

# *I Remember.*

*By WINIFRED OUGHTON.*

When I am not working the Vic. draws me back with irresistible magnetism. Night after night I sit there—on the wrong side of the curtain—and my mind is flooded with memories.

I remember my first impression, in September, 1915. It was a dress-rehearsal of "As You Like It." The theatre was very dark, I could just distinguish Ben Greet's white head as he sat alone in the Pit, watching. Robert Atkins was the Jacques. He was not dressed for the part except that he wore a hat and carried a stick—as stage manager he had too much to do to think of his own appearance, for in those days the Vic. could only afford three stage hands—Bob and Charley, and Jim up in the "flies."

The stage was crowded with girls dressed more or less unsuitably as foresters. Some of them had feathers in their hats. This roused Mr. Greet's indignation, and he called to them to "take those feathers out of your hats. You are in the Forest of Arden, not Hampstead Heath on August Bank Holiday."

How right he was! Nothing is easier than to overdress a part—in the desire for beauty to keep on adding "bits" (as he used to call them) till the individuality of the costume is quite gone.

It struck me as queer that girls should be acting boys' parts. I soon lost that feeling when I joined the Company, for most of us did nothing else.

Those days!

At first we only impersonated young boys—Osric, Donalbain, Biondello and their kind. But the war claimed one actor after another, and soon we had to tackle grown men of all sorts and ages, from Justice Shallow to the Bishop of Carlisle. No one was exempt, and no one wanted to be. I remember

Sybil Thorndike; as Prince Hal, as Ferdinand, and as the Fool in "Lear"—Florence Saunders, as Lucio (Measure for Measure), Silvius, and black from head to foot, as Pindarus.

The dear Vic. audience was very kind to us, and indeed, I think we must have attained something like reality, for we were often taken for men. I remember a performance of "The Tempest," when a young boy in the Company deputised for the girl Gonzalo, and someone in the audience enquired quite seriously what had happened to the old gentleman who usually played the part, and who was the girl doing it to-night. How we laughed!

Almost my first part was the French citizen in "King John," and it was while I stood upon the walls of Angiers defying France, England and Austria, in the persons of Mark Stanley, Russell Thorndike and Ernest Meads, that the first German aircraft flew over the Vic.

Had he but known it, the enemy could not have chosen a better time to visit us. The theatre was packed—it was the first night of the season, I think—and the knowledge of his presence positively helped the performance.

The patriotism of "King John" is astonishingly modern, astonishingly humorous. Again and again on that wonderful night the characters in the play expressed to perfection the emotions of the audience. Laughter and applause deadened the noise of the bombs, and I think no sound was ever more beautiful than the deafening cheers that greeted the concluding words of the play—those words of Philip's, as characteristic of the England of 1917 as of Shakespeare's England, when he wrote them more than three hundred years ago.