

of dramatic art as Shakespeare, by universal consent, has long been admitted to be—and this in an age, when, not only Shakespearian students, but the entire intelligent public, English as well as American, Colonial and foreign, have begun to demand that we should see Shakespeare's plays—so far as it be possible—as they were written, and not as they can be cut and carved to suit the taste of literary advisers or the exigencies of actors and stage managers. Thus, as the piece is now arranged at Her Majesty's, it seems to have been overlooked that Shakespeare naturally made his first act break off with the Faulconbridge incident, at Northampton, because an interval was absolutely required for the transference of the action to Angiers in France. The compression, moreover, of the scene enacted before the walls of Angiers cannot meet with approval, since nothing can be nobler nor more finely conceived, than that, after a doubtful combat, the heralds of the respective forces should request the citizens to deliver up their town, as though either side had gained a conclusive victory. The sarcastic colloquies also between Queen Elinor and the Lady Constance are somewhat unduly abridged—while a "Tableau" of the fight is introduced, which, though certainly striking and picturesque in itself, impedes rather than furthers the action of the play, and compels deplorable excisions! Again, in respect to the Shakespearian division of Acts II. and III., the interval, though it need not be so long as that between Act I. and Act II., is still requisite, on account of the time taken up by the marriage of the Dauphin with Blanche, and of the withdrawal of Constance to meditate on her sorrows in the French King's tent. The opening words of Constance's speech at the beginning of Shakespeare's third Act explicitly show this, since they point to her having received the news of the league newly-made between the Kings, whilst she was absent; and when the curtain discloses her with Arthur and Salisbury in the scene as now played at Her Majesty's, it should disclose her, not as just entering, but as already having had the reports brought to her. That Faulconbridge (or as he has been made by King John, Sir Richard Plantagenet) should strip the slain Lymoges of his lion's skin and appropriate it in view of the audience is more in accordance with modern ideas than bringing in his head, and may therefore pass. By removing also the colloquy between the Dauphin and Pandolph after the departure of Constance from its allotted place in the drama, viz., at the close of Act III. the necessary interval for the transference of the action from France to England is not shown, and the absurdity permitted in Act I. of the present arrangement is repeated. What possible justification moreover, Mr. Beerbohm Tree's literary adviser can bring forward for allowing him to interpolate a tableau of the signing of the "Magna Charta" between Act II. and Act III. of his presentment I cannot divine! No allusion is made to "Magna Charta," either in the old play of the "Troublesome Raigne of King John," upon which our great author founded his piece, nor has he made the slightest reference to it himself. There is every reason, indeed, to believe, that Shakespeare, both for dramatic and political reasons, purposely made this omission, and it seems amazing to think that any modern Stage Manager should have foisted it into his Production. By a sort of theatrical Nemesis the very curtains refused to close upon the Tableau on the fourth night of the performance, and it was not until

someone more ingenious than his fellows thought of letting the main curtain fall, that the discomfited artists were enabled to withdraw. Verily, one of the "unrehearsed incidents" most to be dreaded in the case of what was intended to be a solemn and soul-stirring Tableau! As a practical proof, too, of the mischief likely to arise from such unwarrantable interpolations, I cannot avoid mentioning that the occurrence of this ominous incident on the night in question made it incumbent on the Management to omit a subsequent scene of much beauty and interest, viz., the dying words of Count Melun, after disburdening his conscience to the English Lords! In fact, owing to sheer want of time, partly occasioned by the exhibition of the afore-mentioned "Tableau," and partly by the difficulty of handling an apparently too complicated scenery, there seems to have been a necessity for playing fast and loose with the five middle scenes of the Shakespearian fifth Act, portions of them being left in or kept out in a sort of happy-go-lucky fashion! To avoid all this therefore, it would have been wiser for the management at Her Majesty's to have followed the example of The Lyceum in all its Shakespearian Presentments, *i.e.*, to have printed and published their acting text; and to have abided by it. But, enough in defence of Shakespeare. I now gladly advert to the great merits of the representation from the point of view taken at Her Majesty's. Both in the general conception and in the manner in which it is worked out the highest credit is due to Mr. Beerbohm Tree, and to those who have worked with him. Their sole fault is that they have attempted rather too much in the way of stage business and setting, and have consequently been not seldom obliged to deprive Shakespeare of the power of speaking for himself. After what I have already said about the treatment of the Piece, there is little need here for me to demonstrate this by examples. One conspicuous instance I will alone indicate, viz., that, by omitting the scene in which Count Melun's confession and approaching death are depicted, two lines are not given, which are peculiarly beautiful in themselves, and which, if possible, have acquired a greater fame and a deeper significance, through their having been placed by Sir Walter Scott in the lips of Sir Harry Lee in the memorable passage at the close of his brilliant novel, "Woodstock," when the dying knight waits with his daughter to receive his Sovereign, Charles II., as he comes back to "take his own again." "Unthread the rude eye of rebellion, and welcome home again discarded faith." Such lines are surely worth more than any "Tableau," even if it were relevant to the occasion! Touching the entry of the English King and his suite in the scene before the walls of Angiers, I must observe that King John and his niece, Blanche, who came in on horseback, ought at once to dismount on their said entry as a matter of courtesy to the French King, and before they begin to converse with him. Of the acting generally I can scarcely speak too highly. Mr. Beerbohm Tree has undoubtedly reached a much higher level in his impersonation of King John than he has yet attained in anything Shakespearian, and the effects he produced in his colloquy with the discontented Lords, and subsequently with Sir Richard, and with Hubert in Scene III. of his Second Act, together with those in his death scene, at the end of the drama, prove him to be possessed of histrionic genius of the highest order. In the famous scene with Hubert,

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