

## In Memory of "Bob."

By his Friend and Manager, LILIAN BAYLIS.

I have many many letters from artists and audience about the Vic's loss of this faithful servant which came so soon after the joyous opening at Sadler's Wells. The sympathy which has been conveyed both to me and through me to the Robinson family has been very precious; I cannot mention all those who wrote or sent their contribution towards the Fund we are getting up for Bob's widow; but as an example of the far-reaching way in which his death was felt I will name Alfred Dove, one of the first conductors at the Vic; the cook at the Welcome canteen for down-and-outs that is now in Webber Street, but used to be opposite our stage-door; William Poel, manager of the Vic in 1881; a Morley College student who spoke of Bob's friendly assistance with regard to the lectures; such well-known stage folk as our dear Sybil Thorndike and Lewis Casson, Edith Evans and Sir Barry Jackson, who sent a wreath; and a very old friend of mine who wrote what I have often felt: "The last time I saw him he packed you into Rollie's car and said good-night and I marvelled to myself at such devotion—Just like getting a child off to bed safely."

I feel I should also like to thank those members of the opera company who helped to make the Requiem and Funeral Service at St. John's, Waterloo Road (which "Father Hutch," as the Rev. C. W. Hutchinson is affectionately called, arranged at once with Bob's sons) so beautiful and impressive, and particularly perhaps Walter Wiltshire, who acted as organist, and Booth Hitchen, whose solo "Thou art passing hence, my brother" to Sullivan's music was so moving. Three very old friends—Constance Willis, Robert Atkins, and J. W. Keys (who represented Sir Philip Ben Greet) afforded me great comfort by their presence amongst the many who almost filled the church. It was good too to feel that our loss was shared by so many of the audience and by people in the neighbourhood.

Fifty years is a great record of service; and Bob has left us as a legacy a son and a grand-daughter as part of our regular staff. In our early days we had neither time nor space to keep proper records; and often we have had to rely on Bob's wonderful memory for a date or description of an event. He was our living history-book; and the various positions he occupied here brought him into contact with an unusally wide circle; singers of world-wide reputation who came to our ballad concerts; great actors; rough and tumble variety artists (and how interesting these dear people were) and great scientists, explorers and the like who came to lecture here.

My first memory of Bob is at one of the tenants' excursions to the country, when my aunt took her people from the slums of Drury Lane, Marylebone and from Surrey Lodge into the country for the day. She was one of the first persons to organise such excursions; and very often we were about 1,000

strong. All tenants who had paid their rents regularly—fathers, mothers, and the children—met at Liverpool Street and we went to Epping Forest for the day. Bob was always at my aunt's side until the train started; Miss Ellen Cons made a wonderful lemon syrup—many bottles of it; and this was packed in boxes; cricket stumps, gifts, a large skipping rope which also served for starting the races which came at the end of the day—all these packages were put in Bob's charge; and he also saw that great cans of water were ready to mix with the syrup. The tenants brought their own lunch; but we all sat down to a big tea about three o'clock. Bob marshalled them all at their appointed tables, and after tea helped to start the races. On the homeward journey he hurried the late comers to carriages and then jumped in at my aunt's side, saying: "They're all in, Miss, I've counted them."

In those days Bob was check-taker in the gallery; but when I came back to England as a girl of twenty-three, Bob was in charge of the stage. He was also our messenger; for the Vic work was done at Surrey Lodge; and Bob brought the letters over twice a day and banked the takings, cashed the staff cheques, etc. Telephones were not general in those days; and when an artist failed, Bob had to rush off in a cab and get a substitute. I recollect a performance of "The Daughter of the Regiment," when the "Countess" had a heart attack in the afternoon. Only one other singer in London could play the part without rehearsal; so Bob rushed off to bring her back. He found she had moved that day; followed her to her new home; and discovered that the furniture vans had just left and the poor lady, very grubby, was trying to get the house straight. With much persuasion, Bob managed to get the lady to take a bath while he went on unpacking, and rushed her here just as the orchestra had played the overture.

I could multiply instances without number of Bob's persuasiveness, if not forcefulness, with artists. But as stage-doorkeeper all his experience stood him in good stead. Very often, this position implies a necessary sternness to keep people at bay, but Bob managed to combine friendliness with his duty; and to see him with complete good-humour making a path for a favourite artist through the crowd of admirers, or lining up autograph hunters into a queue was, I imagine, a scene which could only happen at the Vic.

It is good to know that Bob never recovered consciousness after his accident and suffered no pain. I am sure that had Bob fallen ill and been unable to continue his work here, he would have been unutterably miserable; for the Vic was his life; and it is a consolation to think that when the end came, it was swift. At all events, he lived to see the fulfilment of our great hopes with regard to Sadler's Wells; and knew that our work was likely to extend and develop still further. He was very proud and happy over this.