MR. GILBERT AND "THE ERA."

In the Queen's Bench Division, on Monday, was heard, before Mr Justice Day and a special jury, the case of Gilbert v. Ledger. In this, Mr W. S. Gilbert sued *The Era* for £1,000 damages in consequence of an alleged libel upon himself. Mr Gilbert's play *The Fortune Hunter* was produced at the Theatre Royal, Birmingham, on Sept. 27th last. When the piece got to Edinburgh, Mr Gilbert paid a visit to that city, and while there was interviewed by a representative of the *Evening Dispatch*, an Edinburgh paper. In that interview he was reported to have said that Mr Sydney Grundy was "only a translator," and that no English actor could make a thirty-line speech interesting. Sir Henry Irving, Mr Beerbohm Tree, and Mr Alexander having "the same dull monotony of delivery." The following article, commenting upon these statements, appeared in *The Era* for Oct. 16th last year :—

MR. GILBERT AND MR. GRUNDY.

The happy knack of non-endearing himself to his contemporaries which Mr W. S. Gilbert possesses in such a remarkable degree was once more employed by him the other day at Edinburgh. Mr Gilbert, as all our readers are aware, recently wrote a drama called *The Fortune Hunter*, which was produced at the Theatre Royal, Birmingham, on the 27th of last month, and was received by the critics with various shades of disfavour. There, with ordinary amount of wordly wisdom on Mr Gilbert's part, the matter would have ended. *The Fortune Hunter* is evidently not one of those utterly silly efforts which the critics feel themselves aggrieved at being asked to criticise ; nor is it a work of a vicious tendency which one is called on to be angry with. It was, if we may judge from the accounts which have reached us, a piece of rather theatrical and mechanical cleverness, which might have passed muster as a good play somewhere in the "fifties." The critics had been asked to pronounce opinions on this work, and they gave them firmly and moderately. In a few weeks *The Fortune Hunter* would have been forgotten, had not Mr Gilbert chosen to emphasise its ill-success by an attack on the critics, the actors, and poor Mr Sydney Grundy.

According to Mr Gilbert, the author of a bad or unsuccessful play is treated by the critics as "a man who has committed an outrage against nature," and is "attacked as a scoundrel of the worst type." At first it is difficult to understand how so clever a man as Mr Gilbert could have made such nonsensical statements—statements which it is hardly necessary to say are without the smallest foundation. The author of a bad, or unsuccessful, play is *not* treated by the Press as a scoundrel of the worst type, still less is he regarded as "a man who has committed an outrage against nature." How then, it will be wondered, came Mr Gilbert to make such absurd accusations? We believe we possess the correct explanation. Mr Gilbert's abnormal self-esteem has, with advancing years, developed into a malady. In his own estimation, he is a kind of Grand Lama or Sacred Elephant of dramatic literature. The mildest criticism on his work, the most gentle disapproval of one of his plays, is a crime of *lèse majesté*, for which, if it were in his power, he would punish the culprit severely. It is a significant fact that one of the first things Mr Gilbert did when he retired—as it was trustfully believed—from business, was to become a J.P. It is evident that, did we live under a more despotic dispensation, he would commit all the London critics for contempt of court. It is not so much a question of the honesty or reasonableness of the critics' objections to his plays as the fact that they—or, indeed, anybody —should object to the work of Gilbert the Great at all. Such a view of life is obviously unsuited to any condition except that of an Oriental potentate ; and as a matter of fact Mr Gilbert's career has been a succession of assaults with the object—alas ! unattained—of vindicating the Gilbert Theory of the universe against sceptics and rebels. It is a great mistake to consider Mr Gilbert as a cruel or spiteful man. He has sometimes seemed so, but his real kindliness and good nature have simply been obscured by the abnormal protuberance of his bump of self-esteem.

Take his attack on Mr Sydney Grundy for instance. Mr Gilbert did not, he said, want to decry Mr Grundy. "I *tried* not to be tedious," said a speaker to a friend once. "And yet you *were*," was the reply. If it be not "decrying" a man to call him a mere translator, what is ? Mr Grundy, like Mr Gilbert, has done his adaptations, and he has done his serious work. But that this man, this—what's his name ?—Grundy should have written such successful original works as *Sowing the Wind*, &c., while he, the great Gilbert, has meekly failed, after failure in modern drama, is simply preposterous and "not to be borne." Mr Gilbert's absurd accusation against Mr Grundy is not, we contend, an instance of spite, but simply an ebullition of the loud, puffy, colonel-of-a-regiment kind—an expression, in short, of violent indignation with the erroneous and imperfect arrangements of an injudicious Providence. It is the same with the statement that "we have no actor on the stage that can make a thirty-line speech interesting." It is as incorrect as Mr Gilbert's other accusations ; but again we say, it is not to be regarded as a statement, but as an expletive. The actors and managers fight shy of Mr Gilbert's serious plays. Very well. It cannot be, he argues, that there is anything the matter with the plays ; something must be the matter with the actors and the managers. Mr Gilbert puts into his plays beautiful, long, thirty-line speeches. The actors will not even read the plays, notice the speeches, acknowledge regretfully in their own minds that they are incapable of making them "interesting"—and return the MSS.

But all Mr Gilbert's silly sayings in the Edinburgh interview are atoned for by the supreme wisdom of his concluding resolution. "I think it better," he says, "to refrain from writing, as I am not obliged to write." Herein Mr Gilbert, we think, makes the best and highest choice. A man who is so constituted that, after having administered to others during a long career the sharpest satirical cuts, he cannot endure even the moderate chastisement of candid but not abusive criticism, had far better lay down his pen, and confine his energies to the usual occupations of a country gentleman. Mr Gilbert's last attempt, in the letter which we print elsewhere, to "water down" his remarks to the Edinburgh interviewer, comes a little too late to be satisfactory or effective. What Mr Gilbert said to the interviewer was :—"*Why, I hear Sydney Grundy put on the same level as Arthur Pinero, while the fact is that Mr Grundy is only a translator.*" It will not do for Mr Gilbert, after having allowed these words to appear in print without contradiction, to try and avoid the consequences of his rough and hasty observations by "explaining away" his own words, and applying a little oily flattery to Mr Grundy's instead. We notice, too, that, in Mr Gilbert's letter, he makes no attempt to withdraw or modify the insult which he offered in the same interview to "every living actor," with the mention of the names of Sir Henry Irving, Mr Beerbohm Tree, and Mr George Alexander. "*Why,*" he said, "*have we no actor who can tackle a thirty-line speech interesting? Whoever heard in this country 'All the world's a stage' declaimed by a Jaques who did not in every line make it plain he had learned it off by heart. Every living actor—Sir Henry Irving, Beerbohm Tree, Alexander—has that dull monotony of delivery.*" We can understand Mr Gilbert liking to attack a rival like Mr Sydney Grundy ; but why he should insult wholesale the actors—some of whom have rendered invaluable assistance to him in making his fortune by the stage—we cannot understand. But this has always been the way with Mr Gilbert after one of his failures. He has invariably attacked somebody or other ; either a rival author, the actors, or the critics. In this instance he has "gone for" all three. The fact is, when he is in one of his tempers there is no knowing what Mr Gilbert will not say or do. At such times his friends should—if possible—keep interviewers from him and him from interviewers.

The court was densely crowded. Sir Henry Irving and Mr Beerbohm Tree, who had been subpœnaed as witnesses, were present, Sir Henry being accompanied by Mr Bram Stoker. Miss Fortescue occupied a seat behind the junior counsel, and Mr Robert Buchanan and Mr George Alexander were also in court, with many other well-known members of the profession.

Mr Lawson Walton, Q.C., M.P., with Mr Marshall Hall and Mr Rowland Brown, appeared for Mr W. S. Gilbert ; and Mr E. Carson, Q.C., M.P., and Mr Henry Kisch represented Mr Edward Ledger.

The solicitors for *The Era* were J. H. Mote and Sons, of 11, Gray's-inn-square, W.C., who also act for the Actors' Association.

The pleadings in the case set forth that the plaintiff claimed £1,000 damages from the defendant, by reason of the libel published in defendant's paper. The defence was a denial that the statement was libellous, and a plea of fair comment.

Mr Lawson Walton, Q.C., in stating the case for the plaintiff, said, according to the modern definition in English law, a libel was a publication which held another up to contumely, contempt, or ridicule. Mr Gilbert claimed that, by reason of the statement which appeared in the defendant's newspaper, he was exposed to contempt of a large section of the community whose good opinion he highly valued, and the loss of which he would regard as one of his greatest misfortunes. It was unnecessary to introduce Mr Gilbert at any length to the jury. His name was well known to all, and counsel did not think he would be going too far if he said that Mr Gilbert had earned the grateful recognition of all English-speaking races by works of great literary skill, high imagination, and ingenuity. He had added to the mirth and gaiety of two nations, and it would be idle for anyone to conceal from himself the distinguished and eminent position which Mr Gilbert had attained. As an example of Mr Gilbert's work in pure literature he need only mention the "Bab Ballads," and in works of dramatic literature his name was associated with a number of plays, of which he would name only *Engaged*, *Sweethearts*, *The Palace of Truth*, *The Wicked World*, and *Sweethearts*. It was, perhaps, in the domain of light comic opera that Mr Gilbert's works had attained the widest publicity. He was associated with the Savoy Theatre and with the name of Sir Arthur Sullivan in a number of productions, most of which the members of the jury had probably witnessed with great pleasure and delight. They would recall the titles of some of them, such as *The Pirates of Penzance*, *Patience*, *Iolanthe*, *The Mikado*, and many others. Mr Gilbert's career as a dramatic author covered thirty years of his life, and during that time his works in the dramatic department of literature exceeded seventy in number. He had made many friends ; he had been associated with brother authors and with many artists in every department of the dramatic profession, and had done nothing to merit the ill-will or forfeit the affection and esteem of those with whom he had been associated. He had now gone into retirement, hoping and believing that he had carried that goodwill with him, and would retain it until the end of his life. The defendant was the proprietor of a newspaper called *The Era*, which was an organ associated with the dramatic profession, and probably the most widely read theatrical journal in the world. It was to be found in the hands, probably, of every person connected in any way with dramatic literature or the theatre in any shape, and was the quarter in which an attack would be the most injurious to the reputation of anyone connected with the profession. One of the features of modern journalism was a tendency to produce what were known as personal paragraphs. If these were amiable in their character, possibly they would do no harm ; they ministered to the harmless vanity of the subject of them and caused innocent amusement to his friends. But if they were hostile or malevolent they occasioned great pain to the subject of them, and excited very strong feelings among the friends of the person attacked. The temptation to publish these paragraphs was very great to every newspaper conductor, because they added a considerable piquancy to the journalistic dish, helped the sale of the paper, and added to the revenue which attended its circulation. It was a form of publication which might be pursued with considerable impunity, because the subject of the attack usually shrank from the ordeal of instituting an action for libel and encountering the ill-natured sneers which the proceeding of that kind very often entailed. Therefore, when anybody came forward to exercise an injustice of this kind he rendered a public service. In the present case he would briefly indicate the nature of the article of which complaint was made. It bore directly upon Mr Gilbert's character and reputation. It did not dwell on the merits of Mr Gilbert's compositions or discuss his standing in dramatic literature. It treated of Mr Gilbert's personal character, and charged him with mean and sordid envy of his dramatic colleagues ; it taxed him with being guilty of falsehood, and imputed to him an overweening and egregious conceit. It suggested the course of construction which might be pursued with considerable impunity, because the subject of the attack usually shrank from the ordeal of instituting an action for libel and encountering the ill-natured sneers which a proceeding of that kind very often entailed. Therefore, when anybody came forward to exercise an injustice of this kind he rendered a public service. In the present case he would briefly indicate the nature of the article of which complaint was made. 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It was a hateful and repulsive picture, and the man who drew it must have been animated by the strongest feelings against Mr Gilbert, and must have been anxious to alienate from that gentleman the goodwill of those among whom he had spent the whole of his active life. Mr Gilbert felt that the picture was an untrue portrait, and one that he could not allow to go forth unchallenged ; and he had therefore adopted the only course open to him and brought the matter before a jury to invite their opinion on the attack that had been made upon him. The facts which led to the publication of the libel were these :—During last year Mr Gilbert wrote a play called *The Fortune Hunter*. He had been asked to write it by Mr Willard ; but while in the course of construction he came to the conclusion that as it was drawn on entirely new lines it would not be suited to the theatre with which Mr Willard was associated. He had also been asked by Mr George Alexander to write a play for the St. James's, and Mr Gilbert, being of opinion that the unusual nature of its dramatic style was not suited to Mr Alexander's company, decided to produce it in the provinces before introducing it to a metropolitan audience. It was accordingly entrusted to Miss Fortescue, who was taking a company through the provinces. It was produced at Birmingham, and was an unqualified and brilliant success. The great bulk of the provincial press spoke of it in terms of high approbation, and some of the London papers took the same view ; but there were one or two critics who found fault with some features of the piece. After being produced at Birmingham it was removed to Edinburgh, and Mr Gilbert was present at the request of Miss Fortescue at the performance. Shortly before the performance Mr Gilbert was introduced to an interviewer. Mr Gilbert had an objection to interviewers, but Miss Fortescue had promised the interviewer that he should have an interview, and Mr Gilbert saw this gentleman and was in conversation with him for an hour and twenty minutes. He did not know if the jury had ever been interviewed. The process was this ; a gentleman called with a note-book. At long intervals he made notes in his book, quite oblivious of context. He afterwards pieced these notes together with embellishments of his own, and the article was called an interview. The next morning Mr Gilbert left Edinburgh. He believed he had been interviewed for the *Scotsman*, and bought a copy of the paper to see if the interview had been published, but he could not find it, and heard nothing about it until some time afterwards he saw a paragraph in the *World*, which professed to quote his opinion of Mr Sydney Grundy as a dramatic author. Mr Sydney Grundy was a friend of Mr Gilbert's, and the latter had for him a very high esteem. The paragraph contained a most untrue statement, suggesting that Mr Sydney Grundy was a mere adaptor. It was true that Mr Grundy was an adaptor, the greatest adaptor living ; but he was also a dramatic author of very considerable original power. Mr Gilbert was anxious to contradict that. So, instead of waiting until the next issue of the *World* he wrote a letter to *The Era*. That letter was as follows :—

Sir,—I learn from a paragraph in this week's *World* that an Edinburgh interviewer has made me say, "I hear Sydney Grundy put on the same level as Arthur Pinero, while the fact is that Mr Grundy is only a translator. He is a creditable translator, but to put him on a level with Mr Pinero is a monstrous injustice." As I have no feeling but goodwill towards Mr Grundy, I shall feel obliged if you will allow me to state what actually occurred.

Asked by the interviewer what, in my opinion, was the prevailing error in modern dramatic criticism, I replied that it was a tendency to place a good adaptation on the same level with a good original play—a manifest injustice to the original author ; for whereas no form of fictional composition is more difficult than an intellectual original play, one shall succeed, in spite of its intellectual quality, in commanding the approval of the public, nothing is easier than to translate or adapt a play from some foreign source ; and I referred to Mr Grundy as one instance of an author whose excellent adaptations had been so treated. The question of the precise status to which Mr Grundy's original plays are to be assigned did not arise between us. I spoke of Mr Grundy simply in his capacity as a skilful adaptor, and I referred to his adaptations for no other reason than that he is among adaptors what Mr Pinero is among original dramatists—*facile princeps*.

I am, your obedient servant,
W. S. Gilbert.
Harrow Weald, Oct. 12th, 1897.

The letter was published by the defendant, but in the same issue of the paper was published an article, which he would read, and which contained the statements complained of as libellous. It began :—"The unhappy knack of non-endearing himself to his contemporaries which Mr W. S. Gilbert possesses to such a remarkable degree was once more employed by him the other day at Edinburgh." This, counsel said, was a suggestion that Mr Gilbert was an unpopular man in his profession. The article went on to say that Mr Gilbert's play, *The Fortune Hunter*, was received by the critics "with various shades of disfavour." This was a most injurious remark. True, there were unfavourable criticisms, but to say that all the critics treated it with disfavour was not a fact. The article went on to say that according to Mr Gilbert the author of a bad or unsuccessful play was treated by critics as "a man who has committed an outrage against nature," and is "attacked as a scoundrel of the worst type." So far from complaining of the critics, Mr Gilbert had throughout his life had little but praise for them. Only on two occasions had he cause to remonstrate as to any criticism, and then not so much for his own work as in respect of the acting. Then, again, the suggestion that the plaintiff could not write a serious play was untrue. As a matter of fact, the whole of the seventy plays he had written had been written on commission. Eleven of these were dramas, and eight had been marked successes, and four or five of them were being performed at the present time. So that the allegation was quite untrue. Another serious part of the alleged libel was the following statement :—

"Mr Gilbert's attempt, in the letter which we print elsewhere, to 'water down' his remarks to the Edinburgh interviewer comes a little too late to be satisfactory or effective. What Mr Gilbert said to the interviewer was, 'Why, I hear Sydney Grundy put on the same level as Arthur Pinero, while the fact is that Mr Grundy is only a translator.'"

This, however, Mr Gilbert denied that he ever said. It was untrue that he had ever spoken of Mr Grundy alleging that that gentleman was only an adaptor of plays, or that he was actuated in saying so by any spiteful motive. It was absolutely untrue that Mr Gilbert ever made a statement so foolish as that there was no actor on the English stage who could make a thirty-line speech interesting. He was discussing the acting qualities of plays written in blank verse, and as opposed to prose writers he had pointed out that the traditional fashion which prevailed on the English stage of reciting blank verse, with more regard to the scansion than to expression, produced a sense of monotony, and that the best of our actors reciting in the traditional fashion lost the attention of his audience long before the speech was concluded. Anyone must have noticed the same thing in listening to a Shakespearian play. He did not, of course, refer to the example produced within the past few weeks, in which a well-marked effort had been made to escape that characteristic, because at the time the interview with Mr Gilbert took place that play was not before the public. But, whatever was said by Mr Gilbert, it was spoken against the custom, and had nothing personal in it whatever. Counsel went on to deny that it was true that actors and managers kept shy of Mr Gilbert's plays, or that he had had MSS. returned to him, as suggested in *The Era* article, and in conclusion said it was untrue that Mr Gilbert attacked Mr Sydney Grundy by alleging that he was only an adaptor of plays. He submitted he was actuated by envious or spiteful motive ; it was untrue that he was guilty of falsehood in writing his letter to *The Era*, disclaiming the character of that attack, it was untrue that he had attacked critics because they would not praise his plays, and that he had been actuated in these attacks by an overweening and egregious self-esteem ; and it was untrue that he had abused and quarrelled with actors and actresses who had helped to make his fortune. The criticism to which he had been subjected in the article in which these allegations were made was no criticism, but personal attack upon a gentleman which Mr Gilbert was entitled to protection, and which would, he had no doubt, be afforded to him by the verdict of the jury.

Mr William Schwenck Gilbert was then called, and examined by Mr Marshall Hall. He said, in reply to counsel, that he had written in all about seventy plays. Last year he finished *The Fortune Hunter*. It was commenced to the order of Mr Willard, but during the course of developing the play the character he had intended for Mr Willard fell into the background, and another character, that of a Frenchman, came to the front. He, therefore, wrote to Mr Willard, asking to be relieved from the agreement, and Mr Willard at once consented. Mr George Alexander had several times asked him to write a serious modern play for the St. James's Theatre, but he had always refused, because he felt himself more at liberty to exercise his imagination in plays of a fanciful type. However, he let Mr Alexander have the refusal of *The Fortune Hunter*, telling him that it was not suited for him, and Mr Alexander agreed in that opinion. Ultimately, the play was produced at Birmingham, in September, 1897, by Miss Fortescue, who took the part of a young lady. On its first production it was well received, and the Press notices were favourable. The article in *The Times*, however, was unfavourable. After being performed for a week at Birmingham, it was played at Edinburgh. Miss Fortescue's request he went there, and in her interests he allowed himself to be interviewed. The interview took place on Oct. 4th, and he was under the impression he was interviewed for the *Scotsman*, but it did not appear in that paper, and no interview until he saw a paragraph in the *World* newspaper, and upon that he wrote the letter that had been read by counsel, and which was published in *The Era*. He wrote to *The Era* because he was anxious not to remain under the imputation of having said an unhandsome thing of a brother dramatist. On Oct. 18th *The Era* published his letter, and at the same time published the article of which he complained. At the time there was reason to believe the piece was a success, and though he had expressed some opinions he had not attacked the actors, and certainly made no attack upon Mr Grundy. It would be untrue to describe Mr Grundy as a mere translator, and he had never so described him. He had produced eleven modern dramas, eight of which had been successful, and three had proved unsuccessful, including *The Fortune-Hunter*. The letter which he published in *The Era* was an accurate statement of what had occurred at the interview with regard to Mr Grundy. Since he wrote his first serious play, twenty-eight years ago, he had never written these plays without a commission. The first, *An Old Score*, was seen by Mr Hollingshead in proof, and was accepted by him in that shape. He never complained of candid criticism, but he certainly complained of uncandid and abusive criticism like that which he objected to in *The Era*. His letter to *The Era* was not to water down what had been said by the interviewer, but to correct what he considered inaccurate. He admitted that he said the critics treated the author of an unsuccessful play as if he had committed an outrage against nature, but that was only a jocular exaggeration. In fact, he was laughing when he said it to the interviewer.

You have read what was said in the article about your bump of self-esteem. Do you regard that as written in joke or seriously ?—I can hardly take it seriously, because I cannot suppose that anyone thinks I wish to reconstruct the universe. I am perfectly satisfied with Cosmos as it is.

Is it true to say that you have had successive combats with anybody to vindicate your theory of the universe ? —Oh, no ; I have no theory of the universe, and I am not a combative man.

Then with regard to the inability of any English actor to make a thirty-line speech interesting, was that a statement made by you ?—It was not. I was asked whether I intended to write any more blank verse plays. I replied I did not. I was then asked if I thought that the taste for modern blank verse had entirely died out, and I said no—that what I objected to was the present fashion of delivering blank verse, which allowed the metrical—the iambic structure to dominate the sense, caused the audience to lose the thread of the discourse, and obliged them to give up the speech for a bad job, and wait for the next speech in the hope that they would find better luck with it. That statement was only intended to apply to blank verse. It would be most untrue to apply it to the great proportion of actors in regard to ordinary prose. It was not at all personal, had referred solely to the principle upon which blank verse is spoken.

You did not intend these remarks as an insult to Sir Henry Irving, Mr Tree, or Mr Alexander ?—No, certainly not. It was merely my comment upon the state of the blank verse stage.

As a matter of fact, did you mention their names at all ?—They had responded to me by the interviewer, who said, "Do your remarks apply to Irving and Tree and Alexander ?" and I said, "Yes ; all living actors who deal with blank verse."

And the opinion you expressed at the time was that so far as blank verse goes there is a fashion of some monotony ?—Yes. The fact is that there are only two or three plays, not Shakespearian plays, in blank verse that now hold the stage, and one of these is a play of my own.

Further examined—Mr Gilbert said he did not find fault with actors as a body, and, as a matter of fact, for twenty years he had not found fault with any actor or actress to disinterpreting a play of his own. If a play failed it was his practice to go to the actors and exonerate them from any blame. He was on good terms with the profession as a body.

Cross-examined by Mr Carson—He was not irritated by the adverse criticism of the London papers when he saw the interviewer from the *Edinburgh Evening Dispatch*. He only saw the criticism that had appeared in *The Times*. It was not a favourable criticism. He wrote to the manager of *The Times* about it, but he was not irritated about it. Reasonable criticism never irritated him.

But if you thought the criticism was not reasonable it is the kind of thing that would irritate you ?—It would depend a good deal on the paper it appeared in.

In *The Times*, for instance ?—I should consider it annoying, but hardly irritating.

Hostile criticism of *The Fortune Hunter* appeared in most of the London morning papers ?—I know nothing about that.

You don't like reading hostile criticism ?—I have a horror of reading criticism at all, either good or bad.

Do you know that hostile criticism appeared in *The Times* ?—Yes.

In the *Morning Post*, the *Advertiser*, the *Daily Chronicle*, the *Morning*, the *Pall-Mall Gazette*, the *St. James's Gazette*, and *Daily Graphic* ?—I don't know. I have not seen them.

But you would admit that that is a formidable list of hostile criticism ?—Distinctly, I am quite prepared to admit that the play is a very bad play. A play that fails is for all practical purposes a bad play.

Did you ever ask the gentleman who interviewed you, and who was going to give your views to the world, what paper he came from ?—No, I did not. I understood from Miss Fortescue that he came from the *Scotsman*.

And you did not in the least mind how far these views were disseminated ?—I knew they were going to be published.

And knowing this you never saw the account of the interview from Oct. 5th until Oct. 12th, a week afterwards, when you wrote to *The Era* ?—I had not seen the report of the interview then, nor for a week afterwards. When I gathered from the article in *The Era* what else had been said inaccurate, then I wrote to the editor of the *Evening Dispatch*, and requested him to forward me the correction under oath of the interviewer, and at the same time to be good enough to send me a copy of the paper. I got a copy a few days afterwards.

Have you ever written to any paper withdrawing any of the statements, except the letter you wrote to *The Era* ?—No, I have not.

Did you observe from the public Press that a short time afterwards Sir Henry Irving, at a dinner of the Sheffield Press Club, spoke good-humouredly but warmly about the criticisms upon himself ?—I do not admit that he spoke good-humouredly but warmly. I noticed that he spoke most angrily and most spitefully concerning me. He described me as a librettist who soared to write original comedy.

You were not angry with Sir Henry Irving ?—I was most angry at that coming from a gentleman whom I have never given any occasion for such an utterance.

Do you think that Sir Henry spoke angrily ?—I am sure he did.

And spitefully ?—Most spitefully. I cannot conceive why he did so. I have never had an angry word with him, and I cannot conceive why he should be so spiteful.

Did you read what he said ?—I read a report of it. I do not know whether it is accurate or not.

You say, sir, that you consider that Sir Henry Irving was angry at what appeared to be your opinion expressed to the interviewer. Did you ever write to the paper to contradict or withdraw any single sentence of the offensive statement put forward about English actors ?—No ; I wrote to Sir Henry Irving's secretary, and as I see him in court he may have the letter about him.

Don't you think it would have been only fair to have written and publicly withdrawn them in the Press ?—The matter was in my solicitor's hands, and this action had been begun.

You had no intention with Sir Henry Irving ?—No.

You had turned him into an angry and spiteful man by what you had said publicly to an interviewer ?—Yes ; but I wrote an explanation to his secretary, Mr Bram Stoker, which he could have published if he had wished.

Witness was then cross-examined at length by Mr Carson on his interview as published in the *Evening Dispatch*. In it he stated that managers could not judge of the value of a play in manuscript. They might judge of its literary quality, but not of its acting capabilities. He did not mean to convey that managers accepted plays on the strength of the name of a particular author without being able to judge whether the play was good or bad ; but he meant that the name of a well-known author would influence them in accepting a play. He did not remember mentioning Sir Henry Irving's name in this connection, but he would not swear that he did not use it. He never asked Sir Henry Irving to accept a play. About twenty-five years ago he spoke to him about a play called *Dan'l Druce*, which was left on his hands by the death of Mr Emery, but asked Mr Tree to perform one of his new plays, but on one occasion he suggested that Mr Tree should take the part of Mephistopheles in *Gretchen* ; but Mr Tree said he would rather not, as Sir Henry Irving was going to play the same part at the Lyceum. He had no sympathy with translations, because he thought there were too many French translations on the English stage. English actors should leave the French stage alone. The French had admirable actors, but atrociously bad plays. His remark that English actors were incapable of delivering a thirty-line speech so as to make it interesting applied only to blank verse. The interviewer mentioned Sir Henry Irving, Mr Tree, and Mr Alexander, and he agreed that these actors did fall in with the prevailing fashion of delivery, which in regard to blank verse was dull and monotonous. He considered he was an expert in these matters, and that his opinions should carry weight with them, and he spoke them for purposes of publication and not to flatter these gentlemen. He had written privately to the three gentlemen assuring them he had been misrepresented, and he informed them of what he had said and that his remarks applied only to the delivery of blank verse.

Questioned further about French actors, witness said they were so good that they could make even a bad play a success. He never said that no English actor could make a thirty-line speech without making it plain he had learnt it off by heart. What he did say was that English actors spoke blank verse in a monotone, raising or lowering the voice a semitone at the end, according as the speech was a question or a statement. They spoke it just as the boys at Harrow or Eton delivered their verse on Speech Day. And, in reply to a question by the interviewer, he had said that Irving, and Tree, and Alexander, excellent though they were, had the same fault, a dull monotony of delivery. That was his deliberate opinion, though he did not select the names of these gentlemen.

Mr Carson—You accepted them, and gave the statement to the public ?—I accepted them ; that makes a difference.

Do you now mean to convey that these gentlemen have what you call a dull monotony of delivery ?—I do mean to convey that in dealing with blank verse they fall in with the prevailing fashion. That is my opinion, and many others hold it.

Do you consider it fair criticism to say that Sir Henry Irving and these other gentlemen, however excellent they may be, have a dull, monotonous delivery ?—I said they came to the prevailing fashion.

Do you think it fair criticism ?—I know it to be absolutely true, but I wish to explain that I do not suggest these gentlemen as conspicuous examples.

And you gave that, what I will call severe criticism, to an unknown interviewer, to make use of as he liked ? —I gave it to him for the purposes of publication.

Do your consider it fair criticism ?—Absolutely fair. I am an expert in these matters.

And it is because you are an expert that it is so much more important ?—Oh, it is for others to consider whether I am an expert.

In reply to a question as to what direction the dramatic taste of the present day lay in, Mr Gilbert replied :—In the direction of musical comedy ; bad musical comedy, in which half a dozen irresponsible comedians were turned loose on the stage to do as they pleased. These are our popular pieces. I said that to the interviewer.

What kind of pieces do you refer to ?—Pieces in which low comedians are allowed to do what they please.

Will you mention one of them ?—Oh, there are plenty of them.

I wish you would mention one ?—Well, take the pantomime at Drury-lane Theatre, with the great Dan Leno.

But that only goes on a short time in the year ?—It goes on for a long time in the evening.

Is a pantomime a bad musical comedy ?—It is not to be differentiated from it.

Do you really describe a pantomime as a bad musical comedy ?—No, but you would describe a bad musical comedy as a pantomime.

That is very clever, but I would like to know what you mean by bad musical comedies ; give us the name of one ?—There are fifty of them.

Give me one ?—I would say such a piece as *The Circus Girl*.

Would you call it a bad musical comedy ?—I would call it bad. I believe the manager calls it a musical comedy.

You give it as an instance of what you mean by a bad musical comedy ?—Yes.

Have they half-a-dozen irresponsible low comedians turned loose in *The Circus Girl* ?—I do not know how many there are.

Miss Ellaline Terriss, for instance ?—She is an artist of the highest pretensions.

But she is in *The Circus Girl* ?—She is the redeeming feature of it.

And Mr Seymour Hicks ?—He is an admirable comedian, but I believe he is allowed to do and say what he pleases.

Is he one of the irresponsibles turned loose ?—I would not say he would be.

Can you give us one ?—I do not know the whole cast of *The Circus Girl*. I only quote it as an instance.

You say that is one of the pieces in which half-a-dozen low comedians are turned loose, but you don't know the cast. Give me another that you know better ? —I do not see how I can be called upon to do this, but there are the musical comedies that have been played at the Gaiety. I do not know their names, but there is *The Shop Girl*, and there is *The Bar Girl*, I think. And another one *The Lady Slavey*, *The Gay Parisienne*, and a numerous piece of that class which come in the category, as it seems to me.

You mean the actors in these are irresponsible low comedians ?—Not all of them. Certain of them are, as in the plays produced by Mr Arthur Roberts, at the Lyric, where he says and does what he pleases.

He is an irresponsible comedian ?—Certainly ; most irresponsible and most amusing.

Then in your interview you were asked if these plays cultivated a taste for the music halls, or if the halls cultivated a taste for the musical comedy ?—My opinion is that they react upon one another. If the actors are not in the halls they are in the country, and so the taste for the halls grows. In fact, the butcher boy in the gallery is the thing in the theatre now.

Then do you think that the legitimate theatre is falling off ?—The theatre is as strong as ever at this moment, but there are fewer original plays than one would desire to see.

Perhaps that explains why there are so many adaptations on the English stage ?—Yes, and I attribute it to the action of the Press.

Now you are going for the Press. How do you explain that ?—Because the critics seem to draw no distinction between the production of an original play and a translation from a French one. When a boy I studied and translated the ancient Greek dramatists, but I never considered myself the author of their works. I have always given Sophocles the credit for his share of the work in them. I once translated a French play, sitting up all night to do it, and I got £3 000 out of it.

That was better than the Bar ?—It is better than my experience of it.

In answer to further questions witness said that the original work of Mr Grundy was not in question at the interview. Mr Grundy had attained a very high position as an original author. He mentioned him as an adapter because he was the best in that direction, and he thought it was fair to him to do so. He did not mention Mr Grundy in the interview as an original writer. The principal critics in London were men of discrimination and experience, but the unpractised journalists who swarmed in Press circles cared for nothing but personalities. It was because he did not care to be made a cocksby for such personalities that he had decided to give up writing for the stage. One of the disadvantages of being a dramatic writer was that of being exposed to the gross personalities of the Americanised writers who swarm in Press circles, men who had no culture and no qualification whatever for the post of dramatic critics, and who were sent to write dramatic criticism because it was the easiest work upon which an incompetent journalist could be set. He explained to the interviewer that it was no longer necessary that he should be a cocksby for these gentlemen ; that he had intended to withdraw from the active work of his profession, he, of course, only speaking of the herd of low critics.

Why did the herd attack you ?—I do not know, but I frequently have paragraphs forwarded to me.

Do you know who wrote them ?—Not in the least.

Then how do you know they were written by the