



MISS HILDA CLOUGH - THE PORTIA



MRS. MARK GERSTLE - THE JESSICA

SHYLOCK AND DICK HOTALING IN THE MERCHANT OF VENICE FOR SWEET CHARITY

By Helen Dare

Of one thing we may feel sure—and that is that Dick Hotaling's Shylock will be different.

"I am thinking," says Dick Hotaling, "of playing Shylock with an—"

But, perhaps, it is as well to preface now, before we go any farther, that it is not the degree of our chumminess that makes my pencil write him "Dick"—much, of course, to my loss, and consequent regret.

As a matter of cold fact, I may put to the credit of Shylock, who has little enough to his credit, poor warped old man, the happy circumstance of my meeting with the pleasantest bachelor in San Francisco; and at our meeting the formalities are carefully observed conversationally.

But what would you think if I wrote him down "Mr.," or becoming explicit, even made it "Mr. R. M.," as it is in the directory and on his visiting card?

"Who's HE?" you would scornfully demand. "Never heard of him. WHO is he, anyhow?"

A case, of course, is still a rose by any other name; but it isn't so with a man. Call him by an unfamiliar name and he's a mystery—or a nobody.

For example: The small boy who is just discovering the revelations of history, and who has the common human weakness of accumulating his knowledge in a fragmentary way, comes home to his noonday chop and pudding, full of information and the desire to impart it.

"Well, dearie," asks obliging mamma, "what did you learn this morning?"

"Oh—lots of things; 'rithmetic and history—and, say—history's fine!"

"That's nice. And what did you learn in history?" for mamma, after the fashion of women, woos her mankind through their vanity.

"We learned about a dandy fellow this morning—D. Boone."

"D. Boone? Who on earth is D. Boone, and what has he to do with history?"

"What don't YOU know? Well, he was that champion hunter and trapper fellow, and he wore a coon-skin cap and—"

"Oh-h-h! Ah-h-h!"

"Now, we don't want that sort of thing happening in The Call, do we?"

So, away with "R. M." and formality. Let it be "Dick"—at least in print.

But this, after all, is mere animadversion, and it has nothing to do with Shylock.

"I am thinking," so Dick Hotaling is saying, "of playing Shylock with an accent. Nothing broad, of course; nor along the lines of the low-comedy Jew; not actually in dialect, but with a Semitic accent."

"It hasn't been done, and tradition is against it," he argues with himself, "but why shouldn't it be done?"

"Why?" I ask, "why should it be done?"

"I think," goes on Mr. Hotaling, toying with his mental portrait of the abused Jew, "that I shall make Shylock darker than he is usually made, and, perhaps, not quite so old."

"Irving's Shylock was too papery white, I always thought—too old and shell-like, it seemed to me."

"And to me," agrees Mr. Hotaling, and I am grateful for his support in my opinion of dissent. "His Shylock did not satisfy me altogether; it somehow seemed lacking in humanness. Edwin Booth's Shylock was the one that seemed to me great. Those two were the only Shylocks I have seen—and I am not going to see Mansfield's."

"Because—"

"Because I have my own conception of Shylock which I want to carry out, and—Oh, it isn't vanity. I just want to keep my own intact. I don't want it to be affected, or weakened, or blurred by any other conception, however great."

"I think I shall make Shylock darker, it will be more Jewish and, anyway, he might have been a Portuguese."

"I played Shylock once," Mr. Hotaling smiles his whimsical smile again. "I was 19."

"How did you play him then?"

"Along Booth's lines. I had seen Booth's Shylock and admired him immensely, of course."

"I mean how did you play him, from the inside or the outside?"

"Oh, from the outside entirely. It was an entirely superficial Shylock. It could not be otherwise, for youth does not understand. I doubt if I comprehended Shylock then."

"And how did you play him from the inside?"

"I think so. I think it could not be otherwise now. In studying the part I am simply trying to put myself in Shylock's place, to think and feel as he would under the conditions of the play, and to do the things as he would do them."

"Shylock is not an agreeable old man. He is warped by the prejudice against the Jews, and by the hatred with which he responds to that prejudice. He loves only two things in this world—his daughter and his money. The loss of both arouses all the passionate resentment and vengeance of his nature. He has murder in his heart—you remember how he snatches at the knife and lunges with it?"

"I don't think you can make him a character to arouse sympathy—he is antagonized to all the world. The prejudice against the Jew has cut him off from a happy participation in the life of other men, and thrown him in upon himself. All that is left for him to do is to get rich and love riches. His only human companion whom he can love and trust is his daughter. Thus by very force of circumstances he is made suspicious and cruel. He passionately resents the proscription he suffers."

"I think I shall try to bring out this side of him, and make him eager to share in the pleasures of the young Christians instead of mocking at them. He would, it seems to me, do that from reasons of expediency, anyhow, and would find a certain gratification in being admitted to their company."

"Personally I have not much sympathy with Shylock. He is a cruel, revengeful old man, and he is not so badly treated in the end. You know that after all he doesn't lose his riches. He only has to make them over to his daughter. His punishment is not so severe."

"The book of the play, gilt lettered and luxuriously bound in soft morocco, open at the place where Mr. Hotaling left off when I came in, lies face down upon the shining desk, and I ask him how he does his studying."

"I see Shylock in my mind, now doing this, now doing that, and I am constantly adding to and taking from the picture. In getting ready for the play he has become very real to me."

There's nothing in Shakespeare to indicate that he does—but why shouldn't he? It would add to the picture. It would be characteristic of the Jew—there is in the Jew, even the Jew of to-day, more than a trace of orientalism, with the oriental love of adornment, and it was also a custom of the time."

It is in this way, with careful, thoughtful consideration of the minute and seemingly unimportant details, and with the deeply intimate understanding of that larger side of the character—the examination of the soul, the searching for the springs of action—that Mr. Hotaling is getting his Shylock ready.



RICHARD HOTALING - THE BUSHNELL PHOTO

It is, as every one who reads his morning paper knows already, for sweet charity that Mr. Hotaling will give his Shylock, for the benefit of the Doctor's Daughters, who do a beautiful and un-

tentatious work of charity among the invalid poor.

The performance is to be at the Majestic Theater on Monday night, December 18, to be followed by a matinee the next day, Tuesday afternoon, December 19.

Mr. Hotaling, who is an amateur actor in the true sense of that much-abused word and not in the common and perverted meaning of it, will be well supported.

Mrs. Mark Gerstle, who has no longer to win her laurels in the mimic world, who, like Mr. Hotaling is not a professional because she already has everything that the most brilliant success could give her, is to be the Jessica.

and made such a charming maid, will be the Nerissa.

Who will be the sweetest and finest of Shakespeare's women?

This much I may assure you—Mr. Hotaling will be more fortunate in his Portia than Mr. Mansfield is. His Portia at least will look the part, for she has the good fortune to be a California girl, "divinely tall," and all the rest of that—just as Portia should be.

She is Miss Hilda Clough, and Miss Clough is bringing a sympathetic appreciation to the part, as well as a charming personality. Her performance of Portia will be interesting, for she has never seen any of the great Portias—not Ellen Terry's nor Julia Marlowe's, not any Portia at all, in fact, except Mr. Mansfield's most inadequate Portia, whom, perhaps, she would as well have left unseen.

Miss Clough's Portia, like Ellen Terry's, will wear the scarlet robe in the trial scene, but her conception of the part, if not the dressing of it, will be entirely her own.

The time seems propitious, when Mr. Hotaling is telling me how he will play his Shylock, to put the question that is forever rising to the top:

"Mr. Hotaling, how came you not to be an actor?"

It is an open secret that Dick Hotaling is the best actor off the stage, that in every Bohemian Club links, both high and low, there would be deep, wide gaps of cheerfulness were it not for his special gift.

I am not prying open a half-healed wound I know, for Dick Hotaling could have been an actor—or he would. It's an old story and a pleasing one that he put aside his heart's desire to humor his father, that he made a toy of the talent that might have brought him fame. But he answers my question with no hint of that.

"It isn't because I didn't try to be," he tells me again with that whimsical smile.

"When I was 19 I went to New York with the determination to go on the stage."

"I had made the acquaintance of Daniel Frohman here and of course the first thing I did when I got to New York was hunt him up and give him the first chance to secure me. I went to his office—the outer office—and waited. I got past all the secretaries at last and he greeted me with:

"Ah, yes, Mr. Hotaling—I remember the name. And you want to go on the stage. Um-m-m, well, perhaps we can do something for you. You might go around to my theater (it was the Lyceum then, with Georgia Cayvan and the Belasco society dramas), and see what the young actors are doing."

"I went around, and I watched the extra young men—sort of male cornucopias doing this," and Mr. Hotaling illustrated with faintly imitations, "and I said to myself: 'I'm too good for this kind of thing.' So I didn't go back to see Mr. Frohman. I went to A. M. Palmer next."

"There was a big anteroom where we waited—we who wanted to go on the stage. We were of all sorts—chorus girls, show girls for 'Evangeline,' ingenues and heavies—everything from myself to Mrs. Bowers. I had a letter from W. L. James, who was Postmaster General under Garfield and some sort of a relative of mine, and after a good deal of waiting I got the chance to see Mr. Palmer. I was ready, but he didn't seem to be. I asked him just to hear me read, if not for my sake at least for Mr. James'."

"Very good. Just the thing, but not to-day. I'm too busy to-day. But come back—let me see—say—well—um—come back a week from next Thursday."

"I went back. In the meantime, I had been brushing up my most ambitious speeches, and I had the happy inspiration

that the clever thing to do—the strategic move—would be to take a morning gown; that it would serve as drapery and make my appearance more effective; that the sleeve falling when I made a gesture like this," and Mr. Hotaling illustrates for one fleeting moment the aspiring tragedian, "would be quite classical and toga-like."

"I waited in the outer room with my morning gown in a hand-bag, and—after a while—my chance came. Mr. Palmer saw me. He looked at me vaguely, and I explained.

"Yes, yes, you were to read to me—but not to-day. Not to-day. You see I'm so pressed—rehearsals, making up companies, getting a new play ready—not to-day; but some other time, yes, some other time. Come back, let me see—well, a week from next Saturday."

"I took my bag with my morning gown back to the hotel to wait until a week from next Saturday."

"To put in time I commenced taking singing lessons. When you pay five dollars a lesson your voice is sure to be remarkable—it's not in human nature for the singing master to find it otherwise, and of course mine was—a very remarkable tenor, not phenomenal, to be sure—but remarkable, very remarkable. I could hope for much from it. That gave me another string to my bow, and I felt quite independent. If I couldn't get a chance to sing, I could sing. I always had that to fall back upon—and it was in this happy frame of mind I went back to Mr. Palmer."

"He remembered me this time—perhaps he thought it was just as well to. Perhaps he suspected that I had an indulgent father behind me and that I could tire him out before he could tire me. I had my little bag with the morning gown with me, as usual. Mr. Palmer gave a boy orders to get the stage ready, to arrange things as I wished, waved me through the door leading from his office to the stage, and told me to let him know when I was ready for him."

"This was getting on, I thought, and I followed the boy. There on the stage was a rehearsal in full blast. I never knew whether it was a put-up thing or an oversight; but I went back to Mr. Palmer—without unpacking my morning gown from the little bag. He expressed his regrets:

"You see how it is," he said; "how almost impossible—"

"I saw, and I gave him my card with my address and told him in my very best manner—I remembered I had my singing in reserve—that there was where he could find me when he would wish to send for me."

"After some more singing lessons I came home with the intention of surprising my family with my voice. I sang. My mother listened very patiently and kindly. When I got through my father said that there was a job down at the store for me corking bottles, and that I could report there in the morning."

"I went down, and I didn't stay in the corking department long; a place was found for me in the office."

"That is how I came not to be an actor."

"But as an amateur—"

"I played Shylock, Richelleu, Lago, Bertuccio in 'The Fool's Revenge'—nothing was too big for me. In our amateur performances Blanche Bates played, and Olive Oliver, and Katherine Grey; Holbrook Blinn was one of us and so was Frank Murasky, who is Judge Murasky now, and Willie Hallett, who is interlocutor in a minstrel show. Our friends were very good to us—they came to see us and paid their way in."

The light is softening on Rollo Peters' moonlight scene above Mr. Hotaling's desk.

His Lambert waltz plays along his sentences like the little darting tongues of the heat lightning on a summer night, illuminating his talk with piquant surprises. He fingers the book of the play—Edwin Booth's prompt book—lingeringly and affectionately. He tells me in his spirit of self-banter:

"The best piece of acting I've ever done is this—the role of a business man."

Of course, I can know nothing about that, but I do suspect that his Shylock, as well as being different, will be well worth while both for the sake of the Doctor's Daughters and the point of view of Dick Hotaling.