkie which perhaps suffered most.

Larger concerns, such as Williamson's, continued to invest in large-scale spectacle. Their latest offering was *Chu Chin Chew*, rumoured to have cost £20,000, for which it was intended to charge 10s.6d. for the best seats. Wilkie was apparently offered the Australian lead in *Chu Chin Chow*, which ran in London for five years (August 1916-July 1921), starring its author, Oscar Asche.

He refused the offer, because he did not want to accept defeat for his company. The musical opened at the Melbourne Tivoli on 9 December 1920, and ran for over one hundred performances before moving on to Sydney and Adelaide. Wilkie took his company to Geelong for a three-night season, and then to Adelaide, where they played for three weeks before Christmas.

The next stage of the inaugural tour was to be a visit to Tasmania, and Wilkie decided to fulfil this engagement, even though it seemed likely that financial difficulties would put paid to the idea of a permanent Shakespeare company. The visit had been projected at least in September 1920 (and mentioned in the *Mercury* on 28 September), so it cannot be regarded as a last-minute decision to attempt to recoup losses. On the contrary, adverse conditions seemed likely from the start, owing to a shipping strike which had disrupted normal traffic to Tasmania. Under normal circumstances, the summer months were probably the best time of year to visit this state - the mild climate made it a popular holiday resort for visitors from the mainland, who would no doubt be happy to patronise any entertainments offered during their stay. This annual influx more than offset the Christmas-holiday retreat to the country of Hobart's more affluent citizens. However, the well-timed strike ensured that most hotels and boarding houses remained empty of mainland visitors, closing off one effective source of revenue to Wilkie. Understandably, advance bookings for the season were very low, as most residents assumed that the tour would be cancelled. This had been the case with other advertised

attractions - Madame Ethel Ashton, for example, "foremost amongst Victoria's concert platform singers and teachers", was obliged to cancel her scheduled appearance at the Hobart Town Hall. Undaunted, Wilkie made arrangements to get his company and effects across the Bass Strait, an undertaking which, as reported by the *Mercury* (28 December), was to cost him "no less than £300". An advance party managed to obtain passage on a cargo ship, while the majority of the company, including the principals, braved a rough voyage in the *S.S. Marrawah* from Melbourne, via King Island, to Stanley, on the north-west coast of Tasmania. Arriving at midnight, they boarded a large motor-car, and travelled all that night and the following day, arriving in Hobart on the evening of Sunday 26 December. Such dedication deserved to reap its reward, which arrived in the news that bookings for the season, due to open on Boxing Night, were steadily increasing.

Tasmania, in its isolation, had had a varied theatrical history. In the nineteenth century it had witnessed the start of some major ventures, such as the formation, in 1845, of George Coppin's first company. Hobart's Theatre Royal, the original of which was built in 1836, was certainly not the oldest theatre in Australia, but it was the oldest site at which theatre had been more or less continuously performed. Hobart was on the touring circuit for most major companies, which meant that it saw many of from the mainland. By 1920, apart from ³⁴the popular offerings the Theatre Royal, entertainments could be found at the Temperance Hall, which ran successful - usually imported - vaudeville

programmes, and at the Town Hall, normally the venue for concerts. There were local amateur performances from time to time, on an irregular basis. In addition to these somewhat spasmodic live entertainments, Hobart possessed several cinemas, which offered frequent changes of programme at a cost of 6d. plus tax. Even the Theatre Royal was converted to this purpose from time to time - Sunday-night screenings there were popular and regular. All things considered, it was most unlikely that more than one theatrical entertainment - especially from the mainland - would be offered at any given time, so any entrepreneur might reasonably expect to find a season in Tasmania profitable, once the transport costs had been offset. The popularity that Allan Wilkie's Shakespearean Company was to enjoy, then, need not seem surprising.

In the months preceding the Wilkie season, artists who appeared at the Theatre Royal included the Eugenie Duggan Dramatic Company, playing pieces like *When London Sleeps* and *East Lynne*, the Famous Diggers, and, most recently, Czerny the illusionist, at the head of "the most Artistic, the most Weird, the most Wonderful Show seen in Tasmania for years." Cinema fared particularly well in Hobart - there are many reports of packed houses for popular films, and in December 1920 audiences could select films by Billie Burke, Buck Jones, Larry Semon, Dorothy Minto, or Georges Carpentier "the most magnetic man in the world"). Apart from a visit by Gregan McMahon's amateur players, in 1912, little or no "classical" drama had been seen in Hobart for some years, a fact lamented by the *Mercury* leader which discussed the forthcoming Wilkie season:

The great gap in the social atmosphere of any city of only moderate size is the lack of opportunity of responding to the fine emotions expressed by opera and the drama. It is very seldom indeed that operatic or first-class dramatic companies pay Hobart a visit, and everyone will rejoice to hear of the approaching season of the Allan Wilkie Shakespearean Company ... [17 December 1920].

It should perhaps be mentioned that W.H. Simmonds, the editor of the *Mercury*, was on Wilkie's published list of patrons. According to the *Mercury*, no Shakespeare had been seen in Hobart since 1897. Before that date, there had been occasional performances of the plays, including a production of *Macbeth* in 1882, and seasons from Mrs Scott-Siddons (in 1878), George Rignold, Essie Jenyns, and others. The current dearth of Shakespeare, combined with the lack of theatrical competition, were to prove to Wilkie's advantage, both on his tour of Tasmania and on his subsequent visits to other centres outside the mainland capitals. If nothing else, his company could offer novelty value to a whole generation of new theatregoers. The problem - then and always - was to present plays with sufficient popular appeal to attract an audience.

Advance publicity was, of course, a significant part of each tour, establishing the company's name and reputation in each centre visited. Wilkie was to build a most competent system of publicity, which ensured that his name was kept before the public eye as such as possible. An important strand of the publicity lay in securing the patronage of the leading citizens in each state, and within a short time, Wilkie had acquired an impressive Tasmanian list, including the Governor (Lord Allardyce), the Premier (Sir Walter Lee), the Chief Justice, the Lord Mayor, the University

Vice-Chancellor, and many others, thus consolidating the practice begun in Melbourne.

In the two-week Hobart season, the Wilkie company performed all seven plays in their current repertoire. As was so often the case, the first appearance was in *The Merchant of Venice*, on 27 December 1920, in the presence of the Governor of Tasmania, and before a full house. Taking its cue, perhaps, from the publicity material that the *Mercury* had printed, the review of the production offered nothing but praise. In the case of the principals, this was unalloyed - Miss Hunter-Watts as Portia

displayed much of the simplicity, clarity and breadth of effect that belong to classic acting. It was an agreeable mixture of high spirits and high seriousness, carrying with it sympathies of the house [28 December 1920, p.6].

For the other company members, praise was modified: "The Antonio of Mr Jack Lennon, although perhaps a little too serious in the first act, was on the whole, a carefully thought-out performance." The reports suggest that favourable response by audiences grew in leaps and bounds, so that after the staging of *Hamlet*, on the third night of the season, it was said: "histrionically, the production was perfect, and the enthusiasm of the audience was irrepressible at the conclusion of each oration, and at the fall of each curtain" (30 December). By the end of the fortnight, the *Tasmanian Mail* was able to report that the Wilkie season "had a most remarkable conclusion ... when the building was packed from floor to ceiling" (13 January 1921, p. 8). The attendances at the twelve performances were said to be a record for Hobart, so Wilkie

may be considered justified in claiming Tasmania as one of his strongholds. As he said: "I have frequently quoted Hobart as being the most remarkable Shakespeare centre for its size of any this display of enthusiasm,³⁵ place I have ever visited." Despite Wilkie gave only one performance of each of the two unfamiliar plays in the repertoire - *Errors* and *Merry Wives* - as he was unwilling to risk bad houses. On the other hand, it was announced that *As You Like It* was to be repeated "for the benefit of the hundreds who were turned away" from the previous performance.

The season was regarded as a cultural opportunity for Hobart audiences, with phrases like "intellectual treat" and "scholarly manner" figuring prominently in newspaper columns. At the same time, Wilkie himself lost no opportunity to bring home the sheer comedy, akin to farce, which his stage business emphasized. As an example, his treatment of the so-called kitchen scene in *Twelfth 'Night* (II.iii) shows him dwelling on the aspects of broad humour which may make the strongest appeal to an audience. The business was described by a later reviewer in the *Sydney Morning Herald* as follows:

Mr Wilkie had contrived much elaborate "business" so that he himself might take the curtain. Instead of going off to bed, the two knights sank snoring back to back upon the floor. Then Feste stole in with a ghost-like effigy that he had contrived out of a sheet, woke the knights, and sent them into the wings roaring with terror. Forthwith, humming over snatches of his songs, "O Mistress Mine" and "Come Away Death", Feste pulled his chair close to the fire and fell into a doze. Thus it was that Malvolio was able to make his entrance carrying a drawn sword, and skirmishing round after marauders [3 May 1928, p.15].

In this way, **Wilkie hoped** to broaden the base of **his** appeal to a popular audience. **His** advertising tried to get the **best** of both worlds - a scholarly approach to the text for the "purists", and encouragement to "the masses" not to regard the productions as dry or dull. To appear elitist would be to lose an important source of revenue, and this fact was never forgotten.

With his success in Hobart confirmed, Wilkie moved the company to the National Theatre in Launceston for a further eight performances - a surprisingly long run, considering the population at that time. Plans to play in Burnie and Devonport, the other major centres in the State, were cancelled because of delays caused by the shipping strike, one of many occasions on which Wilkie's tours were to be disrupted by industrial disputes - another hazard of the course he had chosen to follow. The Launceston visit followed the usual pattern, a pattern of reasonably good houses on the first nights of seasons, and "crowded and appreciative audiences" for the final nights, with a tendency to give Wilkie a round of applause after every long speech.

Once the whole Tasmanian tour had been so gratifyingly concluded, Wilkie regained confidence in his scheme to maintain a permanent Shakespeare company in Australia. He had ample evidence to suggest that he would be working in a largely untapped field, since the major commercial theatre firms rarely, if ever, toured outside the capital cities, and audiences in the country centres would be most likely to appreciate whatever was offered to them in the way of entertainment. Shakespeare, in particular, would

be a novelty for the majority of the young generation of the 1920s. This had been proved in Tasmania, which thus represented a useful testing ground.

When he left Tasmania, Wilkie took with him a new musical director - a Hobart musician named Bradshaw Major, who was to remain with the company until 1930. His main job was to direct the orchestra which supported all Wilkie's productions, providing overtures and entractes, and playing incidental music wherever appropriate. This ranged from accompanying the songs of Shakespeare to adding musical motifs, such as the piece of "Malvolio music" to which the character made all his entrances, as well as providing appropriate music for dances. Extant music was used where possible - for example, Mendelssohn was always played for performances of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Nicolai for *The Merry Wives* - but where necessary, Major would compose his own pieces, such as the march for *Julius Caesar*. The components of the orchestra would vary from one venue to another. In the mainland capitals, local musicians were hired, to provide a competent orchestra of perhaps a dozen instruments. In the small towns, there might be found only one or two musicians who were capable of working with little or no rehearsal. Mr John McGowan, who toured for a time with the company as violinist, recalls the occasion on which a local grocer acted as trombonist. His shop was close to the theatre, and every time a customer rang the bell, he would leave the orchestra pit to attend to her needs. Fortunately, although this practice was disconcerting, he was never absent when actually required to play.

[36]

Major's task clearly presented its own difficulties from time to time, but his work was a valuable addition to the success and the "polish" of the Wilkie company.

In February 1921, the company staged a five-week season at the Sydney Grand Opera House - the first time Wilkie had been seen there in Shakespeare since 1916. Even though the population far exceeded that of Hobart, Wilkie kept to his new-found policy of changing the programme every evening. Reviews pointed to the company's achievement in staging eight plays in such a short space of time, the *Bulletin* (17 February 1921) calling this effort a tour de force.

The one new play introduced into the repertoire was *Julius Caesar*, which opened on 12 March 1921. It was thought that this play had not been seen in Sydney since George Rignold's company had played it some twenty-seven years previously, but it had in fact been played more recently than that. In 1909, Oscar Asche had staged it, first at the Town Hall and later at the Criterion, as an experimental part of his season. In contrast to the elaborate settings of the other pieces he staged, *Julius Caesar* was presented as a costumed recital, with the stage bare of furnishings, and decorated instead with black velvet curtains. Whenever a change of scene was to be indicated, the strong pools of limelight trained on the stage would be momentarily dimmed. The actors were dressed in the traditional white and purple togas, and the only other spot of colour was provided by Caesar's assassination, when the conspirators turned to the audience to reveal their arms covered

in "blood". Asche himself had chosen to play Brutus, rather than the usual actor-manager choice of Mark Antony, a decision which presumably arose from the fact that he had played this role with Benson's company at Stratford, and was more familiar with it. When he revived *Julius Caesar* in Australia in 1922, Asche played Mark Antony. The production was praised for the simplicity which enabled the audience to focus their attention upon the actors, rather than being swamped by the scenery. Thus, Wilkie's innovation had been preceded in Australia, although for Asche it had been an experimental departure and not the norm. In the Wilkie version, Mark Antony became once more the star part, in which Wilkie was said to have "employed his luscious voice effectively in the orations" (*Bulletin*, 17 March, p.42), and the part of Brutus was left to Jack Lennon. Departing from the new policy, *Julius Caesar* was played without interruption for the last six nights of the season, on the principle that, being new to the repertoire, it would attract larger audiences.

Wilkie divided the play into two parts, as was now his normal practice, ending part I after the murder scene, III.i. Following his advertised eight-minute interval, the remainder of the play was given in three scenes: the Forum (III.ii to IV.i), Brutus's Tent at Sardis (IV.ii and iii), and the plains of Philippi (V), each of these scenes requiring a further pause of one minute. This made the production more cohesive than, say, the Ian Maclaren 1917 version, which had divided the play into three acts, isolating the Forum scene as Act II, and adding the spectacle of Caesar's body being burnt on a funeral pyre. Ellis Irving, who joined the Wilkie

Company in 1922 (aged 20), recalls the first night of *Julius Caesar* at the Palace Theatre in Melbourne (18 February 1922):

All the white togas of the senators, and purple and gold for Caesar, coloured costumes for the women and various colours for the mobs. All this with the bottle green tabs and marble pillars, etc., and heaps of rose petals thrown at Caesar and Anthony on their way to the senate. As a lad I thought this exciting, and thrilled to be part of it.³⁸

The Sydney season ended on 18 March 1921, and the company then embarked on its first full-scale tour of Australasia. Wilkie saw clear advantages in following the best climate, so it became regular practice for the tours to play in Queensland around April and May (mid-winter, when the climate was perfect), and in Tasmania in January, thus avoiding the great summer heat of the mainland. This very sensible plan was altered only when it became impossible to find vacant theatres at the appropriate times of year, or when tours of New Zealand threw out the regular schedule. Wilkie made it very clear in his memoirs that the tours were an enormous undertaking, requiring meticulous organisation, and always subject to upset in the face of strikes or other unexpected obstacles.

I was ... handicapped by my constant difficulty in obtaining theatres at suitable times and in their natural geographical rotation, as theatres were only available when the proprietors did not require them for one of their own companies. This often necessitated huge journeys when a theatre did happen to fall vacant, or else filling in time in small towns where, at the best, it was impossible to meet the expenses of a large company.³⁹

The immensity of such an undertaking should be kept in mind when assessing the work of the Allan Wilkie Shakespearean Company. In

addition to the "legitimate" unavailability of theatres, Wilkie also had to contend with the opposition of rival managements. From time to time, this took the form of barring Wilkie from playing in their theatres, or else placing major obstructions in his path. An interview with Wilkie printed in the *Mercury* on 28 December 1920, suggests these difficulties. Wilkie is quoted as saying:

... the difficulty is to get the theatres. In the mainland capitals the theatres are all in the hands of one big combine ... I want to take my company to Sydney, but I cannot get a theatre. The combine is unwilling to let to an independent company; besides, they have their own companies and shows to consider, and I am the only independent actor-manager at present touring Australasia. I would like to see a municipal or state theatre established in every State capital. Until this is done it is becoming more and more impossible for an independent company to live in Australia.

In the later years of touring, opposition to Wilkie was to become more blatant, with the result that he was often faced with the unenviable choice of avoiding seasons in the lucrative east-coast capitals, or of taking obscure and unfashionable theatres in these cities.

The remainder of 1921 was occupied by extensive touring, beginning with the first visit of the Allan Wilkie Shakespearean Company to Queensland. A three-week season at His Majesty's Theatre, Brisbane, in which the full current repertoire was played, proved to be a successful venture, and was followed by a tour of other centres in Queensland, including Rockhampton and Toowoomba, over about four weeks. With long distances to be covered by rail,

travelling time alone must have eaten heavily into this period. From Queensland, the company embarked on its first tour of New Zealand under its new name, remaining there until mid-September. It was during the season in Wellington that the company celebrated its first anniversary, an occasion which was marked by the presentation to Wilkie and his wife of an illuminated address testifying to "the high esteem in which the recipients were held by the members of the company and staff" (*Mercury*, 4 October 1921). I draw attention to this fact only to reinforce the idea that Wilkie must have created a strong company spirit, with a sense of fair play, decent working conditions, and a reasonable wage, in order to retain the loyalties and services of company members for comparatively lengthy periods, as he did. On this same occasion, Wilkie spoke of his ambitions:

The company, by touring for a year in Australasia with Shakespearean plays, had achieved something unique in the annals of the Antipodes, and he hoped to add four more plays to their repertoire yearly, so that in seven years they would have presented all Shakespeare's works, which would constitute a world's record.

On returning to Australia, the company performed at country centres in New South Wales, including Wagga Wagga and Albury (each of which produced sufficient audiences to warrant two performances), gave its second season in Adelaide, during October, and then moved to Western Australia. There was a three-week Perth season, at His Majesty's Theatre, which culminated in a special open-air performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (newly added to the repertoire) in the grounds of Government House. In his fashion,

Wilkie was keeping alive the traditions of Ben Greet, traditions which were particularly apt in the Australian climate. Brief seasons at other centres in Western Australia followed - for example, a week at Kalgoorlie, playing in the Town Hall - and then the company began the journey back across Australia, making brief halts at suitable venues such as Broken Hill, Port Pirie in South Australia and Ballarat in Victoria. They were then poised to make the trip across the Bass Strait for their second Tasmanian season.

By the end of 1921, then, the Allan Wilkie Shakespearean Company had covered Australia and New Zealand, playing in all the capital cities and in many surrounding and outlying towns and cities. The only region not visited either then or at any time in the future was the Northern Territory. In an interview given to the *Mercury* on 23 December 1921, Wilkie summarised his company's achievement.

During the fifteen months his company had been in existence they had given 325 performances of Shakespeare's plays to upwards of half a million people, in over 50 cities and towns in Australia and New Zealand, and travelled 1,300 [sic] miles in the process, without doing indifferent business anywhere.

The triumphs of the first year - which had overturned all the predictions of disaster heaped upon the venture - could be attributed in part to the fact that many of the centres visited by Wilkie had seen no dramatic company, and certainly no Shakespeare, for a considerable period of time. In his memoirs, Wilkie pinpointed one of the difficulties he was to face when planning further seasons for these places. On return tours

there was no longer the element of novelty which attached to my first visits, and it was, therefore, necessary to maintain the interest by constantly adding new productions to my repertoire. Unfortunately when one has exhausted the more popular plays of Shakespeare there is but a limited clientele for those that are lesser known, such as, say, *Coriolanus* or *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. [40]

In a sense, Wilkie was trapped. He had given it as his express intention to perform all the plays of Shakespeare, in order to achieve a world record, and apparently for purely altruistic, scholarly and artistic motives. It becomes clear that he was now obliged to pursue this record in order to maintain enough public interest for the whole venture to remain a financial possibility. Within a few more years, he would find it necessary to adapt his grand scheme in order to survive, since it was only too true that the Australian public had a very limited capacity for attending the plays of Shakespeare, especially when staged again and again by the same company, with little variation in production, and with the same anonymous settings of bottle-green curtains. Wilkie would have to resort to excellent publicity to overcome these problems.

One of the ideas that he hit upon to drum up additional public interest in the works of Shakespeare was the founding of his own journal, called *The Shakespearean Quarterly*. This was launched in Sydney in January 1922, selling at a cost of 1s. per copy. The editor was Hector Bolitho, a young journalist whom Wilkie had met in New Zealand during his 1919-20 tour, and who was then on the staff of the Sydney *Telegraph*. Hailed by its founder as the only Shakespearean journal published in the British Empire, the new magazine set itself comprehensive aims. In his preface to

the first issue, Bolitho made it clear that the magazine was intended to become "an. established record of Shakespearean study and stage production", both within the Commonwealth and elsewhere. It was also to be "the official organ of Shakespearean societies throughout Australasia, giving accounts of their proceedings and activities" (*Mercury*, 23 December 1921). The magazine was to strive for a format to appeal to all:

We desire to present the research, scholarship and appreciation of the world's finest intellects in a form that will be understood by the people of our cities and the growing children of our schools.

The content of the first issue reflects the policy that was to be followed throughout the magazine's short life. There were one or two scholarly articles, and reports on the activities of the Shakespeare societies of Brisbane and New South Wales. There were poems, jests and other matter loosely connected with Shakespeare and there were photographs and illustrations of Shakespearean actors, including, naturally, full-page portraits of Mr Allan Wilkie (as Hamlet) and Miss Hunter-Watts. The bulk of the first issue was occupied with the details of Shakespearean performances in Australia, including a survey of nineteenth-century performance, as well as observations on the work of Allan Wilkie. This latter subject received prominent attention, with details of past and forthcoming seasons, and praise from various quarters for the success of his huge undertaking. Five thousand copies of the first issue of *The Shakespearean Quarterly* were printed, and in order to dispose of this number, it was arranged that copies could be purchased at all the theatres where the Wilkie Company performed, either from

the programme sellers during the course of the evening or from the theatre office. This information was advertised on all programmes for the season. Despite the high hopes and good intentions of the publication, it did not prove to be a profitable venture, and Wilkie was forced to abandon this convenient form of publicity. It survived for three years, the last issue appearing in October 1924. Its brief flourishing stands as a monument to Wilkie's astute sense of publicity and public relations, and also, of course, it confirms his serious intentions and scholarly aspirations with regard to Shakespeare. This in itself was not an insignificant achievement.

During the Wilkie company's absences from Melbourne and Sydney in the years 1920-22, a number of other Shakespearean ventures had arisen. One must surely give Wilkie's success some credit for inspiring others to follow in his wake, since the activity in producing the plays of Shakespeare was higher in this period than it had been for some years previously. The efforts which now appeared - most of them on an amateur basis - can be divided into three categories. First, there were plays presented by the Mermaid Play Society, largely for general interest; secondly, there were plays presented by groups with the specific intention of attracting audiences predominantly composed of schoolchildren; and thirdly, in the space of two months in late 1921, Melbourne saw two different "one-man" recitals of Shakespeare. These recitals were, in fact, the only fully-professional presentations of Shakespeare in Melbourne during this two-year period, apart from the visits by the Wilkie Company.

The Mermaid Play Society was formed, as was its English model, to present, as the *Bulletin* described it, "the lesser-known classics and the best 'literary' efforts of the modern stage" (30 June 1921). Two of its productions were plays by Shakespeare, both presented in Melbourne's Melba Hall. The first of these was *The Winter's Tale*, produced by Arthur Goodsall and staged in April 1921. The second production, which was of *Much Ado About Nothing*, was seen in May 1921, starring Carrie Haase (a teacher of elocution) as Beatrice. This production received generally scathing notices ("... a dispiriting performance, in which the prompter had the principal part"), but it is still worthy of note because it shows a re-awakened interest by local actors in the staging of Shakespeare - something which had been largely absent before the arrival of Allan Wilkie.

The second category of Shakespearean performance at this time shows even more influence by the work of Wilkie. These were the plays staged principally for "educational" purposes in Sydney and Melbourne. In September 1920, the *Bulletin* reported briefly on the work in both cities of an actor called Stanley McKay. He had formed a group called the McKay Players, who had already performed *The Merchant of Venice*, selected as one of the school set texts of the year. They now proposed to present *Henry V* in Sydney, again chosen because it was a current examination text. McKay, who had formerly headed his own professional touring companies, took his inspiration, he claimed, from Ben Greet, who had established a series of Shakespearean matinees in London for

schoolchildren. It was claimed that 30,000 school children had seen McKay's matinee productions to date, which presumably made it a reasonably profitable undertaking, despite the fact that the Victorian Education Department, though displaying enthusiasm for the project, was unable to offer any financial assistance. I can discover no later reference to McKay, which perhaps suggests that his venture was short-lived. However, he was by no means the only one to take up the notion of Shakespeare for schools in this period. Three months later, the *Bulletin* drew notice to the work of Eleanor Ross, who formed the Shakespeare Women Players during that year in Sydney. Her group evidently gave Shakespearean recitals in various Sydney schools, and were the first group to do so (*Bulletin*, 2 December 1920, p.42).

The most interesting of the companies formed at this time to perform Shakespeare for schools was that created in Victoria by Arthur Greenaway. The existence of this company was announced in the *Bulletin* on 20 January 1921. Greenaway had a strong background in Shakespeare, having played "principal Shakespearean roles in England, America and Australia", and numbering amongst his experiences tours with Osmond Tearle. He had last been seen in Shakespeare in the successful Ian Maclaren. season of 1917. He now decided to set up his own venture, which was to tour Victoria, with the approval, once more, of the Education Department, offering to schools productions of *As You Like It*, *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar* and *The Merchant of Venice* - all presumably set texts for study in 1921. A few performances of these plays were given at the Melbourne

Playhouse, for the general public, between March and May, and were considered creditable, on the whole. Two main points of interest arise from these productions. The first is that it was planned to keep the sets as simple as possible - they were to be nothing more than curtains, which would make touring an easier task. The second point of interest is that Greenaway secured the services of several actors who had appeared in Shakespeare for Allan Wilkie. The most prominent of these was Edward Landor, who repeated his successful portrayal of Polonius, and also undertook such parts as Launcelot Gobbo. Other familiar figures included Fred Patey (Gratiano), who had been with Wilkie from 1916 to 1921, playing "second low comedian" parts like Gregory and William; and Adele Inman, who had played ingenue roles for Wilkie between 1913 and 1920, and was now promoted to major roles like Portia. Thus, Wilkie's training of actors in classical methods was beginning to spread to other companies.

The third type of Shakespearean production, other than Wilkie's, to re-emerge in 1921 was the solo recital. The first, presented at the Melbourne Playhouse in October, was a single-nanded presentation of *Hamlet*, in a two-hour version, of which the most unusual feature was the fact that it was performed by a woman, Miss Dorothea Spinney. Miss Spinney, who was on tour from England, was renowned for her one-woman interpretations of Greek plays, and this was to be her one recorded venture into Shakespeare. She claimed never to have seen a performance of *Hamlet*, but her interpretation did not necessarily suffer because of this. In

fact, the extreme simplicity of the staging and the beauty of her work received praise. *The Shakespearean Quarterly* reported the comments of Owen Wistor, an American author, who said that "in her rendering of the part of Ophelia he saw what he had never seen before - mad hands" (January 1922, p.33). Her hands, certainly, and her face, were emphasized by the brown velvet costume she wore, which was "knee-length, and cut on Hamlet-like lines, with long suede legging-boots, and for the ghost scene an additional long cloak" (*Bulletin*, 6 October 1921). Although no comparisons are drawn with Wilkie's settings Miss Spinney's simple staging was praised: it featured only an "antique chair" and a table, set in front of brown linen drapes. The performer, then, was the one focus of attention.

This was also the case with the second recital, presented by Alexander Watson, a well-regarded English actor making his third tour of Australia. He, too, chose to present himself in excerpts from *Hamlet*, and was especially praised for his presentation of such diverse characters as Polonius and Ophelia.

Interest in Shakespeare was also promoted and maintained by the various Shakespeare societies around Australia. Perhaps the oldest of these was the Shakespeare Society of New South Wales, founded in 1900, and flourishing in 1922, when the growing membership was reported as over one hundred (according to '*The Shakespearean Quarterly*'), under the leadership of the current president, Shakespearean actor Walter Bentley. Regular meetings were held for discussion and the presentation of papers; lectures were given

for the benefit of schoolchildren preparing for examinations; and readings of the plays were also held. Clearly, it was in Wilkie's best interests to support and promote these groups at every opportunity, and indeed he made a point of doing so, speaking to the groups whenever possible on Shakespearean matters.

As a further impetus to the flourishing of Shakespearean performance in this period, it was in 1922 that Oscar Asche returned to Australia - without Lily Brayton, from whom he had been divorced. Asche, who was to remain in Australia this time for about fifteen months (leaving early in 1924), had no intention of offering an exclusive diet of Shakespeare on this grand tour. He opened with extended runs of his latest musical extravaganza, *Cairo*, but this was to be followed by revivals of his productions of *Julias Caesar*, *Othello* and *The Taming of the Shrew*. All were to be on the grand scale of their former presentation, and would point once more to the major differences in style and outlook between his work and the production methods Wilkie was determined to continue with.

While Shakespeare was gaining in popularity on the mainland, the Allan Wilkie Company travelled to Tasmania, commencing its second season at Hobart's Theatre Royal on 26 December 1921, exactly one year after its first appearance there. So confident was Wilkie of the favour in which Tasmanian audiences held Shakespeare that the length of the season was doubled to four weeks - a surprising length of time for a small population to support a professional visiting theatre company. However, Wilkie's confidence was fully

justified by excellent attendances for the entire season. The repertoire now consisted of twelve of Shakespeare's plays, eleven which were to be presented during the Hobart season. ^{42 of} Plays which had been added to the repertoire during 1921 were *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Othello* and *Julius Caesar*. Three of these, of course, had been in the repertoire of the George Marlow Shakespearean Company, but none of the five had previously been played by Wilkie in Tasmania.

The relative popularity of Shakespeare's plays, as gauged by Wilkie, can be indicated by the number of times in which each play is included in a season's repertoire. ■ In all, Wilkie was to make nine visits to Tasmania, and three plays were included in eight of those visits: *The Merchant of Venice*, *Twelfth Night* and *Hamlet*. Next in popularity, each retained in seven tours, were *As You Like It*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet*; while at the bottom of the Wilkie scale such plays as *Measure for Measure*, *Cymbeline* and *King Lear* appeared only once each. This is by no means surprising, since the latter were amongst the plays which were performed only rarely in Australia. One ought rather to applaud Wilkie for bringing them to light once more and providing audiences of the 1920s with a rare opportunity to see them.

I have mentioned that one of Wilkie's publicity features was the aim to establish a world record for consecutive performances of Shakespeare's plays. This was to appear in all his advertising for the next three years, with at least the partial objective of encouraging audiences to support his endeavour by attending more

performances. The opening night of the 1921-22 season in Hobart was to be the 329th consecutive performance by the company. In later months, as the number increased, the fact that Wilkie had achieved his world record was emphasized, and it was brought forward as an object worthy of praise.

A Midsummer Night's Dream, opened this second Hobart season, and it was played for three consecutive nights, allegedly because it was "so suited to the Christmas season". Full houses were the rule for this and all subsequent productions offered, the *Dream* being sufficiently popular to warrant a further performance later in the visit. The role of Nick Bottom the Weaver was one of those to which Wilkie's style was best suited. The *Mercury* review described his interpretation as "mercurial and noisy in turns; a robust and cheery Bottom, a compound of ignorance, mock heroics, and unbounded conceit, whilst he also possesses a fair dash of mother wit" (27 December 1921). It might be added that this is very much a summary of the character as Shakespeare wrote it: at the least, Wilkie can be credited with not distorting the playwright's intentions. However, his performance in this role did receive good reviews in all centres where the piece was played. His large build and big voice made him physically suited to the part, and his costume and movements capitalised on this, ensuring that his performance remained the centre of comic interest. As producer and leading actor, Wilkie was always ready to capitalise on audience preference, with the result that this production was dominated by those scenes involving the rehearsal and performance

of "Pyramus and Thisbe", with the transformation of Bottom coming a close second. Much attention was lavished on the development of comic business for these scenes, at least some of which was "borrowed" from earlier performers. For example, when Bottom awakes (IV.i), he discovers some hay in his pouch, which throws the unreality of his dream into doubt. This business Wilkie took from the comedian George Weir, whose performance as Bottom he had witnessed in his teens, vividly recalling this one moment. "I

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didn't hesitate to appropriate such a telling piece of business." The *Sydney Morning Herald* (25 July 1930), was to describe Wilkie's traditional awakening business as follows:

With looks of gawky wonderment, he felt for the pair of giant ears. In a sudden agony of fear he whisked round and looked behind him to see whether he still wore the ass's tail. Then, when he had finally decided the whole affair was a dream, he put his hand to his pocket and discovered there the sheaf of grass which Titania's little fairy servitors had given him. The find was too much for him. He retired slowly from the scene, shaking his head dazedly, as the curtain fell.

The play-within-a-play (V.i) was prolonged, of course, with business to amuse the audience. For example, in Melbourne, "the house rocked most to the preposterous business of Wilkie preparing himself for a comfortable pose as a corpse" (*Bulletin*, 30 March 1922). Every device was tried to add to the humour. Starveling was afflicted with deafness, which "perpetually upset the calculations of the others" [*Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 July 1928], and as Moonshine he was equipped with a real dog.

Such incidents as Bottom's search for Thisbe's

mantle, which "Night"[sic] had casually picked up to use as a protection against the hot metal of his lanthorn, were keenly amusing. The rest of the players in this scene acted up to Mr Wilkie with enthusiasm, increasing the effect of his sallies into broad farce. ... [There was a] highly ridiculous Thisbe, fighting with Pyramus for possession of the outspread fingers which represent a chink in the wall, and greatly discommoding

the knight when she fell upon his prostrate form [5 July].

So the business mounted. Douglas Wilkie recalls that, especially in the smaller country towns, the play scene would be extended as far as possible, at the expense of the remainder of the text. It was the lovers who suffered. Their scenes were cut wherever possible, to permit extension of the broadly comic elements of the play. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that their performances were frequently considered lacklustre, or that a critic could describe the role of Helena as one which "'doesn't give much scope for acting" (*Bulletin*, 30 March 1922).

The emphasis of humour was all the more necessary in Wilkie's production because it had to compete in the memories of the audience with two earlier versions, one of which was near-legendary in Australia. This was the production by the George Musgrove Shakespeare Comedy Company, which had toured Australasia in 1903. On its initial appearance in Melbourne at the Princess's Theatre, it ran for an exceptional seven weeks. Most of the company were imported, and apart from their various abilities the greatest attraction of the piece lay in its spectacular presentation, emulating the splendours of Tree's version in England. The imported scenery was painted by Hawes Craven, the forest scenes being particularly splendid. The fairies flew, the costumes were

decorative, a large orchestra was assembled to play Mendelssohn's music, and as one of the more impressive effects, the slow dawning of the day in the forest, where the Athenian lovers lay sleeping, was presented. This production also emphasized the farcical elements of the plot, and that, together with the time required to present effects, necessitated cuts in the text. The whole seems to have been best appreciated as a glorified pantomime with a superior "book", featuring as it did ballets of elves and fairies, and a woman - Miss Dora Rignold - in the role of Oberon. Ten years later it was in this latter feature that the Oscar Asche version of the *Dream* differed. Against audience expectation, he cast a man (H.R. Hignett) as Oberon, though he retained the then-usual female Puck, played in this case by Florrie Allen. Asche's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, opened in Melbourne in February 1913, and achieved a respectable run of four weeks, again partly to be attributed to its scenic display. This had its own disadvantages -the first-night performance lasted nearly four hours, because of the unavoidable delays for scene changes. Wilkie's 1921-22 production could at least escape this, though that may have been poor consolation for those who recalled the sheer beauty of the earlier performances. His production, divided into six simple scenes, used scenery which suspiciously resembled the Wilkie Forest of Arden. Like Asche, he retained a man in the part of Oberon (Leslie Manners, in the 1922 season), and like both his predecessors he used the music of Mendelssohn. However, this was supplemented by Bradshaw Major, who wrote music for dances of fairies and gnomes, these being children recruited in each city of the tour. To sum up, then, since Wilkie's

chosen method of staging could not hope to compete with these former glories, it was necessary for him to emphasize the farcical element of the text to a far greater extent than his forerunners.

Wilkie's second tour of Tasmania was a pronounced success. After his extended stay in Hobart, he played for a fortnight in Launceston - twice the time of his previous visit - and, in addition, he made appearances for one or two nights in Devonport, Burnie and Ulverstone, centres rarely visited by dramatic companies. The success of the Wilkie Company in Tasmania is all the more remarkable when one realises that the population of Hobart in 1921 was recorded at only 52,391. However, it seems that the smaller centres, less well catered for, did support him more strongly than the larger cities. Dunedin in New Zealand, in many ways comparable to Hobart, was similarly strong in its support of Wilkie and his Shakespeare productions.

Returning to the mainland, Wilkie commenced a season at the Palace Theatre in Melbourne on 18 February 1922, playing his 1921 repertoire, to which was added a revival of *Richard III*. In March a new problem arose. Frediswyde Hunter-Watts, whose health was never strong, was obliged to retire temporarily from the company. Her place was filled by an Australian actress named Hilda Dorrington, company throughout 1922. The new presentation⁴⁴ who remained with the of *Richard III*, which opened on 1 April 1922, used Shakespeare's text rather than Gibber's. This meant that material from *Henry VI Part III* was left out, while Clarence's dream (I.iv) was restored to the text, providing a showpiece for Leslie Manners in the part.

A surprising omission in the Wilkie version was the character of Queen Margaret, thus depriving the play of her famous vituperative exchanges with Richard in I.iii. The other women of the play - especially Queen Elizabeth and the Duchess of York - had their parts considerably reduced in Wilkie's cutting. For example, II. ii. 1-33 and 47-88 and the whole of II.iv were eliminated.⁴⁵

Wilkie was now considered to be an adequate, if flawed, Richard. The *Bulletin* called his interpretation "glaringly and humorously hypocritical, characteristically uneven in histrionic merit, and always powerful in a rough way" (6 April 1922, p.34). For the *Age*, however, the part was beyond Wilkie, so that "in the most dramatic moments he invariably showed a tendency to adopt the methods of the villain of cheap melodrama" (3 April, p.8). The *Bulletin* asserted that he took no real interest in the part - as was revealed by the fact that, from time to time, he forgot to maintain his crippled pose and dragging leg. Another indication that he did not perhaps feel entirely comfortable with this part is that *Richard III* disappeared entirely from the repertoire after June 1924.

In 1922 Wilkie played two seasons in Sydney - the last year in which he was to be able to do so. The first of these, at the Grand Opera House, ran for six weeks, while the second, at the Palace Theatre, lasted two weeks, preparatory to another tour of New Zealand. During this second Sydney visit, he prepared and presented *King John*, the first of the lesser-known history plays of Shakespeare to appear in his repertoire. It had not been

staged in Australia for over fifty years, the last performance probably being that of Walter Montgomery, a touring English actor, in the late 1860s. Yet for the *Bulletin*, at least, the play was best forgotten. "For every penny-worth of fine patriotic sentiment there is an intolerable deal of turgid declamation" (31 August 1922). The strongest argument against Wilkie's production was that it lacked the one element which might have given it vitality - "something epic in the way of staging and scenery". Here was a case when it might be argued that the text was not able to stand alone without sufficient colour and pageantry to assist its passage.

The new tour of New Zealand almost put an end to the Allan Wilkie Shakespearean Company. New Zealand was at that time suffering a depression, and the effects of this struck hard at the theatrical profession - a warning, of sorts, of conditions in the great depression to come at the end of the 1920s. Wilkie suffered great financial losses during this tour amounting, as he later claimed, to over £3,000. As a direct result of this disastrous experience the Wilkie Company was not to return to New Zealand for five years.

The company returned to Australia in January 1923. Wilkie booked the Prince of Wales Theatre in Adelaide, and tried to raise the £400 he required to recommence operations. Fortunately, he discovered on this occasion that a sufficient sum of money lay forgotten in one of his bank accounts to tide him over. This situation points to the extremely precarious nature of Wilkie's "hole venture. All his profits from one season could be eaten up

very quickly if a bad season followed. As it happened, the four weeks that the company now played in Adelaide cleared a profit of over £1,000 - but, of course, with no assurance that this sum would not disappear if another bad season occurred. Wilkie estimated that his weekly running costs amounted to anything between £1,000 and £1,400, while only infrequently could he maintain a bank balance of more than two or three hundred pounds, so that "it required very skilful financial juggling wherewith to meet my salary list, with unflinching regularity, at the end of each week."⁴⁷

During 1923, Wilkie added four new plays to his Shakespearean repertoire, thus maintaining his estimated annual quota and bringing his total up to eighteen productions. The plays were *Henry 7*, *The Tempest*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *King Lear*. The company now consisted of about twenty full-time actors and actresses, including Frediswyde Hunter-Watts, who had returned for the Adelaide season. By this stage, Wilkie had created a versatile group, made up of character "types" who were able to provide stock Shakespeare characterisations. It was a useful blend of older, experience actors - J. Plumpton Wilson, Lorna Forbes, William Lockhart - with young talents, still learning their craft - Ellis Irving, Irene Webb, Claude Saunders. In effect, he was providing a practical training school for these young actors. Plumpton Wilson, ⁴⁸ for example, an actor of long experience in modern and classical plays, had been a member of Sir Frank Benson's Shakespeare Company for six years, appearing annually in Benson's Stratford-upon-Avon festivals. For Wilkie, with whom he remained for five years, he

played a variety of character roles, such as Touchstone, Starveling, Trinculo, and the Fool in *King Lear*. Kiore King was a young New Zealand actress who had trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and had also appeared in Benson's Stratford-upon-Avon productions, She joined the company in 1923, and undertook supporting roles such as Jessica or Phoebe, while because of her slight build she was frequently cast as Puck or Ariel, or as boy characters such as Arthur in *King John*. More surprisingly, she was also required to play the Nurse to the Juliet of Miss Hunter-Watts - though this was typical of a stock repertory company, where an actor might be called upon to fill any vacant role, no matter how unsuitable. On the whole, however, Shakespeare's plays can admit of casting to type - old man, comic lead, second comedian, juvenile, and so on - so that Wilkie was in a sense retaining a long-standing tradition of the stock companies. All in all, the company was now developing into a satisfactory blend of experience and fresh "attack", and it was this which in part enabled Wilkie to continue expanding his programme.

The first of the new plays for 1923 - possibly introduced during the New Zealand tour - was *Henry V*, which was staged during the Adelaide season. Little information is available on Wilkie's production of this piece, beyond the commonplace that its simple setting made it quite different in its emphasis from the earlier productions by George Rignold (the epitome of *Henry 7* for most Australian playgoers) and by Lewis Waller. Wilkie appears to have been in his element in the role of Henry V - his vigorous style of

delivery lent itself to the rousing speeches that the King is called upon to make. The Hobart *Mercury* reviewer spoke of his "spirited eloquence", while the Brisbane *Courier Mail* described his prayer before the battle (IV.i.281-98) as "a fine achievement of histrionic skill" (13 June 1923). Waller, in 1913, had cast Madge Titheradge as both Princess of France and the Chorus, but in the Wilkie production Miss Hunter-Watts was content to play only the former small role, leaving the latter to Lorna Forbes, who was consistently complimented for her fine elocution in delivering the prologue to Act I and other interpolations. The *Bulletin* review made clear the scenic limitations of the production:

Allan Wilkie, as Henry V, led a few reckless supers against a French king, whose man-power had visibly wilted owing to the requirements of the other side. However, the audience's imagination filled up the holes, and if the actual spectacle of facing "the breach" was wanting in bloodthirstiness, Wilkie's indomitable voice and waving sword created a passing illusion of battle. The somewhat matured actor is inclined to make old Harry of the hero, but he is refreshingly free from the prettiness of Waller and the pomp of Rignold [18 October 1923].

More than any other play by Shakespeare, of course, *Henry 7* in the speeches of the Chorus emphasizes the fact that Shakespeare's stage was virtually devoid of scenery and supers, so one might give Wilkie credit for restoring the play to its proper setting. Audiences of the 1920s, however, were little inclined to do so, on the whole. Most reviews of Wilkie's *Henry V* production devote much space to the comedy element of the play, provided by Pistol, Nym, Zardoiph and the Scottish, Irish and Welsh officers, in the first instance, and by the English lesson for the Princess (III.iv), as

well as the wooing at the end of the play. One might suspect that Wilkie as producer permitted the play to become unbalanced by allowing the comic element to predominate, purely as a device to attract audiences who might find the piece tedious when unrelieved by scenes of splendour. Thus, the *Mercury* review, having delivered itself of some uneasy compliments about the elocutionary splendours of the dramatic and patriotic portions of the play, turned with relief to a lengthy commentary on the lighter side.

Mr Augustus Neville made a richly humorous Pistol. His grotesque get-up was enough to provoke laughter. The strutting, ferocious swashbuckler was amusingly truculent and unctuously grandiloquent. His quarrel with the sullen cut-throat Nym (humorously played by Mr Lewis Townsend), and the episode with Fluellen, when the little Welshman made him eat the leek, were scenes that were made uproariously funny [2 April].

Wilkie's decision to emphasize comedy in his productions was noted by the *Bulletin* in a later review of *The Merchant of Venice*.

Wilkie bribes his audience into listening to Elizabethan patter they do not understand by introducing knockabout farce not contemplated by the playwright; and it is a pity he has no Stiffy and Mo to co-operate with him in his wise endeavour [25 September 1924].

In other words, Wilkie was content to "popularise" Shakespeare as far as was consistent with his methods of staging the plays, and within the capacity of his company.

The second new production for 1923 was *The Tempest*, generally considered a difficult play to stage. It had been infrequently seen in Australia. G.V. Brooke had given Melbourne its first

and there had been no production in Australia since 1900. As might be expected, Wilkie's production emphasized the comic element wherever possible.

The comedy scenes were played with much zest and infinite jest by Mr Augustus Neville, exceptionally clever and droll as Stephano, and Mr J. Plumpton Wilson, a capital Trinculo. The wine bottle scenes, in which they were joined by Caliban, provoked roars of laughter [*Mercury*, 4 April 1923].

Wilkie elected to play the part of Caliban. This role was a popular one with actor-managers - Frank Benson and Beerbohm Tree had both undertaken it, and Irving had expressed a wish to play it, though he had never done so. Wilkie devised a suitably grotesque make-up and stance for the character, probably borrowing details from the performances of Benson and Tree. As described by the *Bulletin* (27 September 1923), Wilkie's Caliban was "a grotesque and arresting figure - a red-haired souvenir of primeval man who lumbers from his cave with his mouth buried in the bowels of a fish." This first appearance of Caliban with a fish in his mouth had certainly occurred in the productions of Benson and Tree. Wilkie's costume was designed to indicate the hirsute bestiality of Caliban - Irene Webb recalls threading hair into the legs of the tights he was to wear in the part, to achieve the appropriate effect. Caliban may have been one of Wilkie's best roles. The *Argus* review of the production pointed out elements of his interpretation of the part:

Mr Wilkie expressed ably the contrast of the uncouth Caliban with the more privileged beings of the island. Caliban was not made too repellent, or too far

removed from humanity. At times there were suggestions of the pathos of a clouded intellect struggling to achieve understanding and to be understood [24 September].

Wilkie clearly did not permit this opportunity to develop a character to become swamped by the temptation to over-exaggerate the grotesque and the comic where his own performance was concerned.

Wilkie divided the play into five scenes, which required only one backcloth, to illustrate the setting of Prospero's cave.⁵² According to the *Argus*, the cave was decorated in "masses of colour". Scene I (I.i) took place in front of a curtain, and made little effort to create the effect of a ship caught in a tempest. As the *Bulletin* commented, it relied on "the brawling elements off stage, and the heavy gloom and troubled voices of the passengers" (27 September). The chaotic effect required for the scene was further reduced by Wilkie's decision to cut the appearance of the mariners.⁵³ [53] The dance of reapers and nymphs in the masque (IV.i) was also cut: "the divers spirits in shape of dogs and hounds gave way to a few children as goblins" (*Argus*). Scenes II, III and V took place "before Prospero's cell", while scene IV (III.ii, the drunken conspiracy of Trinculo, Stephano and Caliban) occurred on "another part of the island", and was played in front of curtains. Wilkie further simplified the staging by making his shipwrecked travellers arrive in front of Prospero's cave rather than elsewhere on the island. Effects were obtained by means of lighting and costume. Coloured lights were used to provide atmosphere for the different scenes. Amber in particular was favoured for this purpose, but although it provided suitable highlights for the majority of the

costumes, Ferdinand (Ellis Irving, in blond wig and green suit) looked washed out and pallid. Possibly this was the first Wilkie production in which experimentation with the lighting effects occurred, since the *Brisbane Courier Mail* (4 June 1923) also felt impelled to comment on their effect. In this case, the effect was an undesirable one - the stage lights were so strong that every detail of make-up was revealed, thus straining audience credulity, especially where Caliban was concerned.

Wilkie's ending for *The Tempest* was closely modelled on that of Beerbohm Tree's 1904 production. Since Caliban had succeeded Prospero as the star part, minor alteration to the text, and additional business, were required to give Caliban the final curtain. Thus, Prospero's epilogue was cut, as were the lines in which he promises to regale the travellers for the night with the history of his time on the island. In the Wilkie production, Prospero was seen to break his magic staff and "drown his book" before his final exit, even though this is only referred to in the text. Once all the characters had left the stage,

Caliban came on for the final curtain, [and] sank down on the high rock overlooking the sea with arms extended towards the ship carrying them all away. ... There is a note of pathos in Caliban being left alone there with only the spirit, Ariel, who torments him. As he knelt ... Ariel, in Wilkie's production, was heard singing from the boughs above:
 Merrily, merrily, shall I live now,
 Under the blossom that hangs on the bough.⁵⁴

Although it is not Shakespeare's ending, this proved as effective a final curtain for Wilkie as it had for Tree.

The third new production of 1923 was *The Winter's Tale*, in which Wilkie took the part of Leontes, while his wife was cast in the dual role of Hermione and Perdita. This double was not uncommon, being perhaps best known from the London production in 1887 which the two parts were played by Mary Anderson. In Sydney, the play had not been seen since 1882, when Louise Pomeroy had also doubled the two roles. The only difficulty comes in the final scene, in which mother and daughter are united. This problem was readily overcome by cutting Perdita's lines in this scene - she speaks only half a dozen - and by providing a substitute for Perdita in that one scene. As Wilkie recalled, "with her back to the audience and a low lit stage, nothing was lost in verisimilitude." The two parts gave Miss Hunter-Watts the opportunity to show versatility in character portrayal, and she succeeded admirably. As the *Age* reported, "Purity personified was the outstanding impression left on the mind by Miss Hunter-Watt's dual portrayal. ... The two diverse characters imposed an exacting task which was handled with restraint and skill" (1 October, p.12). For the *Bulletin*, she was "particularly sparkling" as Perdita.

In Wilkie's Leontes, it was his voice which once again proved to be his greatest weakness, as the *Bulletin* review indicated:

There are no soft effects in the actor's orgy of accusation, but when the Delphic oracle pronounces emphatically in favour of his Queen, his voice gets as near to tenor in its sorrow as a massive baritone can. Here Wilkie is weakest, because his contrition sounds falsetto, whereas he scores in the baser moods because his natural tone is fitted for the expression of raucous hate [4 October].

In other words, those scenes which call for the expression of rage and jealousy afforded Wilkie the opportunity to display his particular talents - the ability to create heights of wild passion, as in melodrama, though without the ability to manage subtler moods to offset this.

The production of *The Winter's Tale* - indeed, of all four plays added to the repertoire - could not be considered to be catering to popular taste. On the play's appearance in Sydney and Melbourne, the majority of the audience was drawn from university students and Shakespeare enthusiasts, as reviews indicated, while the general public preferred to attend the better-known plays. The situation was a little different in other centres in which the play was given. Hobart, for example, had never had a production of *The Winter's Tale* before, and the novelty of the present occasion "drew a large audience, which testified to its appreciation in hearty applause at several points as the play progressed" (*Mercury*, 31 December 1923). Wilkie claimed that he could find no record of previous professional performance of the play in Melbourne, though of course the Mermaid Society, under Arthur Goodsall, had given an amateur production in 1920. As the *Argus* concluded, the inclusion of *The Winter's Tale* in the current repertoire was "an earnest of Mr Wilkie's determination to give what he considers good in Shakespeare without awaiting the impress of public approval" (1 October) .

Wilkie's production of *King Lear* was a further indication of his good intentions put into practice. It was another of the

plays rarely performed in Australia. Tasmania had never before seen a production, while for Sydney and Melbourne, the play had not appeared since 1882, when it had been performed by an American actor named W.E. Sheridan. Several reasons were put forward for its lack of popularity, including the fact that, for the leading actor, it presented an exhausting task, both mentally and physically. Charles Lamb's assertion that "the Lear of Shakespeare cannot be acted" was still widely accepted in the 1920s, as if the magnificence of Shakespeare's creation could never hope to find a sufficiently accomplished exponent. This did not prevent Wilkie from attempting the part.

Contrary to one's expectations, reviewers of the Wilkie production were all very kind to the actor-manager - perhaps because they had no standard by which to judge his performance. Interviewed in the *Mercury* (5 January 1924), Wilkie commented on his own view of the play, and the role of Lear:

I entirely disagree ... with the portrayal of Lear as a decrepit old dodderer. On account of his extreme age, he is usually depicted in that way, but everything points to his being exceedingly virile, and even, in spite of his four score years, of herculean strength. Shakespeare presents him as returning from an all-day hunting expedition, and even at the end of the play, after all his vicissitudes and misfortunes, he kills with his own hands the man who has hanged his daughter. Then he enters carrying the body of Cordelia in his arms. This feat would be an impossibility if Lear were not still a strong man.

It may be argued that Lear is not generally depicted as a "decrepit old dodderer" - in fact, the *Age* review commented that it would be

difficult to see how Wilkie might have played him other than as a virile and robust old man. With regard to Wilkie's performance, the *Bulletin* commented that he "clothes [Lear] in undeniable dignity, and depicts the wanderer's tragedy with exceeding pitifulness" (20 September 1923). The *Mercury* offered a more detailed picture of his performance:

The lofty stature, ample and resonant voice, copious animal excitement, fluent elocution, and the vigorous, picturesque, and often melodramatic movements, gestures and poses of the actor-manager, unitedly animated and embellished a personality such as naturally absorbed attention, and diffused excitement. ... In the first part of the play Lear was pictured as autocratic, hot-headed, and weary of affairs of State. ... Then he gave way to furies of impotent rage. ... His awful frenzy in the storm scene, and the many impetuous invectives of the old man as he hurled them forth from a breaking heart and distracted mind, were spoken and acted very realistically [7 January 1924].

It can be seen from this that Wilkie's talent for displaying anger and madness, by melodramatic means, was well adapted to the demands of this role as he saw it. Wilkie gave only a few performances of *King Lear* during his career. This may have been because the play could not be considered a "draw", even though audiences had flocked to the few performances that were given. The reason that Wilkie himself put forward was simply that the play was so physically demanding. There is no question that the part of Lear dominates the play completely, and in fact there was very little to be said about the other actors in the Wilkie production. As Cordelia, Miss Hunter-Watts could only look charming and pathetic, in a white dress and green-lined cloak. Of the remaining characters, Lorna

Forbes and Irene Webb conveyed something of the evil of Goneril and Regan, though their partners were considered a poor match - Ellis Irving (Albany) and Hamilton Henry (Cornwall) were generally ineffective, while Claude Saunders as Edmund did little to develop the potential interest of the part. Perhaps the biggest disappointment was Plumpton Wilson's interpretation of the Fool, which tended towards the comic at the expense of the bitter cynic and counterpoint to Lear.

The play was performed in the usual setting of green curtains, though the painted inset scenes were largely dispensed with. This was because, despite his simplifications, Wilkie was obliged to present the play in twenty-one scenes. He arranged the play's single interval to fall at the end of Act II, ensuring an act curtain for Lear by concluding the scene with Lear's exit line, "O fool, I shall go mad!" An interesting omission was the blinding of Gloucester (III.vii), apparently because audiences would find the enactment of this scene too distressing. This Wilkie had discovered after including it in the initial performance, which took place at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music on 1 September 1923.

One of the difficulties which Wilkie often encountered began to re-assert itself during this year. It was the problem of obtaining theatres, with which he had always had to struggle, but which now became a serious concern. It is seen in the fact that he was obliged to stage his Sydney season at the Conservatorium, instead of in one of the city's commercial theatres. The new venue was more

customarily employed by amateur groups - and, by 1924, by Gregan McMahon's Sydney Repertory Society, who would give productions a try-out here before presenting them at the Palace Theatre.⁵⁸

The Conservatorium had a reasonable capacity, but it lacked fashion, and Wilkie's attendance figures may well have suffered in consequence. The same difficulty beset him when the company moved to Melbourne in September 1923. On this occasion, they were obliged to present Shakespeare at the Playhouse, which was a theatre on the "wrong" side of the Yarra, across Princes Bridge from central Melbourne. This theatre was chiefly associated with the city's Repertory Society, and thus had no great professional or commercial status (despite the fact that Melba had sung there, in 1916). This disadvantage was thrust on Wilkie by the commercial managements, who either could not or would not free any of their theatres for him when he required them. He was thus faced with the alternatives of taking the smaller, unfashionable theatres, or being blocked from performing in the two major capital cities.

By this time, Wilkie had long established himself as an educational benefactor to the country. It was acknowledged on all sides that his productions of Shakespeare made an important contribution to the upbringing of all Australian schoolchildren, for whom - then as now - Shakespeare formed an inevitable part of the study of English. Almost from the beginning, Wilkie had established a policy of reduced prices for schoolchildren and university students, in parties of ten or more, at nearly all performances. This policy meant an appreciable loss of revenue,

because of the simple fact that Wilkie had to place a great deal of reliance upon the attendances of students to provide adequate houses for many of his productions. His policy had a double effect. On the one hand, it earned him praise for his endeavours to "teach the young idea how to shoot", with regard to the plays of Shakespeare. On the other hand, the attendances of students were vital if Wilkie was to continue to run his Shakespearean venture: without them, audiences would have become progressively scantier. In order to maintain student interest, Wilkie always ensured that the plays currently set for school and university study formed a part of his repertoire in each State that he visited - a sensible move, which benefitted the students as well as Wilkie. For better or worse, Wilkie's productions of Shakespeare were the first - and in many cases the only - introduction to Shakespeare in performance for an entire generation of young Australians, many of whom still recall their encounters with Wilkie and "the bard" with gratitude and affection. He made an honest attempt to provide thoughtful, moderately entertaining and fluid productions of the plays. This in itself was sufficient to show the students that Shakespeare the dramatist was at least as vibrant and important as Shakespeare the dramatic poet, whose work, in those days, they were largely obliged to study as literature, often disregarding its theatrical nature.

It was on the basis of his contribution to education that Wilkie made an approach to the Premiers' conference in May 1923. Arguing that his productions served an educational purpose, he

sought freight concessions from the various States. His initial request was that he be granted free transport for his company and properties and effects over the entire Commonwealth and State railway systems. This request was unprecedented and although the various Premiers were sympathetic to the case he put, it was finally resolved that it should not be granted. The chief reason given for this was that it might instigate a flood of similar requests from other theatre companies, with or without such good grounds for application. Wilkie then emphasized the fact that transport costs were one of the most prohibitive items of his extensive touring, and in the end, it was resolved that each State should independently resolve whether or not to grant Wilkie concessions. As a direct result of this, the Queensland government immediately granted a fifty per cent rebate on all Wilkie's fares and freight within that State. Unfortunately, the other State Premiers were slow to follow this lead. Gradually Wilkie persuaded them, by frequent representation, to accede to his request. Tasmania was the second State to do so, followed by New South Wales. In the end, Wilkie was granted completely free transport over the entire railway system of Australia for his company and effects. This was the first major struggle for concessions in which he succeeded, with others to follow. He pointed with pride to this achievement -

an epoch-making event in the history of the theatre, as I believe it was the first occasion in which any government in the British Empire gave even an indirect subsidy to the drama, thereby recognising it as an important educational and cultural factor in our social life.⁵⁹

Although Wilkie's account of this may appear over-emphatic, it cannot be denied that it was the first sign of government assistance to the arts in Australia. Those European countries with long traditions of aristocratic patronage had recognised the need to support the arts, but such recognition had not yet spread to the British Empire.

The year 1924 brought another kind of landmark for the Allan Wilkie Shakespearean Company. It was on 13 June of this year that the presumed world record for consecutive performances of Shakespeare was established, when the company gave its 1,000th performance. The event was celebrated with the first performance of a new play in the repertoire - *Cymbeline*, rarely seen in Australia. The company was then in the middle of a season at His Majesty's Theatre, Brisbane, one of the centres which offered excellent public support to Wilkie's venture. The occasion, which was well publicised, was one for public assessment and recognition of Wilkie's work over four years, and the pattern for this was set by the Prime Minister, S.M. Bruce. In his memoirs, Wilkie recorded the congratulatory message he received from Bruce, which included the following assessment:

It is due in no small measure to Mr Wilkie's efforts that Shakespeare is something more than a name in this country. His enthusiastic and unremitting activity is particularly commendable, as the production of Shakespeare's plays cannot be regarded as the most lucrative of theatrical enterprises. Mr Wilkie, in carrying on his self-appointed task, is really performing a duty of a national character, and the value of his efforts should be appreciated very highly indeed by the people of Australia.⁶⁰

Unfortunately, Mr Bruce's admiration did not extend to recommending a direct subsidy which would enable Wilkie to maintain this "duty of a national character" with reduced financial hardship.

The occasion was marked by further public tribute. After the 1,000th performance, the Governor of Queensland presented Wilkie with a testimonial subscribed for by the Brisbane citizens at the instance of the Lord Mayor. Wilkie had a special souvenir pamphlet printed to mark the occasion. Called "The Shakespearean Chronicle", it contained the history of the company, including very brief biographies of all its current members, the theatrical background of Wilkie and Miss Hunter-Watts, and a comparison of support by all States for the venture. In Wilkie's assessment, attendances and finance inevitably loomed large. It transpired that for "good solid business", Adelaide and Perth could always be relied upon. For the most consistent support to his venture, Wilkie had no hesitation in naming Queensland as the best State in the Commonwealth, while he considered Hobart to be "remarkable, inasmuch as with its population of only 60,000, I can always play an annual season of at least a month to good houses throughout, and nowhere do our performances and players meet with a more enthusiastic reception." In Sydney and Melbourne, the procuring of suitable theatres remained the greatest difficulty, while audiences could range from excellent to poor. Wilkie could only shake his head over the State of New South Wales, which showed the least response to his work:

The country towns are apathetic to a degree, so far as Shakespeare is concerned, and even

Newcastle with its large and prosperous population is, with the exception of a small section of the community, more addicted to vaudeville and the movies than the artistic or intellectual, whether in music or the drama.

The second new play added to the company's repertoire in 1924 was *Much Ado About Nothing*, which was given its first performance in Hobart during February. Played on the last night of a specially extended season, this was in effect a dress rehearsal of the piece. Hobart was often used as a "testing ground" in this way by Wilkie. In *Much Ado* the Wilkies took the roles of Beatrice and Benedick, and, according to available reviews, were more than acceptable in their rendering of the couple's wit and sparkling humour. Miss Hunter-Watts found particular favour in the eyes of the *Mercury* critic, who reported that she "distinguished herself in every scene", and gained round after round of appreciative applause. When the play was revived in Hobart in January 1925, one of Beatrice's more famous scenes was singled out for particular comment - her encounter with Benedick in the later part of IV.i:

In this scene the actress displayed the terrible earnestness of outraged womanhood at witnessing a sister shamed, to the extent of driving every other feeling out of her mind. Her "Kill Claudio" was intensified with a well-simulated ring of desire in it for Claudio's death, and when she came to the long speech which ends with "O God, that I were a man" [lines 299-304] it was finely delivered. In the lighter parts of bantering encounters the actress was equally effective (2 January 1925).

Most reviews are brief, content to point out the popularity of the play with current audiences. Despite this, the play had been little performed in recent years. Wilkie claimed in his advertising

that it had not been seen in Sydney for thirty years, and it had probably never been staged in Hobart or Brisbane. Melbourne, however, had witnessed two productions of the play within the previous eight years - the Ian Maclaren version in 1917, and an amateur production by the Mermaid Society in May 1921, produced by Mrs F.L. Apperley, who had previously worked at Dublin's Abbey Theatre.

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small cuts were made in Wilkie's production. One of the passages excised from the text was the brief flirtatious interchange between Margaret and the singer Balthasar while dancing, at II.i. 80-96. The reason for its removal may well have lain in the fact that Wilkie had cast a woman in the role of Balthasar - Jessica Dale, who played all the singing parts at that time. Balthasar has only one other piece of dialogue, and this too was deleted from the acting text. It is a brief exchange with Don Pedro which prefaces Balthasar's first song (II.iii. 40-56). Other cuts were made to bowdlerize the text for a 1920s audience. For example, later in II.iii, during the discussion of Beatrice and Benedick by Don Pedro, Claudio and Leonato, lines 120-32 were cut, in which is described Beatrice's "very pretty jest" in the form of a letter, which, "when she had writ it, and was reading it over, she found 'Benedick' and 'Beatrice' between the sheet." A larger cut came in Act III, when the whole of scene iv. was removed. Set in Hero's apartment, this scene focuses on Beatrice's low spirits on the morning of her cousin's wedding-day. Wilkie may have felt that it was an unnecessary intervention between the first two comic

scenes with Dogberry (William Lockhart) and Verges (Eric Donald). The removal of III.iv also eliminated two scene changes. The division in the play Wilkie placed after Act II. He managed to present the play with only six scene changes: three or four of the scenes would have been played simply before a drop curtain -the hall in Leonato's house, a street, and perhaps the prison, which appears in only one scene. The end of the play - scenes 12 and 13 in Wilkie's production - took place in Leonato's garden. These scenes correspond to Act V, for which the Alexander text suggests four different settings, including (in scene iii) a churchyard. The production retained the two dances specified in the text of the Alexander edition - the first immediately following the masquers' entry in II.i; the other at the end of the play. The *Mercury* was lavish in its praise:

The minuet in the first act, and the second one in the closing scene were danced magnificently, and brought down the house, which was very liberal in its applause throughout the evening [2 January 1925].

Cymbeline, the celebratory twentieth Shakespeare play produced by Allan Wilkie, received comparatively little comment. Perhaps this was because the critics were unfamiliar with the play, and had no point of comparison to make. It had not been seen in Sydney for thirty-seven years, its previous presentation being by the Holloway company at the Criterion theatre in 1887. On that occasion, Essie Jenyns played Imogen to the Posthumus of her stepfather, W.J. Holloway. In Melbourne, the play had not been staged since the

Louise Pomeroy production at the Theatre Royal in 1880. In most cases, the critics were in agreement that the play was an inferior effort *by* Shakespeare. In the words of the *Bulletin*,

If an Australian playwright inflicted so ill-constructed a piece on the public, every honest and competent critic in the metropolis would gleefully rend him to pieces; the sacred Bard, whom we all worship but don't go to see, being the author of the thing, each newspaper will duly burn 10 sticks of conventional incense to it and pass on to half a column of adoration of the latest musical comedy [6 November 1924].

Yet audiences were said to be particularly appreciative of the Wilkie production, presumably on the grounds that it gave them the opportunity to witness an unfamiliar play.

Once more it was Miss Hunter-Watts, as Imogen, who received the greatest share of the praise. For the *Argus*, her portrayal made of Imogen a delightful character (31 March 1925), while the *Mercury* emphasized the realism of her performance:

She made the chaste Imogen a very real and charming character . . . The scene in which she fainted [over the body of Cloten in IV.ii-] brought forth a spontaneous gasp from the audience because of its realism [5 January].

Wilkie chose to play the part of Imogen's husband, Posthumus Leonatus, leaving the more flamboyant role of the villainous Iachimo to Claude Saunders. By taking the part of Posthumus, and giving a stolid performance, Wilkie left the critics very little to say. Even the *Mercury* could only comment that he had a part which, "although of vital importance, is not very prominent", and that, under the circumstances, he "did all that was required of him with

his usual ability." This comment suggests that Wilkie cut the part rather than tackle the difficulties it presents to an actor. Little is known of his actual production of the play, and its unfamiliarity caused it to be dropped from the repertoire after 1925. •

Early in 1925, Wilkie introduced the twenty-first Shakespearean play into his repertoire. This was *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, first performed in Adelaide in February. Once again, the play was largely unfamiliar to that generation of Australians, and its previous production was even more remote than that of *Cymbeline*. It had first been staged in Melbourne in 1859, in a production by G.V. Brooke, who took the role of Valentine, and there does not appear to have been another production in Australia in the interval. One reason put forward for this by the *Bulletin* is the fact that the play does not offer any clear star part for the actor-manager. Yet this may have worked to Wilkie's advantage, since he elected to take the part of Launce, an extremely small part for the leading actor but a role which was ideally suited to Wilkie's talents. Launce, who appears in only four scenes of the play, does his best work with his dog, Crab, "the sourest-natured dog that lives" (II.iii). His speeches are laced with quibbles, and with malapropisms like "I have received my proportion, like the Prodigious Son...". In this respect, Launce is clearly close kin to Nick Bottom, one of Wilkie's best roles. In his performance, Wilkie was aided by "an entertaining mongrel which suffered no stage fright, and cocked his ears appreciatively when the audience applauded" '*Bullezin*,

26 March 1925). It was generally agreed that, between the two of them, they more than adequately fulfilled their function of keeping the audience amused, although apparently the text was an expurgated version, to judge from the *Bulletin* review, which stated that the part "suffers from the way the meat has to be cut away before the bone is presented to a modern audience." The remaining cast members filled their roles adequately. Claude Saunders' speeches as Proteus were "finely delivered" and Ellis Irving was "frank and manly" as Valentine (*Argus*), while the *Mercury* found Dulcie Cherry to be "piquant" as the maid Lucetta, and Lorna Forbes graceful and sympathetic as Sylvia. Once again, Frediswyde Hunter-Watts was given a role which suited her talents. The *Bulletin* found her portrayal of Julia "more than usually pleasing", and further commented that this suggested that the actress was "better suited in such lighter roles than in some of the heavy ones which circumstances thrust upon her."

The task of presenting Shakespeare in season after season was proving increasingly difficult for the Wilkie company. The problem was in continuing to attract audiences to the productions, for inevitably the lesser-known plays found a very limited audience. It seemed that Melbourne and Sydney were prepared to give major support only to familiar, well-tested plays. Consequently, Wilkie elected to cease his pursuit of world records for consecutive performances of Shakespeare. Early in his 1925 season at Melbourne's New Palace Theatre, he announced his intention to restore the classic eighteenth-century comedies to his repertoire, to be played

in tandem with Shakespeare. The first of these revivals was Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*, which opened on 11 April, and played for a fortnight, to be succeeded by *The School for Scandal*. The *Argus* reported that Wilkie had taken the decision to extend his repertoire "on account of the inevitable loss with which he was faced during the school vacations" (13 March 1925). This offers further proof, if it were needed, of the source of Wilkie's audiences. The presentation of the plays of Shakespeare was to be continued at the rate of two new plays each year, so that Wilkie estimated he would have presented all thirty-seven plays within eight years (i.e. by 1933). He indicated that he might consider adding other plays of the "classical and poetic drama type" to his repertoire, such as Massinger's *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*. At the same time, Wilkie remained resolutely determined not to return to the presentation of modern plays. He declared that "the presentation of modern plays is totally opposed to my taste, inclination and policy." Eventually, financial circumstances were to shake this resolution, but for the moment he was able to keep to his policy.

On 2 June 1925, in recognition of his efforts to popularise the works of Shakespeare, Allan Wilkie was awarded the C.3.E. in the birthday honours list. At that time he was presenting a season in Brisbane, offering a mixture of Shakespeare and Sheridan for the first time in Queensland. The *Brisbane Courier Mail* devoted a leader to this honour, indicating its approval because of the nature of Wilkie's work.

If Mr Wilkie had considered his own financial interests he could have presented many more lucrative plays than those of Shakespeare. But he has persevered with Shakespeare's plays as if it were a mission of his life to bring many thousands of people every year into direct touch with the works of the greatest dramatist of any age or any country. For that alone he is worthy of the honour that has been bestowed on him [4 June 1925, p.6].

More particularly, it was the work Wilkie was doing to bring Shakespeare to the children of Australia that won approval. In comparison to the "indiscriminate bestowal" of honours on social-climbers and other unworthies, Wilkie's award could be approved by all. In a curtain speech after the performance of *Julius Caesar* which the company gave that night, Wilkie expressed his gratitude, taking the honour as an indication that his efforts were appreciated, and as a stimulus to spur him on to "still greater efforts". John West, while not denying Wilkie's right to the award, suggests that Gregan McMahon would have been a more worthy recipient, for his untiring and high-standard work with the repertory societies of Melbourne and Sydney, but McMahon's less-publicised unrecognised until 1938, It may well be argued ^[62]work was to pass that McMahon's standards were higher than Wilkie's, but this does not lessen Wilkie's honest intentions in the matter of presenting an exclusive diet of good, non-commercial theatre.

The same Brisbane season saw the reintroduction of Leopold Lewis's melodrama *The Bells*, with Wilkie once more revelling in the part of Mathias. The first night of this revival, 24 June, was to be claimed as Wilkie's 600th performance in the part, and

he had lost nothing of the ranting and highly melodramatic style of playing it. His advertising billed his performance as one which had "created a deep and lasting impression throughout the English-speaking world" - praise which was not altogether deserved. When the production was staged in Hobart, in January 1926, the audiences were most enthusiastic, responding with vigorous applause to such moments of drama as the expressions of Mathias' guilty conscience in Act I:

The change in the actor's face from gratified delight over the approaching marriage of his daughter to a wild, haunting fear of discovery, was admirably simulated, and the livid terror of the man wonderfully shown. ... With a peal of laughter that is neither that of a maniac nor natural, but altogether terrifying, he rushes on Christian ... and, unable to contain himself longer, he drags himself away, hiding his misery in discordant laughter [*Mercury*, 7 January 1926].

During Wilkie's first presentation of this play in Melbourne, in 1917, the *Age* critic had been a little harder to please, suggesting that this same display of raw emotion must have alerted Christian and the villagers to the guilt of Mathias, unless they were "so many dolts, blind and deaf" (5 February 1917). Perhaps it was to assist the illusion that Wilkie now required Christian (Ellis Irving) to stand with his back to Mathias during the sequence.

Since *The Bells* was a relatively short play, Wilkie supplemented it with a one-act piece which would give his wife some opportunity to perform. The play selected was Oscar Wilde's *A Florentine Tragedy*, first seen in 1906. The decision to produce this seems incongruous in the light of Wilkie's claim that he did not wish

to produce any "modern" plays. However, Wilde set the play in Florence in the early sixteenth century, and wrote it in rather stilted blank verse. Both these elements help to remove any stigma of modernity. As Bianca, the noble wife of Simone, a merchant, Miss Hunter-Watts was required to deliver such neo-Middletonian lines as:

I pray you pardon my good husband here, His
soul stands ever in the market-place, And his
heart beats but at the price of wool. Yet he
is honest in his common way.

Little was said for the production, even by the *Mercury*, which was content to note merely that the climactic sword-and-dagger duel between the prince and Bianca's husband was exciting and realistic, while the whole was played with "much fervour" (7 January 1926).

Only one further Shakespeare play was added to the repertoire in 1926. This was *Measure for Measure*, which was given its initial performance at the Theatre Royal in Hobart on 9 January. The play had not been done professionally in Australia for about sixty years - G.V. Brooke had staged it during the 1860s. One of the more obvious reasons for this lack of performance lay in the play's subject matter, then considered likely to offend the sensibilities of the audience. However, it proved impossible to bowdlerize the play sufficiently: to attempt to do so would have made sheer nonsense of it. Wilkie therefore made a brave decision to stage it, if not in its entirety, then at least in a reasonable approximation. The result was that, while the effort was praised, there was an occasional sense of distaste. The *Mercury* review, on

behalf of the citizens of Hobart, clearly expressed this opinion:

There is little but good to be said for Mr Wilkie's production, unless it be that certain elements of scene and dialogue might have been expunged with more pleasing results [11 January].

The larger centres, however, were not quite so modest in their appreciation of the play, refusing to be scandalised by it.

The two central performances received, as usual, the most attention. Leaving the Duke to John Cairns, a new member of the company, Wilkie had taken the part of Angelo. He played him dressed in black velvet, and with a red beard - Wilkie's signal colours for villainy - and, as so often, overstepped the mark, falling into the trap of melodramatic performance. This was later indicated by the *Sydney Morning Herald*, which was to comment that

Mr Wilkie gave rein to his own idea of Angelo, both as to appearance and demeanour, and perhaps overstressed the reserve of a prince swept by the fire of sudden human passion [16 July 1928].

The role of Isabella was well suited to the talents of Frediswyde Hunter-Watts. She brought to it her usual measure of graceful, slightly cold, reserve, which in this case lent itself to the role. Dressed in white, with the white veil of a novice, she made an excellent foil to the Angelo of her husband. As the *Bulletin* commented, "in her hands, Isabella's nobility and virtue shone whitely against the murky background of unregenerate Vienna" (31 March, 1927).

The production was received with some degree of enthusiasm, perhaps because the opportunity to see this rarely-performed dark

comedy was welcome. The *Argus* review estimated that it was "easily one of the best things, from the viewpoint of acting and production, the company has done" (28 March 1927). In Wilkie's estimation, Melbourne audiences were particularly receptive to the production. In one of his programme notes to the play, he printed a letter that he had received from the artist Arthur Streeton, which offered encouragement in rather general terms:

It was a great delight to witness your first production of *Measure for Measure*. The whole design of the play is novel and fascinating to a degree, and I feel sure that, when it is better known, and people see the beautiful presentment of Isabella by Miss Hunter-Watts, the theatre will be filled to overflowing.

This was the eternal problem for Wilkie - convincing an audience to attend a play with which they were unfamiliar. As with so many of his productions of the less familiar plays, *Measure for Measure* received only two or three performances in each of the major capitals, and then disappeared from the repertoire, no longer able to provide a sufficient draw to warrant its retention.

By 1926, with six years of almost continuous touring in Shakespeare behind him, Wilkie was finding it an effort to maintain sufficient public interest in his productions. The lack of scenic interest - green curtains became a little repetitive - lost him a certain type of audience, who might have flocked to see an Oscar Asche extravaganza. Transport costs were still causing economic difficulty, as were the demands of entertainment tax. The company was playing more and more for audiences of schoolchildren, who

were receiving their introduction to the plays of Shakespeare. One of the difficulties was that very few adults could be persuaded to attend any production more than once, especially when there was likely to be little variation in the performances, costumes or setting. Even in Hobart, one of Wilkie's strongholds, attendance was unpredictable. During his 1924 season, the *Illustrated Tasmanian Mail* had been full of tart comments on the lack of enthusiasm suggested by poor attendances at such popular plays as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Twelfth Night*. On the latter, the reviewer's comment was

... our chief regret was that so excellent a production was witnessed by such a thin house. If the people of Hobart will not give better support to such good entertainment as this, they deserve to be bereft of it forever [3 January 1924].

It was reported that a member of the audience had been heard to mutter that he would prefer to live on the mainland, where he could choose to see *Sally* instead of Shakespeare, while another had dismissed *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as "just a play for children". The holders of such views were duly scolded for their inability to appreciate subtler qualities in the plays themselves, or in Wilkie's productions. No amount of rebuking, however, - and Wilkie himself was never slow to complain about lack of public support - could force audiences to attend productions of plays they had no great desire to see. Another factor which began to affect Wilkie's venture was what seems to have become a concerted effort by the commercial managements to keep him out of Sydney, and to make his path more difficult than ever in other centres. Often the company

had to make major detours to take up theatres which chanced to be vacant, while other theatres on their direct route were already booked by other companies. Wilkie had given his last Sydney performances in November 1924, at the New Palace Theatre, and although he succeeded in making a tour of New South Wales country centres, including Newcastle, in October 1925, he simply could not get into Sydney. This posed serious problems, not only of finance, but also of prestige. The company would rapidly lose its status as a leading professional company unless it was seen to perform regularly in the major centres of population. This was the position in which the Wilkie company was beginning to find itself by June 1926.

The month of June had begun to hold special significance for Wilkie. It had heralded his 1,000th consecutive performance, and seen him awarded the C.B.E. This year, the month was to hold its greatest significance for the company. The early months of 1926 had been occupied by tours of South Australia and Western Australia, with extended seasons in Adelaide during March, and in Perth during April and early May. A tour of Victorian country centres followed, and on 20 June 1926, the company arrived in Geelong, where they were scheduled to play for three nights in the local Mechanics' Institute. In this makeshift theatre were deposited all the scenery, costumes and properties, together with the personal possessions of the actors and stage crew, most of whom spent the evening sorting equipment for the opening night. Early in the morning of 21 June, the Geelong Mechanics' Institute was completely

destroyed by fire - an outbreak thought to have been "the work of a maniac" (*Mercury*, 22 June 1926). With the exception of a small amount of property stored in Melbourne, and "a small safe, one and the coffin used in the production of *Hamlet*", the ⁶³box, Wilkie company lost everything. Wilkie estimated that the total loss, including the personal possessions of the company, amounted to more than £4,000, and there was no insurance to cover it. The effect was devastating, as Wilkie pointed out:

The stage effects, costumes, and other theatrical accoutrements were the results of years of labour - the music for the productions must be rewritten, the prompt books prepared again, and the wardrobe and stage equipment reaccumulated. Many of the costumes and articles destroyed cannot be replaced. Some of the costumes I had purchased from old Shakespearean actors of the past, and they had many historical associations. Apart from the monetary loss there is a sentimental loss which I feel greatly [*Argus*, 23 June 1926, p.18].

Faced with these losses, Wilkie announced with reluctance that the company would have to be disbanded. However, this was to be a temporary measure, as he was determined to gather together enough material to begin again.

Although unquestionably a disaster, there was a sense in which the fire was also a piece of good luck for Wilkie. Coming just at the moment when the company was beginning to struggle for continued support, it served to place the Wilkies and their plight before the attention of all Australians. The immediate result was a rallying of support from culturally-minded bodies all round the country, who were determined not to see Wilkie's valiant effort pass undefended. A public appeal was launched in

Melbourne by W.A. Watts, the former Speaker of the House of Representatives, and R.S. Wallace, professor of English literature at the University of Melbourne. The object of this appeal was to raise funds which would purchase new costumes, scenery and properties, to ensure the earliest possible resumption of Wilkie's programme. All those who had appreciated Wilkie's efforts over the years were asked to contribute to the fund. It was pointed out in the appeal that the Allan Wilkie Shakespearean Company had become "a national institution in the Commonwealth and New Zealand" (*Mercury*, 23 June).

Newspapers everywhere rallied to support this cause. The *Mercury* of 24 June published a leader which pointed out Wilkie's contribution to the theatrical life of Tasmania, and urged all Tasmanians to repay this debt. Led by the recently-formed Shakespeare Society (which Wilkie had helped to create interest in), Tasmania was one of the first states to launch its own appeal. Typical of the eulogies delivered for Wilkie were the comments of Professor A.B. Taylor of the English Department at the University of Tasmania:

Shakespeare is generally recognised as the world's greatest dramatist, and as the greatest author of our Empire, and may be considered the supreme link between the Dominions and the Mother Country. To see his plays may be considered a liberal education for men and women of all classes. Mr Wilkie has, therefore, done very great service to Australia in presenting to us Shakespeare's plays. This work, however, does not bring the profits that merely popular work of a shallow kind brings, and therefore it is the moral duty of the people to support him in every way that they can [*Mercury* 24 June].

Others pointed to the important contribution Wilkie was making to the education of the young, and suggested that this alone should ensure his support by the people. In the first instance, the *Argus*, the *Geelong Advertiser* and the *Mercury* opened funds, and other States and groups soon rallied to support. For example, the Bendigo Shakespeare Society intended to devote the proceeds of a Shakespeare night to the fund, and indeed Shakespeare Societies throughout the country were naturally in the van with regard to offers of assistance. Adelaide rapidly moved to open a fund, under Archibald Strong, who was always an advocate of Wilkie's work. As he wrote:

He has done more than any man yet to forward the love of Shakespeare in Australia, and richly deserves the sympathy and practical support of all who enjoy the regular staging of the greatest dramas of our race [*Argus*, 25 June].

Arthur Streeton wrote to the *Argus* in similar terms, emphasizing the need for public sympathy, for, "apart from the high standard of the Wilkie productions and their entertainment, they do form a vital part of education in any British community" (24 June).

Within weeks, funds from sources all over the country began to mount. By 3 July, the *Argus* had received £566. 12s. 6d., a sum that was to be considerably augmented, while the *Mercury* fund eventually reached a total of £267. 19s. 6d. The theatrical profession also decided to show support for Wilkie. In the first instance this took the form of a benefit matinee held on 13 July at Melbourne's Princess Theatre. The "mammoth programme" was to

contain excerpts from every show currently being staged in Melbourne, including scenes from *Mercenary Mary* and *Abie's Irish Rose*. As a climax, the trial scene from *The Merchant of Venice* was to be staged, by the Allan Wilkie Company, with a collection of "leading barristers, politicians and others" as senators of Venice. Ticket prices ranged from 10s. to 2s., no tax was to be levied, and members of the Theatrical Employees' Association and the Musicians' Union gave their services gratis. The matinee raised approximately £400, and Wilkie received an ovation from the house and from the stage. In his speech of thanks, Wilkie said:

I regard it as a proof not only that my efforts in the past have not been in vain, but also that there is a desire that Shakespeare shall have a permanent place in the public theatres of the Commonwealth. [*Argus*, 14 July 1926, p.26].

Although public support was excellent, he added, it could not restore all that was lost. Nothing daunted, Wilkie promised to recommence operations within about six months with new plays added to the repertoire.

Money and expressions of sympathy continued to arrive. In Wilkie's estimate, about £5,000 was eventually collected throughout the Commonwealth to assist him. This was a remarkable expression of practical support for a theatrical venture. It sprang, in part from the good-natured desire to support the underdog in extreme adversity, to "give him a go". Because of the difficulties he continually faced, Wilkie was considered a sufficiently worthy cause to merit this chance. The *Argus* identified some of the reasons for support in an article which appeared in the 26 June issue:

The popularity which Mr Wilkie and his wife, Miss Hunter-Watts have enjoyed in Australia is different from that enjoyed by most actors, for it has sprung as much from Mr Wilkie's evident desire to spread a knowledge of Shakespeare and his constantly demonstrated eagerness to show the beauties of the dramatist's works to children as from Mr Wilkie's ability as an interpreter of them.

In that kind of assessment, it would not be necessary for Wilkie's productions to be more than barely adequate for him to still merit praise and support for his work. His good intentions were considered sufficient, and the fact that his productions could actually range from mediocre to good was seen almost as a "bonus" for his audiences.

One of the contributions received by Wilkie was the offer of a free return passage to England as the guest of the Orient Steamship Company, and this he gladly took up, sailing on 27 July 1926 on the *Ormonde*. Public interest remained such that he broadcast a special farewell radio message from the Melbourne 3AR studio, thanking "the many lovers of Shakespeare who rallied to help him." He explained that a hasty trip to England was essential, in order to acquire items of wardrobe and properties unobtainable in Australia. On his return, he promised, there would be a full-scale production of Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*.

CHAPTER FOUR: FOOTNOTES

1. This claim, mispronounced by Peter Quince as Prologue (*Dream* V.i.114) became the motto of the Allan Wilkie Company, and was printed on ail programmes.
2. According to a *Bulletin* correspondent, writing to the "At Poverty Point" column (2 May 1912, p. 11), the following plays by Shakespeare had never been acted in Australia to that time: *Titus Andronicus*, *Pericles*, *All's Well*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Henry 17 Part 11*, and all three parts of *Henry VI*.
3. For example, the following paragraph from "Stargazer" appeared in the *Bulletin's* "At Poverty Point" column on 30 September 1920:

I see that Wilkie talks in Melbourne about a permanent Shakespearean company. I do not recollect a Shakespearean revival that was not accompanied by a similar talk of the enthusiastic management warmed by the first glow of an apparent success. But never once did the apostle of the higher art talk in the same vein a few weeks later. ... It is a sad reflection, but the bitter truth is in it. While many Shakespearean seasons have opened with fine promise, most of them have closed in comparative gloom, and we have not got our permanent Shakespearean company yet. The moral seems to be that we like Shak. [sic] in moderation.
4. Dennis Barthoimeusz, *Macbeth and the Players* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p.180.
5. Barthoimeusz, p.184.
6. Robert Speaight, *Shakespeare on the Stage* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1973), p.57.
7. Madeleine Bingham, *Henry Irving and the Victorian Theatre*, p.236.
8. A.M. Nagler, *A Source Book in Theatrical History* (New York: Dover, 1959), pp.502, 504, 505.
9. Frances Donaldson, *The Actor-Managers* (London: Witdenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), p. 162.
10. Barthoimeusz, p.216.
11. Speaight, p.126.

12. Robert Speaight, *William Poel and the Elizabethan Revival* (London: Heinemann, 1954), p.109. Shaw's comments had appeared in *The Saturday Review*, 20 July 1895.
13. Speaight, *William Poel and the Elizabethan Revival*, p.103.
14. Poel's production of Marlowe's *Edward II* was said to be the first staging of the play since the sixteenth century.
15. Australia had already seen *Everyman*, presented by J.C.W. at the Melbourne Town Hall in October 1905, with Julius Knight as the title figure.
16. Information about Goodsall from a brief report in the *Bulletin*, 7 October 1920, p.46. In 1911-12, he had toured the Far East as a member of Wilkie's company, and he had also worked for a time with Frank Benson's Shakespeare Company.
17. This was not strictly true. Oscar Asche had staged *Julius Caesar* in 1909, at the Sydney Town Hall, presenting it as a costumed recital, on a stage decorated only with black velvet curtains. See below, pp.126-27.
18. For example: *Argus* 13 September 1920; *Bulletin* 16 September; *Mercury* 28 September.
19. Quoted from a publicity pamphlet put out by Allan Wilkie in 1920.
20. Reviewers in Dunedin were not so generous. "Even such a simple character as Macbeth has. its variations, and to represent him as a blind and blundering savage is to really lower his force" (*Evening Star*, 20 June 1921). "The stage murders made such demands on the sympathetic understanding of the audience as to come perilously near the verge of burlesque" (*Otago Daily Times*, 20 June 1921).
21. An interpolated death scene for Macbeth was very common. See Sprague, *Shakespeare and the Actors*, pp.278-79. Garrick and Edmund Kean, as well as Irving, had been amongst those who chose to die on stage.
22. Wilkie, p.255. •

23. Marsh, *Black Beech and Honeydew*, p.141. She further noted that Goodsall, whom she does not name, was "a designer of conspicuous merit who also played bit parts with frenetic enthusiasm and finally went mad."
24. Arthur Colby Sprague, *The Doubling of Parts in Shakespeare's Plays* (London: The Society for Theatre Research, 1966).
25. Letter to A.C. Sprague, 7 June 1966.
26. *Tasmanian Mail*, 6 January 1921.
27. See Sprague, *Shakespeare and the Actors*, pp.37-39, for Audrey "business". It had been common for her to appear munching on a turnip or an apple. In an interview with Wilkie during August 1953, Sprague noted the fact that in Wilkie's productions, Audrey ate a turnip with an apple concealed in it. Notes supplied to me by Professor Sprague.
28. Interviewed by me, Melbourne, 17 October 1980. Miss Webb recalled that Wilkie wanted her to play Audrey as a yokel, with a dirty face and her hair poking through her straw hat.
29. Marsh, p.123. Sprague, p.48, also notes the Asche business.
30. Letter to Sprague, (?), 1945. (No clear date shown.)
31. They were succeeded by Lord and Lady Forster, and this couple also were happy to become patrons of Shakespeare.
32. E.H. Sugden was to be the author of *A Topographical Dictionary to the Work of Shakespeare and his Fellow Dramatists* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1925).
33. Wilkie, p.271. Strong had a marked interest in the theatre. He was one of the founders and trustees of the Melbourne Repertory Society, he had helped to found the Mermaid Society, and he later became president of the Adelaide Repertory Society. (Information from an article by R.C. 3ali entitled "Sir Archibald Strong" in *The Australian Quarterly*, II 1930, pp.104-13.
34. Always provided that transport costs were not prohibitive, and that a suitable venue could be found for large-scale productions. Within the previous ten years, Tasmania had seen Nellie Stewart in *Sweet Nell of Old Drury* (1911), a variety of "Marlowdramas" and Gregan McMahon with the Melbourne Rep., performing Shaw, Galsworthy, etc., in a season sponsored by Edward 3ranscombe (1912).
35. Wilkie, p.260.

36. Mr. John McGowan interviewed by me in Hobart, 23 August 1980. This anecdote was recorded by him in "Violins and their makers", an unpublished work, prefaced by a brief life of the author, in which his theatrical experiences figure prominently.
37. Asche's playing of Brutus for Benson is noted by John Ripley in "*Julius Caesar*" on Stage in England and America, 1599-1973 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p.194. Description of the Asche Australian production is from the *Bulletin*, 30 September 1909, and 14 October 1909.
38. Recorded by Ellis Irving in a letter to me from Fife, Scotland, 18 September 1980.
39. Wilkie, p.265.
40. Wilkie, p.265.
41. Information from the *Bulletin*, "At Poverty Point", 5 January 1922.
42. *The Comedy of Errors* was the only omission.
43. Letter to Sprague, n.d., 1945. Wilkie's comment was in response to the fact that Sprague noted Weir's hay business in the Preface to his *Shakespeare and the Actors*, p.vii.
44. Another actress engaged by Wilkie at this time was Pamela Travers, who was later to achieve fame as the author of the Mary Poppins books.
45. Cuts indicated by Irene Webb's script. The removal of Margaret may simply have been because Wilkie had too few actresses in the company at that time.
46. "Playing Shakespeare. Mr. Allan Wilkie's work: the man and his ambitions". Interview in the *Argus*, 25 June 1926, p.7.
47. Wilkie, p.271.
48. This point was confirmed by Mr Ellis Irving in a letter to me from Fife, Scotland, 18 September 1980.
49. John West, *Theatre in Australia* (Stanmore, N.S.W.: Cassell Australia, 1978), p. 41. George Rignold may also have produced the play between 1880 and 1900.
50. See Sprague, *Shakespeare and the Actors*, p.41.
51. Interview with Miss Irene Webb, 17 October 1980.

52. Information on Wilkie's division into scenes of this and other plays is drawn from programmes for the various productions.
53. Irene Webb's script.
54. J. Beresford Fowler, *Shakespearian Talks* (Ilfracombe: Stockwell, 1975), pp.74-75. Fowler was assistant stage manager for Wilkie in 1923, and also took minor roles like the boatswain in *The Tempest*. He later formed his own company, the Little Arts Theatre, which performed Shakespeare and the "good" modern dramatists. He was to play Caliban in his own production of *The Tempest*, and based his performance on what he had observed of Wilkie's.
55. Letter to Sprague, 3 March 1965.
56. From 1927, whenever *The Winter's Tale* was played, Frediswyde Hunter-Watts only took the role of Hermione. In performances for that year (for example, Dunedin, N.Z. 11 August; Hobart, Tasmania 29 December), Perdita was played by Dulcie Cherry. The final performance of *The Winter's Tale* by the Wilkie company appears to have taken place in Sydney, 25 July 1928.
57. Irene Webb's script.
58. See Gregan McMahon article in *Komos*, p.130.
59. Wilkie, p.275.
60. Wilkie, p.276.
61. Cuts recorded in Irene Webb's script.
62. West, p.155.
63. From a report of the fire in the *Argus*. 22 June 1926, p.11.
64. Streeton was a supporter of Wilkie's work.
65. *Argus*, 27 July 1926, p.11.