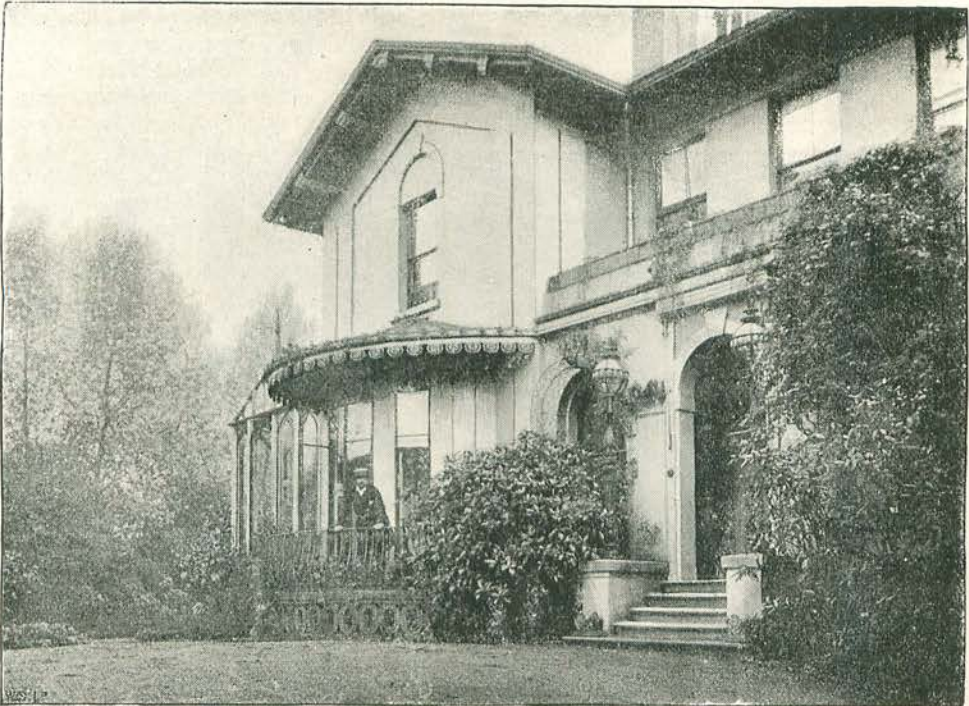




PREPARING FOR THE PANTOMIME.

Illustrated Interviews.

No. VI.—SIR AUGUSTUS HARRIS.



[From a Photo. by]

THE ELMS.

[Elliott & Fry.]



MERRY Christmas! A merry, merry Christmas! Sir Augustus Harris enters at the happiest period of the year. His name is positively seasonable; at Christmas he is as inseparable from pantomime as the pudding is from the table on the five-and-twentieth day of this month. After spending a considerable time with this veritable Crichton amongst theatrical managers, wandering about Covent Garden and Old Drury, and watching the elaborate preparations for pantomime, one's pen seems to run away on the heartiest of best wishes ever expressed in a trio of words—A Merry Christmas!

I had much trouble in catching Sir Augustus. He is one of the six busiest men in London. Our long interview together was held in all sorts and conditions of places; over the breakfast table at his delightful

home at "The Elms," Regent's Park, on the slopes of Primrose Hill; at the theatre, whilst he was buying rich and rare brocades, testing somebody's voice at Covent Garden, or sampling another's terpsichorean capabilities in the *foyer* of Drury Lane. And in all this the ex-Sheriff of London has a wonderful faculty. He can watch a couple of youngsters merrily trip a minuet, and give you at the same time unquestionable facts and figures. He seems to revel in transacting a dozen things at one and the same time, and comes through all successfully.

In appearance Sir Augustus is of medium height, stoutly built, and never at a loss for a smile. He is partially bald, but, as he declares, the hard work associated with management is sufficient to make any man lose his hair. No man has a keener eye than he; no man can scent a bargain quicker. He will bid for a voice one moment, and a

hundred guineas for some exquisite lace to put on a chorus singer's costume the next. At Regent's Park, where he lives with his wife and only child—Florence Nellie—a pretty little lady of eight summers, and the proud possessor of every animal pet imaginable, with a couple of tiny rabbits as particular favourites—he has a charming home. It seems to be right away from the world. To reach the house one passes up a long and leafy avenue, a glorious stretch of elms, about half way up which is St. Stephen's Church. The gates

thatched out-buildings—years ago a farm stood here, and the dairy and bake-house still remain as mementoes; indeed, this very spot was once known as Primrose Farm.

The entrance hall is crowded with pictures of operatic stars and theatrical celebrities, City magnates, men eminent in the world of art and letters, and many portraits of the master of the house in the various characters in which he has appeared, an autographed picture of the late General Boulanger, and close by the hall-stand a portrait group in which a fine duck has a corner. She was a pretty creature—one of little Florrie's pets—and would with the greatest alacrity sit on a chair to table. She would even accompany the cat for a stroll up the Avenue-road. This led to her loss. One day she disappeared, and has not been seen since—probably, long ere this, she has



From a Photo. by]

IN THE GROUNDS.

[Elliott & Fry.

of "The Elms" are immediately in front. A few more steps and you are on the grand lawn in front of the house where Mario and Grisi once lived. Before entering the porch, over which the Virginia creeper is hanging, just stay to admire the pretty nooks about the grounds, with its delightful rustic summer-houses and quaint bridges, under which the ducks are swimming. The goat, Nan—the tiny chaise is near at hand—is making friends with Nelly, a St. Bernard with a coat to be envied, in a corner of the stable; and here, running along one side of the church, is the kitchen garden: in the midst of the rows of scarlet-runners and beds of potatoes stands a huge bust of Victor Hugo, which was brought from the National Theatre. There are numbers of old-fashioned

posed in a dish surrounded with green peas. The hangings in the hall are of exquisite Japanese workmanship. Walk up the stairs and the friendly photos are countless. On the landing is a fine ebony cabinet with numerous nicknacks, amongst which is a great silver-plated stick, engraved with signs fearful and wonderful—the magic wand of Professor Anderson, rescued from amongst the *débris* after the great fire at Covent Garden.

Just at hand is a photograph of a group of the members of the Drury Lane Fund at their annual friendly gathering at Burnham Beeches, with a few of their friends, amongst whom were Mr. Willard, Mr. Fernandez, Mr. Harry Nichols, and Mr. Fred Latham. Another position was suggested. "Very well," said Augustus Harris; "Right about face!"—and everyone turned his back on the camera and was so taken.

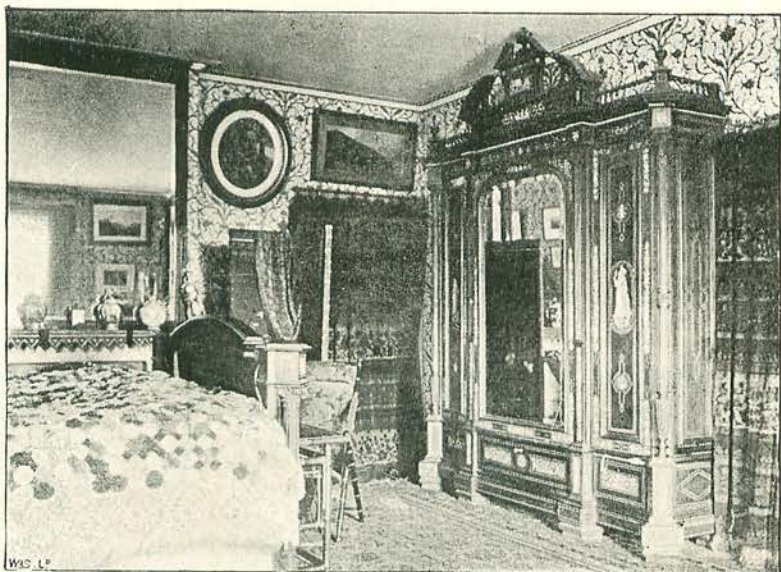
Leading off from this landing is the bedroom. It is practically a workroom. In the bookcases are every conceivable work

on costumes of every period and country. Whilst running through a volume, a pretty combination in colours strikes Sir Augustus, and he jots it down for the coming pantomime. A hundred reference books are glanced through. I run over the pages containing the original score of Wagner's "Tannhäuser," which cost £200; and then, over an early cup of coffee, we turn over leaf after leaf

of one of many volumes of odd cuttings of intense interest. Here is a letter from Lefroy, confessing his guilt. Lefroy, it seems, used to occupy his time in prison by writing such letters to prominent individuals. Then we come to many interesting pages in the family history. Sir Augustus's grandmother was Madam Elizabeth Ferron, the famous opera singer, who popularised the opera, "No song—no supper." We read through her engagement agreement—she was getting £30 a week in 1828 at the Royal English Opera House, now the Lyceum Theatre, and soon afterwards £40 a night at Drury Lane—at that time considered a big salary. On the next page is the engagement of Donata, the famous one-legged dancer, who danced himself to death; and the telegram announcing the burning of Covent Garden Theatre on March 5, 1856.

The bedroom suite—a work of art—is of walnut, inlaid with red tortoiseshell and ivory, and exquisitely engraved. Hanging to a convenient post at the head are telegram forms, slips of paper, and pencil. If the master of the house has an idea in the middle of the night, paper and pencil are handy. On a small table is a huge cut-glass bottle of what looks like smelling-salts.

"The finest remedy for headache in the world," says Sir Augustus. "It is Dr. Lennox Browne's recipe, and is simply lumps of carbonate of ammonia steeped in eau-de-Cologne."



WAS. L.F.

From a Photo. by]

THE BEDROOM AND LIBRARY.

[Elliott & Fry.

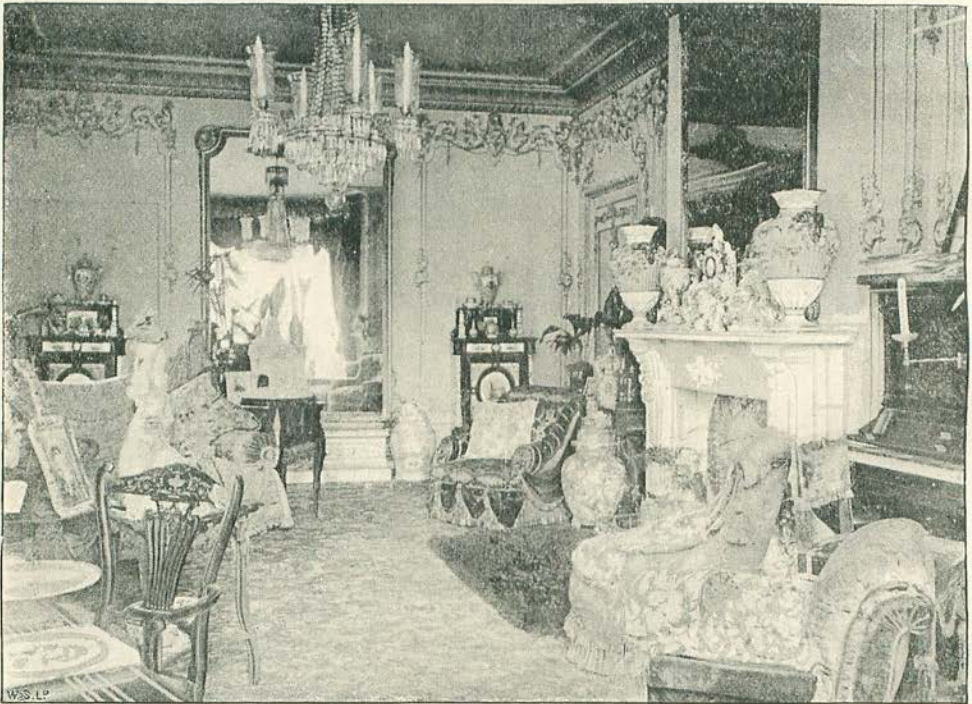
In a corner is the safe. Hey, presto! and I have in my hand the gold snuff-box studded with diamonds which he received on the occasion of the German Emperor's visit.

The two rooms next to the bedroom are not without interest. The first apartment is devoted to a score of testimonials, framed, and the various patents granted to him—among others, the approval of Her Majesty to his election as Sheriff, and the patent of a fact which will be new to many, namely, that of the knighthood conferred on him by the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen, ten years ago. The room adjoining this has a great cabinet containing all the sketches of past Drury Lane pantomimes, from the earliest time of the Dykwynkyn régime, and on a table near the window numbers of silver mementoes, one of which is a substantial silver snuff-box, presented by the renowned E. T. Smith to E. L. Blanchard, and afterwards passed on by his widow to Augustus Harris.

Downstairs a room is devoted to the storage of nearly every opera produced for the last eighty years, including the collection of his grandmother and father. On the wall hangs "The Glossop" pedigree, for Sir Augustus Harris's real name is Glossop, and Harris a *nom de théâtre*, originally assumed by his father. The pedigree starts from 1624, and it shows that nearly all the male members of the Glossop family for two centuries have been clergymen.

The drawing-room is a delightful apartment, and opens out into a conservatory, where is a wealth of fuchsias, lilies, azaleas, palms, and ferns. The walls are of cream delicately picked out in gold. Dresden china crowds the marble mantelboard and every nook, save for an occasional rarity in Japanese ware. Many portraits are here, and the little daughter is to be seen in no end of positions as chronicled by the camera—here with one of her pets, and in another in the costume of the "Queen of Hearts," as she

Lady Harris—a most charming woman—joins us, and we enter the dining-room, with its fine bronzes, and sideboard overweighted with silver flagons and tankards, salvers, and other choice examples of the silversmith's art presented to Sir Augustus by the members of his various companies. Many interesting oil paintings adorn the walls, including one, by Cecil M. Round, of Lady Harris, with her little girl in a blue frock and white hood rushing to her side. Another is an exceptionally clever work by W. L. Wylie, painted in 1882. Two fine busts of



From a Photo. by]

THE DRAWING-ROOM.

[Elliott & Fry.

appeared at a recent Mansion House ball. Just then she bounds into the room and plays a small operatic air for our enjoyment. She is caught up by her father.

"This child has so many pets," he says, "that I am thinking of charging 6d. to anybody who wants to come and see them. Do you know, this place is often taken for the Zoo by strangers on their way to that popular resort? Only the other day a couple of boys walked up the path. 'We've got 'em, sir,' one said. 'What?' I asked. 'The tickets to admit us.' 'Where to—' 'The Elms?'" 'No, sir; the Zoo!' 'Bottom of the road and the first gate you come to!' I directed them."

Aunt Chloe and Uncle Tom occupy a position near the window, and everybody wants to know why Lady Harris puts an old straw hat on Uncle Tom. It is part of the modelling, but is so realistic as to cheat the eye. Then, all in a happy mood, we breakfast together, and a few minutes later I am seated by Sir Augustus Harris's side driving down to the theatre.

That drive—round Regent's Park, down Portland-place, and through the busy traffic of Regent-street—resulted in the story of many interesting incidents in his remarkable career. No man has worked harder than he, and he frankly admits that he has made his greatest successes out of the

very efforts of his enemies. He was manager of the National Theatre at twenty-seven, and ten years later had the two great patent theatres under his sole control.

"I was born in Paris, March 18, 1852—to-day I go to Paris as often as I go over Waterloo-bridge. I was brought to England shortly after. At the age of ten, I started as stage manager, author, and my own scenic artist—as *impresario* of a large model stage. I worried my father into giving it to me. It was some seven feet high, fitted up for me in a large room used as a laundry, at the back of the stables, and here I would perform 'The Miller and his Men,' and similar sensational plays to a very select audience. My efforts, however, soon led me into an original groove, and I really believe this early practice was of great service to me in after life. There was a big fire scene in 'The Miller,' and my anxiety to get realism even at that early age resulted in my having an explosion. I nearly blew the

took place at school at Turnham Green. The boys were getting up a charade, just before the Christmas holidays. Some dresses were required, amongst others a clown's costume. My father had this made for me. The charade was a success, and the dress was put away in my play-box to take home. Now I fear I must tell you that as a youth I made up my mind never to be unjustly sat upon. Shortly after the charade, my master punished me for an offence of which I was not guilty, and sent me out of the room. I smarted under this very considerably, and determined to be even with him, and at the same time give my schoolfellows a bit of good fun. All was still, when suddenly the door opened, and I bounded into the room in the clowns' costume with a shout of 'Here we are again!' You can imagine what the result was, and no doubt I deserved it.

"At the age of thirteen I went to a college in Paris, where I remained some



From a Photo. by]

THE DINING-ROOM.

[Elliott & Fry.

laundry roof off one day, and shattered the nerves of my audience for a considerable period.

"Another incident in my early life which I always look back upon with astonishment,

four or five years. From there I went to Hanover to learn German, and finally came to London, where I became treasurer to my father at Covent Garden theatre. Still I wanted to go into a commercial life, and,

through the influence of a great silk merchant, was allowed to study raw silk at the St. Katherine Docks, with the intention of going out to Japan. Day by day I went to learn the Chinese "chops," and to see every sample of silk that came into the London market. I was, however, offered the post of foreign correspondent at Messrs. Emile Erlanger & Co., the financiers of Lothbury—a firm with branches in every great financial centre. I cast off the silk, and went in for finance. I remained there three years, and then accepted a much better position in Paris. I had only been in Paris about a month when my father died. Old John Ryder was in Paris. I consulted him, and he, after trying my histrionic capabilities, advised me to take to the stage. I went to Manchester to play *Malcolm* in 'Macbeth,' at the Royal. Then to Liverpool. There I had the hardest fortnight I have ever had in my life. I got the large sum of £2 a week to study twelve parts in a fortnight—which I had to do with the aid of strong tea to drink, and wet towels round my head to keep me awake.

"Then I came across Mapleson, who appointed me stage manager for his Italian Opera Company. I was with him until he went to America.

"It was whilst with Mapleson that I met that grand artiste, Titiens. Poor Titiens! She might almost be said to have died in harness. Her first serious attack was at Portsmouth. She was playing *Leonora* in 'Il Trovatore,' and at the end of the opera she is supposed to fall dead. The

curtain was rung down. She was found to be suffering terribly. She was a slave to her duty, and that night had performed every note before giving way. She underwent a series of operations, but all of no avail. She only played one night more, and then died. She was a brilliant artist, but she was never thoroughly appreciated to the full extent of her genius.

"Then I played in 'Pink Dominoes' for 500 nights. I produced pantomimes at the Crystal Palace in partnership with Charles Wyndham; and, being out of an engagement, went to see my friend Edgar Bruce, who was going to open the Royalty.

"Do you want a treasurer?' I asked.

"No,' came the answer.

"A manager?'

"No.'

"A stage manager?'

"No.'

"An acting manager?'

"No.'

"The 'Noes' had it, and I retired. However, I returned

to the charge, and he engaged me as acting manager. I soon found myself also performing the duties of stage manager, treasurer, author, actor, all rolled into one. Bruce went to Egypt, leaving me in absolute charge of the theatre.

"About this time Drury Lane was advertised 'To let.' There was 'Drury Lane to Let' right in front of me. Why shouldn't I take it? Fortune seemed to favour me, and a gentleman of position and fortune said he would find the money. I applied for the theatre, and, though my youthful appearance stood terribly in the way, still, after weeks of anxious negotiations, I was accepted as tenant, and was asked for a deposit



From a Photo. by

SIR AUGUSTUS HARRIS.

[Elliott & Fry.]

of £1,000. I went to my friend, and he was *non est*. What was to be done? The money had to be found! I made up my mind not to be beaten, and I wasn't, for on the appointed day I paid the deposit, much to the satisfaction of the lawyers of my landlord, and to the surprise of my own. 'The World' was really my first great success, and from that day I have never looked back.

"There is a romantic side to the story. Soon after the death of Mr. Rendle, who helped me to open the old theatre, I married his daughter. We were married at 8 o'clock in the morning at St. Luke's, and I shall never forget poor Harry Jackson spreading the report that I was to be married at such and such a church at 11 o'clock, a joke he practised day by day on a number of people for over a fortnight, and in one instance hundreds of people assembled at Hanover-square to witness the ceremony, and in another quite a select party of well-known actors specially went to a quiet little church in the North of London on a similar fruitless errand."

As Sir Augustus laughed heartily at this little incident, we had reached Covent Garden Theatre. We stayed there for a moment to see the wardrobe, unrivalled for its beauty by any opera-house in the world. There are rooms filled with costumes—they hang up in the great cupboards wrapped in tissue paper, for all the world like so many hams. They are numbered up in hundreds

—shoes, stockings, dress, belt, hat, gloves, all corresponding, a large proportion of the handsomest dresses being the personal property of Sir Augustus; the remaining part has been accumulating here for over forty years, and one comes across dresses once worn by the great Mario, and now allotted

to a member of the chorus. The dresses cost from a few pounds to a hundred guineas apiece. In some instances two hundred has been paid.

"I have spent £15,000 on dresses this year for the opera alone," said Sir Augustus, taking up the delicate dress worn by Miss Eames as *Desdemona*, and pointing out its marvellous workmanship. "*Romeo* is the most expensive opera I have ever dressed; but as it always draws such enormous houses, and as I have purchased all rights in it for the British Empire, I could afford to be extravagant, and I have been.

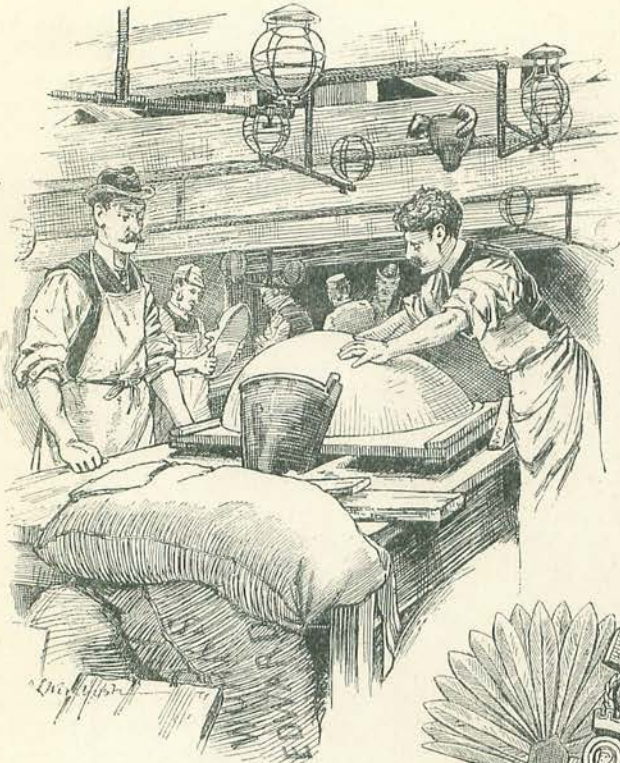
"Gounod, when asked which opera he liked best, 'Faust' or 'Romeo,' replied: 'When I wrote "Faust" I was younger, when I wrote "Romeo" I was older.' Last opera season about balanced itself. The accountant's books show a return of £80,819. But the expenses of the artists were so great that little or nothing was left, but I wished the season should be a memorable one, and live in the recollection of those who appreciate true art, and I am perfectly content. There would have been a large profit had it not been for the influenza and the financial



From a Photo. by]

LADY HARRIS.

[Elliott & Fry.



HUMPTY-DUMPTY'S EGG.

decent burial.' I did revive it, but it cost me £16,000 in six weeks. However, the next year opera was living and in a healthier state than ever, and I got my money back and had done something in the cause of art.

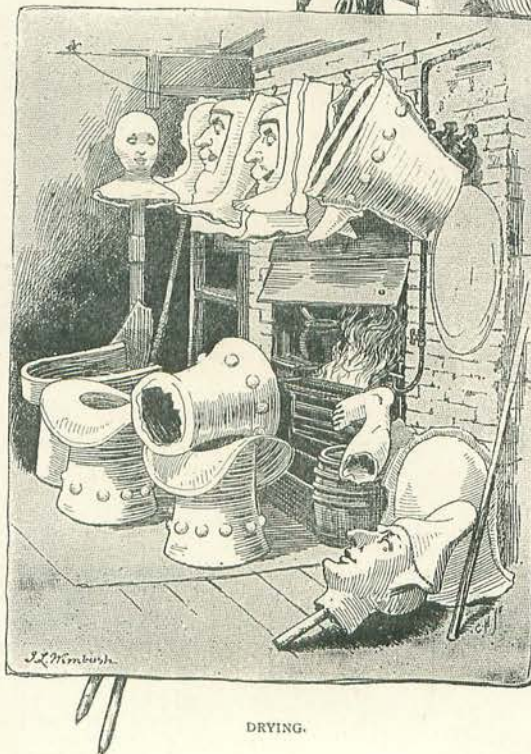
And now for the home of pantomime—for old Drury Lane. We crossed Bow-street together, and entered through the great portals which lead into the theatre. It is a marvellous place; you can pass through fifty rooms and find another score awaiting your in-



MOULDING MASKS.

crisis, which took away all the Stock Exchange men. When a man comes to the opera, you know that he is doing good business. As Rothschild said, 'Good business in the City means a good opera season.'

'It might interest you to know that the night the German Emperor visited Covent Garden Theatre the house was worth £5,658. His box alone cost £1,000 to decorate. When, in the Jubilee year, I determined to try Italian Opera somebody remarked to me 'It's dead.' 'Very well,' I replied, 'I'll either revive it or give it a



DRYING.

spection. As for the staircases, they are positively a Chinese puzzle to the uninitiated. These are times of merriment, days when the happy laughter of the little ones ring to the roof of the theatre at the fun and frolic of the pantomime. We

want to know all about it—what it costs, how it is produced—and Sir Augustus Harris is in possession of the key of knowledge.

"What does it cost?" he cries. "There



WIRING MASKS.



TOUCHING UP THE GROG BLOSSOM.



"HOW'S THIS?"

are my books." He turns over page after page in a great book. "A pantomime costs from £16,000 to £20,000 for dresses, scenery, &c. A big procession costs from £5,000 to £6,000. A good principal boy means £60 to £100 a week, a troupe of acrobats £70 or more, a first-class clown £30 or £40, and a sprightly dancer £30 to £50. Then there are many other salaries of £45, £30, £25, £10 a week each, whilst the ballet averages out at 30s. a week, with extra for mornings. More salaries, for the

week: Carpenters, £191 3s. 3d.; property men, £129 12s. 6d.; gas and electric light men, £26 3s. 8d.; limelight men, £26 9s. 6d.; wardrobe, dressers, and others, £111 4s. 10d.; paint-room artist, £334 10s. 11d.; orchestra, £160 a week."

Then we go on to the stage. What a change from the brilliancy of the thousand lights at night! The auditorium is in darkness; the house clothed, as it were, in great white cloths. How different, too, the scene on the stage! The pupils of the school for dancing have been rehearsing, and there is a lull for a moment. The pianist has stopped; the young ladies arrayed in neat cotton "practice" dresses, are resting for the moment, though a quartet of the most industrious are still tripping to a one, two, three, four in a deserted corner.

They have a month's good work before them ere the curtain rises on "Humpty-Dumpty" on Boxing night, and plenty of practice in store previous to being drafted into the regular ballet. Little fellows are trying on their masks, waiting to be provided with a comfortable fit,

and the tiniest and sweetest of little fairies are lightly walking about with wands in their hands, learning how to "stir the soup," as waving the wand is familiarly designated in pantomime circles. A pretty little mite is just passing before Sir Augustus. She must try and use that magic wand more gracefully, and he shows her how. Away she goes to practise in a corner. She will soon learn—earnestness is written on her little face; she wants to be noticed in the

great stage picture on Boxing night.

Leaving this busy scene, I visit the modelling or property-room. The men are handling heads and creating countenances upon them calculated to give rise to a smile on the most serious face. Here is the first stage of the immense egg out of which

Humpty-Dumpty will jump. It has just been moulded, and will go through a score of other stages until completed. Take this big giant's head for instance. It is just being modelled at the far end of the room.

The interior of the gigantic cranium is filled with pots, pails, and odd things to hold the clay together; then a cast will be taken of it in plaster-of-Paris. When it is thoroughly set it will be cleaned and oiled, and then layers of paper will be placed in it, on which the features are to be painted. A wonderful array of models are being dried in front of the great fires—immense kitchen grates—huge Cavaliers' hats, Crusaders' heads, interspersed with legs, while a fine punchinello is quietly resting on the ground. A woman is wiring the edges of a mask to keep it firm, whilst on a wooden support is the wonderful cranium of a Crusader, with a sensational moustache, and a worker is giving the gallant knight's nose a finishing touch. Others are "trying on" to see the effect. Pussy's head looks capital on a white-aproned worker.

"Twelve months will be occupied in making all we need for a pantomime," Sir Augustus said, handling a little toy nigger. "We have made in this room a giant's head six feet high; it needed the services of six men to creep inside and work all the machinery. It took three months to make. We use for a single pantomime five hundredweight of paper, three tons of clay, and over ten tons of plaster-of-Paris. Of course, the clay is used again and again—it may be a giant's head one week and the body of a little

cupid the next." We hurry through the great store-rooms, where are silent mementoes of many a past Christmas production. Soldiers and sailors are no bigger than the six-foot human knives and forks

which tripped along so merrily last year. Here are huge plaster bouquets and dishes of fruits, cherries, strawberries, luscious pears, and bunches of grapes, gilded columns and angels, imps of mischief—in short, a wonderful *olla podrida* of properties. Then to the work-rooms—the dress-making departments, where altogether a hundred women are busy with the needle. The treadles of the machines are being industriously worked, thousands of spangles, heaps of glittering jewels, are being sewn on to the richest of brocades, some of which material costs as much as fifteen guineas a yard. A *costumière* is cutting out the patterns. She has the design of the dress painted on a small card some nine inches long by five inches wide, and her experienced eye knows exactly what to cut, to half an inch.

Then to one of the paint-rooms. The famous manager sits down in front of a little model stage—the trees, bridges, and paths are in cardboard, the very clouds of the same material. He looks at the scene. Down comes a bridge, a tree is uprooted to another position, and a cloud is moved away. From this model the artist will paint the great canvas. The palettes—set out on the bench which stretches through the centre of the room—have twenty-five or thirty different divisions filled with all the colours of the rainbow. Paint pots are



THE PAINTING-ROOM

dotted about, the huge canvas sheets hang suspended from the roof, and already fairy-land is beginning to appear on some of them in response to the magic touch of the artist's brush. A second canvas reveals a huge comic kitchen—it will take a fortnight to paint. A single joint here would fill the window of an average butcher's shop. Every cut is prize meat, indeed; the very penny bottles of ginger-beer are three feet high. Old Drury will ring with laughter on Boxing-night.

I asked Sir Augustus what class of entertainment he best preferred, pantomime, melodrama, spectacular, or opera?

His reply was, "My acts speak for themselves. Do you suppose I should take all this trouble, subject myself to the fads and fancies of singers, if it was not that I delight in all that is most refined and most artistic? I love good music, good flowers, good painting, good everything. In fact, only the best of everything is good enough

for me, and my public. My friends say I am too lavish in my expenditure, but I am convinced that there is a large section of the public who fully appreciate a good thing when it is placed before them. Where is the proof? Look at Covent Garden. I have applications for next grand opera season that would more than twice fill the boxes. If you want a good thing you must be prepared to pay for it, and I consider my great success in pantomime has been through trying to elevate the tastes of the public, for I cannot see why an endeavour should not be made to make pantomime a work of art, such as I have always tried to make it. But whatever the performance, whether it be Wagner's masterpieces, a child's Christmas entertainment, a popular melodrama, or an exquisite idyl like Gounod's 'Philémon et Baucis,' everything is worthy of the greatest care. In short, to

quote an old maxim, 'If a thing is worth doing at all it is worth doing well.'

HARRY HOW.

