

Richard Burton

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Burton was brought up on the Bible. In his family, everyone was taught to work hard, play hard, and laugh while doing both. This rage for living is summed up in a maxim from Ecclesiastes: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest." Richard used to repeat this maxim after his father. He liked the feel of the phrases on his tongue. Today, they are engraved on a tag attached to his key ring.

Burton's life was not easy in the bleak, treeless valley of South Wales where he grew up. His home was in the slums. His mother died after the birth of her 13th child—Richard had been the 12th.

Some of the grimness was taken out of the boy's existence through his close relationship with Philip Burton, a high-school English teacher who became his "second father." The older man saved Richard from the Welsh coal pits where his father and brothers toiled, interested him in the theater, rid him of his Welsh accent, got him a scholarship at Oxford, clothed him while he was there, and finally adopted him legally. It was then that Richard acquired the last name Burton. He was born Jenkins.

Philip Burton is currently director of the summer session at the Musical Theater Academy in New York. When I talked to him recently, he refused to discuss Richard's problems.

"It's a frightful thing that all this attention should come to Richard because of the headlines and not because of the fine work he has done. I am sorry not to be helpful, because I like to talk about my son. Try me again in two or three months, when I trust this terrible publicity will have ended."

On Stage He's All Pro

Richard Burton has a fine professional reputation. He's a worker. Before he ever sets foot on stage, he memorizes the entire script.

For those who do not know their lines, those who are late for rehearsal, those who grouse about how much they are asked to do, Burton has no patience. Staying up until six o'clock in the morning will not keep him from a nine-o'clock theater call—and on that little sleep, he can last through a morning rehearsal, a matinee, and an evening performance.

"Dick's not a big man," a friend says. "He stands 5 feet, 11, and he weighs 165 pounds. But he's strong as a bull."

Burton is not really an attractive man, either. His complexion is pock-marked, a flaw which he doesn't try to disguise with make-up for informal pictures. But he manages very well. Off-stage, he distills the same magic that he projects across the footlights.

Unlike most actors, Burton has little interest in clothes. "Undoubtedly I'm the



Burton re-enacts famous graveyard scene from "Hamlet" during Old Vic tour in 1954.

worst-dressed man in the world," he says. "No matter what I wear I look a little like an unmade bed."

The necessity to dress up accounts for Richard's strong resistance to party going, but once he is at a party, he has a wonderful time, especially if given an opportunity to perform.

Hostesses compete for him. For if a party lags, the merest nod will get him to sing Welsh songs in his remarkably good baritone, tell jokes in any dialect, or recite the Welsh and Scottish poetry, of which he has a large repertory.

Sybil says with pride: "He has a most fantastic memory. He can quote Shakespeare by the hour. And he will, too, if you let him. He knows the lines of any play in which he has ever appeared."

Young Man from the Old Vic

Burton reads everything from Mickey Spillane thrillers to the classics. When he was narrator for the tv documentary, "Churchill: The Valiant Years," he amazed the producer by being completely familiar with the six volumes of Sir Winston Churchill's memoirs, on which the series was based.

Churchill's pleasure in this series, the report that he shed tears when he viewed the programs at his home, and the letters Richard received from Churchill's secretary saying how much the former prime minister had liked his commentary were a delight to him. It was, after all, Winston Churchill who got him this job. Consulted as to whom he would like to do the narration, Churchill had said, "Get that young man from the Old Vic."

Burton has visited Churchill many times and has an admiration for him that is both great and tender. "He's amazing," Richard says. "When he used to come to see me in 'Hamlet,' he sat in the stalls—and I could hear him reciting along with me in a soft undertone."

Sometimes Richard is given to moods, as most Welshmen are. And the infiltration of Hebrew and Gypsy blood in his veins is probably no help in this matter. When he turns very quiet, Sybil (Welsh herself) leaves him alone. When she comes back, she finds him waiting to put his arm around her waist and say, "Sorry I was moody."

The Richard Burton whom Elizabeth Taylor has given no indication of understanding is a man Sybil Burton knows well—and loves well.



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