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THE DAILY KLONDIKE NUGGET: DAWSON, Y. T.

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Talk With Actor Willard

"You would do better to go around to the dressing-room and make the appointment yourself," said Mr. E. S. Willard's manager. "If I go we may be exchanging diplomatic messages for several days."

This was on the opening night of "The Cardinal," just after the first act. I had not forgotten that Willard was an Englishman, but I had forgotten for the time being the leisurely habits of the English. No doubt the manager spoke wisely and with truth. Still, as I say, it was a first night, and I was there in the theater to gather impressions of the play and the actor for the next morning's paper. Those that have seen "The Cardinal" will remember that its first act is one of peculiar dullness. I had not yet found out that this act is merely the preparation for the excitement that follows in the other three. All I knew was that it was dull, and that Willard had been straining until the veins in his neck stood out like whipcords, as Laura Jean would say, in an endeavor to make it lively.

My heart felt damn as I neared the dressing room. Perhaps he would ask me, benevolently, what I thought of the show. On paper I can be almost bold at times, but in a face-to-face meeting I am painfully sensitive of the other fellow's feelings. Once upon a time in a similar situation an actor asked me something of the same question I had half expected Willard to ask. He wanted to know how he fitted his new part, and I, in my gentleness, told him that his misfit was nothing as compared to the misfit of the leading lady. Then it was his turn to comfort me. He told me that the leading lady was his wife.

The manager pulled aside the door curtain and I was submitted to the presence. Willard was still the Medical Cardinal. Even in those close quarters the actor's make-up did not show. The red robes were not the flimsy pretense of stageland; they were, to all external purposes, real. And the gleam of exaltation was as bright in the cardinal's eye as I had seen it on the stage. I felt like kneeling for a blessing as I had seen the company kneel.

Mr. Willard only partly relieved the illusion by giving me a gloved hand. I shook it at my own risk. He smiled ecclesiastically and inquired what he could do for me.

He could find it in his kindness, I hoped, to give me some of his wisdom for the benefit of a large Sunday circulation.

How long should it take, he asked absently.

I said that a willing subject frequently told all in a half hour.

"Then say 11 in the morning," he said.

I explained that that hour would be delightful as far as I was concerned, but that the man that made the midnight sketches would perhaps be dreaming of his art at 11 a.m.

"Quite right," he answered, still in the Medical voice, "one must always allow for the artistic temperament. Say 12 o'clock, then, instead of 11."

I clasped the Cardinal's glove again and backed out. I wrote something that night about a stage Cardinal whose identity was incontestable.

And when I went out Van Ness avenue next noon to the Hotel Baltimore I honestly expected to find something of the same identity. I knew of Mr. Willard's scholastic accomplishments—who does not? I knew that the Cardinal's love of Virgil in the Parker play was not all acting. I feared that he might feed me Latin deeper than my first six books of Caesar. Greek, too, perhaps. But that would be safe—the limotype refuses Greek.

The artist and I got out of the elevator on a floor that echoed with song. A man's voice was sturdily lifting in ragtime. Rag time on Willard's floor! It was profane. The bell boy headed straight for the singing, which ceased when he knocked on a door that was opened by the actor himself.

Mr. Willard could not have been better attired for the song. He wore the summiest kind of tweeds; his coat was cut sack, and his waistcoat was absent to reveal a full front of snowy linen. The room was principally a great bow-window, with every sash raised for the morning air. Willard suggests a new picture and a new sex for spring. His face was beamed with good nature and vigor. His porcelain-white hair might have been an artist's fancy to preserve the lightness of the sketch. The Cardinal of last night might have been his elderly uncle.

Generally he prepared to put me at my ease. I dote on having people

put me at my ease. In doing so they are sure to tell things that read easily and lightly. Mr. Willard was not at all surprised that he looked young. His father had just celebrated a ninety-first birthday in the best of health.

"The old gentleman is beginning to think he missed his vocation by not being an actor," said his son. "England is a great place for longevity. No wonder you Americans call us slow. We are slow; I admit we are. I have to work twice as hard, twice as fast, over here. Climate, I suppose; your climate is full of electricity and—" He paused for a word and I suggested:

"Hustle?"

"Ah, yes; hustle! Remarkable slang the Americans have—quite different from ours. You do things quicker than we do; you want your acting—everything, done quicker. We are by nature inclined not to do things in a hurry. But we get our reward. Don't we live longer for it?"

I admitted that in times of peace the well-conditioned Englishman did outlast the American.

"Do you know what is the saddest column to me in reading your newspapers?" said Willard, as though shifting the subject.

I could think of only one—the dramatic.

He smiled and said: "Not that one, but the obituary column. I look through it and read of this man, a president of a bank, dead at the age of 45; of that man, a president of a railroad, dead at 46; of all sorts of big men, professional and mercantile, dead in their forties. In England men as young as these are not presidents of anything. They are not considered old enough for such responsible positions. You burn yourselves out, I am afraid."

He talked to me in a kindly, almost fatherly way and I commenced to feel precocious responsibilities of my own, and I wondered how many of my feet Willard saw already in the grave.

The threat of a sickening silence was arrested by the artist.

"I say, Mr. Willard," he said, "do you think the things in this are funny?"

The artist had been rummaging through a pile of papers on the couch and he was now holding up a copy of "Punch."

The question was preposterous, offensive, ridiculous, impertinent, profane. I should as soon have asked an Englishman if he thought the morals of his wife were sound. In my shame I could have killed that artist. I don't know what I said in apology, except that I tapped my forehead and mumbled that he had been working beyond his years lately.

But the strangest and most unbelievable part of it is that Willard, instead of paying any attention to my apology calmly answered the question.

"Oh, yes," he said, "I find 'Punch' very funny at times. Of course, 'Punch's' humor is very local and doesn't always appeal to the American mind. Our slang is quite different, too, although you have good authority for some of yours. Where we say, 'Chuck him out' or 'Chuck her out,' you say 'Fire her out,' which is more or less Shakespearean. In one of the Sonnets Shakespeare says, 'Till my good angel fire my bad one out.'"

Only a kind man and good one could have talked like this in such a circumstance. The one other Englishman with whom I had discussed "Punch" and the jokes of our respective nations died a few months afterward of apoplexy. But he was a short, squat man, with a thick neck. Willard is a man of splendid length, and he wears the tallest collar obtainable. And he is reasonable on the subject. We told yarns in turn that illustrated our different schemes of national mirth. And he laughed as heartily at mine as I did at his, which is not saying much perhaps, except to show that we respected each other's jokes, just as we would have respected a difference in religion.

I started with telling him the story of Wilton Lackey's great speech at a Lamb's dinner. It was a great speech; strong men wept at its pathos and punched their own ribs over the epigrams; and its last line was followed by that intense second of breath-taking silence that goes before a hurricane of applause. This silence was broken by Nat Goodwin, who shouted enthusiastically, "Author! Author!" and turned the bottled-up applause to laughter.

It was such a good joke that I had to laugh myself when I finished it,

and that started a mild laugh in Willard. Then he explained his laugh.

"They usually call for the author on a first night in London," he said. He followed me with one from a prize issue of "Punch"; warned me that it was about the best he had ever heard. He started:

"A man, by name Johnson"—and I laughed right there and Willard looked at me reproachfully until I explained that Johnson was the name of the artist that had found his "Punch." Then he went on:

"Johnson walked into a London drinking place, a bit the worse for wear, and asked the barmaid if his friend Smith had been in that morning. She said he had; then Johnson said, 'Was I with him?'"

The other Johnson laughed at this, and so did Willard, and I joined in just about as hard as Willard had joined on my joke. Then I said:

"What did the barmaid say?"

"She said nothing," he answered; "that would spoil the joke."

"But Johnson asked her a direct question?" said I.

Willard regarded me hopelessly for a minute; then the look of reproach came back in his eyes. I told him another Goodwin story—how Nat went to an English music hall to see himself impersonated by a famous mimic, and when asked what he thought of it, answered, "Ah! I've got to say is one of us is rotten"—but Willard wouldn't even smile. At least not when I needed it.

Pretty soon we were gliding along easily on the impossibility of an American on British shores seducing any one but himself into believing that he is an Englishman. Willard said:

"A friend of mine from Boston, perfect accent, London-made clothes and all that sort of thing, came to me one day and said, 'By Jove, old man, I can't see how all these shop people find out that I am an American. I went into a shop this morning and asked the man to show me a pair of suspenders. He brought me a pair and said, 'Here you are, sir; three shillings—seventy-five cents in your money.' How the deuce, Willard, did the fellow know I counted my money in dollars and cents?"

I knew it was a joke, and I was dying to laugh, but not sure of myself, I sat gulping. After revengefully holding me a bit in this torture Willard permitted me to ha-ha myself into a jelly by explaining that his Boston friend gave himself away in the word suspenders. He should have said braces, of course. I think that an international joke would do more than Whitelaw Reid's knee-breeches toward clasping loving hands across the sea.

All this and not a word of acting. I doubt if we should have mentioned it at all had he not reminded me that Partridge of "Punch" was formerly an actor.

"Yes, Partridge has reformed." That's the way Willard put it. He told me of his own "reformation"—how he played villains for Wilson Barrett until he had to find a theater of his own to get away from them, and how he has never played a bad man since, save the rascal half of the double role in "John Needham's Double." And Willard in his day of specialization was reckoned the best villain man in all England. He it was that created the role of the Spider in "The Silver King."

I mentioned this part as his creation and he modestly misunderstood my stage slang.

"Henry Arthur Jones created the Spider," Willard said; "he wrote the play. The influence of the part on the whole piece is so strong that no actor could fail in it."

This last was said frankly, without arch self-deprecation; I believe that he believed it.

"You come to the United States every season," I said, "yet we have not seen you here since 1891. Don't you like California?"

"I don't come every year," he corrected; "this is my eighth American engagement in twelve years. As for California"—he took in the sun-bathed room and looked out the window on the length and breadth of the avenue—"I would rather be here than in the East or the Middle West, if only for the climate. Ah, if California were only nearer the Atlantic coast!"

I asked him what he thought of American audiences and he answered by telling me that most of his new productions were given here before they were given in London.

I swelled with the national pride. The American invasion of London theaters became as nothing compared to the fact that an English actor preserved his premieres for Yankee audiences.

But Willard explained, where almost any other actor would have let the implied flattery rest.

"It's really a great benefit to me," he said; "if I try a new play in Boston, say, then I have a chance to

whip it into shape for New York, and after its run there I can form a fair opinion of how it will take in London. Here I have several chances to make the play a success. In London I have but one. There is no appeal from the verdict of the London first-nighters."

So, after all, we are nothing more than a national dog (theatrically speaking, of course) for Willard's London theater. I didn't say this to him. Indeed, I did not think of it at the time. If I were not so boisterously truthful, I could work lots of afterthoughts into these interviews and get a reputation for spontaneous repartee. But I know that the Lord sees me. What I did say to Willard was to thank him for making my work seem like pleasure. He's a delightful personality, and we parted good friends.

"I'll see you to the elevator," he said.

"To the what?" said I.

"Why, to the elevator."

"I really don't understand you, sir. The first thing you know you'll be wearing suspenders."

"Well, then, I'll see you to the lift," said Willard.

I sighed gratefully, and, as I say, we parted good friends.—Ashton Stevens, in Examiner.

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9:05	Shops	4:05
9:15	Boulder	4:15
9:35	Clifton	4:35
10:00	Gisler	4:50
10:10	Tunnel	4:55
10:15	Switchback	5:00
10:20	WHITE PASS	5:05
10:50	Medows	5:10
11:00	Frear	5:20
11:15	Log Cabin	5:30
11:45	RENNETT	5:55
12:00 p.m.	Pavey	6:00
12:45	Pennington	6:50 p.m.
1:00	Dundak	7:00
1:15	Waters	7:15
1:40	CARIBOU	7:30
2:00	Landsdowne	7:45
2:10	Lorne	7:55
2:20	Winto	8:05
2:30	DeWette	8:15
2:45	Robinson	8:30
2:50	Cowley	8:35
2:55	Dundale	8:40
3:00	Wheat	8:45
4:00 p.m.	WHITE PASS	9:00 a.m.

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