

Shakespeare's Men Played by Women.

A WAR-TIME MEMORY.

By FLORENCE SAUNDERS.

"I must say I admire the way you girls tackle men's parts," observed Pushboche one morning to a roomful of nine or ten girls. The instant hubbub that arose was deafening—

"Oh Pushboche, how can you!"

"We're awful!"

"He's laughing at us!"

"We *hate* it!"

Poor Pushboche was overwhelmed. He attempted to bolt, but was seized and forcibly detained. "You asked for it," Lambkin informed him firmly, "and you're jolly well going to get it."

"Yes," said Willie, "we'll tell you exactly what we think about girls playing men's parts."

Pushboche submitted. "I'll listen to anything you like," he declared, "if only you won't all shout at once in your stentorian Vic voices. Now what's the trouble—one at a time, *please*—William, you begin."

"Well," said Willie, "of course we realise there's a war on, so it's necessary for us to play men, and from that point of view, we're all jolly pleased to be doing our bit." ("Hear, hear!" shouted the listening girls.) "But," continued Willie, "why I dislike male impersonation is because I think it's so rough on the audience. Directly a girl-man appears their minds are jerked away from the business of the play to consider—an individual curiosity, so to speak. It makes me feel I'm an illusion-breaker."

"Well," teased Pushboche, "in Elizabethian times and for long after all women's parts were played by young boys and nobody seemed to mind in the least. But I suppose you'd have called them illusion-breakers too."

"No, silly, of course not," cried Willie, "because then an all-male cast was taken for granted."

"Besides," interrupted Dickie, "you know jolly well, Pushboche, that's probably the reason why Shakespeare made so many of his heroines dress up as boys. Downy old bird! But I wish he'd foreseen the world-war and written a classical 'Charley's Aunt' for us."

"Well, what about Flute and Falstaff as Thisbe and Mother Prat?"

"They don't count," retorted Dickie quickly—"you know we're never called upon to play parts like those."

"Well, don't despair," remarked Pushboche hopefully, "you never know what may happen if you continue putting on flesh at your present rate of progress—! And for that matter, you all look more like land girls than actresses off the stage," he continued genially, "a fine 'ealthy, 'earty lot o' young women as ever I see; and I repeat my assertion—I admire the way you tackle men's parts!"

Dead silence followed this remark. Then—

"You know," said Dicky slowly, "I believe I'd be jolly sorry never to play a man's part again." Another silence, then "So should I," murmured Kitty-Cat. "And I," "And I," slow assent ran round the room. "If only my legs weren't so fat"—began Olly-Olly, when the door burst open and a heated stage-manager appeared. . . . "Everybody on for Macbeth's army," he shouted, and the meeting dispersed.