

To R. D. L.:

"There are some ghosts," said poor Jack, "that will not easily bear raising . . ."

Thus am I confounded by words of my own choosing, for in truth I have raised one; and not for me, as for Dame Sylvia, does Chivalry blow upon a silver horn to drown the squeakings of that folly. Which is merely another way of saying that those younglings we two know and love, and who fretted me into the writing of a play for their theatricals, have rejected the outcome after a tentative rehearsal, with certain remarks for my pondering.

Well might that fat wholesome man have been left to the undignified fate his creator had appointed for him!—or at least in the staid trappings wherewith I did gird his behemothian bulk in my story, *The Love Letters of Falstaff*. Decked for the stage and with bella donna in its eyes; my sketch, they tell me, is a ghastly remains to which the footlights would add but the effect of funeral candles. In fine, that which lacks both plot and action, and offers, in lieu of lusty characters, four gray ghosts, is not a play but an edifying exposé of

the pitfalls and snares into which a romancist might be expected to stumble when he dons the habit of a playwright. These and many other complaints which I shall strive to live down in the years before me, conveyed a discomfoting unanimity of opinion on the part of my hopeful players.

With such humility as becomes one of our soberer estate in the presence of these, our juniors and betters, I pointed out that it was not my fault, assuredly, that Falstaff was no longer the merry taker of purses whose roaring oaths had filled all Gadshill. Nor that Will had never displayed any very hearty admiration for humanity nor found many more commendable traits in general exercise among its individuals than did the authors of the Bible: a spirit which, however distasteful to my palate, I was obliged in this instance to emulate! Yet I dared think (and my defense grew noticeably weaker under their incredulous stare) that old, gross and decayed as he had grown, the demiurge still clings to the old reprobate; yea, and the aura of divinity to Helen, whose beauty is drifting dust, so that Falstaff sees before him not Sylvia Vernon but Sylvia Darke.

Poor Falstaff. "Were't not for laughing I should pity him!"

But they had since ceased to listen. Vanished were they like the merry company whose mere names, thought Falstaff, were like a breath of country air. My script lay before me, eloquent in naught but their disillusion. Alone, I thought the fire winked knowingly at me, much like the one I had fanned from the embers of the past, as if it said: How old must a man become 'ere he shall be wise enough to content these sure young critics, so awfully and so inevitably right?

I should have dropped the record of my folly into the flames and so played out the last scene in my puppet's stead, had I not remembered in time my promise to you. Well!—you had expected to receive it worn from the caresses of eager thumbs, scented perhaps with the bouquet of reverent applause. It comes to you fresh and unmarred by any defacing ardor; only its theme is sere, only its author's vanity thumb-marked!

And remember: 'tis not a play you give to the world but rather a spirit croaking to itself in a house where nobody has lived for a long time.

*J. B. C.*