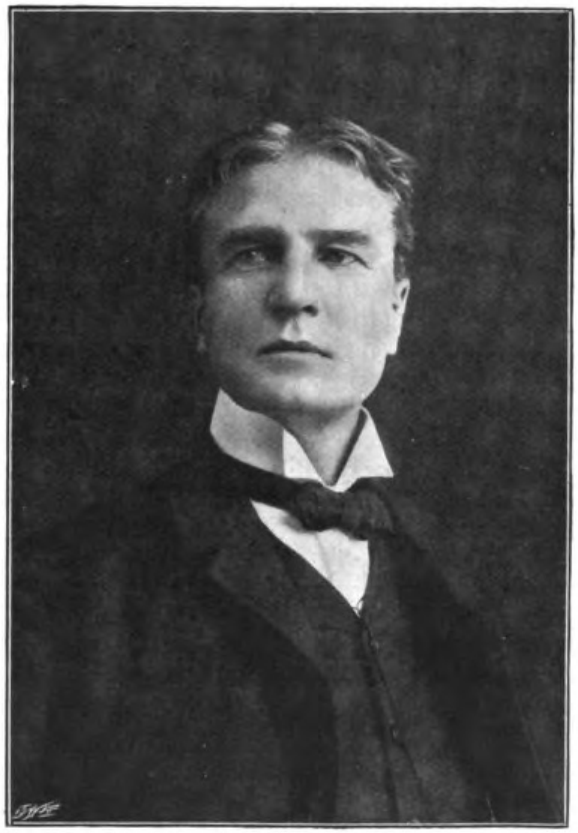
Mr. William Gillette as Sherlock Holmes.

By Harold J. Shepstone.

IT was in the manager's room at the Lyceum Theatre that I first had the pleasure of meeting the famous stage detective, Mr. William Gillette. I have seen him since, both on and off the stage, and have had many pleasant little chats with him. His tall, alert figure, clear-cut features, deep-set eyes, and cool bearing make him an interesting and at the same time a decidedly mysterious personality; interesting because of his individuality and mysterious because of his wonderful versatility. As a stage detective he is a marvel of vividness, of directness, of economy of effort, of dramatic force, of perfect self-poise, of instant command of resources, of unescapable convictions.



MR. WILLIAM GILLETTE.
From a Photo. by Sarony, New York.

But it is of Gillette the man that I wish to speak first. His individuality is remarkable. His very presence impresses you; his manner, his actions, and movements bespeak a personality that is no mere surface cloak that can be removed and explained at leisure. It is an individuality that is bred in the bone; it is a part of the fibre of character and completely beyond analysis. You can tell what a person is, but you cannot say why he is. Forcible and striking as Mr. Gillette's individuality undoubtedly is, he possesses a wonderful versatility in character delineation — a strange and inexplicable histrionic quality that enables him constantly to maintain an insistent, strikingly unique and seemingly fixed personality, and at the same time project an impersonation that is unmistakably individualized. Were it otherwise, Gillette the actor would not have impersonated Dr. Conan Doyle's wonderful creation with such marvellous success.

His tall, slender figure and natural composure enable him to incarnate with astonishing faithfulness the Sherlock Holmes of fiction. Indeed, this personal likeness to the great literary hero has led to some curious incidents. When Mr. Gillette arrived on the *Celtic* in Liverpool, in August last, Mr. Pendleton, of the London and North-Western Railway, had a letter to deliver to him. He went on board and asked one of the passengers if he knew Mr. Gillette. The man replied:—

"Do you know Sherlock Holmes?"

The visitor was rather taken back, and said: "I have read the stories in The Strand Magazine."

"That's all you need know," said the passenger. "Just look around till you see a man who fits your idea of what Sherlock Holmes ought to be, and that's he."

Mr. Pendleton went away, with a laugh. As he was going up the companion-way he collided with a gentleman, and as he looked up to apologize the passenger's advice occurred to him, and he said, "Are you Mr. Gillette?"

"I was, before you ran into me," was the reply.

"Here's a letter for you."

Although Mr. Gillette has been before the public as a popular and successful actor for many years, few know anything of his private life. Even his most intimate friends would never dream of asking him. Extremely modest and unassuming, Mr. Gillette abhors talking of himself.

Those who knew him as a boy describe him as "a precocious youth fond of spouting Webster's speeches." He gave early evidence of theatrical inclinations, and at the age of ten astonished his family by constructing a miniature theatre, fitted with grooves, scenery, foot and border lights, the puppets of which were worked from above with black thread. The next step came a year later, when the juvenile stage-manager organized in the garret a complete high-class stock company. From the attic it descended to the drawing-room, which became an extemporized temple of the drama, to the dubious edification of the Gillette household.

One of Master Gillette's playfellows was Professor Burton, who has very kindly recollections of the pleasant evenings he passed as a boy with his young friend. "When I played as a boy with Gillette," he said, "in Hartford, he was just enough the elder to make patronage and bullying the order, but he never exercised those juvenile rights, and it was typical of him, lad and man. In school his tastes were for science, oratory, and history. When he came on the platform, at the Hartford High School, to deliver a graduation oration, the applause plainly bespoke his popularity amongst his school-fellows." Throughout his teens he still kept up his determination to know all that he could about stagecraft. When he first walked across the boards he investigated everything connected with the stage and its mechanical operations.

To follow Mr. Gillette's career is unnecessary here, interesting as it undoubtedly is. In 1875, when only eighteen years of age, we find him playing minor rôles; while only six years later, to be exact, in 1881, he was playing in his own dramas. It was at New Orleans that he first made his appearance on the stage. It was during one of his long vacations, for he is a graduate of Yale College. Anxious to obtain actual stage experience he joined a stock company in the famous cotton city, giving his services free and furnishing his own wardrobe. One night he made a decided hit in the part which he played, and next morning sought the manager and hinted that a small salary would be appreciated. The manager evidently thought otherwise, for he there and then dismissed him. Such an action was sufficient to discourage any ambitious youth, but young Gillette was by no means despondent. Indeed, he spent the remainder of his vacation in studying characters for the stage in a decidedly curious way. Desiring to make some special studies among those who imagined themselves ill, he hung out a doctor's sign in a small Ohio town. In a short time he had many patients. Everything went on satisfactorily for some weeks, when the authorities, doubting his being old enough to have a diploma, asked to see that necessary document, whereupon he had to confess. He convinced the officials, however, that he had wrought some wondrous cures with very simple means, and was allowed to depart.

It was in 1875 that Mr. Gillette made his first appearance on the stage as Guzman, in "Faint Heart Never Won Fair Lady," at the Globe Theatre, Boston. His theatrical godfather was Mark Twain, who was a great friend of his father. Through the humorist's influence he obtained a position in the Boston Stock Company, which, at that time, was one of the most famous companies in America. Mark Twain has declared that he did not think Mr. Gillette was serious, and that when he got him his position he really thought he was having a huge joke with the management. "I do not know," said Mark Twain, "which I like best—having Gillette make a tremendous success, or seeing one of my jokes go wrong. It is the only joke I ever perpetrated that so completely miscarried."

How "Sherlock Holmes" came to be written for the stage is an interesting story. Curiously enough, it was not at the suggestion of Dr. Conan Doyle, Mr. William Gillette, or Mr. Charles Frohman, who is Mr. Gillette's manager, but through the inventive genius of an American reporter. This enterprising individual wrote a paragraph to the effect that Conan Doyle had stated that should anyone ever dramatize Sherlock Holmes it would be William Gillette. The doctor had said nothing of the kind, and at that time had not even met Mr. Gillette or had any correspondence with him. Mr. Charles Frohman came across the paragraph, which was printed in an obscure newspaper, published in the Western States of America, while he was in London. He cut it out and showed it to Mr. Gillette.

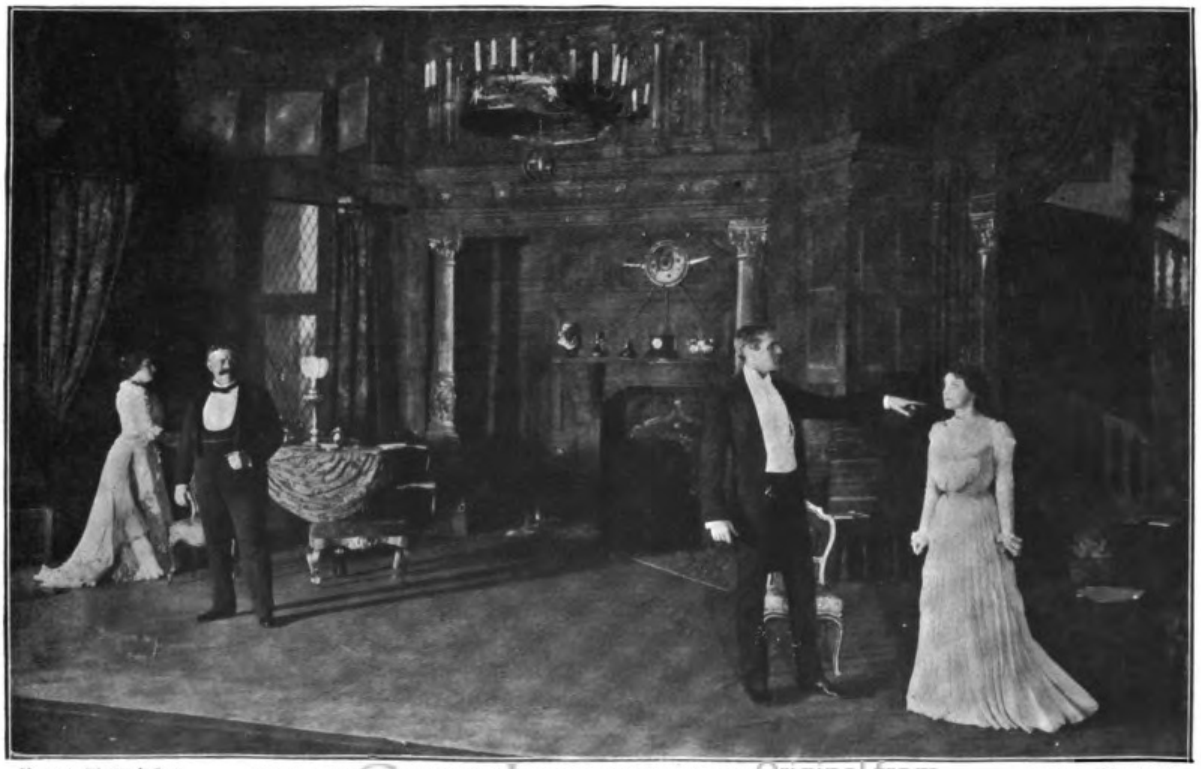
To tell the honest truth, Mr. Gillette smiled as he read it. Up to that moment he had voted the stories as almost too impossible for dramatization, and he laughed at the idea of his ever appearing on the stage as the great detective of fiction. He went so far as to suggest to Mr. Frohman, however, that it might probably be a good

thing to secure the title of "Sherlock Holmes" for dramatic use, and on this suggestion Mr. Frohman negotiated with the doctor on a royalty basis for the use of the name, regardless of what it might be put to in the future. There the matter ended until two years ago, when Mr. Frohman wrote to Mr. Gillette, who was then on his farewell tour in "Secret Service" in California, asking him to prepare a stage version of the hero detective.

The first thing Mr. Gillette did was to write to Dr. Conan Doyle asking to what extent he might take liberties, if he so desired, with the literary character. The actor speaks in the highest praise of the courteous communications he received from the doctor, who said that he might marry the detective, or murder him, or do anything he pleased with him, preferring to leave a stage detective entirely in the hands of a master actor. Before commencing his task Mr. Gillette made himself thoroughly acquainted with the stories. In four weeks the play was finished, and as Mr. Frohman had given him six weeks' leave of absence from the cast of "Secret Service" for the task, he went to San Francisco to spend the remaining two at his ease.

Here an accident occurred which would spell discouragement to any man not possessed of Mr. Gillette's forceful and resourceful nature. The manuscript was in the possession of his secretary, who was staying at the Baldwin Hotel. As many may remember, this hotel, which adjoins the theatre, was burned and many lives were lost. There was no time to save anything, and the secretary barely escaped with his life, leaving the manuscript in the burning building. The moment he realized what had happened he rushed to the Palace Hotel, where Mr. Gillette was stopping. It was nearly three o'clock in the morning when he gained admission to the playwright's apartments and excitedly told him that the result of their hard work was in ashes. The great stage detective looked up from his pillows in his quiet way and characteristically asked: "Is *this* hotel on fire?" "No, indeed!" said the secretary. "Well, come and tell me all about it in the morning," responded the actor.

Mr. Gillette has not written "Sherlock Holmes" by merely stringing together a number of incidents from the adventurous career of the detective. It is an original play, in the title-rôle of which Mr. Gillette has adopted the methods of Conan Doyle's world-famous creation. It is nothing less than an interesting episode in the career of the great detective, wonderfully conceived and cleverly acted. In the space of three and a half hours' acting, with some 10,000



From a Photo. by] ACT I. SHERLOCK HOLMES'S FIRST MEETING WITH MISS ALICE FAULKNER. *[Byron, New York.*

words, Mr. Gillette and his company present an adventure of the indomitable Sherlock Holmes that would require at least 80,000 words in cold type to relate.

The opening scene of the play is in the house of the Larrabees, a pair of unscrupulous adventurers, who are living under the name of Chetwood, and have in their charge Alice Faulkner, whom they have managed to put under an obligation, and who is, practically, a prisoner in their house. It soon transpires in the preliminary dialogue that these Larrabees know that Alice Faulkner has in her possession certain papers, letters, and photographs which compromise a certain exalted foreign personage. These papers came into Miss Faulkner's possession at the death of a sister, who had been betrayed by her titled lover and died in grief and shame. While pretending to befriend Miss Faulkner from noble motives, the Larrabees are in reality trying to gain possession of the compromising documents for blackmailing purposes.

ACT II. SHERLOCK HOLMES IN HIS ROOMS AT BAKER STREET.
From a Photo. by Sarony, New York.

Sherlock Holmes, the detective, having been commissioned by the nobleman to secure these papers which the exalted personage desires earnestly to have, as he contemplates marriage, succeeds in placing in the house of the Larrabees as butler one of his agents, through whom he learns all that goes on there. The detective calls at the house and, at his request to see Miss Faulkner, Mrs. Larrabee comes down to impersonate her; but the deception will not do, and the detective insists upon seeing the real Alice Faulkner. When they meet he urges her to give up the papers and forego her desires for revenge. Finding her obdurate he gives the signal for a prearranged alarm of fire, and during the excitement the girl betrays the hiding-place of the papers and Holmes takes possession of them. Having got them, however, his first act is to return them to Miss Faulkner. His reason for doing this is not a sudden impulse of generosity, but it is because it is the best means of attaining his design. He cannot take her property against her will without actually breaking the law. If he can gain her confidence and put her under an obligation he may soften her bitterness and prevail upon her to voluntarily give up her plans of revenge.

The Larrabees now see that with Holmes on the case they are thoroughly incapable of coping alone with his superior ability, and they call to their aid Professor Moriarty, London's high caliph of crime, who has at his beck and call half of London's underworld, and who enters into the case with an enthusiasm born of his hatred of Holmes because the detective had, in the past, thwarted many of his plans. Moriarty calls on Holmes in his rooms in Baker Street with the avowed purpose of patching up a peace, but with the real purpose of taking the detective's life. Holmes is prepared for this, and having got the Professor at the point of his revolver, in a very clever scene, covers him until his boy, Billy, removes the criminal's revolver.

This development of the story brings the drama to the close of the second act, and the first scene of the third act shows Moriarty in his underground office, smarting under the

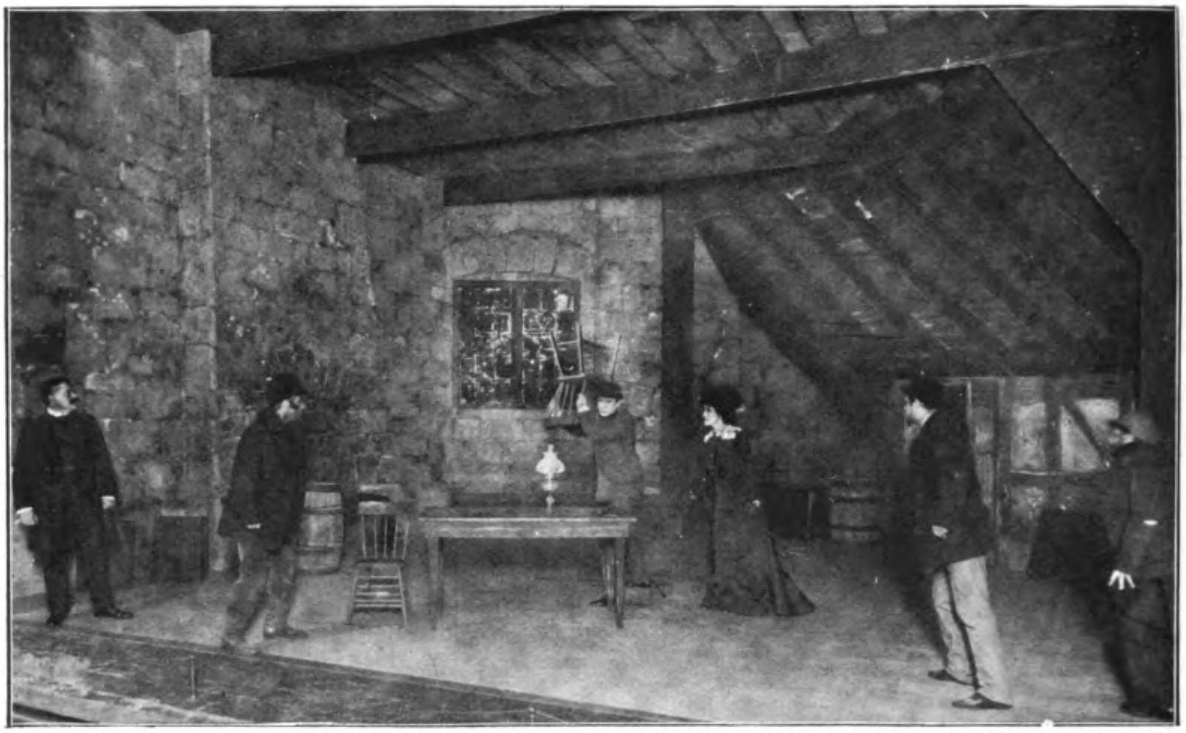
double irritation of having been frustrated and made ridiculous. In conjunction with the Larrabees, he lays a scheme to have the compromising papers counterfeited, and for the purpose of selling these counterfeits to Holmes they scheme to lure him to the gas-chamber in Stepney, where he is to be met by some of Moriarty's men, bound, gagged, and asphyxiated. In the meantime, Alice Faulkner has learned of the plot to murder him, makes her way to the rendezvous, and promises Larrabee that if he spares the

ACT III. THE TURNING-POINT IN THE PLAY—HERE SHERLOCK HOLMES ACCUSES LARRABEE OF ROBBERY.
From a Photo. by [*Byron, New York.*

detective's life she will give him the genuine papers. He promises, but when he learns the hiding-place of the precious papers binds and gags her and has her locked in a cupboard. At this point Holmes arrives. He knows the gas-chamber and he knows Larrabee's game, and for purposes of his own falls in with the latter, buys the counterfeit packet, and in doing so exposes a roll of bank-notes which Larrabee, believing that the detective is to be murdered, grabs and puts in his pocket. This is what Holmes has been waiting for. He now has something by which he can hold Larrabee, and this point marks where he abandons his method of acquiescence in all that his enemies propose and where he begins his aggressive warfare for the apprehending of the criminals. He denounces Larrabee, and Larrabee taunts him and declares that he has not a witness to prove his assertion that he has been robbed. Here Larrabee, like Moriarty, reckoned without his host, for Holmes knew that Alice Faulkner was in that gas-chamber, and he rescues and unbinds her.

Here comes one of the most thrilling episodes in the drama. In reply to Larrabee's whistle three ruffians come in for the purpose of carrying out the original plan laid by Moriarty, and inform Holmes that they propose to tie him to the top of the table, turn on the gas, and leave him. Here Holmes proves the old maxim that self-possession in the face of danger is half the battle won. He calmly puffs at his cigar, harasses the men by pretending to write descriptions of them for the police, and before they are aware of what he is doing picks up a chair and smashes the lamp. Instantly all is intense blackness, except for the glow of the detective's Havana, and the cry goes up, "Track him by the cigar." A crash of glass is heard, the glow is seen motionless, and Holmes's voice is heard telling the would-be murderers they will find the cigar in the crevice of the window, and the door, with its heavy bars, which had been carefully prepared to lock Holmes in, is slammed on the criminals and the tables are turned.

Meanwhile the great criminal has not been idle. He has burned down Holmes's house. He has laid many plans to capture him, and finally comes to Dr. Watson's office in the guise of a cabman, and here Holmes plays his trump card, and Moriarty is made a prisoner. Quickly following on this, the emissaries of the disreputable nobleman call by appointment to receive the papers from Holmes's hand. He gives them the counter-



ACT III. THE MOST THRILLING INCIDENT IN THE DRAMA—SHERLOCK HOLMES ESCAPES FROM THE STEPNEY GAS-CHAMBER BY SMASHING THE LAMP AND EVADING HIS WOULD-BE CAPTORS IN THE DARKNESS.
From a Photo. by Byron, New York

feits which he has purchased. They discover that they are counterfeits and taunt him, but Holmes has been prepared for this. In an adjoining room Alice Faulkner waits, where she can hear, and she has with her the originals. When the emissaries threaten Holmes with prosecution for deceiving them Miss Faulkner hears and appears on the scene, and to save him offers them the papers they covet, not merely because of the esteem she has for the detective, but because she has learned the lesson taught by little Dan Cupid.

Then comes the last scene. Holmes tells the girl that he has won her admiration, nay, her love, to further his own selfish ends, of which he is ashamed, and that she is at liberty to go. Woman's wit is not so easily fooled, however, and Miss Faulkner tells the detective that she does not believe him, and that he is not the only one who can read things from small details. Just how it ends Mr. Gillette does not tell; the audiences are left to find that out themselves. But the picture which they carry away as they leave the theatre is the fair head of Miss Faulkner resting on the shoulder of the detective.

All through the play there are innumerable instances of the marvellous reasoning powers of the great detective. Even now, after the play has had a run of two years, Mr. Gillette receives an extraordinary number of letters asking him how Holmes knew this and that, and why he does certain things. But it is not difficult to see that there is not a part in the whole piece that is not absolutely reasonable, if you once admit that a man like Holmes, with an extraordinary faculty for observing details and reasoning quickly from them, exists, and they certainly do, as we have such men in real life, to a greater or less extent. Once admitting that, there is not an unreasonable or improbable speech or situation in the play. There is no time to explain, in every instance, exactly how Holmes arrives at his conclusions, but the explanation is there, and is as simple and easy as those that are shown.

When Mr. Gillette took the play to St. Louis, where the critical fraternity seems to be impressed with the idea that it is paid to kill off anything that is brought to that charming town, the following of Holmes's cigar in the dark was anathematized as unworthy of presentation on the American stage because of its absurdity. They finally sent the chief detective of St. Louis, undoubtedly one of the cleverest detectives in the United States, to see the piece and to tear it to pieces—particularly with reference to this cigar episode.

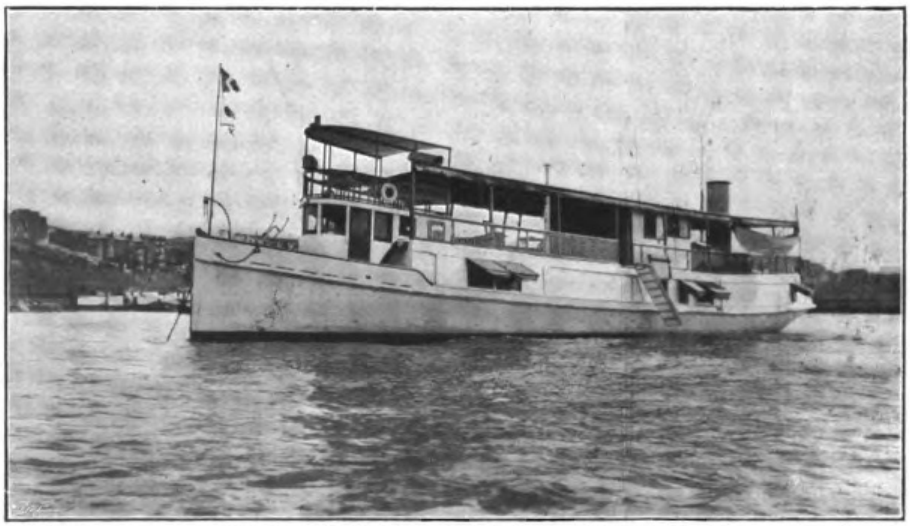
Next morning the officer wrote a lengthy description of the play, which appeared in the St. Louis *Star*, in which he said that the great

cigar-scene, at the end of the third act, where Holmes, after he has extinguished the light, put his cigar in a crevice by the window to fool his would-be captors while he makes his escape, so far from being impossible, as the critics there declared, had a parallel in his own experience. In speaking of the incident he says: "Holmes does a very neat trick in the Stepney gas-chamber scene, where, after smashing the lamp, he sticks his lighted cigar on the window-ledge. The thieves who have him trapped make a rush for the cigar, thinking thus to locate him. When a light is struck Holmes is going out of the door. To show how near fiction is to reality I will relate an actual experience in which a lighted cigar played a prominent part. During the big street-car strike some fifteen years ago, when I was a detective, we received a tip that the leader of the dynamiters, who were doing so much destruction, was in East St. Louis. I got a stool-pigeon, or snitch as they are called. He knew the fellow we suspected, and agreed to help us. This fellow, myself, and another detective went over to East St. Louis one miserable night, when the rain was coming down in torrents. The snitch told us that the leader and some of the gang were going to a house where the dynamite was stored. He was to go with the dynamiters, we to follow until we located the place. East St. Louis was not then what it is now. There were few pavements and no lights to speak of. So I made a plan by which we could keep our quarry in sight. I provided the snitch with half-a-dozen cigars and told him to keep one constantly lighted. Well, the snitch met the gang and they started out. We couldn't see a figure ten feet in front of us, so we followed the lighted cigar. All we could see, about two blocks ahead, was the little red point, the smoker holding the cigar turned backwards in his hand frequently so we would be sure not to miss it. When about to turn a corner he struck a match, as if to get a better light. In this way we followed our game for several miles through the slush and rain and darkness.

"When they reached the house our confederate lighted two matches. We knew what it meant. In a few minutes he came to the doorway and struck three matches in succession, which was the signal that all was ready for the arrest. We rushed in with levelled revolvers and made the gang throw up their arms. We landed them in the East St. Louis police-station, and searching the house found the dynamite stored away. So you see this little incident in the play had almost a parallel in actual experience."

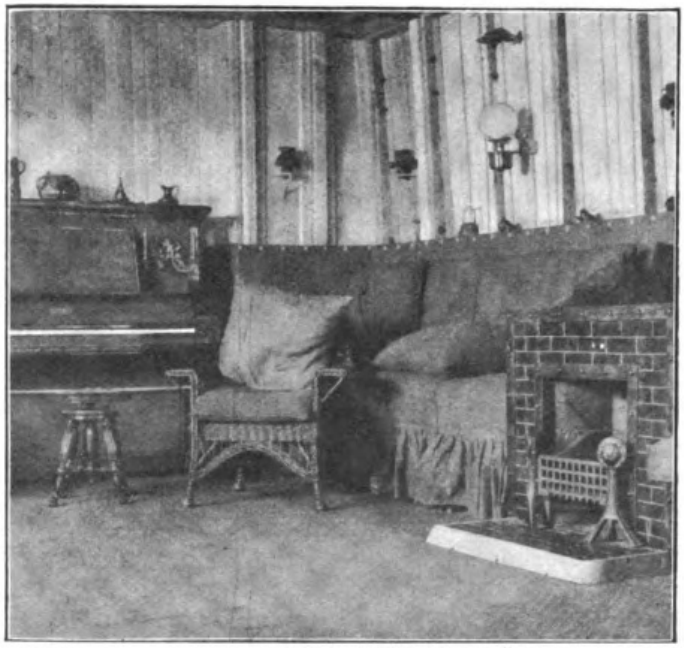
What surprised the American critics most was the almost perfect personification of the literary hero. That is evidenced by comparing our photographs of the great actor with the well-known drawings of the literary detective by Mr. Sidney Paget. There is the tall, slender figure, the sallow, unhealthy face, and the eternal pipe or cigar. Mr. Gillette loves his smoke on the stage. Indeed, he seldom takes a part in a play where he cannot smoke. He is one of the very few actors who can portray different expressions and emotions in smoke. In "Sherlock Holmes" he is seen smoking a pipe, cigar, and cigarette, but they all serve some purpose.

Not a single item in the production of the famous play has escaped Mr. Gillette's personal attention, from the arrangement of the scenery to the smallest piece of furniture. The novel light effects, by which changes of scene and act are not effected by the familiar rising and descent of the curtain, but by a sort of photographic process, as if the shutter of a camera were opened and closed by the pressure of a button, deserve a passing refer-



From a] MR. WILLIAM GILLETTE'S YACHT, "AUNT POLLY." *[Photo.*

ence. Suddenly the whole theatre is plunged in darkness, and as suddenly the stage is illuminated, and, presto, the scene has entirely changed. The company have their own electric switch-board and carry their own foot and border lights; the former instrument weighs one ton. By it the electrician controls 300 incandescent lights. In the change of scenes some very rapid work is accomplished. In the second act, for instance, the change from the underground office to the apartment in Baker Street occupies some fifty seconds; yet every piece of furniture has to be removed, including the ceiling. I have witnessed some very quick changes on the stage, but never such a smart piece of work as this. With only a pilot light to guide them thirty-five men remove one scene and introduce another boasting of a number of pieces of furniture in the short space of forty-eight seconds. On inquiry I was told that at a theatre in New York the same scene was shifted in thirty-five seconds.



From a] THE CABIN ON THE "AUNT POLLY." *[Photo.*

Off the stage Mr. Gillette leads a very simple life. His dislike for society, with its affectations, makes him all the more interesting when one recalls the same point in the character of the detective of fiction. If Mr. Gillette has any recreation at all it is yachting. His yacht is as interesting as her owner. She is what the Americans call a yacht-houseboat, and rejoices in the name of *Aunt Polly*. He told the builders what he wanted and they supplied it. In her he has cruised up and down the American coast, for she is a perfectly seaworthy craft, and on the American rivers. The engine and the quarters for the crew are well aft, thus giving plenty of space for the cabins, bathrooms, and large saloon amidships and forward.

A visitor who went over the yacht last summer made one curious remark about her interior furnishings, namely, that it principally consisted of cushions. But the owner of the *Aunt Polly* believes in comfort, and this is apparent from our little photograph showing the fireplace and piano on board, and, incidentally, three or four of the cushions. The boat has an upper deck, and with her engine of 250 horse-power is capable of making a speed of ten knots an hour. She has a length of 140ft., a beam of 21ft., and a draught of 7½ft.

When not fulfilling engagements Mr. Gillette is either yachting or living a very lonely life in his bungalow in the South Carolina Mountains. This retreat of the playwright is at a place called The Thousand Pines, in the very heart of the "Great Smoky" range. His bungalow is deep in the woods, about two miles from the village of Tyron. Not a tree, twig, or leaf was disturbed more than was necessary for the laying of the foundation, and so careful is Mr. Gillette to make his approaches and departure by different ways that not even a path leads through the forest to the doorway. There it is, deep among the rhododendrons and honeysuckle, with the tall pines standing sentinel and the rugged sides of the great mountains hemming it off from the world. This is the spot that the living Sherlock Holmes has selected for his habitation after his contracts with theatrical managers have been fulfilled.

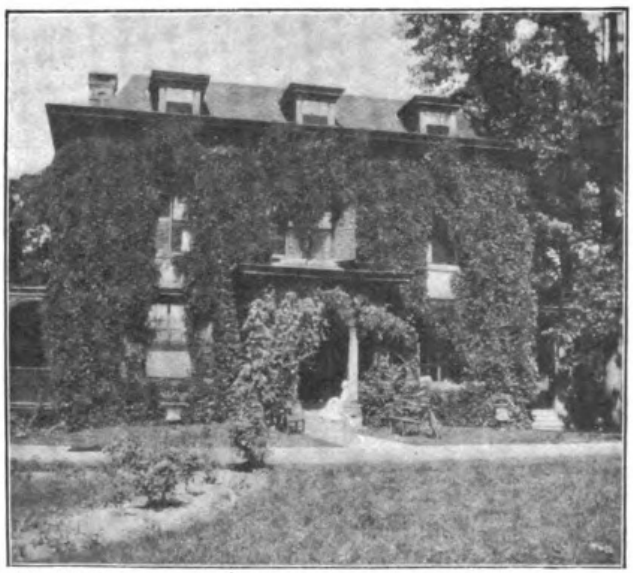
Mr. Gillette does not keep himself absolutely secluded in his bungalow; he often appears at the village in his long, light coat and rough cap, and there is no more approachable man than he at that time. Everyone in Tyron knows him and everyone loves him. Not as Gillette the famous actor and playwright, but as Gillette the man, the kind, good-natured, funny gentleman, who always has the right thing to say to the children, and gives everyone a word

that makes the day seem brighter just for his passing.

He will drop into a humble cottage and talk, not of the stage—for many of the people of Carolina have never seen a play, nor do they know what an actor is—but rather of their own affairs, their pleasures, and their troubles—their own little world in which they move and have their being. But there are few worlds in this world that Mr. Gillette does not know, and none that he cannot make brighter, and his visit to a cottage is never forgotten.

South Carolina is a curious retreat for a busy and successful dramatist to select. But, as in most things, there was a reason for such a choice. It was to regain his lost health after a very sad and painful event, and one which threatened to end his career, the death of his wife. At first he occupied a cottage adjoining the one in which Sidney Lanier, the famous poet-musician, lived just prior to his death. Tourists to Tyron are always welcomed at The Thousand Pines, for Mr. Gillette is the essence of courtesy.

The following little story is an instance of this, and it serves also to illustrate his wonderful quickness in accepting a situation. It seems that a famous lady temperance lecturer was travelling in the district, and by some chance had stopped at Tyron, where she was being entertained by the president of the local temperance organization. Hearing of Mr. Gillette's retreat, she expressed a desire to visit it. Mr. Gillette was kindness itself in showing the lady and her companion about the house; the lounging room, with its great stone fireplace and natural shelves projecting from the rock; the kitchen, with its primitive utensils, and not even the privacy of his chamber was passed by. But, notwithstanding all this, at a moment when Mr. Gillette's back was turned the ladies endeavoured to open surreptitiously the door of a small cabinet which stood in the room. Mr. Gillette turned just in time; in a moment he was at their side; the door was opened and a bottle of whisky produced in one hand, with glasses in another. "Ah, ladies," he said, "I am so pleased to see that you will accept a little refreshment! Allow me!"



MR. WILLIAM GILLETTE'S RESIDENCE AT HARTFORD, CONN., U.S.A.
From a Photo.

I could write much of Mr. Gillette's courteous and practical sympathy with his fellow-actors. Always ready to lend a helping hand to a struggling colleague and to relieve distress, he has gained the respect, nay love, of those who have come in contact with him. Ask those who have acted with him, year in and year out, of Gillette—the man—and you will hear many a touching little story of a great actor who has gone out of his way to render assistance to a less fortunate individual.

Mr. Gillette is a native of Hartford, Connecticut, U.S.A. While appreciating the beauties and advantages of other countries, he nevertheless considers himself fortunate in having been born an American. Although he is over the average height, standing about 6ft. 1in., his grace and ease and utter carelessness of effect make him appear considerably less.

His father was a United States Senator, a relative of the late Henry Ward Beecher and of Harriet Beecher-Stowe, the authoress of "Uncle Tom's Cabin." Mr. Gillette has already played the part of Sherlock Holmes over 600 times. The play was first produced in New York, where it had a run of an entire season. It then went on tour for another theatrical season through the States. From the Lyceum it is expected to go back to New York, and from there to Australia, in which case "Sherlock Holmes" will have had an unprecedented run of over four years.