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# DAN LENO

BY

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METHUEN & CO  
36, ESSEX STREET W.C.  
LONDON

*Colonial Library*



*First Published . . . September 1905*  
*Second Edition . . . October 1905*

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## PREFACE

**T**O be interested in a biography one must, of course, be interested in its subject. We have biographies of monarchs, statesmen, authors, painters, soldiers, travellers—each one of which appeals more or less strongly to those to whom the living man appealed.

There is, therefore, no apology needed for a biography of Dan Leno. Surely, among Britons, there never lived a more universal favourite than he. He did not appeal to any particular class or section. He appealed to all, from the King to his humblest subject; from the child to its grandparents.

It is said that a German seer once succeeded in evolving a camel out of his own inner consciousness; Dan did much more than this out of the inner consciousness of Leno. He evolved galleries full of quaint beings, male and female, grotesque, whimsical, bizarre beings; yet sufficiently human for us to see and understand the solid foundation on which the burlesque was built, and all vivified by that little touch of Leno that made the whole world laugh.



In presenting these quaint conceits to us, it is not too much to say that no orator ever swayed his audience, or held it more completely in the hollow of his hand, than did Dan Leno. As you sat at his feet and listened to him, he never gave you the impression that he was trying to make you laugh, that he had the least desire to make you laugh—far from it. He was merely narrating some incident in the chequered career of the character he was portraying, and he was in deadly earnest about it. If the incident itself was funny, he couldn't help that—that was no fault of his—and his sole anxiety was that he should explain it so clearly and thoroughly that a child could understand it. If his explanation was at times somewhat confused, it was not intentionally made so. It all arose from over-anxiety to be perfectly clear.

Then, if you laughed (as you always did), that neither annoyed him nor pleased him; because the genuine actor's "fourth wall" was between him and you, and he wasn't really talking to you at all, didn't even know you were there. As a matter of fact, he was talking all the time to a person he had evolved out of his own imagination, and whom you couldn't see. This person happened to be one of the most abnormally and hopelessly dense persons that even a Dan Leno could imagine, and he could not possibly grasp the situation until it had been put before him from every possible—and impossible—point of view, and explained to him

with all the wealth of elaborate detail of which Dan Leno was a past master. Hence Dan Leno's deep personal interest in everything he said or did, and hence your laughter!

To what did Dan Leno owe his pre-eminence? Hard work? Yes! But plenty of men have worked hard with poor result. A sense of humour? Naturally! But he shared that with many. A quaint presence? Partly! But other comedians have been better gifted by nature than he in that respect. It was simply that marvellous gift which neither we who have it not, nor, I believe, he who has it, can thoroughly understand. Personality! He was Dan Leno, and in saying that, we say all.

In following his career, it is interesting to note how this germ of personality slowly but surely developed until it was inevitably recognised, and, being recognised, almost worshipped by the British public. This gift was all that Dan Leno had to thank Dame Fortune for. Indeed, the fickle lady seemed to view his advent with stern disfavour. At birth, and for many years afterwards, she consistently frowned upon him, and if in later days she relented and smiled, it was only because the whole world smiled at him, and she could resist him no longer.

It is a thousand pities it never occurred to Dan Leno to write his own biography. Those who have been privileged to hear him tell tales of his younger days

will appreciate what is meant by this. His tales were all of his early struggles—never of his later prosperity—and he told them from his heart, with a mingling of pathos and humour such as only a real comedian can command.

Knowing what such a biography might have been, it is with considerable diffidence that I begin my labours. It was, however, my good fortune to have many delightful chats with Dan Leno over the old times, and these recollections sustain me somewhat; while my best thanks are due and cordially offered to Mrs. Leno and to Mr. Johnny Danvers, Dan's lifelong friend and comrade, for their valuable assistance and kindly co-operation in compiling these annals of Dan Leno's life.

I may add that the book is published under the authority of Dan's widow.

J. H. W.

## NOTE

Thanks are due for permission to reproduce extracts from articles and illustrations to Mr. T. P. O'Connor, M.P. (of *M. A. P.* and *T. P.'s Weekly*), to *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Saturday Review*, *The Sun*, *The Outlook*, *The Era*, and A. M. Thompson, Esq. (of *The Clarion*); Messrs. Francis, Day, and Hunter and Charles Sheard and Co., Music Publishers; Mr. George Scott, Alhambra Music Hall, and Mr. Peter Keary; Messrs. C. A. Pearson, Limited.



THE FIRST AUTHENTIC PORTRAIT

# DAN LENO

## CHAPTER I

### HIS BIRTH AND PARENTAGE

**D**AN LENO began badly by starting life under an alias. He elected to be born, on the 20th December, 1860, under the name of George Galvin, at No. 4, Eve Court, in the parish of St. Pancras, London. It is impossible, unfortunately, to affix a name-plate to his birthplace, as has been done in honour of many famous Londoners, because it no longer exists; but the Midland Railway Company has made some amends by erecting a huge memorial, in the shape of a railway station, on its site.

The selection of the parish of St. Pancras for such an event has always seemed to me a particularly happy idea.

If St. Pancras, the patron saint of children, did not directly influence the event himself, it must at least be a source of gratification to him to know that Dan Leno, who made more children happy than all the saints put together, first saw the light in his domain, and is registered in his parish books.

From the very outset of his career there was never any doubt whatever as to what Dan was going to be. He had no choice. He was inevitably born for the stage, and, I daresay, by the time he was old enough to think for himself was extremely surprised to realise that there was any other trade or profession.

Heredity, of course, had much to do with this. His father and mother appeared at the Variety Halls as "Singing and Acting Duettists" for many years, dating back to the time when the old Rotunda in Blackfriars Bridge Road was in existence. His father died comparatively young; but his mother lived to complete a record of fifty years as an active performer.

Many instances go to show that she was a clever woman, capable of making much out of little when supplies ran short, and trying to make little out of much when troubles poured in upon her. Dan worshipped her in life, and her memory when she was gone. There is no doubt he inherited much of his ability from her.

As Mr. and Mrs. Johnny Wilde, the pair toured London and the country after Dan was born, and Dan, not dreaming even of passive resistance, toured with them. Being anxious to cause his parents as little trouble as possible, he considerably refrained from growing, to any extent, during this period.

This was a great convenience to them, as, being a very small child, they were able, when they went out for their nightly performances, to stow him away in the second or third row of a chest of drawers, with the

reasonable prospect of finding him there, safe and sound, on their return. What the youthful Dan's thoughts were during these long night vigils history sayeth not. Indeed, history is strangely silent on the subject of Dan Leno's childhood. I can find no instance of precocious infantile wit recorded anywhere. Probably, in his juvenile wisdom, he was saving it up for the day when he had achieved a market value. It was at this period of his existence that he first foregathered with his life-long chum, Johnny Danvers. To the best of Mr. Danvers' recollection, they met in a perambulator, and his first and lasting impression of Dan was that he could howl like a banshee on the slightest provocation. I have no doubt the children would have howled in sympathetic unison could they have foreseen the struggles and privations they were destined to endure together.

From that time Dan Leno and Johnny Danvers were to each other as brothers. From boyhood to manhood they worked hand-in-hand, sharing joys and troubles alike—a David and Jonathan whose friendship lasted unbroken till death.

Dan Leno's childhood ended in 1864, and his life's work began.

His father unfortunately dying, Dan, having attained the mature age of four years, decided to begin life's battle. He descended from his seat as a passenger on the family coach, and helped the others to pull the machine along.

In other words, it was in this year that he made his



first appearance at the Cosmothica Music Hall, Bell Street, Paddington.

I believe the site of this old hall is now occupied by Paddington Baths.

He was billed as "Little George, the Infant Wonder, Contortionist and Posturer."

Where he learnt to contort and posture nobody knows for certain ; but I cannot help fancying that his childish experience of sleeping in chests of drawers may have given him useful experience.

For this first appearance Dan, being still small and accommodating, required no extravagant outlay of hard-earned money for costume. Thanks to his convenient stature and his mother's ingenious economy, a pair of her own silk stockings, joined at the top, made a complete set of tights for him, and when they were fastened round his neck, there stood Dan, fully equipped !

As the salary was an inclusive one for the family, it is impossible to say what Dan earned during this, his first engagement ; but it may safely be surmised that he more than earned his "keep," and, from that time henceforth, was more of a profit than an expense to those who, theoretically supporting him, he was practically helping to support.

So "The Infant Wonder" danced, and postured, and contorted ; was, I daresay, often very hungry when food was short, and, perhaps, in his more optimistic moments dreamt of and prayed for the day when he might earn a whole pound a week.

So his mother sang, and pinched, and scraped, and contrived, somehow, to make ends meet. She had plenty of pluck, and some of her ingenious devices for cheating poverty would be amusing if they were not pathetic.

For instance, to provide Dan with a new dancing suit for a special engagement, she stripped the silk from the ribs of an old carriage umbrella and made it of that. On another occasion she made him an entire tweed suit and a Scotch cap out of her own old serge petticoat, while Dan, like a dutiful son, assisted her in these devices by consistently declining to add anything worth mentioning to his stature.

Truly, as Dan himself said a year or two ago, "I've earned a good deal of butter to my bread in my time ; but I should have enjoyed it more if it had been better spread. I don't want to eat dry bread on Monday and lumps of butter on Saturday."

There was little or no change in Dan's fortunes when his mother married again. His stepfather was one William Grant, who performed under the name of Leno—the name his stepson was destined to make famous—and, if ever a man married a widow without encumbrance, he was that man.

Among the cotton-spinning towns of Lancashire, where the "half-timer" flourishes, a large family, so far from being an expense, is a source of revenue. Each child, as it grows up, brings its earnings to swell the family purse, and in this system Dan's new father was evidently a firm believer.

There were no holidays for Dan in those days. We find him in 1867 busily dancing with his brother at the Britannia, and described on the bills as "The Great Little Lenos." Later on, he appeared again at the same hall—only nine years in age, but more nearly ninety in ripe experience; where he was announced, "First appearance of the Great Little Leno, the quintessence of Irish Comedians." Where he picked up his Irish comedy is a mystery; probably he had thus early begun to evolve things from his own inner consciousness. Anyway, there he was.

When the family were fulfilling an engagement in Rochdale, and money was coming in with more than usual regularity, Mrs. Leno broached a scheme to her husband—a pet scheme she had long pondered over. It was no less than that Dan and his brother Jack should be rigged out for Sunday wear in nice little velvet knickerbockers, with white lace collars and dear little velvet caps to match. She knew, of course, that the expense would be considerable; but, in her motherly eye, she saw the two boys walking out together thus arrayed, and she felt that to attain such a magnificent effect it would be worth while making some sacrifice.

Mr. Leno, senior, agreed up to a point. He admitted that they might look well enough under such conditions; but, when it came to a question of money in pocket or the personal appearance of two boys, he preferred the money in pocket every time.

In place of the black velvet, he suggested corduroy and cloth caps, and, as Mr. Leno was a man of some

force of character, they compromised on corduroy. Mrs. Leno, however, satisfied her motherly pride by insisting on gilt buttons, on which point Mr. Leno gracefully yielded.

The first Sunday after their new suits arrived Mrs. Leno carefully dressed the two boys, and sent them out hand-in-hand to be gazed at by admiring and, probably, envious Rochdale. Under these circumstances, it naturally follows that the demon who enters into the soul of the boy who wears the new suit lured them to the side of the canal.

There lay a barge, and from the barge to the canal bank stretched a plank. Obviously, such a chance was too good to be missed; so the young Lenos jumped up and down on the plank for some time, without noticing that each jump was pushing the barge further into the middle of the canal.

When the barge got far enough out, that end of the plank fell into the canal, and the boys, who were on it at the time, went with it.

They scrambled out, and, looking at each other, realised that it would be injudicious—indeed, the height of folly—to go home in their present condition. So they sat down and sadly ruminated until Dan spied a brick-kiln in the near distance.

That seemed to solve the difficulty. They repaired to the brick-kiln with all haste, and dried their clothes as they sat in its friendly shelter.

So far all had gone well; but they received an unexpected check when they attempted to dress again.

"Dan," exclaimed Jack, as he struggled hard to get inside an abnormally tight pair of corduroy knickerbockers, "I fancy this must be *your* suit I've got here."

"I don't know whose suit *you've* got," returned Dan, also struggling, "but I'll swear these aren't the clothes I took off."

They changed suits, and tried again; but the result was even worse.

At last they realised the awful truth—the corduroy suits had shrunk in a very palpable and permanent manner.

With an effort they got them on somehow, and surveying each other, noted that the knickerbockers were now well above the knee, and the coat-sleeves ended just below the elbow.

"What's to be done now?" said Jack.

"I know," replied the resourceful Dan. "When we get home, we'll sit down at table quick, put our arms and legs well out of sight, and say, 'Is dinner ready?' That'll keep us out of trouble till we've had our dinner, anyhow."

And so it was done; but it didn't come out quite as Dan had hoped and expected. Probably, in their anxiety, they overacted.

Mr. Leno was reading when they arrived with a mad rush, flung themselves at the table, and breathlessly inquired, "Is dinner ready?"

He looked up in surprise, and eyed the boys curiously.

"What's all this quick business about?" he inquired. "Stand out here!"

At the second time of asking they *did* stand out, because it wasn't safe to allow Mr. Leno to repeat a request more than twice.

He looked them up and down. And then—

"Mother!" he shouted to his wife. "Mother! come here and have a look at your black velvet beauties!"

And that is the reason why Dan Leno got no dinner that day, and never possessed a black velvet suit in his life.

It may be noted here that Dan's brother soon left the stage to learn a trade, and died at an early age.

In 1870 the Irish element was still further fostered in Dan, for he was then billed as "Dan Patrick Leno," and described as "Descriptive and Irish Character Vocalist."

In this connection it may be noted that there is a popular idea that Dan Leno, in his young days, was a clog dancer, pure and simple, and only took to songs in his later years. As the record of his career shows, this is quite a delusion.

One of his big successes in these days was a song entitled "Pity the Poor Italian." In this song Dan, attired as an Italian hurdy-gurdy boy, and with real white rats crawling over him as he sang, struck a note of genuine pathos. It is not surprising that he should have done so, since the memories of his own short life might well have engendered in him a sympathy with the character he portrayed.

The song was especially popular in the colliery districts. It is hard to see the connection; but the

fact remains, that wherever Dan had colliers as his audience, he was certain of a shower of coppers raining upon the stage as he sang.

The colliers might not, however, have been so generous had they seen the expectant stepfather waiting at the wings, carefully counting each coin as Dan picked it up, and thoughtfully relieving the "poor Italian boy" of his burden the moment he came off the stage.

So far, all salaries had been inclusive for the family ; but Dan's stepfather, with the idea of netting an extra salary, changed the boy's name to Dan Patrick, and, as such, he duly appeared for his first recorded separate salary. This was at a combined music-hall and hotel in Birmingham, and his reward for singing and dancing four times nightly was 23s. a week, with board and lodging. This was a distinct advance for him.

It is true that he never, personally, saw any of the 23s. ; but, as he used to say, he was permitted to keep the board and lodgings for his very own.

While on the subject of Dan Leno's salary, there is a very curious instance worth recording.

In his young days it was the custom of the music-hall proprietor to make out the artistes' contracts personally, and in his own handwriting. In the hands of some of the more illiterate owners of the cheaper halls a contract thus became, at times, a very weird document.

One of these gentry, having engaged Dan's services

at the salary of £2 *os. od.* per week, duly handed him his contract for signature.

Unfortunately his education being defective, or his memory at fault, he had either never learnt or had forgotten that £2 · 0 · 0 required a dot before each "0." The astonished and delighted Dan, therefore, opened his contract to read that he was engaged for one week at the salary of £200!

Needless to say, he didn't get it then, although he got it afterwards; but I am inclined to believe that the spirit of prophecy must have entered into that music-hall proprietor as it did into Balaam's ass, and that he prophesied better than he knew.

In 1877 the little company were in Manchester, and in rather low water. They had been out of an engagement for nineteen weeks; they had no immediate prospects, and the outlook was gloomy.

So the word was passed to Dan, the indefatigable, that he must go out and earn something somehow; sing at public-houses, in the streets; anywhere, so long as the result was money. And Dan, the indefatigable, obediently set forth.

Finding that there was no overpowering demand at the moment for a comic vocalist in busy Manchester, he tramped further afield, and eventually found himself, penniless but by no means despairing, in the small town of Hyde.

Pausing before the Railway Inn there, he was delighted to see in the window an announcement to the



effect that a "free-and-easy" was to be held there that very evening.

"Here's my chance!" said Dan to himself, and promptly went inside to interview the landlord.

The gentleman in question was a short and extremely stout specimen of humanity, who, it afterwards turned out, suffered from some complaint that caused him to fall asleep at frequent intervals, and with marvellous abruptness. On these occasions it was the rule of the house that everybody sat still and preserved complete silence until he woke up of his own accord.

To him Dan proffered his modest request that he might be allowed to sing at the forthcoming entertainment, and, to his joy, he was granted permission to sing what he liked and collect all he could.

It was then four o'clock in the afternoon, and the concert began at six.

"What are you going to do between now and six o'clock?" asked the landlord.

"Walk round the town," replied Dan.

"But you can walk round Hyde in a quarter of an hour," objected mine host.

"Very good," said Dan, making a rapid calculation, "then I'll walk round it eight times!"

"H'm! You seem to be fairly fond of walking," remarked Boniface.

Dan considered a moment. "Well," he said at length, "it's not altogether that; but it's the cheapest amusement I know except sleeping, and they won't let me do *that* in the street."

The landlord looked more closely at the boy, and evidently saw something in his face that moved him to pity.

"You're tired, my lad," he said, "and you're hungry."

"Oh yes!" admitted Dan, with the careless indifference of one who describes his normal condition. "Oh yes! I'm hungry!"

"Then," said the good-hearted landlord, "dinner's just ready. Come in and sit down with us."

A few moments later and Dan was sitting at table gazing rapturously at a beautiful joint of roast beef. The odour of it was a delight in itself, and if Dan had been hungry before he was doubly so now.

Mine host sharpened his knife on the steel, and was just on the point of carving the first portion, when, alas, his complaint overcame him, and he fell fast asleep, as he sat, knife in hand.

At once all business was suspended, and the assembled company sat and gazed at the beef in deadly silence.

What the others felt Dan never knew; but he himself suffered all the torments of a Tantalus.

He sat there, heart-sick with deferred hope, until he felt that he absolutely could not stand it any longer.

So, being essentially a man of action, he boldly took the initiative.

He happened to be sitting next to the sleeper, and his first step towards emancipation and dinner was to secure, unostentatiously, a three-pronged steel fork.

This weapon he carefully concealed under the folds

of the tablecloth, and, watching his opportunity, adroitly "jabbed" it into the calf of his slumbering host.

"It didn't go in so *very* far," said Dan afterwards, "but, of course, I had to be sure it went far *enough*, and famishing folks can't stick at trifles."

It went far enough.

Mine host woke with a start and a shout, rubbed his leg, said he reckoned he'd a bit of cramp (on which point Dan was careful not to contradict him), proceeded with his carving, and Dan got his dinner.

That night he duly appeared at the free-and-easy.

The proceedings were opened by songs from two or three local working-men, and then Dan was let loose upon the assembly.

His success was instantaneous, and so complete as to be almost embarrassing.

To the credit of the critical faculty in Hyde, be it said that his audience appreciated him so highly that, after his first song, they steadfastly and absolutely declined to listen to anybody else. So, for the remainder of the night, until eleven o'clock, Dan sang and danced without intermission, and, but for the licensing laws, might have gone on singing and dancing until next day for all his audience cared. At the end of his labours he got his reward — a collection of £1 18s., mostly in coppers.

The last train having gone to Manchester, and there being limits even to his pedestrian endurance, he slept that night on the floor of the concert-room, and started for home next morning with his load of coppers, a



My word you  
surprise me  
How Leno

DAN LENO'S IDEA OF HIMSELF



quaint little figure, with his bundle slung on a stick over his shoulder and a pair of ornate dancing-clogs on his feet.

On the high road he met a trio of beggars—man, woman, and child—dolefully singing a melancholy tune, in the hope of attracting the attention of the charitable. Dan, the successful, looked at them, and his heart melted.

Diving into his pocket, he produced a handful of coppers, thrust them into the man's hand, and closed his fingers over them. He repeated the operation with the woman and the child, and then went on his way.

Not a word was spoken on either side; but when Dan, after walking fifty or sixty yards, turned to look behind him, there were the three, standing where he left them, each holding a hand still outstretched, and gazing after him in open-mouthed amazement.

Said Dan afterwards, "I don't think I ever walked six miles so lightly and easily as I did after that."

Dan arrived home in the middle of a domestic storm. His mother, rendered nervous by the fact that he had been away all night, was severely blaming his step-father for sending him out in the way he did, and freely asserting that, if her boy ran away or got lost, the fault would be entirely his.

However, the advent of Dan and his peace-offering cleared the sky, and as he very wisely told nobody the exact amount he had collected, nobody missed the amount he had given away in charity.

## CHAPTER II

### ON TOUR

**S**OON after this the company sailed for Ireland. How they managed to scrape together the money for their fares, or whether they travelled "on their baggage," is not recorded, but they got there somehow ; for the first impression of Dan, as he appeared in the streets of Dublin, is given by one who came to know him well in later years.

This is how he struck the passer-by.

"A smallish man, or a biggish boy, with an expression of chastened sorrow on his features, somewhat tempered by a mischievous twinkle in his eye. On his head a white billycock hat of the usual basin shape he always affected in those days (there is strong reason to believe it was always the same hat), a short coat, a still shorter waistcoat, with a considerable piece of vacant land between its termination and the beginning of the trousers.

"Item, a pair of elastic-side boots that were worn indifferently by Dan and his mother, and which fully accounted for the fact that, unless Dan wore his clogs, they were never seen out in the street together."

As Dan, in all his glory, passed a group of loafers, who were busily engaged in leaning up against the wall of a public-house, one of them, pointing to him significantly, whistled a few bars of the then popular song, "He's got 'em on! He's got 'em on," to which Dan immediately responded by pointing, first to his own nose, then to the inflamed organ of the whistler, and whistling the well-known air from *Les Cloches de Corneville*, "Just look at this—just look at that!"

Then, realising that the loafers were not only larger, but more numerous than he was himself, he incontinently fled without waiting further developments.

During this tour, Dan, in addition to singing and dancing, fulfilled the Shakesperean adage by playing many parts. One character sketch he gave was known as *Torpedo Bill*.

This explosive person was a mischievous boy, who was a source of great trouble to his worthy parents.

The plot was of the simplest. It began with a discussion between his father, a cobbler, and his mother, a washerwoman, as to what was Torpedo Bill's real vocation in life.

The father desired him to stick to the last; but the mother had more ambition, and earnestly wished him to turn his attention towards becoming a great inventive genius.

Bill, in his efforts to justify his fond mother's estimate of his latent powers, invented a great many wild, weird things that consistently involved the family in awful disaster whenever they were tested, and ended the



piece by blowing up the entire strength of the company with gunpowder.

It must have been a bustling sketch while it lasted, and if anybody could carry through a thing of that kind successfully, Dan could.

In another sketch he appeared as "Pongo," a particularly athletic and vicious species of monkey.

Dan specially enjoyed this performance, as the "business" included a considerable amount of chasing his stepfather to and fro.

Pongo was armed with a thick roll of brown paper for this purpose, to the manufacture and solidity of which Dan saw personally every night; and as he fairly estimated that every resounding whack he got home on his revered step-parent's anatomy metaphorically wiped off a box on the ears, it is to be hoped and believed that by the time the latter gentleman retired from the stage, they were fairly entitled to cry "quits" on the score of assault and battery.

It was this visit to Ireland that gave Dan the "touch of the brogue" that led so many people into the delusion that he was of Hibernian origin. Why he should have adopted an Irish accent, when he had just as much reason to be Scotch, Lancashire, Yorkshire, or Cockney, it is not easy to say; but the fact remains that it clung to him throughout life.

It was, to be sure, most obvious when he was in mischief or when he was very much in earnest; but, as he was generally one or the other, there was a pretty constant and strong suggestion of it about his speech.

No doubt, also, his childish training as a singer of Irish songs was partly responsible. He went to Ireland for the first time as an Irish comedian, more or less; he came back, more or less, as an Irishman.

If, during these early struggles, Dan's mother was always willing and anxious to help him, Dan, in his turn, was no less eager and ready to help his mother.

Indeed, his will was sometimes greater than his power, as the history of the ruined dinner at Belfast testifies.

On a certain Sunday Dan's mother was not feeling particularly well, so Dan packed her off to bed, there to rest until dinner was ready, while he boldly undertook the responsibility of the culinary arrangements for the entire family.

The bill of fare consisted of a roast of beef, boiled potatoes, and a batter pudding, all of which Dan, sternly declining offers of outside assistance, undertook to have "done to a turn" by the appointed time.

So his mother retired to bed, while the rest of the family went their various ways and left him to it.

He started operations by peeling the potatoes, which he soon found to be a more difficult task than he had expected. There appeared to be no middle course between the Scylla of leaving large pieces of peel on the potatoes, and the Charybdis of cutting off large chunks of potato with the peel; so he chose the latter course as being the less of two evils, and very quickly reduced five pounds of potatoes to three, or thereabouts.

The process was, in fact, as magnificently simple as that of the would-be sculptor, who proposed to make a statue by taking a large block of marble and knocking off the pieces he didn't require.

Carefully throwing away the rejected pieces of potato, with the peel attached, he placed the remnants, or—as he described them—the potato pellets, into a pan of water, and, trustfully leaving them to boil until further orders, turned his attention to the beef.

This joint he rigged up before the fire by means of an involved contrivance of string that was entirely his own invention, and, feeling he had done his duty by it, left it to its own devices, and went for the batter pudding in the spirit and with the enterprise of an Edison.

Dan had theories about batter puddings. What particular ingredients he put into the specimen in question he never divulged to a living soul; but the consensus of opinion among the family, when guessing afterwards, was that there had been a sinful waste of Portland cement in its preparation. However, that is anticipating.

Dan, looking up for a moment from the intricacies of his batter pudding, noticed that, while the beef was turning a brownish black on the side nearest the fire, the opposite side still remained in its original raw-red condition.

Obviously it was necessary that the joint should revolve if both sides were to be eaten on the same day; so, having no meat-jack, he twisted the string with one

hand, while he vigorously stirred the batter pudding with the other.

This kept him busy, until the string broke and the beef fell into the fire. Nor was this all; for Dan, jumping up hastily to try and save the beef, upset the batter pudding on the floor, and the disaster was complete. This would have daunted most men; but Dan never gave in; so, after scraping the beef, rescuing what he could of the pudding, and wiping up all traces of the accident, he cheerfully began again.

It was, by this time, long past the usual dinner-hour, and the various members of the family, who had returned hungry, took it in turns to look in the kitchen, and inform the cook, gratuitously but pointedly, what time it was.

To these hints Dan merely replied that all would be ready in a few minutes. He said it hopefully; but, in his own heart, hope was dead. He knew the beef and the pudding had failed him, and his only chance of salvation depended upon the potatoes. They, at any rate, had remained quietly in their pan, and, so far as he could judge, had been strictly attending to business. When, however, he poured them out, a sodden, shapeless mass, he yielded to the inevitable, served up the dinner as it was, and bravely prepared to face the consequences.

He brought in both courses at once, partly to save time, and partly to know the worst as soon as possible.

He was not long kept in suspense.

His stepfather, about to carve the joint, suddenly

paused and inspected it more closely; then, without a word, took it from the dish, and hurled it with all his might at the unfortunate cook.

Dan, dodging to avoid, fell back with his chair, and while he was on the floor, the justly irate Mr. Leno, after pouring the potatoes and batter pudding over his prostrate form, left the house, in great indignation, to seek refreshment elsewhere.

So ended a perfectly unique dinner, that required six hours to prepare, and was polished off in something under five minutes.

It was not the only gastronomic disappointment the unfortunate family were destined to have on this eventful tour.

One day, Dan and Johnny Danvers, taking a walk in the country outside the town in which they were performing, found themselves in an extensive copse or thicket.

"What are those things growing up there?" asked Johnny, pointing.

"Nuts! Hooray!" exclaimed Dan, recognising them at once.

They were small; but they certainly were nuts; so the pair set to work to reap their harvest, and, after filling their pockets, their caps, and every other receptacle they possessed or could invent, returned home in triumph, laden with their spoil.

"Hullo! What have you got here?" inquired Mr. Leno, senior, inspecting the heap that Dan and Johnny had deposited on the table in the sitting-room.

"Nuts," replied Dan, with justifiable pride.

"Nuts! So they are!" exclaimed Mr. Leno, rubbing his hands with considerable satisfaction. "And a goodish pile of them, too! Now, you can leave all that arrangement to me. I've been in good society in my time, and I know how nuts ought to be eaten. We'll keep them till Sunday, and then we'll eat them after dinner, with a drop of good port wine just to give them a flavour."

Sunday duly arrived; dinner was over; Dan had brought in from the adjacent public-house the "drop of good port wine," or, in his own words, the "bob's worth of red ink," and the nuts entered amidst loud applause.

The sad sequel is soon told. The family hopefully cracked those nuts for the best part of an hour and a half; but not a single kernel did they find, for the simple reason that the nuts had all been gathered too young.

On this Irish tour Dan, while losing none of his comedy, was steadily developing, as a clog dancer, those marvellous steps that gave him, a few years afterwards the championship of the world.

Nobody taught him; but possessing that rare combination, an original and an imitative brain, he successfully copied all the various steps he saw others do, improved upon them, and, in addition, invented not a few of his own.

Famous clog-dancers were, in those days, fairly numerous, especially in the north of England; but nobody suspected that there was, in Ireland, a com-

paratively unknown youth, who was quietly training, and was destined to upset the pretensions of more than one champion at his very first attempt.

His local fame as a dancer was, however, spreading to the extent that, as a professional tutor in the art, he began to take in pupils.

One day there came to him a member of the Royal Irish Constabulary who explained that, being ambitious to join the Police Minstrel Company as an active member, he wished to learn a few steps, in order that he might be more efficient as an entertainer.

The policeman was a fairly large specimen of a fairly large class, and, for a moment, Dan gazed at his feet, reflectively and in some doubt. He thought, however, that there was probably money in the undertaking that he could ill afford to throw away; so he agreed to do his best to teach the constable to dance.

By the end of six weeks he had succeeded, with the expenditure of much patience on the one side, and perspiration on the other, in teaching his pupil three steps.

"Now," said Dan to him, "you've got three steps solid, and if you put half of one step into half of another, you can vary it so that you've really got six steps altogether. I have to go away for a fortnight; but what I've taught you is no earthly good unless you practise.

"Practise whenever and wherever you have the chance, and when I come back, if you're all right on what you know now, I'll teach you some more."

At Dan's return, he was met by the constable in great trouble. It appeared that, following out his tutor's instructions faithfully and conscientiously, he had been in the habit, while on night duty, of retiring up secluded passages, and, placing his lantern on the ground, assiduously practising his three steps, and painfully endeavouring to convert them into six.

While thus engaged one night, he was surprised by his sergeant. The sergeant, very naturally, accused his subordinate of being drunk, and would listen to no explanation whatever. He entreated Dan to see the sergeant and corroborate his statement; so Dan good-naturedly saw the sergeant; explained satisfactorily, and, the sergeant becoming interested, Dan gained another pupil.

After a somewhat severe course of instruction, Dan pronounced his pupils to be efficient—that is, for police minstrels—and within a week or so had the satisfaction of learning that, at a public concert, and a specially shored-up platform, they had performed a *pas de deux* with complete success.

So far, nothing had been arranged regarding payment, but, three days after the concert, the sergeant called upon Dan, and, expressing himself as eternally grateful, both on his own behalf and that of his colleague, thrust into his hands a cigar-box with holes bored in the lid by means of a red-hot poker, begged his acceptance of the same, and, without waiting for thanks, left in a somewhat hasty manner.



Dan, somewhat surprised, and not a little curious, opened the box, and found therein a live canary.

Not liking to keep the poor thing immured in such an uncomfortable and highly flavoured prison as an old cigar-box, Dan, although he could ill afford the necessary shillings, purchased a cage, and installed his prize in this more commodious home. Next day the bird died ; so that Dan's reward, for several weeks' hard work, was a dead bird, and a bird-cage he didn't require, minus several shillings he required very much.

He took it very philosophically, however ; the only comment he was ever heard to make on the transaction being :

"It serves me jolly well right for teaching policemen to do what nature never intended they *should* do."

The ungrateful policeman somewhat unexpectedly cropped up again a week or two later, and was, all unwittingly, the means of healing the only quarrel Dan Leno ever had with Johnnie Danvers.

At their then impressionable age, the quarrel was, naturally, over a member of the other sex.

She was an attendant at a skating rink, and evidently a firm believer in the advisability of having more than one string to her bow. She was also a subject which, although, as it afterwards turned out, Dan and Johnnie had in common, they somehow never discussed together. So it happened that one fine Sunday afternoon, neither suggested to the other to take a walk ; but both repaired to the bedroom at the same hour, and began to make a careful toilet.

"What are you getting yourself up like that for?" inquired Johnnie.

"It's a pity if I can't wash my face without *you* interfering," retorted Dan. "And if it comes to that, why are you putting all that grease on your hair?"

"To keep it on," replied Johnnie laconically; "so mind your own business, and keep *yours* on."

As spick-and-span as they could make themselves, the twain emerged from the house together. At the gate they paused mutually.

"I'm going this way," said Johnnie significantly, and indicating his direction.

"So am I," returned Dan.

Up a street, round a corner, up another street, and round another corner, they marched side by side in dignified silence, until it seemed to strike Dan that their destinations might possibly synchronise in a manner too embarrassing to be pleasant.

"How far are you going?" he asked suspiciously.

"I'll stop when I get there," was the other's enigmatic reply.

A few more streets and corners they negotiated in common, and, finally, both halted before a certain house with the precision and uniformity of a military manoeuvre.

"I'm stopping here," explained Dan pointedly. "Good-bye."

"You needn't say good-bye," said Johnnie, "because I'm stopping here, too."

So, for a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes, they

stood there, alternately scowling at each other defiantly, and indulging in plaintive little whistles, obviously intended to announce their proximity to their charmer.

At the end of that time, the door opened ; they eagerly started forward ; and the young lady emerged, followed, all in his Sunday best, by the stalwart constable Dan had been at so much pains in teaching to dance. Without so much as a look at the unhappy pair, she took the policeman's proffered arm, and sailed majestically down the street.

Dan and Johnnie watched them out of sight ; then, turning to each other, they burst into a roar of laughter, and walked home arm-in-arm themselves.

The Leno family did not find Ireland a veritable El Dorado.

For instance, Dan has himself stated :—

"I remember being engaged to give a song and dance at the Exhibition in Dublin. I danced my clog dance with hardly a bit of sole under my clogs ; but I got fifteen shillings a week during that engagement, and jolly glad I was to get it."

It is a noteworthy fact that the next time he visited Dublin his salary was one hundred pounds a week.

After a thorough and protracted search, throughout the length and breadth of Ireland, for the fortune that all good Bohemians believe they will eventually find, the family returned to England, there to resume the monotonous occupation known as "touring the smalls."

While thus engaged they visited Sheffield, and here

it was they got a chance which, they all fondly hoped, might prove to be the turning-point in their career.

While perusing a theatrical paper one day, Mr. Leno chanced to see an advertisement that interested him greatly.

It was, in effect, that an entrepreneur was wanted, who could supply a really good high-class entertainment on the occasion of certain festivities that were to be held in honour of the coming of age of the eldest son of a certain noble lord, whose family seat was situated some twenty miles distant from Sheffield. The fee offered was an inclusive one of fifty pounds, and all applications were to be sent to the steward of the estate. Mr. Leno immediately sat down and wrote a letter to the steward that did him infinite credit.

In it he stated that he (Mr. Leno) was an entrepreneur of immense experience and world-wide fame; that he was willing, for the sum mentioned, to bring down a company of London artistes, all of unrivalled ability and marvellous versatility, adding that the happy accident of this brilliant troupe being as close at hand as Sheffield was the reason that enabled him to offer the noble lord what was really the chance of a lifetime.

His company, continued Mr. Leno, was high-class or nothing; but where high-class was required it was simply and absolutely everything.

He fearlessly undertook to supply any kind of high-class entertainment that the noble lord might select—

Light Opera ; Comic Opera ; Grand Opera ; Shakespearean Revival ; Farce ; Orchestral Concert ; or Tragedy.

" But," he somewhat artfully concluded, " if you wish to see my company at its very best, I would recommend a variety show as being our very strongest point."

There were a few days of sickening suspense ; but at last there came a letter from the steward to say that Mr. Leno's offer had been accepted, and requesting him to bring his company down to give a variety show on the day appointed.

Then there was great joy in the house of Leno, mingled with much furbishing up of theatrical garments, and practising of new songs and steps.

It was arranged that the company were to travel by train to a small station down the line, where they would be met by a wagonette, and driven to the scene of the festivities.

This is Dan's description of the talented company that boarded the wagonette, much to the surprise of his lordship's servants, who had been led to expect something different.

1. The old man (Mr. Leno) got up as the entrepreneur. Hair well oiled, to the great detriment of his coat collar ; shocking bad top-hat ; and the inevitable Family Ulster with bits of an old fur boa of mother's stitched on the collar and cuffs.

2. A harmonium player, with a groggy face, carrying his harmonium.



"DADDY THUMB"



3. A violinist who squinted.
4. A cornet player with four teeth out—the worst cornet player in the provinces.
5. A negro comedian in a velvet coat and corduroy trousers.
6. The human eel. A very fat man with a purple face through bending backwards.
7. A lady vocalist, dressed entirely in stage "props," and wearing a hat a man had once worn when he played Romeo.
8. Johnnie Danvers in patched boots.
9. Dan Leno in frayed trousers. And
10. The luggage. An old tin box with hollows all over it, and tied up with pieces of rope.

When they arrived at their destination, they found that the entertainment took the shape of a garden party; a platform was erected at the end of a lawn for their performance, and behind it stood a large marquee.

About this lawn were strolling ladies and gentlemen, all beautifully attired, and in order to reach their dressing-room, the company had to cross it in full view of the assembled guests.

They hesitated a moment; then Mr. Leno boldly took the plunge, and led the way. The others followed, and, the passage being safely accomplished, they were met on the other side by two flunkeys in gorgeous livery. Before them Mr. Leno, temporarily overawed by their magnificence, took off his hat and bowed humbly. The flunkeys, eyeing the party disdainfully, merely pointed to the marquee, and then retired.



They entered the marquee, and were delighted to see, spread before them, a large round of beef, pickles of many varieties, and jugs of beer wherewith to wash it all down.

For a moment they gazed in silent admiration.

The human eel was the first to speak.

"Oh dear! I wish my poor wife were here!" he said; a speech that did him credit, but suggested sad memories of hungry days. But the human eel was not a man who wasted much time over foolish and unavailing regrets.

He heaved one sigh, and, philosophically remarking, "Well, if she's not here, I am," attacked the cold beef and pickles with a certain amount of science, and a great deal of vigour.

He showed such strong tendencies towards rapid consumption that the rest of the company had, in self-defence, to sit down without loss of time and join in the fray.

A somewhat prolonged meal was the result; indeed, it was not until after five or six messages, each one more urgent than the last, had been sent by the steward to know if the company was nearly ready to begin the performance, that Mr. Leno reluctantly gave the word to desist.

The human eel, who had been particularly heavy on the beer and the pickles, sat back in his chair with a satisfied grunt, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and remarked somewhat huskily, "Guv'nor! put me on last!"

It was a pity, as it afterwards turned out, that Mr. Leno did not take this sound, practical advice.

The proceedings opened with a performance of the overture to *Zampa* by the full orchestra. This was so distressingly bad that the audience took it to be intentionally so, and laughed heartily at what they, with some reason, imagined to be a burlesque on the real thing.

The insulted orchestra retired, in high dudgeon, to the marquee, there to console themselves with more beef and beer, and Mr. Leno, remarking that if they wanted to laugh he would give them something to laugh at, turned on the negro comedian instead of the lady vocalist, whose next turn it should have been.

This gentleman had a large stock of jokes from which to draw—jokes that were for the most part more distinguished for breadth than length, and that certainly possessed the merit of being absolutely new to a fashionable audience. The effect of them was instantaneous.

At the end of the first joke a distinct shiver ran through the audience; the second caused them to shuffle their feet restlessly; the third emptied half the seats; and the fourth was never finished, because Mr. Leno, who knew the point of it, audibly insisted on the performer leaving the platform before he got more than half-way through.

The entrepreneur now felt that something must be done quickly in order to obviate disaster, so he decided to play his trump card. Mounting the platform, he

announced to those who had bravely remained in their seats that he had much pleasure in introducing to them a most sensational novelty, none other than "The Human Eel."

Applause, a chord from the band, and the human eel stepped on to the platform in the bright sunlight, attired in green tights, mended, in various places, with blue worsted.

"My first feat," said he, "will be to bend backwards, pick up a glass from the ground with my teeth, and consume the contents as I resume my original position."

Placing the glass on the ground, and sighing deeply, he began to bend, anxiously watched by the rest of the company.

Poor eel! He was, as stated in the bills, only a human eel after all, and, as was to be expected under existing conditions, he never got his mouth anywhere near that glass.

He struggled nobly, until—— There was a sharp "rip," the green tights yielded where the blue worsted most predominated; and the remainder of the audience retired.

In vain Mr. Leno remounted the platform, and entreated them to remain and see "the great and only Dan Leno, the greatest dancer and comedian on the stage." They knew when they had had enough, and publicly intimated the same.

A brief period of doubt among the company as to what it was advisable to do next was peremptorily

settled by the steward, who informed Mr. Leno that the further services of himself and his distinguished company would be dispensed with; that the wagonette was now waiting to take them back to where it had, unfortunately, found them; and that the cheque for £50 would be sent in the course of a day or two.

There was no help for it. So poor Dan, cheated out of his first appearance before a really fashionable crowd, climbed sadly into the vehicle and was driven away.

I wonder how many of that high-class party have laughed at and applauded him since then, without knowing the bitter disappointment they caused him on that eventful day.

Three days elapsed, and no cheque arrived. The family, in anticipation of the expected wealth, had launched out into various extravagances, and money was decidedly short. So, on the fourth morning, Mr. Leno started off to collect personally.

On arrival, he was informed by the lodge-keeper that the steward and his lordship were out shooting.

"Where are they shooting?" inquired Mr. Leno.

"Somewhere over there," replied the lodge-keeper, waving his hand in the direction implied.

Mr. Leno looked "somewhere over there," and saw an apparently illimitable expanse of fields, ploughed and otherwise. The expedition seemed almost hopeless; but pecuniary matters were pressing, and he felt that he must collect something, or die in the attempt.

He walked about the fields for four hours, in shoes

and garments ill adapted for the purpose, and at last, a muddy and dishevelled object, came upon the shooting party. The steward promptly ordered him away ; but Mr. Leno had not come through so much only to yield tamely, so he declined to go, and appealed to his lordship.

A promise to post the cheque that evening was met by Mr. Leno with the objection that certain pressing creditors must, without fail, be satisfied immediately on his return home.

"But, my good man!" exclaimed his lordship, "I don't carry fifty pounds in my pockets when I come out shooting."

Mr. Leno knew that. In fact, he never did it himself ; still, landlords were landlords, and the company did not wish to walk about the streets of Sheffield all night ; in short, a sum of money in cash at once, and the balance by post that night, were necessary to save the financial situation. A collection was thereupon taken up among the members of the party, and the sum total, seven pounds in all, being handed to Mr. Leno on account, he began his return journey, feeling, with the village blacksmith, that he had "something attempted, something done."

Elated, but weary, he turned into the village ale-house, there to refresh himself and wait for his train. Assembled in the bar-parlour he found a crowd of village worthies, with whom he got into conversation. They turned out to be such a sociable lot, and when they discovered he was a real play-actor from London,

so respectfully appreciative of the honour he did them by sitting in their midst, that Mr. Leno missed his train.

However, there were others, and he was enjoying himself; so he missed the next three, and being nothing if not convivial, occupied his time by treating the entire assemblage to "whatever they fancied" at frequent intervals. As the glad tidings spread through the village, fresh arrivals dropped in, and very soon there was "standing-room only" in that bar-parlour.

When the time came for absolutely the last drink, and the last train, the villagers escorted their generous host to the station, and, giving him a hearty cheer as the train moved off, sent him away in a blaze of popularity that contrasted finely with his departure on a previous occasion.

When Mr. Leno arrived home very late that night to the expectant family, he merely exhibited three pounds without comment, and until the cheque arrived next morning nobody knew enough to ask him what he had done with the balance.

## CHAPTER III

### DAN LENO AS AUTHOR AND PAINTER

WHEN the company on tour arrived in a new town, and were looking for lodgings, Mr. Leno, senior, generally used to formulate his request something in the following manner :—

“I require a room for myself and wife, and any odd corner you may have where we can put the boys.”

The boys in question were Dan Leno and Johnny Danvers, and there is no manner of doubt that, as a rule, they slept in some very odd corners indeed.

Left very much to themselves when they were not required on the stage, they used to amuse each other by telling impromptu stories.

If they were lucky enough to secure a real bedroom with a real window in it, they were able to round off these stories with dramatic effect. If Dan, for instance, told a particularly good one, Johnny, to show his appreciation, would get out of bed, and gravely raise and lower the window-blind ; while Dan, also getting



HERBERT CAMPBELL, JOHNNY DANVERS, AND DAN LENO





out of bed, would as solemnly bow to the street. In theatrical parlance, he "took his curtain."

The pair used to indulge in long conversations or absolute nonsense, the aim being to keep the ball rolling, the more eccentrically and extravagantly the better.

As for instance :—

*Dan.* I once had an IOU.

*Johnny.* So had I ; but now I've only got U left.

*Dan.* Yes! Poor IO died.

*Johnny.* What did IO die of?

*Dan.* Don't you know? Iodide of potassium.

*Johnny (looking for socks and finding a pair with holes in them).* Don't talk to me! I'm collecting my rents.

*Dan.* Ah! That's the worst of taking socks on a long lease.

*Johnny (inspecting socks).* These are three quarters overdue! I must speak to my valet.

*Dan.* Oh! By-the-by, have you heard what's happened to *my* valet, Simpson?

*Johnny.* No! you haven't parted with him, have you?

*Dan.* I *had* to. He died.

*Johnny.* Of potassium?

*Dan.* No! A rattlesnake bit him in the Strand.

*Johnny.* It's a mean thing to do when a man isn't looking.

*Dan.* Oh! But the snake was perfectly fair. It gave him every chance. It rattled three times before it bit him.

And so on. Extravagant nonsense, of course ; but

the kind of nonsense Dan revelled in, and that he was able to retail with such truly marvellous effect on the stage in later years.

In every way the ridiculous *non sequitur* appealed to him far more strongly than did the obvious.

I well remember the morning when he turned up at a rehearsal of the *Mother Goose* pantomime at Drury Lane, and announced that he had got with him the song he intended to sing. The title, he explained, was "The Wasp and the Hard-Boiled Egg," at which we all laughed hugely, thinking this was one of Dan's little jocular inventions.

But it turned out that it actually *was* the title of the song, and he sang it, with great success, throughout the run of the piece.

Who that heard him can ever forget the pathos—almost amounting to tears—in his voice, when, after the passionate appeal of the wasp to the hard-hearted egg, he sang—

"But not one word said the hard-boiled egg,  
The hard-boiled egg,  
The hard-boiled egg,  
And what a silly insect was the wasp to beg!  
For you can't get any sense out of a hard-boiled egg?"

It could never occur to anybody but a Dan Leno to create such an incompatible alliance as a wasp and a hard-boiled egg, and make a mock love ballad out of the result.

It was this passion of his for sheer, irresponsible nonsense that, combined with his gift for lifelike caricature

made his humour irresistible. One recognises this, not only in his performances, his grotesque make-up and stage attire, but in his sketches and in his writings.

Painting was a great hobby of his. In this, as in all else, he was entirely self-taught ; but he has left behind him specimens of his handiwork to show beyond doubt that the artistic gift was latent in him. He was particularly proud of some scene-painting he did for a theatre he rigged up to amuse his children at home.

When on tour he carried about with him a MS. book, in which he recorded his freaks of fancy as they occurred to him, and illustrated them in the same spirit in which he wrote them.

Some of these specimens of how Dan Leno amused himself in his leisure hours are well worth reproducing.

Here is what he describes as

### “ A VERY BRIEF DRAMA.”

*Dramatis personæ—*

A SAILOR. A MAIDEN. A VILLAIN.

ACT I.

SCENE. *The Docks by Rushlight.*

*Enter* SAILOR.

*Sailor.* Here's a fine go ! I've been and lost my 'bacca-box.

*Enter* PRESS-GANG.

*They take no notice of him, so he volunteers.*

*[Curtain amid suppressed excitement.*

## DAN LENO

## ACT II.

SCENE. *A Large Clothes Line.*

*Enter MAIDEN, with mouth full of clothes-pegs, singing "The Anchor's Weighed."*

*Enter VILLAIN, with tears rolling down his cheeks.*

*They talk on their fingers until "All lights out."*

*[Curtain amid applause, which was promptly suppressed.]*

## ACT III.

SCENE I. *A Fried Fish Shop.*

*Enter A CROWD, who borrow eightpence and exit.*

*Enter VILLAIN.*

*Villain.* I know not how it is with me, and I'm blessed if I know how it would be without me.

*Posts an infernal machine in the letter-box, and exits.*

*Wonderful change to*

SCENE II. *A little way down a street; nearly at the bottom.*

*Enter VILLAIN, MAIDEN, and a HOUSE DOG.*

*They bark bitterly till muzzled.*

*[All off.]*

NOTE.—*This scene does not change unless the prompter is sober, in which case—*

*Stupendous change to*

SCENE III. *The Château.*

*Enter MAIDEN and SAILOR.*

*They talk in French until Thunder and*

*Simply awful change to*

SCENE IV. *The same place, five minutes afterwards.*

*Enter EVERYBODY, all talking at once.*

*Curtain amid wild excitement, while the audience go out and take something for it.*

ACT IV.

SCENE I. *Italy, or as near as possible.*

*Enter MAIDEN and SAILOR, followed by BRIGANDS, armed with bowls of soup.*

*Maiden.* At last we meet !

*Sailor.* Yes. But I wonder why we walked here from Swansea ?

[*All exit, wondering.*]

SCENE II. *The same place twenty-two years later.*

*All discovered still wondering why they walked from Swansea.*  
*General Breakdown.*

*Step dance till audience sleep.*

[*Curtain and sudden death of the authors.*]

This is a pretty fair specimen of the way Dan Leno could let himself go when he had a pen in his hand and felt in the humour.

But he also tackled more serious subjects than transpontine melodrama.

History of any kind had a great fascination for him, and, wherever he travelled, he was always keen to see any cathedral, castle, or other building of historic interest.

Here are a few of his impressions of Holyrood and Windsor Castles, the Tower, and other national edifices, together with his comments on the various events that happened therein. The sketches accompanying are his own. He begins by describing Holyrood Palace thus :—

“ This palace is one of the many palaces of its kind, but vastly different to some of the other ones.

"It stands in Scotland at the end of a long street of dirty houses. It stands well back from the road. Whether the smell drove it back, or whether it went back of its own accord, I must leave my readers to guess."

As he goes on with his description, it is easy to recognise the germ of his "Beefeater" song, which he sang with conspicuous success many years later.

"On entering the palace, a cold chill runs through you.

"You shudder as your eyes wander over the scenes of fearful tragedies; the bloodstains on the floor; the terrible faces in the oil-paintings; and the awful man at the door, who takes your bob, and gives you a ticket."

After this lurid introduction, Dan tries his hand at making history.

"Many years ago, on a waste piece of ground, stood a royal hunting party, consisting of Jane Shore, MacDuff, Mary of Anchovy, MacRural's men, and Mary Queen of Scots.

"The Queen seemed rather impatient, and was playfully tapping her horse on the eyebrow with a large piece of granite that she had picked up to throw at one of MacRural's men for wiping his nose on his kilt.

"'Hold!' cried MacDuff, 'tis useless travelling further to-night.'

"'True!' exclaimed Mary of Anchovy. 'A storm is brewing. I recognise the signs, for my father was a brewer.'

"'Silence!' cried the Queen in a voice that shat

tered the very air and rent the palace on a repairing lease. 'Those who wish to desert me, may desert; those who wish to stay, may stay; the rest of you may stay to dessert. All loyal subjects will now kiss my boots!'

"And immediately MacRural's men knelt before her and kissed her boots, crying, 'Oh, Queen! Live for ever!' which, of course, she couldn't do; but that was no fault of theirs. (See illustration.)"



When Rizzio appears on the scene, Dan describes him as—

"A man-musicker, who discoursed indifferent well on the banjo, taking into consideration the fact that the strings of his instrument were entirely composed of ginger-beer bottle wires.

"He played 'Only a Pansy Blossom' with such exquisite pathos that the Queen could not refrain from dancing.

"Being surprised in the act by Lord Darnley, she, with great presence of mind, introduced Rizzio as her music-master.



"Darnley muttered 'Darn lie' under his breath, and fixed on Rizzio a look that broke all his banjo strings at once. (See illustration.)"



According to Dan, the Queen and Rizzio refused to take warning by this untoward incident.

"Riz repaired his banjo, and the Queen said, 'Come let us have some supper! What ho, there! Produce the oatmeal.'

"And they feasted right merrily, until there fell upon their ears a slight noise, as if somebody was moving the piano without any help.

"They listened.

"'It seemeth to me,' said the Queen, 'as if someone were pushing a mangle through an open window.'



"'Nay!' returned Rizzio. 'It is no common noise. It sounds to me as if they were removing the roof without taking the walls off.'

"But the Queen, being braver than Rizzio, only laughed. (See illustration.)"



This dread sound was, of course, the arrival of Lord Darnley and the conspirators, the upshot of it all being, in Dan's words:—

"Dagger followed dagger in swift succession until the unfortunate Rizzio resembled a large pin-cushion. Thus died one of the finest banjo-players of his time."

The Tower of London, he asserts, was originally built as a place of entertainment.

"It supplied a long-felt want; because, at that time, there was no music-hall nearer than Oldham.

"It was built before Regent's Park was invented, and cost between eighteen shillings and sixpence. This may seem an exorbitant price; but, in those days, money was money, and an ordinary cow fetched as much as three-three farthings. The first tower constructed was The White Tower, after which other towers were made and stuck on to it, as various people thought proper.

"The chief 'turns' at this ancient Palace of Varieties were—Knife-throwing and catching in the chest.

"Slow roasting by ladies and gentlemen on a mixed grill; and

"Head-shifting in all its branches. (See illustration.)"



He was a keen critic of Henry the Eighth. Among other things, he writes of him :—

"Henry sent for the Bishop of Rochester to undo him from one wife and tie him up to another.

"The Bishop declared he would do no such thing;



whereupon Henry wept aloud, and gave the Bishop such a black eye that he was unable to attend rehearsal on the following Monday. As this took place in the nutting season, Henry sentenced the Bishop to be off-nutted by the Head Remover.

"Just before his execution, the Bishop recited the following touching lines which he had written during his sixty-five years' imprisonment :—

'I love the little sunflowers  
As up the walls they creep ;  
I love the singing of the wasp  
When I am fast asleep ;  
So now, my friends, I'll drink your health  
In one last, flowing bowl,  
Before they cut from me my nut,  
And stuff me in a hole.'

"Fifteen copies of this poem were sold, and the proceeds given towards building King's Cross Railway Station."

Naturally, as behoves one who played more than once in "The Babes in the Wood," he has something to say about the Princes in The Tower :—

"When the murderers entered the Princes' bedroom a fearful struggle ensued. (See illustration.)

"But at last the youths were overpowered, and put to death without their suppers. For this fearful act, the murderers were to have had four and a half louis de ducats ; but the king being short of cash, he could only raise a shilling and an order for the pit.

"Some eighty-two years after, the murder was discovered through one of the villains boasting, while in his cups, that he could fight any two children breathing.

## DAN AS AUTHOR AND PAINTER 51

This was overheard by a cabman dressed in plain clothes, and the murderers were sentenced to be burnt alive till dead.



"As they were burning, they confessed that the children's bodies were buried under the ash-barrel in the backyard, and there they were found ; but children no longer, for owing to the lapse of time, they had grown into hoary-headed men. (See illustration.)"



Dan concludes his history with the following self-appreciatory remark :—

“Thus ends one of the most beautiful entertainments ever written by man.”

The envelope that is here reproduced was illustrated by Dan Leno, and enclosed a letter to his friend Johnny Danvers. By each separate illustration there hangs a tale.

The history of the boots and the very amateur shoemaker's instruments is as follows :—

The company were in Bolton ; business was bad, and winter was near at hand. Among the many articles of apparel Dan Leno and Johnny Danvers lacked were boots of sufficient strength and stoutness to enable them to resist anything in the shape of inclement weather.

They certainly had boots of a sort—boots that had seen better days ; but so long ago as to be almost forgotten. In plain words, Dan and Johnny were practically performing the feat which is known in the Strand and Fleet Street as “walking on your uppers.”

New boots were quite out of the question ; but Dan's stepfather took pity on them to the extent of presenting Dan with a stout piece of leather and some sprigs, remarking that, if he couldn't patch up the boots and make a decent job of it with *that*, he wasn't worth his salt.

As it had always been Dan's rule in life to be worth his salt and a little bit over, he accepted the leather and the challenge.



AN ENVELOPE ILLUSTRATED BY DAN LENO





Being short of professional implements, he borrowed from the landlady a dinner-knife, a fork, and a flat-iron. With the first he cut the leather ; with the second he bored holes in it ; and the third he used as a last.

He ruined the knife through sharpening it on the doorstep ; he broke all the prongs of the fork ; he pulled the handle off the flat-iron ; he skinned his hands ; but he triumphantly succeeded in fixing on to each boot a sole that was solid, substantial, and thick.

Unfortunately, he quite forgot all about the heels until it was too late, and there was no more leather. The consequence was that, when Dan and Johnny went for their first walk in the reorganised boots, the soles were so high, and the heels were so low, that they were in imminent danger of falling backwards at every step they took.

The backward slope of their bodies must have been very noticeable ; because Dan records that, during this their first and only walk in the celebrated boots, they passed a little crowd of operatives enjoying their after-dinner smoke at the factory gates.

As the pair stumped along at an angle of goodness knows how many degrees, the group eyed them curiously and in silence until, just as they passed, one man pointed at them, and laconically remarked to the others, " Officers ! "

Johnny was for giving in and going home at an early stage ; but Dan, with the pride of the workman upon him, persisted that the boots would be all right when they got used to them.

Even Dan, however, found in the end that the process of getting used to them was more painful than pleasant; so he presented himself before his stepfather in a crippled condition, and requested more leather with which to manufacture heels.

The stepfather, either repenting his generosity or being in a bad temper, examined the boots, and said that the only thing the matter with them was that they were too good for such ungrateful boys. He thereupon ripped the leather off the boots again and sold it to the landlady for eightpence.

It must be confessed that Dan's stepfather was a strong man with a weakness: he had a great fondness for alcohol, and his chief excuse for flying to it was grief.

He seems to have been a man of catholic sympathies, for it is stated that a colliery explosion in South Wales, a wreck in the North Sea, or an eruption of Mount Vesuvius were just as likely to upset him and send him to the bottle for consolation as any personal bereavement. Failing all else, he has been known to plunge himself deeply into woe through reading the obituary notices in the daily papers, and refuse to be comforted except in his own peculiar manner.

On the envelope he is depicted by Dan as standing at a bar and bitterly lamenting the death of George Leybourne.

In two of the illustrations an ulster figures prominently.

It was the family ulster, and was worn by the member

of the company who needed it most at the time. It was a very accommodating garment, in that, like charity, it covered a multitude of sins; sins, be it said, that were chiefly those of omission. In both sketches Johnny Danvers is the temporary owner of the garment.

In the first is shown a meeting that, if second in historic importance to that of Wellington and Blucher, is much more amusing.

Dan had been fulfilling an engagement in Sheffield, and Johnny was anxious to be the first to greet his friend on his return to Manchester. It was a blazing hot summer's day; but it was a case of ulster or nothing; so Johnny bravely buttoned it up and went out in the sun.

Thus attired he met Dan, who had gone to the other extreme in the way of dress. A basin-shaped hat, with a very narrow brim, a coat shorter than most waistcoats, and abbreviated trousers that revealed his stockings, constituted Dan's costume.

"As we shook hands on the platform," he used to say, when telling the tale, "the engine shied and ran to Derby before they could stop it; all the boys chi-iked us as we walked home, and the policeman on point duty wanted to know if we were going to a fancy dress ball or coming back."

In the second sketch Dan and Johnny are "walking-out" two fair damsels of Coventry.

During an engagement there they made the acquaintance of these young ladies, and many a pleasant afternoon's ramble was the result.

In all weathers, rain or shine, cold or heat, Johnny, from necessity, turned up in the family ulster, and this at last struck one of the girls as being somewhat peculiar.

"Tell me," she said to Dan, "how is it that your friend Mr. Danvers always wears that ulster whenever he goes out with us?"

"Well," explained the loyal Dan, "it's this way. That ulster was given to him by his grandmother, and he's so fond of the old lady that he can't bear to wear anything else. Of course, it shows a very nice spirit; but it's a great pity, because he's got wardrobes full of beautiful clothes at home."

Whether the explanation was considered satisfactory or not, history does not relate.

The picture of the demon coming up the trap represents a might-have-been tragedy that ended in farce.

Dan, Johnnie, and the stepfather were working what is known as a "double-trap scene" in a Manchester music-hall.

Johnnie and the elder Leno, dressed as demons, popped in and out of a room, up star-traps, down grave-traps, leapt through windows, etc., etc.; while Dan, in the character of an Irishman, chased them round vigorously.

Unfortunately, the stepfather, who had been assuaging his grief in the usual way, miscalculated his distance, and, in going down a grave-trap, hit his head hard enough to cut it open.

Dan saw the accident he was unable to prevent, and

stood on the stage alone, wondering what was going to happen next.

There was a brief pause, and then up sprang Johnny through the star-trap with tears streaming down his cheeks.

"How's the dad?" whispered Dan, as he went for him with his shillelagh.

"He's killed," replied Johnny, and dived down the grave-trap.

Dan, quite overcome, and unable to remain on the stage another moment, dived after, and fell on the top of him.

Below they found Mr. Leno in a bad way, with blood streaming from the wound in his head; so without waiting to remove their make-up, or change their stage clothes, they got him into a cab and drove post-haste to the nearest doctor.

When the maid who answered the bell saw standing before her, illumined by the red glow of the surgery lamp, an Irishman and a demon supporting another demon with blood running down his face, she naturally shut the door again with great rapidity, and fled shrieking.

Alarmed by her outcries, the doctor himself put his head out of an upper window and surveyed the group with astonishment, as well he might.

Some little explanation was required before he could be convinced that his weird visitors were of this world; but, in the end, they were admitted, Mr. Leno's injuries (which turned out to be not so bad as they appeared)

were attended to, and the Irishman took his two demons back to the hall to work another "turn."

Dan Leno did not actually write much in the way of songs. His best-known effort was a parody on the famous "Queen of my Heart," that helped so much to make the comic opera *Dorothy* the great success it was.

The parody was entitled "I'll give him beans to-night," and was sung in the character of a vixenish wife who was sitting up late at night to warmly welcome her truant husband home. It had a great vogue for some time, but I believe Dan made little or nothing out of it pecuniarily.

But, if he was not the actual author of the songs he sang, he could lay considerable claim to the title of part author. He had the happy knack of taking another man's ideas and words: of preserving the former intact, while he twisted the latter round into his own quaint phraseology, and imbuing the whole with the Lenoesque spirit, until the original author was fain to confess that, although the ground plan was his, the building belonged to Dan Leno.

In considering Dan Leno as author and painter one must remember that, as a youth, he had no education in the higher sense. He had no time for that.

His young nose was put to the grindstone at a very early age, and kept there pretty constantly. Consequently his undoubted gifts in these directions were practically undeveloped.

His writing, if extravagant, is whimsical : his caricatures are broadly humorous. Some of the scenes he painted and several of his landscapes are very excellent.

What he might have attained in the literary and artistic world, had fortune favoured him in his youth, it is, of course, impossible to say ; but to have achieved so much under such adverse conditions is, to my mind, a veritable triumph.



## CHAPTER IV

### DAN LENO AS A DANCER AND A BRIDEGROOM

**I**N 1880 Dan was fortunate in meeting Miss Lydia Reynolds—who afterwards became Mrs. Leno—in Rochdale, where she joined the company as a ballad vocalist.

The next year or two records more travelling, more hard work ; but, alas, very little more money !

To use Dan's own words in describing his career about this period :—

“ We performed everywhere and did everything. I have performed, I suppose, in every singing-room and free-and-easy in Manchester and Liverpool. I appeared at Ben Lang's Music Hall the week after the great panic. I have sung in the Shakespeare Music Hall, in Manchester, on the site where the Central Station now stands.”

It may be parenthetically noted that this is the second time the Midland Railway Company wiped out, with a station, a building that held memories for Dan Leno, the first being, of course, his birthplace in St. Pancras.

“ I have sung and painted scenery for the Star Music Hall, in Ancoats. At the People's Concert Hall I spent

my twenty-first birthday, and was there presented with my first watch and chain. I have played in comedy and drama at the Old Rotunda, in Liverpool. I have even had engagements as a serious vocalist, but, of course, that was in the days before I became a genuine comic singer and mislaid my voice."

With regard to this last statement, he has endeavoured, more than once, to prove its truthfulness by telling the following story :—

"It happened in a north-country town, somewhere in the region of Yorkshire. There I had a friend who possessed a voice that was specially constructed for the purpose of singing such light and frolicsome items as 'The Diver,' 'Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep,' and so on. Naturally, he was in great request at all the mission-hall and temperance concerts for miles round.

"On a certain evening, when I happened to be in the town, he was engaged to sing at a concert in aid of a society called the 'The Guild of Gentleness.' Unfortunately he caught a cold ; his voice departed from him, and as he couldn't dance, and 'The Guild of Gentleness' wouldn't have let him do it if he could, he was, as an entertainer, absolutely useless.

"So he came to me and asked me, as a personal favour, if I would take his place. He said that he didn't care to ask any of his rivals in the neighbourhood because they all sang so badly ; but, strictly between ourselves, I fancy he came to me because all his rivals sang a great deal better than he did.

"The concert was to be held in the Congregational Chapel, and I declined the offer on the ground that I was a very particular Baptist.

"But he argued with me; he said that was sheer bigamy—or bigotry—I forget which. He told me that I had the pious expression of features that is generally associated with early Christian martyrs; that, on that account alone, I would be immensely popular, and that, for a mere shade of difference in creed, it would be unfair of me to deprive the Congregationalists of such a treat as my singing was sure to give them.

"I said I couldn't sing 'Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep,' because it always made me sea-sick, and 'The Diver' was quite out of the question, because the man went several miles too far down for me to follow him.

"In the end I weakened, and promised to sing 'The Lost Chord' if the pianist would play the accompaniment in the alto clef.

"Of course, I didn't know what the alto clef was, or whether the pianist really played it that way on the night; but my friend solemnly promised that he would, so I suppose he did.

"When the evening came and the chairman announced that Mr. Dan Leno had kindly consented to sing 'The Lost Chord,' there was subdued applause, and I walked on to the platform as firmly and cheerfully as most criminals walk on to the scaffold.

"To begin with, I had no make-up on, and I was not used to performing in an unadulterated face, and in the second place, I had a piece of music in my hands, which worried me a good deal.

"I kept my eyes glued to this music while the pianist played the symphony; not that I could read it, but because I had never in my life stood on a stage or platform for so long without doing something.

"Checking a wild desire to dance to the symphony,

I waited until I judged the pianist had finished, and then I began. They told me afterwards that I started off with 'Seated one day on an organ,' which is quite possible, and may have accounted for the curious behaviour of the members of 'The Guild of Gentleness.'

"Gaining confidence as I went on, I ventured to look at my audience, and very soon saw that something was wrong somewhere. The men were looking inside their hats; the women had handkerchiefs to their mouths, and they were all shaking violently. I wondered if they were ill.

"By the time I had got well into the second verse, I was quite myself, and I threw into the song all the voice I had, and as much expression as would have made the fortunes of twenty songs.

"At the end of that verse I looked at my audience again, and found, to my disgust, that they were laughing.

"Ignoring them, I sang my third and last verse directly at the reverend chairman. By the time I had finished he was rolling about helplessly in his seat, and, like everybody else in the room, shouting with laughter.

"Of course, I never knew that 'Guilds of Gentleness' went on like that, or I would never have gone near them.

"I don't know to this day what they saw in 'The Lost Chord' to laugh at, and I'm certain I shall never sing for such frivolous people again."

Although Dan had by this time reached man's estate, he had by no means lost his spirit of mischief. Indeed, he never did lose it to the end of his life; but the prank he and Danvers played with a Liverpool man's bonfire was more typical of the age of fifteen than of twenty.

Looking out of their sitting-room window on the afternoon of one fifth of November, the pair could command a good view of several backyards both up and down the street. They were much interested in watching the building of a bonfire by the man next door, and when he had saturated his shavings with oil, hung his Guy, stuffed with fireworks, on the line, and retired to his house, there to await the darkness necessary for his display, they gazed at the completed article thoughtfully and in silence. At last Dan said—

“Johnny, I’d give all the money I hope to possess to light that fire now.”

“It’s too far off,” replied Johnny.

“Is it?” returned Dan significantly; “you wait here till I come back.”

He disappeared, and in about ten minutes returned with a large Roman candle. This he lit, and then flung it with marvellous precision right in the middle of the shavings. Up shot the flames, down came the Guy, bang! went the fireworks, and out rushed the man swearing.

He never knew who played him the trick, nor how it was done; but he was greatly surprised next morning to receive a card, on which was printed in large capitals the following inscription:—

#### BIRTHS.

ON THURSDAY, 5TH NOVEMBER,  
AT — STREET, LIVERPOOL,  
MR. — OF A BONFIRE,  
PREMATURELY.

It was in 1880 that Dan Leno first achieved something more than a local reputation as a clog-dancer.

His first serious competition was at Wakefield, where, with many other aspirants to fame and fortune, he danced for a purse of silver and a leg of mutton, and carried off the double prize in triumph from all competitors.

This success naturally suggested still greater possibilities to the Leno family, and they looked about for fresh worlds to conquer.

As luck would have it, a certain Mr. Joe Wood, of the Princess's Music Hall, Leeds, announced at this very juncture that he would offer a gold and silver belt, weighing  $44\frac{1}{2}$  ounces, and of the value of £50, to be danced for, it being officially understood that the winner of the said belt had the right to call himself "The Champion Clog-dancer of the World." As is the case in all contests for championship honours, this particular competition was open to all-comers; but it was tacitly understood that the real reason for its initiation was to bring together two great dancers named Tom Ward and Tom Robson, between whom had existed a long-standing rivalry. The partisans of these two rivals were keen to prove that the man they favoured was the better man of the two, and all the knowing brigade, to a man, had backed either one or the other as the ultimate winner.

A comic singer, by name Frank Belton—who evidently knew something about dancing—urged Mr. Leno to

enter Dan as a competitor, and let him try his mettle against the aristocracy of the clog-dancing world.

As it was a case of everything to gain and nothing whatever to lose, Mr. Leno agreed, and so it came about that Dan the unknown found himself in the society of champions.

Through one heat after another Dan danced all-conquering, incidentally destroying great reputations, deserved or otherwise, as he made his own.

It was not long before the knowing ones began to recognise the presence of a "dark horse" in the race, and Dan's career was watched with great interest until he reached the final heat, in which he defeated his last rival and triumphantly claimed both belt and title.

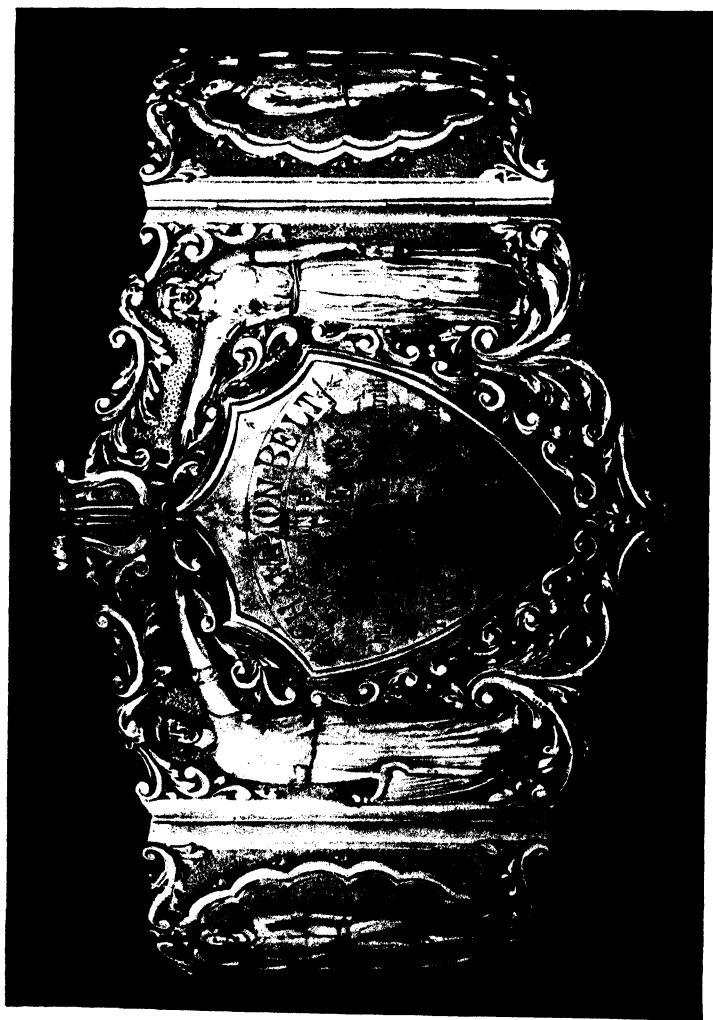
After this he was, of course, challenged to defend his rights on more than one occasion. The first three contests he won, and retained his prize; at the fourth contest the judges pronounced in favour of another dancer.

There appears to have been considerable dissatisfaction expressed in more than one quarter at this decision.

Dan himself made no fuss about it, beyond saying afterwards :—

"I disputed the judge's verdict at the time, but did not argue about it. I dispute it still, but have no desire to go into details now."

That a fuss *was* made on his behalf, however, and that there was considerable bad feeling shown in the matter, is proved by a bill of "Ohmy's Circus of Varieties, Accrington."







On this bill it is announced :—

“ Little Dan’s challenge for £400 a side remains unaccepted. This is open to the World. He will nightly expose the contest in which he was not allowed to win, after beating fifteen of the best dancers in the kingdom. The present holder of the Belt would not stand his chance and dance a second time, according to the conditions of the champion contest, but preferred to buy the Belt of Mr. Mellon for the sum of £10.

“ This fact will prove to the public who remains champion still ! ”

The new champion, before another contest could be arranged, managed to lose the belt altogether ; so another one was provided, and a fresh contest arranged to take place at the People’s Music Hall, Oldham.

Dan Leno entered, and being again adjudged the winner, handsomely recovered the laurels he had temporarily lost. This belt he kept possession of to the end of his career ; nor, indeed, was his claim to be considered the champion clog-dancer of the world ever seriously questioned again.

The inscription on the belt reads as follows :—

CHAMPION BELT  
WON BY  
DAN LENO  
CHAMPION CLOG-DANCER OF THE WORLD  
AT THE  
PEOPLE’S MUSIC HALL, OLDHAM  
AFTER SIX NIGHTS’ CONTEST  
MAY 14TH TO 19TH, 1883

As a dancer Dan Leno was an enthusiast. Like the poet, he was born, not made.

It is strange to hear that no less a personage than Charles Dickens should have recognised his youthful talent, and prophesied future greatness for him; yet this is a fact.

They met in Belfast, where Dickens was lecturing, and Leno dancing—not, it is to be supposed, under the same management; still, although it is not recorded that Leno heard Dickens lecture, it is certain that Dickens saw Leno dance, and, patting him on the head approvingly after the performance, said, "Good, little man; you'll make headway." Of himself Dan used to say: "I can put more beats into sixteen bars of music than a drummer can with his drumsticks," and, when one watched him doing his best, one was not at all inclined to back the drummer.

To the uninitiated it was somewhat confusing when he spoke eloquently, if technically, of the rolling, the kicking, the taps, the twizzles, and the shuffles; of which, he used to explain, the art of clog-dancing consists. Still, the ignorant man, with whom Dan thus conversed, had one great advantage over the learned one, in that, for his better understanding, and to make his own meaning perfectly clear, Dan was compelled to explain with his feet quite as much as with his tongue. A reasonably dense man could always, on this subject, keep Dan dancing for hours.

He was a firm believer in the "extempore dance." He used to say—

"I can only dance when I am in perfect health, for you want all your faculties awake to invent as you go on."

Even in his younger days he asserted that the genuine "extempore dancers" were lamentably few and far between, and, as it is to be supposed they are to-day still fewer in number, "extempore dancing" is in danger of being relegated to the lost arts.

He often cited, as two shining examples, W. J. Ashcroft and Lottie Collins.

"The former," he said, "is a genuine dancer. When I visit him at his saloon in Belfast, we spend all our time showing each other original steps. He'll think of some new movement, and then I think of one, and so we go on dancing against each other till people who see us must think we are mad."

Of Lottie Collins he maintained—"She dances from inspiration and genius; not by imitation or out of a book."

His description of the result of a meeting with such a fellow-enthusiast as W. J. Ashcroft I can well believe; because, long after he gave up clog-dancing and became the great comedian, it was his great joy, during the intervals of Drury Lane rehearsal, to retire into some remote corner, with such of "the boys" as were anxious to learn or willing to watch, and there practise old steps and invent new ones by the hour together.

American dancing did not appeal to him at all.

"Don't talk to me about your cake-walks," he would say, "they're intended for men like Herbert Campbell. I'll guarantee to teach him one in two lessons."

He very nearly succeeded in proving the correctness of this statement in *Humpty Dumpty*, which,

unfortunately, turned out to be the last pantomime for them both.

One day Dan turned up at rehearsal full of a great idea.

He (the Queen) being greatly concerned because Herbert (the King) had been putting on so much weight lately, had decided His Majesty must go in for more exercise.

The Queen went on to explain that the recognised cure for royal obesity was dancing; so she would sing to her royal consort a little coon ditty entitled "In the Cane Brakes" (which was a burlesque on one of the numbers in the negro show *In Dahomey* then running), and would follow this up with a coon dance.

"I see," said Herbert. "Good! I sit and watch you."

"Not exactly," replied Dan. "You sit and listen while I sing the song; but when I dance you get up and follow me round, and imitate me in everything I do."

"Oh! *Do I?*" commented Herbert, in some dismay, and seeing distinct impossibilities.

However, Herbert was far too good a sportsman to stand in anybody's way, so merely remarking (as he often did), "If Dan takes to an idea, you can bet he's going to be funny in it," he loyally prepared to do his best.

At the first rehearsal of this great speciality that we were permitted to see Dan arranged all about the stage a number of plants in pots, explaining that this was done in order to give a realistic representation of "the cane brakes" in question.

The song followed in due course, and we all waited eagerly for the dance.

When the music struck up, away went Dan, skipping in and out the rows of plant pots, and after him went Herbert, manfully endeavouring to give a colourable imitation of the same.

As the dance went on, and Dan got really interested in it, there is no doubt that he put in certain steps which were not in the contract as originally arranged between the two, because Herbert could be plainly heard expostulating as loudly as his exertions permitted him to do—

“Go easy, Dan! Go easy!”

“I can’t do that kind of thing, you know.”

“Let’s have one or two of the simple ones.”

“I shall have to chuck it if you’re going on like that.”

“What do you take me for? An acrobat?” etc.

But Dan would not be restrained, and it was a very exhausted King who hopped off the stage after his nimble Queen.

The next day Dan announced that he had made up his mind to “cut the whole thing out”; so the public were never privileged to see the performance.

Whether it was merely one of his little jokes, and he never had intended to do it, or whether he “cut it” out of mercy to his old friend, nobody knows to this day.

The winning of the championship belt was Dan’s first experience of greatness, and if it did not bring him in a great deal of money at first, it brought him the fame that resulted in the large salary later on.

My own first recollection of him was about this time.

I fancy I see him now, a slim youth, standing on the stage of a Manchester music-hall, wearing his championship belt in demure silence, while a gentleman, purporting to be his trainer, but who was, I suppose, really his stepfather, recited his deeds in a speech of some length. Then the belt was removed ; the trainer retired, and Dan danced. He danced on the stage ; he danced on a pedestal ; he danced on a slab of slate ; he was encored over and over again ; but throughout his performance he never uttered a word.

It was the style of entertainment he gave in those days that has induced so many to believe that he had never posed as a comedian until he gave up clog-dancing.

It seems odd to think that it was considered necessary for a trainer to make a speech to introduce a Dan Leno, who, even then, must have been very well able to introduce himself to any audience ; but high-class clog-dancing ranked then in the north of England as an athletic dumb-show performance, and a trainer was a *sine qua non*.

The professional trainer was a great man. He was generally a bookmaker or a publican, and for ever on the look out for budding talent in any branch of athletics, but more particularly in the pedestrian line.

Having spotted some speedy youth in a country district, he would, after making his bargain with the boy's parents or other guardians, secure his services for a term of years, take him home, and proceed to deal

with him on the same principle as one deals with a greyhound entered to run in the Waterloo Cup.

Under this regime the youths in question naturally developed more muscle than brain, and Dan Leno, who, in his travels up north, met a good many specimens of the class, had many good stories to tell about them. One, in particular, may be quoted here as showing that the old-fashioned triumph was the triumph of matter over mind.

A competitor in a race just about to be run was waiting in his dressing-room for the pedestrian's equivalent to the saddling-bell. His trainer was busily engaged in looking him well over, to be quite certain that he was going to the post fit and well, and the lad was submitting as unquestioningly as a well-trained horse in the hands of his groom.

As a final and artistic touch, the trainer took a large pin, and with this affixed his colours to his pupil's cap; then, stepping back a pace or two, viewed the general effect.

"We're ready now, I think," said he. "How do you feel about it, my lad? Are you all right?"

To which the lad replied stolidly, and without moving a muscle—

"Ay! I think I'm all right! The pin's stuck in my head an inch deep. Should it be?"

Truly, there were Spartans in those days.

It was during the clog-dancing period of his life that Dan Leno had the temerity to raise his first and



only moustache. It was not a great affair, but he treasured it exceedingly, because he was seriously thinking of getting married, and he had no doubt that it helped him greatly to find favour in the eyes of the lady he had chosen.

His friends, however, did not approve of the moustache at all, and there is a dark story of a visit to a shaving saloon and a secretly-suborned barber.

The true facts of the matter have never been openly stated, but, so far as can be gathered, Dan sat down to be shaved in all faith and innocence, only to jump up a few moments later to demand wrathfully "what the dickens the barber was doing."

The barber was very apologetic. It was quite a misunderstanding. He really had been under the firm impression that the gentleman wanted his moustache removed. It was a pity, because, although he had only shaved half of it off before the mistake was discovered, he regretted he was unable to put it on again.

When Dan pointed out that the result of his mistake was to give his (Dan's) face a peculiarly lop-sided appearance, the barber admitted the fact with sorrow. There was only one course he could conscientiously recommend him to take, and that was to have the other half-moustache removed, and thus preserve the uniformity of his features.

So Dan resumed his seat, had the remainder of his moustache shaved, and never grew another.

Although the public demand for comedy gave Dan Leno, in later years, very little opportunity for clog-



HIS FIRST AND ONLY MOUSTACHE



dancing, he never lost his love for the art, and when Mr. Arthur Collins, in 1901, suggested to him that he might bring his clogs out of their long retirement, and, as Sister Anne, dance a measure in the Drury Lane pantomime of *Bluebeard*, he jumped at the idea, and performed with all his old skill. This and a subsequent engagement at the Pavilion Music Hall were, I believe, almost if not quite his last public appearances in the clogs that first brought him fame.

In 1883 he married Miss Lydia Reynolds in St. George's Church, Hulme, Manchester. It was not an imposing ceremony. The happy pair, accompanied by a couple of friends, repaired to the church on foot, the general impression of the event that was left on Dan's memory being, as he afterwards described it, "four little people sneaking into a big church through a back door."

His mother was unable to be present, because she was busy at home preparing the wedding breakfast. This feast consisted—again to quote—of "cold meat and potatoes, topped off with a wedding cake made of bread pudding."

Humble fare, no doubt, but it was partaken of by as merry and contented a wedding party as ever graced a lordly banquet.

At some of the smaller halls in the north visited by Dan Leno in his dancing days, it must be admitted that the orchestra was not a great aid to success.

The members of these organisations were, for the most part, operatives by day and musicians by night ;

while the conductor justified his position by playing the violin during the easy passages and wildly waving his fiddle-stick as a bâton whenever the music became in the least degree intricate.

Dan, whose music had been hitherto of the simplest, was one day presented by his stepfather with a selection of operatic airs, compiled and arranged by himself with a due regard to the measure of the clog dance, and all culled from the most high-toned and thoroughly classical composers.

Armed with the band parts of this unusually superior "musical mélange," Dan arrived at rehearsal one Monday morning at a small music-hall in a manufacturing town in Lancashire.

"Good morning, Mr. Leno!" he was greeted by the conductor when his turn came. "I don't think we'll need to worry about your music. All th' lads know it very well by now."

"Yes!" replied Dan, handing his band parts over the footlights with becoming pride. "But this isn't the old stuff; this is something new."

The conductor inspected the music, and his jaw dropped visibly. "By gum!" he commented, "this is a bit of something extra."

"Rather," agreed Dan. "There's some high-toned music among that."

"There's lumps of it," remarked the conductor after another inspection, "and, if I'm not mistaken," he added prophetically, "there's going to be a bit of trouble over this job."

"Oh, it's easy enough!" returned Dan encouragingly, and not knowing the least bit about it.

"Ay!" said the conductor gloomily, "'cept for them as has to play it. Stand by, my lads"—turning to his band—"I'm sending you something tricky down now."

When the parts were distributed among the men, it was impossible to ignore the fact that an atmosphere of distinct depression was formed, and gradually spread as the unfortunate musicians began to realise the fulness of what was expected from them.

Heads were sadly shaken, and despairing whispers were freely exchanged; but the conductor judiciously ignored these ominous symptoms, and exclaiming with forced cheerfulness, "Come, my lads! Let's get at it. We've gotten to see it through now. Choose how. Art ready? One! Two! Three! Now!" boldly led the way on his violin into the first bar.

The others, observing the politeness which is always the due of a conductor who condescends to perform, respectfully followed him at varying intervals, and with more or less confidence.

Result. A wild whirlwind of sound, during which Dan stood petrified, and wondering what to do. At last, it happily ceased.

"Do I dance to that?" he mildly inquired.

The conductor scratched his head. "That's your look out," he said. "But if you'll take a fool's advice, you'll leave this stuff alone and go back to th' good old la-tum-tiddle."

But Dan was obstinate on this point. He had got

some really good music to dance to at last, and "the good old la-tum-tiddle" was to be forgotten and a thing of the past.

"Very good," said the conductor resignedly, "off we go again, lads!" And off they went.

"That's worse than th' first offence!" he criticised, as they once more paused for breath. "What the blazes are you blowing at down there?" he shouted, fastening on a stout cornet player as being a suitable excuse for wrath.

"I'm blowing at this," responded the cornet, as, perspiring and indignant, he handed up his part for the conductor's inspection.

"I thowt there were summot wrong," remarked that worthy, "tha's got th' second fiddle copy."

The second fiddle, who up to this point had, with rare judgment, played nothing whatever, thereupon disgorging the cornet part, and receiving his own in exchange, a fresh attack was made on the operatic airs.

The music, however, proved itself to be made of stern stuff, and it successfully resisted a series of determined assaults, until the conductor was fain to admit, if not absolute defeat, at least a severe repulse.

"Look here, Mr. Leno," he remarked, in the intervals of mopping his brow, "we can't keep th' rehearsal waiting all day while me and my chaps is trying to find out what your new music is about. Let's pass on; I'll keep th' lads for a couple of hours after you've all gone, and you can tak' my word for't as we shall get through it same as a band o' two-year-olds to-night."

To this, Dan, if he meant to have his music played at all, was obliged to agree, and he left the hall wondering a great deal, and hoping a very, very little.

When he appeared on the stage at night, shod with his dancing clogs and ready to do his "turn," the band played a preliminary chord that sounded magnificent to the uninitiated, but struck apprehension to the soul of Dan. He knew that chord well; it was the same old chord wherewith they had greeted his entrance from time immemorial, and was neither an introduction nor bore any relation to his newly acquired operatic airs.

As the chord died away, and Dan waited the sequel with expectant feet, there ensued a dead silence, which the conductor broke by rising in his place, and addressing Dan in loud tones and full hearing of the audience—

"It's no use, Mr. Leno," he said, "the lads couldn't tackle your job under a matter of three weeks; so unless tha' can be content with th' old la-tum-tiddle, tha' must dance wi'out ony music."

So Dan, being helpless, perforce consented to a revival of "la-tum-tiddle," and the band peacefully settled down to its old form.



## CHAPTER V

### DAN LENO HEADS THE BILLS

**A**LTHOUGH he had not yet succeeded in capturing the metropolis, Dan Leno was now fast becoming a celebrity in the provinces, and enjoyed the distinction of heading the bills at most of the halls he visited. He and his wife still continued to tour with the company ; but as Dan was able to command good money, and Mrs. Leno drew a separate salary as a ballad vocalist, they were now in comparative affluence, and Dan was steadily walking along the high road to fortune, on which, from that time, he never turned back.

Some of the theatres and music-halls in the north that they visited during this tour were, however, still in a very embryonic condition as compared with the palaces of pleasure the northern towns possess to-day. The proprietors of the same were more often than not of the very eccentric variety, and many of the performances witnessed there of a decidedly elementary type.

A very well-known proprietor, in those days, was a gentleman known as "The Signor," who owned a flourishing music-hall in the centre of a colliery



A TYPICAL LENO LADY



district. Why he was called "The Signor" is a mystery, because he made no pretensions to be an Italian, and could not possibly have passed himself off for one if he had desired to do so.

Many were the authentic anecdotes that Dan Leno used to tell of this worthy.

As an additional inducement to patronise his entertainment, "The Signor" used to distribute soup "free gratis" among his audience during the evening, a practice which, however keenly his patrons may have appreciated it, was a distinct slur on the attractive powers of the artistes he engaged to fill his programme.

Also he had a son, whom Dan, having had frequent opportunities of judging, boldly characterised as "the absolute worst ventriloquist on earth." This son, failing engagements at other halls, made up for the deficiency by appearing very frequently indeed at his father's place of entertainment.

"The Signor," being a fond father, to the limit of foolishness, encouraged him to such an extent that his audiences rebelled, and, despite the attractions of free soup, stayed away in large numbers whenever the name of the so-called ventriloquist appeared on the bills.

Thereupon the wily Signor bethought him of another plan. His son's name appeared no more; but, by a remarkable coincidence, some artiste, whose name *did* appear, invariably failed to turn up according to contract.

"The Signor's" method, under these distressing circum-

stances, was always the same. He appeared before his audience, and, making his best bow, explained :—

“Ladies and gentlemen,—I regret to inform you that, owing to unforeseen circumstances, Mr. Blank, whose name is next on the bill, is unfortunately unable to appear this evening. In order, however, to keep faith with my patrons, and being desirous not to shorten the programme in any way, I have succeeded in persuading my son, who is at present resting, to give his marvellous ventriloquial entertainment.”

It was some little time before “The Signor’s” patrons realised the fulness of the idea ; or, if they did realise it, they were slow to resent it. But an audience, like a worm, will turn at last under severe pressure, and, after a month’s suffering, “The Signor,” when he stepped forth to make his now well-known announcement, had only got as far as : “Ladies and gentlemen,—I regret to inform you——” when he was interrupted by howls from the gallery and cries of—

“No! No ventriloquist!”

“Put your son to bed!”

“Send him to school till he learns how to do it!”

And other more or less practical suggestions of a similar nature.

Drawing himself up in an attitude of stern defiance, “The Signor” glared fiercely at his noisy gallery.

“Silence up there!” he commanded. “Silence! or——” here he paused and pointed dramatically at the attendants, who were preparing to go forth, bearing

with them the steaming bowl. "Silence! or I'll stop your soup!"

And silence reigned, broken only by the clatter of soup plates and the feeble voice of a very bad ventriloquist, to whom nobody listened for a moment.

It was at "The Signor's" benefit that Dan Leno played in his first and last melodrama.

He has himself admitted that, with every intention to help the show along, he actually hindered it.

His first appearance was under the table of a sitting-room situate in an Italian village inn, where, concealed by the long folds of the tablecloth, he was supposed to overhear the vile plot, hatched by the wicked brigands, as they sat smoking and drinking.

His instructions were that at a certain cue he must raise the cloth slightly on the side nearest to the audience and cautiously peep out. This was, of course, necessary in order that the audience might know he was there, and thus follow the after proceedings intelligently, and Dan faithfully carried out his instructions.

When the plot was at its very thickest, and the audience were sitting breathless and spellbound at its wicked intricacies, Dan lifted his tablecloth and peeped at them.

Heaven knows what that audience saw in the face that dawned on them so abruptly. Probably, in his desire to be sufficiently intense to fit the situation, he gave them a prophetic vision of the Dan Leno of the near future.

Anyway, there was no more plot in that scene. The whole house shrieked with uncontrollable laughter, and refused to be quiet, or to listen to another spoken word, while Dan sat still under the table and wondered what on earth had happened.

For the remainder of the play his services were used with distinct caution.

At his next appearance, all that was seen of him was the point of his bayonet, while he marched, as a sentry, up and down on the other side of a prison wall. Inside, and in full view of the audience, was the prisoner, busily sawing through the bars of his cage with a file. When he had accomplished his object, and, in the very moment of escape, it was Dan's duty to rush on and shoot him. The prisoner was then to fall back into his cell, and die in the centre of the stage, entirely surrounded by limelight, while Dan knelt by his side, and exclaimed, in accents of horror, "Merciful heavens! I have shot my own brother!" (Curtain!!!)

I say this is what *ought* to have happened; what really *did* happen was otherwise.

It wasn't really Dan's fault at all; it was the gun that wouldn't go off.

With exemplary perseverance, Dan had some half-dozen ineffectual pot shots at his victim, thus affording him an opportunity, not only to escape, but to put several parishes between himself and his judicial murderer.

The prisoner, however, had no intention of tamely escaping. He had a good death scene before him, and

he was too old a melodramatic hand to wilfully waste a centre stage *solus*, and a quantity of valuable lime-light; so, after giving Dan every reasonable opportunity to shoot him, he staggered down the stage to his appointed place and there died of some unknown and mysterious disease, but apparently in great agony.

Dan followed him there, but not being in his confidence as to cause of death, and recognising, under the existing conditions, the utter futility of his original speech as written, he knelt by the lifeless body, and exclaimed in a voice of deepest woe, "Merciful heavens! he has swallowed the file!"

And the audience signified their approval of the same in the customary manner.

These same audiences were rather tough nuts to crack sometimes. What they liked, they liked loudly; but what they disliked, they disliked in an even more vociferous manner.

Dan Leno was always, as one would naturally expect, in the highest favour with them; but some of the weaker members, who fell by the way, could, alas, tell a very different tale!

It was at the hall owned by "The Signor" that an unfortunate serio-comic lady met her fate; whether deserved or otherwise, is not recorded.

It is certain that she was not at all to the taste of the audience, and they told her so with no uncertain voice. The poor girl, whatever her abilities may have been, stuck to her work pluckily, and was singing and dancing, a smile on her lips, tears of mortification in her



eyes, doing her level best to win the audience over to her side, when, in the height of the uproar, "The Signor" appeared on the stage, and the music stopped abruptly as he held up his hand to command silence.

Leading the unfortunate serio-comic by the hand down to the footlights, he began—

"Ladies and gentlemen,—I am ashamed of you! Here is a lovely lady from London who has come among you to interest and amuse you, and you are so cruel as to treat her thus.

"Have you considered, ladies and gentlemen, that this lady is honestly endeavouring to earn her daily bread, and, when you deliberately endeavour to prevent people from earning their daily bread, you——"

At this point of his speech a half-loaf of bread, flung by some patron in the gallery, hit him on the head and fell at his feet.

Too proud to confess the remote possibility of anybody daring to inflict such an outrage upon *him*, he calmly continued—

"Yes! and, adding injury to insult, you even dare to throw bread at her—to throw bread at a poor girl who is doing her best to amuse you. Well, gentlemen, throw bread at her if you like! Thank God, she is not too proud to eat it."

And picking up the half-loaf, he thrust it into the fair serio's disengaged hand, and led her off the stage with the air of a man who had won a diplomatic victory.

On the different play-bills of this period Dan Leno is variously described; but always in the highest terms of

adulatory advertisement, which shows that the managers appreciated him at his proper value.

For instance, at the Britannia Music Hall in Glasgow his advent is thus announced :—

“First appearance in Scotland of the Conquering Hero,  
Mr. Dan Leno!

Champion Clog Dancer of the World.  
He will nightly appear in his Champion Clog Dance.”

A week later he is still there, and on the bills it is stated—

“The audience nightly in rapture at the inimitable  
dancing of Dan Leno,  
Champion Dancer of the World,  
In his Matchless Prize Hornpipe. Every Evening.”

And the week following, although the then redoubtable Irish comedian, Mr. W. J. Ashcroft, was appearing at the same time in the same hall, Dan Leno still held his own, for the advertisements record—

“Re-engagement for one week longer, by universal  
request, of Dan Leno,  
Champion Dancer of the World.”

It is noteworthy that on the same bill he modestly appears in conjunction with his mother and stepfather as—

“The Comic Trio (Mr. and Mrs. Leno and Dan Patrick)  
In their really Funny Entertainments, Songs,  
Dances.”

It is to be supposed that, for his second turn, he assumed the character of “Pongo,” or some equally

efficient disguise, for the purpose of deluding the audience into the idea that Dan Patrick and Dan Leno were two separate and distinct performers.

A most interesting bill is that which announces a "most gorgeous spectacular entertainment" at the Princess Palace in Leeds.

The piece was entitled *The Wicklow Wedding; or, The Leprachaun's Revels*.

The author was Mr. William Leno, who also contributed an original song and played a part in his own work.

The scenery was painted by Dan Leno from sketches taken by him on the spot during his last Irish tour. In addition to his artistic share in the production, Dan headed the list of star artistes employed, and with Mr. Joe Alberto, took part in what is described as a *Terrific Phantom Fight*.

Also further down the bill we read—

"Tremendous success of Mr. Dan Leno,  
the World's Champion Dancer."

We may well suppose that he contributed, in one way and another, a good deal towards the success of the entertainment.

Of this production Johnny Danvers writes me:—

"Mrs. Leno made most of the dresses, Dan and I painted the scenery, and the old man and I wrote the book. The whole thing was put on the stage within a fortnight. We painted scenery most of the day, wrote the book most of the night; while Dan, in the intervals of painting, found time to help his mother in the making of the dresses—such as spangling tights, etc., etc."

As an example of what people like the Lenos were expected to do for their money in those days, I may quote from a couple of bills announcing their benefits.

The first took place at the Star Music Hall, Ancoats, Manchester, and the event is "The Benefit of the Leno Comic Quartette."

It may be noted that on this, as on several other occasions, Johnny Danvers was posing, for the nonce, as Mr. H. Leno.

In addition to the performance of *The Wicklow Wedding* by the full strength of the company, Mr. Dan Patrick Leno danced his championship steps, also—

"Five Grand Prizes given as follows:—

Purse of Silver for the finest Baby under twelve months old.

Each child to be weighed on the stage, and the Mother to appear with the child on the stage at

The Baby Show.

A Purse of Silver

For the best Amateur American Song and Dance.

Purse of Silver

To the best Amateur Comic Singer.

A Purse of Silver

For the best Amateur Clog Dancer.

A Handsome Mounted Collar

Will be given as a prize for the largest and most handsome cat.

And to add to the gaiety of the night,

A Purse of Silver

To the exhibitor of

The Best Performing Elephant!"

One wonders at the marvellous and seemingly im-

possible combination of babies, cats, and elephants, and speculates in vain as to the precise amount that each purse of silver contained.

The second bill emanates from "The Grand Varieties, Sheffield," and advertises the

"Benefit of Dan Leno."

It goes on to promise—

"Mr. D. Leno intends to spare no expense to make this the most pleasant and enjoyable entertainment ever witnessed in Sheffield.

"Look at the following Eight Grand Contests and Double Company!

Now come Leno's seasonable gifts:

200 Half-ounces of Tobacco

To the first 200 entering the Pit and Side-seats.

Every half-ounce genuine.

Now come the contests:

Ten shillings for the best Clog Dancer.

Dan Leno, judge.

Each dancer to dance six steps,

And shuffle in good clogs.

No person that has gained his living by dancing  
will be allowed to enter.

Ten Shillings to the Lady and Gentleman that can  
waltz six times round the stage the neatest.

Half a crown each

Will be given for the longest standing jump,

For the best singer of two verses of a

Comic Song,

For the best High-Kicker,

For a Sack Race,

For a Boot-Finding Contest,

For the person that can stand on the side of a barrel  
and sing a verse of a song."

All this, be it noted, in addition to a laughable burlesque, entitled—

"*Doctor Cut 'Em Up*, in which Dan Leno will play his original part of 'Dirty Billy.'

"And the 'Full Star Company,' in their latest London sensation, entitled *The Collier Boy*."

As clog-dancing competitions were, in the north, very popular, Dan's position as champion rendered him liable to be frequently called upon to act as judge whenever he happened to be in a town where such a competition was taking place.

Now, to judge one of these affairs competently and fearlessly required as much technical knowledge and pluck as to judge a brass band contest or to referee in a football match. Dan had all the knowledge and the pluck; but he more than once found himself in a tight corner, where, he confessed, he couldn't help wishing that Providence had made him several sizes larger; one notable occasion of the kind being in Gateshead, where they build men on large lines.

Business being bad, the proprietor of the hall suggested, in order to wake up things a little, that a clog contest should be held, with Dan Leno as judge.

To this Dan agreed, and the next Thursday night was fixed for the event. A goodly number of locals entered, and the proprietor, knowing that each competitor had a certain following who would pay to see their favourite dance, anticipated a good week's business after all.

The night arrived; the contestants turned up with

their thick-and-thin supporters, and the former got to work as they were called upon, while Dan stood by, conscientiously checking off their "tip-tap and time."

He soon realised, however, that he had undertaken a very difficult task. As he decided each heat, he was certainly greeted with storms of cheers by the friends of the victor ; but, as against this, there were loud demands for his blood from the partisans of the defeated candidate.

Moreover, as, by a natural course of selection, the defeated grew more numerous than the victors, so, in proportion, did the execrations overpower the plaudits until the situation became rather alarming.

The proprietor, ensconced behind the wings, and safe from any possible projectiles, earnestly adjured Dan not to eliminate so rapidly, but to announce as many dead heats as he conscientiously could. As these dead heats were, it may be noted, to be danced off on the following night, at the same place, and at the same prices of admission, it is possible that the proprietor had other motives for his advice in addition to the philanthropic preservation of Dan's skin.

Anyway, Dan did as he was told, and retired from the stage amid mingled howls and cheers. The proprietor, forced into generosity by the prospect of another good "house," sent his judge home in a cab from a surreptitious exit, and thus eluded, on his behalf, the attentions of a few Gateshead gentlemen who were waiting at the stage door to demonstrate to him what the duties of an efficient judge really were.

On the following night the proceedings opened more quietly and reasonably. It seems that among the competitors was one Patsey Gallagher, a gentleman of such great personal popularity that he had managed to fill the gallery with a faction numerous enough to account for all the other factions together, and this helped Dan considerably in his work.

Patsey being a good enough dancer to retain his place in the competition to the bitter end, the judge conscientiously weeded out the weaker members, with the comfortable knowledge that whoever dared to object would be instantly and completely squashed by the Gallagher gang. So matters proceeded smoothly enough, until only two competitors survived—Patsey Gallagher and a callow youth, whose supporters were either few in number, or else subdued into judicious silence by the presence of the opposition crowd.

The final heat began amidst fearful excitement. First of all, Patsey Gallagher danced, with easy and assured confidence, being greeted at the end by cheers loud enough and sufficiently prolonged to bias the judgment of any man of Dan Leno's inches.

Then the boy danced, and Dan Leno's heart fell within him; because, as a matter of fact, the boy danced the better of the two.

As he paused, and gazed doubtfully at the eager faces in the gallery, the owners of which were all anxiously awaiting his momentous decision, he heard the excited whisper of the proprietor, who was, as usual, safely hidden away from bodily harm—



"Don't decide to-night! Give it a dead heat, and let's have another good house to-morrow."

So Dan weakened (who can blame him?) and announced a dead heat.

That night he again went home in a cab; but, on this occasion, the supporters of Patsey Gallagher, rashly secure in to-morrow's decision, escorted the vehicle, and kept him secure from the evil machinations of all defeated competitors.

On the Saturday excitement was at fever height, and the hall was packed when Dan (on whom the proceedings were beginning to pall) walked on the stage to witness and adjudicate upon the final stage of the contest.

It happened exactly as before. Dan Leno had not been mistaken. Patsey Gallagher danced well, but the boy danced better; so Dan, being an upright judge, if a small one, briefly announced, "The boy has won!" and fled to his dressing-room. Then the storm broke.

The Gallagher party, after demolishing most of the gallery woodwork with marvellous rapidity, looked round for "the boy" and his supporters. "The boy" had judiciously vanished, and his supporters were not loudly advertising the fact that they *were* his supporters.

Their next demand was for the proprietor, but that worthy had, with equally sound judgment, retired to his home, bearing with him the proceeds; so a deputation of a dozen went round to the stage door to interview the unfortunate judge.

The stage doorkeeper loyally barred the way, and stated that Mr. Dan Leno could not possibly receive visitors, because he was, at that moment, engaged in changing his clothes; but the functionary in question, being only a matter of 5 feet 11 inches in height, and a trifle over 13 stone in weight, was of no account whatever, and quickly removed.

Thus it was that little Dan Leno, putting on his boots in his dressing-room, and wondering if an armoured train would be provided to take him home that night, found himself surrounded by nearly eighty-four feet of Gateshead humanity.

They wanted to know a good many things. They inquired if he pretended to know anything whatever about the art of clog-dancing.

They wanted to know what he meant by it.

They wanted to know if he had been squared by the other side. They informed him that it was the invariable custom, from time immemorial, for Patsey Gallagher to win all clog-dancing competitions in Gateshead, and they wanted to know what he meant by stepping in and interfering with ancient privileges.

Finally, they asked him—and they asked him this in one loud unanimous chorus—

“Did he want a jolly good hiding?”

“Well,” replied Dan, “I’m only a small man, and, if I’m going to have any choice, I think I’d rather argue about it.”

“There’s no’ enough of him to hit,” growled one of the giants disgustedly.

"Exactly!" agreed Dan. "Now, look here! You all keep pigeons, don't you?"

Naturally they all assented; because a Tyneside pigeon that didn't own a collier for its master was a very rare bird.

"Very good," he continued. "Then suppose you back your bird for five pounds to fly against another man's bird, and your bird alights two ticks before the other man's, you win your money."

This proposition was carried unanimously.

"Very well," said Dan, "that was just how it happened with Patsey—he danced magnificently, but he came in just two ticks after the boy."

It was probably the personality of Dan more than his argument that helped him; but their ferocity abated wonderfully, so, pursuing his advantage, he went on:—

"Come with me, and I'll show you."

Putting on his clogs, he led the way to the deserted stage, and there demonstrated, in a practical manner, exactly what he meant.

Dancing vigorously all the time he was talking, he showed them where Patsey had failed and where the boy had succeeded; he reproduced the steps that each of the pair had danced, and then treated his audience to a few steps such as neither Patsey nor the boy had ever dreamt of attaining. In a word, he danced away their wrath; he danced himself into their good graces, and finally parted with them loudly maintaining that "a chap who could dance like he could had a right to any opinion on the subject he liked to give, and that they

would punch the head of any man (including Patsey Gallagher) who ventured to say he was wrong."

Dan was to have received an addition of three pounds to his salary for this historic judgment, and little enough, too, when one considers that he ran the serious risk of early martyrdom.

Sad to relate, he never got that additional three pounds.

On treasury night, at the end of his fortnight's engagement, the proprietor appeared in the large dressing-room, where most of the male members were assembled, and briefly announced, "Business has been rotten."

As nobody responded to this uncalled-for statement, he put the leading question, "Which of you boys can go three pounds short this week?"

There was a dead silence for a moment, and then they all with one accord began to make excuse.

One said he would have been only too delighted to oblige the management, but the fact was he had been out of an engagement for the past three weeks and simply couldn't afford to do it.

Another, with deep regret, stated that he must positively have his full salary that week, as he opened at Edinburgh next, and the railway fare was a very heavy one.

A third was going to Dublin, a fourth to Plymouth; in fact, there never were such a number of expensive journeys as had to be taken on that particular occasion.

The proprietor turned to Dan. "I know you only go as far as Sunderland," he remarked pointedly.

"Yes, I suppose it's me for it," returned Dan submissively.

"Thank you, my boy," said the proprietor gratefully, "you shall have the money by post next week without fail."

The debt was never paid. Not that the debtor ever forgot it, or even pretended to forget it, because for years afterwards whenever he met Dan he used to greet him cheerfully with the remark, "It's all right, dear old boy! I haven't forgotten that little matter of the three pounds."

When Dan Leno went to London permanently he lost sight of this gentleman for some years; but one day, suddenly spying him sitting at lunch with a few friends in a high-class restaurant, he determined to try and collect the money.

Going straight to him, Dan remarked, without any preamble, "It's all right, dear old boy! I haven't forgotten that little matter of the three pounds."

For a moment he was taken by surprise; but, recovering himself instantly, he replied, quite unabashed, "Neither have I, Dan! Neither have I!"—and went on with his lunch.

It was in 1885 that Dan Leno secured his first engagement in London as a comedian. Success was rapidly coming his way, and he doubtless felt that he was too important a factor to be submerged in a troupe any longer.

So, with his wife, he went up to town, and the old folks practically retired from the stage.

It is typical of him that directly he began to draw a salary out of which it was at all possible for him to save anything he spared a sufficient pension for his stepfather and mother, and, taking a house for them in the suburbs of Manchester, kept them in comfort from then to the end of their days.

It is also typical of his stepfather that when Dan, in the height of his fame, paid them periodical visits, the old man would insist on personally conducting him round all his haunts and proudly exhibiting him to his admiring cronies.

"There he stands," he would exclaim oratorically. "There he stands! Dan Leno! *My* boy! The most famous man on earth—and *I* trained him!" Then, seizing Dan's hand and displaying his diamond ring to the assembled company, he would continue, "See that? Things like that don't grow on gooseberry bushes, do they? Who is responsible for putting that ring on that finger? Ask the boy! *He'll* tell you! I am!"

To which doubtful proposition Dan would dutifully assent, a general libation would ensue, and a move would be made to the next haunt, therein to repeat the same performance.

## CHAPTER VI

### DAN LENO'S EARLY APPEARANCES IN LONDON

DAN LENO first appeared as a comedian in London, at the Foresters' Music Hall. He may be said to have appeared as a comedian in spite of himself, because he had other views; but a kindly fate overruled them.

His salary was £5 a week, in return for which he performed three items.

1. A song entitled "Going to buy Milk for the Twins," in which he impersonated a woman—one of those garrulous, distressed, on-the-verge-of-tears females he appeared to know so well, and was able to portray so vividly.
2. An Irish song entitled "When Rafferty raffled his Watch."
3. His celebrated Champion clog dance.

The last item was, of course, supposed to be his *pièce de résistance*; but the patrons of the Foresters' Music Hall thought otherwise.

His songs they received with rapture, but his dancing with cool indifference, and not even the exhibition of

the celebrated fifty-guinea belt could arouse them to enthusiasm.

For Dan, fresh from the dancing enthusiasts of the North, this was naturally a great surprise. He had not calculated on the fact that the average Londoner knew nothing whatever about the rolling, the kicking, the taps, the twizzles, the shuffles, or, indeed, about the clogs themselves. So far as they could tell, he might have been dancing very well; or he might have been dancing very badly. They didn't know, and they weren't interested.

But they knew when they heard a comic song well sung, and they said so unanimously.

So Dan realised, at his very first engagement, that if he meant to capture London, he would have to do it by his head first and his feet afterwards.

A similar case, pointing out the different tastes of North and South country audiences, was that of Albert Chevalier.

When Mr. Chevalier first visited Manchester, after a London triumph with his idealised coster, Manchester did not understand him in the very least. They knew that such beings as cockney costers existed, but they did not recognise a coster who serenaded his sweetheart and sang love songs to "The Future Mrs. 'Awkins," and it was not until Chevalier sang "Knocked 'em in the Old Kent Road," with a lively dance at the end of it, that they forgave him for what he had previously done.

Chevalier persevered, and in the end Manchester



appreciated him ; but Dan preferred to capture London by giving London what it wanted.

It is a positive blessing to mankind that he did so, and that first-night audience at the Foresters' may congratulate itself on having helped considerably towards adding to the gaiety of the nation. Dan Leno, as a clog-dancer, was, of course, pre-eminent ; but the world soon endorsed the verdict of the Foresters', and gladly spared Leno the clog-dancer to gain Leno the comedian.

I can find no criticisms of his first appearances in the London music-halls, so presume, as the Press had no reason to suspect the advent of a great comedian, they were not present to welcome him.

Most of the songs that he made successful in his early days were written for him by Mr. Harry King. They were never published ; the original MSS. are lost, and for many years past I have no doubt the only complete record of them was in Dan's own head.

The words of "Going to buy Milk for the Twins" are, so far as I have been able to ascertain, lost in oblivion.

The chorus of "When Rafferty raffled his Watch," ran as follows :—

"The fender was chained to the fireplace ;  
The poker was chained to the hob ;  
You bet your life, if they'd been loose,  
They'd both have been on the job.  
The tables and chairs were tumbled downstairs ;  
We'd plenty of Irish and Scotch ;  
And the devil's own row there was that night  
When Rafferty raffled his watch."

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Another success he made about this time was as the "Irish Harvestman," the chorus of which is simplicity itself :—

"I'm Irish Pat, ha ! ha !  
And I come from Limerick Town,  
So hire me, while I'm on the road,  
To cut your harvest down."

While yet another dealt with the troubles and trials attendant upon a surreptitious family removal :—

"There's nobody saw us moving,  
So we shall be hard to find ;  
There's my two daughters pulling at the shafts,  
While the old girl's pushing up behind.  
We sailed away from Poverty Bay  
Not one minute too soon ;  
It's very hard luck,  
And you want a bit of pluck  
To be always shooting the moon."

The successful engagement at the Foresters' was followed by an equally successful one at the Middlesex, where, once more, the comedian triumphed, if anything, more completely over the clog-dancer.

Following hard upon this came engagements at other London halls, and, although he had not yet penetrated into the West End, Dan Leno rapidly became a popular London success.

These London engagements were, perforce, sandwiched between sundry flying visits to the provinces, where he still had old contracts to fulfil ; and it is interesting to note that, at the very time Dan was making his name in London as a comedian, the faithful ones in the North

declined to forsake their old love altogether, and were still announcing him as—

“Still Champion of all the Champions,  
Dan Leno,  
Vocal Comedian, and the World’s Champion Dancer.  
Holder of the only Legitimate Champion  
Gold and Silver Belt,  
The Grandest Piece of Workmanship  
Ever produced in this Country.  
Cost £50.  
One Week only.”

Reading the above announcement, one is inclined to believe that the manufacturing instinct of the North induced the audience to value the belt as highly as its holder, and to value its holder more for his dancing than his singing.

One is strengthened in this opinion by reading, immediately below Dan’s name, of the engagement of a gentleman described as—

“The World-renowned, Funny, Comical, Laughable, and Original Side-splitting Comedian. The most Versatile Comedian we have at the present upon the Music-hall stage. Every song funny! Every song in character!! Every song copyright!!! Not one, but all!!!

“Come and have a laugh! Remember, this is the only one of his name in the Concert Hall.”

I do not give his name, as it has been long since forgotten, and, never having seen him, I know nothing of his abilities; but it is certainly peculiar to read, on the

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same bill with Dan Leno, of a comedian thus described as possessing all the attributes that Dan Leno himself possessed in the highest degree.

When not thus engaged in the provinces, Dan Leno appeared in turn at Collins's Music Hall, Islington; the Queen's, Poplar; the Standard, Pimlico; and other outlying places of amusement.

Then it was that he began to introduce into his songs those wonderful character studies which, if exaggerated as he only could exaggerate and be forgiven, were taken from, and in the main true, to life.

Of such were "The Ice Cream Man," which was a grown-up and much more maturely comic version of the "Italian Boy" of his juvenile days.

The character he gave us in another of his songs, "The Railway Guard," he has confessed that he stole from the original owner: "a fussy little man I used to see at Brixton Station, always rushing up and down, shouting at everybody, and himself doing nothing whatever."

It is doubtful whether that railway guard would, if he had seen the performance, recognise it as a caricature of himself; and it is just as well that he knew nothing about it, because Dan's picture of him, both facially and sartorially, is the reverse of flattering.

Dan had an idea once of presenting, as a companion picture, one of the typically slow and stolid railway employés engaged on a little single line that joined one market town with another, and, between them, ambled gently through insignificant villages in a thoroughly

peaceful and pastoral manner. In the end, however, he decided that the plan was impracticable, because if he gave a thoroughly consistent character-reading of their speed of thought and speech, one song, with the usual amount of dialogue, would be sufficiently long to constitute an entire evening's entertainment.

One morning Dan found himself travelling on this little line, and, having plenty of time to spare (which, indeed, was an absolute necessity for all who journeyed on that system), thought he would alight at one of the wayside stations and visit a celebrated old castle in the neighbourhood.

The train started, and in due course arrived at the first station. Nobody got in and nobody got out; but there was a lengthened pause in the proceedings, and a silence reigned that was only broken by the panting of the engine.

Dan looked out of the window. It was a very hot day, and the stationmaster, with his porter, could be plainly seen in the offing leisurely making for the village inn.

This made Dan feel thirsty, and he began to wonder whether he would have time to join them and have "just one" before the train started again.

He looked up the platform. It was deserted, except for the guard, who sat on one of the seats in an apparently exhausted condition, and wearing an old straw hat well tilted over his eyes.

The engine driver and stoker leant over the side of the engine, and, gazing thoughtfully at the guard, smoked in silent content.



"THE RAILWAY GUARD"



The signalman, having signalled "All lines clear," leant out of his window, gazed regretfully at the village inn, and also smoked.

This pretty picture of still life lasted until it began to assume an air of permanence, so Dan got out of his carriage and approached the guard.

"I'm very much obliged to you for letting me see so much of this place," he said. "It's a very pretty place indeed, but I know when I've had enough of a good thing. Can we go somewhere else, please?"

The guard, without deigning to answer directly, looked up at the engine driver and inquired in an injured tone of voice, "What are you stopping for? Why don't you go on?"

"I'm waiting for you to whistle!" replied the driver placidly, and still smoking.

The guard grunted disgustedly. "I whistled a good five minutes ago!" he said.

"Never heard you!" retorted the other. "Whistle again!"

"Not me!" objected the guard, with an air of quiet determination. "Once is enough for *you*!"

It is hard to say how or when the dispute would have ended if Dan had not seized the whistle that dangled from the guard's buttonhole and given the desired signal himself.

The driver, thus officially roused, moved on his engine with due deliberation; and Dan, looking back out of his window, saw the signalman put his signal at "Danger" and stroll in the direction of the village



inn with the air of a man who had made everything absolutely secure.

When they reached the station for which Dan had booked, he got out; and after watching the train depart, began to search for information.

He could find no stationmaster, but he came across an elderly, rather decrepit porter, who evidently dated back to the days when trains were not.

Dan asked him the way to the castle, but the porter knew "nowt about any castles anywheres thereabout."

"Perhaps you're a stranger here?" suggested Dan.

"I'm not," retorted the old man, indignant at the insult. "I was born here!" and hobbled home to dinner.

Dan had slightly better luck with the booking-office clerk. That youthful functionary, in the intervals of playing marbles on the waiting-room floor, condescended to tell him:

"Ay, there's what some folks call a castle not so far away, but it's not up to much: most of it's fell down."

"Exactly," replied Dan. "That's the castle I want, and it's the 'fell-downness' of it that I've particularly come to see. Which is the nearest way to it?"

"You've come to th' wrong station," said the clerk stolidly, his mind being deeply concentrated on his efforts to "spank taws" out of a chalk ring he had drawn on the floor. "You ought to have gone on to th' next un!"

"And what time is the next train to th' next un?"

queried Dan, determined to see his castle or perish in the attempt.

The youth told him briefly and without comment.

It started in exactly two hours and ten minutes from the date their conversation terminated ; so Dan, to pass away the time, determined to explore the surrounding country and return to the station in time to catch his train.

He strolled leisurely along pretty country roads and lanes, without any definite aim or object in view, until he found himself, just pleasantly tired, in the market-place of a little village.

After refreshing himself and resting for a time in the local hostelry, he retraced his steps, and arrived at his original station with comfortable time to spare.

The booking clerk, now on duty, but occasionally rattling his marbles in his pocket by way of recreation, served him with his ticket. The price of the said ticket was exactly twopence, and this set Dan thinking deeply.

He thought so deeply that, when the train eventually turned him out in the identical village he had walked to and from, and within a hundred yards of the local hostelry in which he had refreshed and waited, he was more annoyed than surprised ; but after considering the matter carefully in all its bearings, he finally decided to be more amused than either.

Dan Leno has himself stated more than once—

“When I first came to London there was a great demand for comic singers, and my style struck the public taste.”

This is a sufficiently modest way of accounting for an undoubted success. However the public taste may vary in the matter of comic singing and comic singers, it seems to me that there always has been, and always will be, a great demand for Dan Lenos.

He further adds—

“The characters of my songs are all ‘founded on fact.’ To get the effect out of such songs is not so easy as it looks. In the first place, you have to catch your song, and you will understand that difficulty when I tell you that I have fully 150 songs at home for which I have paid from one to five guineas each, and which are utterly useless.

“Sometimes I sit up all night studying a song, and trying to see chances of effect in it, until I finally get out of temper and throw it in the fire. I study hard for all my songs, and my favourite way of doing that is to walk for a few miles in the rain, keeping time with my feet to the tune.”

One is tempted to wonder why “in the rain”; but no genius ever lived who had not his own little peculiarities, and Dan Leno was no exception to the rule.

As he rose in his profession he, naturally enough, became the target at which budding authors and composers fired their verses and tunes. From the point of view of such, it is well to be connected with a rising man as soon as possible; so, the further he progressed, the more he was inundated with original songs. As he punctiliously replied to all correspondence himself, his letters on this subject alone must have occupied a good deal of his time.

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In this connection I was, I remember, once able to surprise and puzzle him very completely.

Some years before I was introduced to him personally I wrote a song that I fondly imagined would suit him exactly. So, with delightful visions of hearing Dan Leno sing one of my songs, I posted him a MS. copy, and impatiently waited the result.

Alas! it was returned to me in two days, accompanied by a nice little note that soothed while it disappointed.

The note in question was headed by no address save "London," and the date was merely stated briefly to be "Sunday." I suppose he was too busy sending out similar epistles to have time to enter into minor details. It read as follows:—

"DEAR SIR,

"I am much obliged to you for your offer of the enclosed song, which, I think, is excellent" (and which I don't think he did for a moment).

"Unfortunately, I have another song on the same subject, so am unable to use yours.

"Yours truly,

"DAN LENO"

I kept this note by me, and many years afterwards, before attending a Drury Lane rehearsal, while going through some old papers, I came across it. So I put it in my pocket and took it with me.

The first person I showed it to was Herbert Campbell, and directly he noticed the general vagueness of date and address he saw the possibilities of a joke in it.

So, calling in the aid of Arthur Collins, we three conceived the idea of having a little fun with Dan.

As we were all seated at lunch, I casually inquired—"Oh, by the by, Dan, have I offended you in any way?"

"Offended me?" he replied, looking up in some surprise. "No, certainly not. Why do you ask?"

"Well, I thought I must have done, when you send me a letter like this one," I explained, and, taking the note from my pocket, I threw it across the table to him.

Dan read the note through carefully, and looked puzzled; then he read it over again, and looked still more puzzled.

"Do you mean to say that I sent you this letter?" he demanded.

"You *did*," I replied.

"When?" he asked.

"You can see the date for yourself," I said, pointing to it, "Sunday."

"Well, I certainly *did* send out one or two letters declining songs last Sunday," he admitted, "but, upon my word, I really can't remember"—here he paused abruptly, and was evidently doing his best to dive into his memory and fish up facts.

"What's the matter over there?" asked Arthur Collins from his end of the table.

"This," I responded, recovering the note from Dan and handing it to him. "It's not a very friendly letter for Dan Leno to send to me, is it?"

"I should rather think not," replied Collins, after

perusal. "I wouldn't like him to write that way to me. Read it, Herbert," and he passed it on to Herbert Campbell.

Herbert put on his eyeglasses and read it carefully. Then he turned an accusing glance on me. "You've been upsetting him in some way," he stated, "Dan always writes that way to people who've annoyed him."

"That's what I'm afraid of," I replied. "But, for the life of me, I can't think what I've done."

"No! no!" exclaimed Dan earnestly, emerging from his reverie, "he's done nothing—nothing at all to offend me. What I can't make out is how I came to——" —here he paused once more and resumed his thinking.

"It's all very well saying that," remarked Collins, "but when a man writes to a man he knows well he doesn't begin his letter with 'Dear Sir' if he feels quite friendly towards him."

"I hope you don't think I'm vexed because Dan refused the song," I said. "He had a perfect right to do that if he didn't like it."

"Certainly," agreed Herbert. "But that's not the point; it's the nasty way he did it."

"I know," exclaimed Dan, with the relieved air of one who has solved a knotty problem, "I must have put somebody else's letter in your envelope."

"I see!" said I. "Then what did you write to *me*?"

"I forget for the moment," replied Dan helplessly.

"Oh, come, Dan," expostulated Collins, "surely you remember whether you accepted the song or refused it."

"Upon my word, I do not," he admitted.

"I don't believe he ever read the blessed song at all; simply declined it without even looking at it," Herbert suggested.

"Now that's a thing I never do, and you know very well I don't," contradicted Dan, roused to self-defence. "I read everything that's sent to me. If you tell me what the song was about," he continued, turning to me, "I've no doubt I shall remember all about it."

"It was about a fried-fish shop," I returned promptly, having completely forgotten what the subject of the original song was.

"Oh! *that's* the song, is it?" put in Herbert—"I remember your reading it to me. I'm surprised at Dan refusing it—it would suit him *AI*. The chorus is a nailer. I don't pick up things very quickly, but I've never forgotten it."

"That's a good idea, Herbert," suggested Collins, swiftly turning the tables on his fellow-conspirator. "Sing the chorus to Dan, and see whether he recognises it."

Herbert was for a moment nonplussed, but quickly rose to the situation.

"Yes," he agreed, "I'll sing the chorus. Listen, Dan. This is how it goes." And he warbled to an extempore melody the following poetic words:—

"Fried fish is a very nice dish;  
It's a relish to your tea;  
So, if you wish a pen'north of fish,  
You must all come round to me."

Dan gazed steadily at Herbert, who was slightly



THE TRIO IN COSTUME





overacting by assuming an expression of stern gravity quite foreign to his usually smiling features, and then remarked—

“So that’s the chorus?”

We agreed.

“And the chorus is the best part of the song,” he went on.

We agreed again.

“Then I can explain everything,” continued Dan; “I remember it all perfectly now. That nice little polite note that I put in Hickory Wood’s envelope by mistake was one I had written to the Poet Laureate, who means well, but doesn’t quite hit my style.

“I don’t much mind Wood’s getting this letter although he doesn’t deserve it; but what annoys me is that the Poet Laureate won’t like receiving the other letter to say that if he sends me any more of his vulgar fried-fish verses I’ll have him prosecuted as a public nuisance.”

Which explanation we correctly took to mean that Dan had at last tumbled to the idea of the joke.

From the time he virtually abandoned clog-dancing and began to grow in favour as a London comedian Dan Leno steadily developed his entertainment in one special direction.

One calls his performances on the halls “songs” for want of a pithy word that is better; but they were not really songs at all. They were diverting monologues in a style of which he was as undoubtedly the originator as he was its finest exponent. With him the character

was the first consideration; the amusing wealth of monologue or "patter" was the means whereby he gave his audience an insight into that character, while the verses struck one as being, in most cases, a somewhat unnecessary interlude.

Indeed, he was evidently of this opinion himself, because in his later efforts, when he may be fairly said to have perfected his style, he merely used one verse to introduce himself and one chorus to take himself off the stage. The rest was simply fluent conversation.

I can hardly suppose they were a great success from a publisher's point of view. I *have* heard misguided men, copy in hand, attempt to sing Dan Leno's songs in drawing-rooms, attired the while in evening dress; but I should imagine that any man who really appreciated his peculiar humour would no more think of doing this than he would purchase the full printed instructions of Paul Cinquevalli's feats and attempt to reproduce them by referring to the book.

It was Mr. George Conquest, of the Surrey Theatre, who first engaged Dan Leno for pantomime, and it is noteworthy that a son of Mr. George Conquest played leading parts with him in his last three pantomimes at Drury Lane.

Mr. Conquest heard him sing "Fetching the Milk for the Twins," and at once made him an offer, jointly with his wife, at a salary of £20 weekly to play in the 1886-7 pantomime at the Surrey. The pantomime subject was *Jack and the Beanstalk*; Dan was to be cast for the

part of Jack's mother, and Mrs. Leno was offered that of Mercury.

The offer was accepted, and Dan entered on the first of a series of London pantomime engagements that were destined to last uninterruptedly until 1904.

Apropos of this, Johnny Danvers tells an interesting story.

When Dan first came back to London, he had, curiously enough, never seen Drury Lane Theatre at all ; so one morning Danvers said to him, "Dan, I've often heard you say you've never seen 'The Lane.' Let's walk over and have a look at the outside of it now."

So they walked over and paused before its portals and classic pillars. After a few moments of silent survey, Dan Leno, to the surprise of Danvers, walked up the steps and knelt on the topmost one. Then, rising and returning, he took his chum by the arm and remarked very quietly, "Johnny ! I shall act there some day."

## CHAPTER VII

### DAN LENO'S PANTOMIMES

**T**HE title of this chapter is no misnomer, for Dan Leno had not been in many pantomimes before it came to be an accepted fact that for him to be in one meant that he made it his own.

Some music-hall comedians, being accustomed to work alone all the year round, feel strange and unaccustomed when, in pantomime, they are suddenly required to alter their methods and become parts instead of the complete show. Dan Leno never seemed to be troubled with this difficulty.

His early training as a member of a troupe may have helped him a little to harmoniously combine with others ; but the principal reason for his success in this direction is undoubtedly that he was "to the manner born."

Although he certainly predominated, he never monopolised. His keen sense of characterisation, that kept him always well in the picture, seemed to help those who were playing with him almost as much as it helped himself towards success.

I have often noticed, in pantomime, that whoever was playing in a scene with Dan Leno always seemed, at

that point, to be at his or her very best. So far from extinguishing his colleagues, Dan appeared to be able to bring out their highest qualities. And again, when circumstances demanded, he could, without leaving the stage, efface himself as completely, and do nothing as artistically, as any actor I ever saw.

To Dan Leno, a pantomime character was a real character; a character to be as carefully studied and thought out as that of the emotionally complex nature of a heroine in a problem play.

His pantomime queens, for example, with all their absurd extravagance, yet contrived to convey some subtle suggestion of regality. An impossible queen, we say, of course; but still a queen, and, when we come to think of it, quite a possible queen, too, under the eccentric conditions and amid the peculiar surroundings. His studies of women in a humble walk of life were entirely different. His gait, his manner, his expression were altered, and all his dignity had vanished. He was homely, discursive, and confidential, not to say occasionally aggressive. His own personality was, of course, ever present; but when I saw him playing these kind of parts, the impression he left on my mind was not so much a picture of Dan Leno playing the part of a woman in a particular walk of life as the picture of what Dan Leno would have been if he had actually been that particular woman.

No comedian playing female parts has ever differentiated his studies of the sex so much as Dan Leno did. In his last five pantomimes at Drury Lane he

played a woman's part each year, and she was a perfectly different woman every time. He found fresh individualities for them all.

I remember him saying to me, after going through his part of Sister Anne, in *Bluebeard*, for the first time, "I'm afraid! I'm very much afraid!"

"Don't you like the part?" I asked, rather disappointed.

"Oh yes, I like the part very much!" he replied. "That's what I mean. I see so much in it that I'm afraid I shall overdo it, and I don't want to do *that*."

He was evidently a success in his first pantomime at the Surrey, and an immediate one, because Mr. Conquest, on the second night, engaged him and his wife for the following year, he as principal comedian and Mrs. Leno as principal girl, in the pantomime of *Sinbad the Sailor*.

Both these pantomimes were written by Messrs. George Conquest and Henry Spry. In the first he was associated with, among others, Tom Costello, Johnny Danvers, and Maud Stafford; in the second with Arthur Williams, who played The Ploughboy.

The Press both welcomed and appreciated him at once. Of his first appearance it was written—

"A more amusing Dame Durden than Mr. Dan Leno it would not be easy to discover.

"Naturally some good dancing was looked for here, and nobody was disappointed."

When he played in *Sinbad the Sailor* he was commended as—



SISTER ANNE."





"Mr. Dan Leno, who made a capital tinker, full of drollery and grotesque business. Some of his scenes were particularly good, and he was most humorous throughout the pantomime." \*

It may be here remarked that Dan Leno was very, very sensitive to press, or, indeed, any criticism. Like the princess in the fairy tale, he could detect and be made uncomfortable by one crumpled rose leaf of blame, however many feather-beds of praise were piled on the top of it.

He generally went through his pantomime press notices while resting in the dressing-room he and Herbert Campbell occupied jointly, and whenever he came across any remark about himself that he considered unfair or incorrect in any way he insisted on reading it aloud to Herbert.

If that was all he did, Herbert, who I honestly believe never read a press notice, and certainly never subscribed to any press-cutting association, would merely grunt in a non-committal manner; but if Dan, growing excited over his real or fancied grievances, came across to where Herbert always sat, calmly puffing at a fat cigar, and flourishing the press-cuttings in his face, demanded either a sympathetic or some other expression of opinion on the subject, Herbert would merely remark, "Serve you right for buying a guinea's worth of trouble," † and with that "closure" the discussion.

\* These notes are from *The Era*.

† The press-cutting associations supply a fixed number of newspaper notices for a guinea.

It was while Dan was playing in the *Sinbad* pantomime that he first came under the notice of Sir Augustus Harris, who engaged him to appear in the Drury Lane Christmas Annual of 1888. Mrs. Leno was also engaged; but before Christmas came round again increasing family responsibilities induced her permanently to retire from the stage into a happy domesticity.

Dan's part was that of The Baroness, in *The Babes in the Wood*, and there it was he first met that unruly pair of infants, Herbert Campbell and Harry Nicholls.

Among others who appeared with him were Harriet Vernon, Maggie Duggan, Charles Lauri, Victor Stevens, and the Griffiths Brothers. Here again his success was never in doubt. In the first month of his engagement Sir Augustus Harris renewed it for three years, and, after that, for five more.

Subsequently Drury Lane claimed him, as he used to say, for the term of his natural life; a term which, unfortunately, proved to be all too short.

When, in the fulfilment of his own prophecy, he made his first bow to a Drury Lane audience, he found that his reputation had preceded him. It is interesting to read that—

“Mr. Dan Leno, whose reception was very cordial, made much capital out of the part of The Baroness, his dancing being especially diverting.”

Apropos of the late Charles Lauri, who was, as has been stated, one of his colleagues in this pantomime, Dan used to tell a good story.

One Christmas season Lauri was playing the part of a dog in one of the provincial pantomimes. At rehearsals he was, as ever, full of suggestions for little bits of artistic "business" wherewith to embellish his part and help the show along generally. He had, of course, a great name as an animal impersonator, and his reputation, combined with the fact that his suggestions were generally excellent in themselves, naturally induced his fellow-artistes to respect and act upon them literally.

In this pantomime were engaged two gentlemen of the knockabout persuasion, who stuck hatchets in each other's heads, and generally committed assault and battery in the way of business. The name under which they appeared before the British public was "The Tender Brothers Mick," and their speciality was a blow on the skull that would render senseless anybody but a "Tender Brother."

It was these worthies whom Lauri rashly approached with the request that they would help him in one of his scenes.

"When you come on the stage," he explained to them, "I'll bark; then I'll run out of my kennel and go for you. While I'm biting one of you on the leg, the other one must hit me on the head with his stick. Then I'll howl and run back into my kennel again. See?"

They listened attentively to the explanation, and said they quite understood what was meant. In fact, they added, it might almost be said to be in their line of business. And so it was arranged, and performed for one night only.

When the "Tender Brothers" arrived upon the stage, Lauri barked, rushed out of his kennel, and fastened on to a leg. Whereupon one of the "Tender Brothers," according to instructions, raised his stick and gave Lauri one on the head with it.

I suppose, for a "Tender Brother," it was not a particularly vigorous stroke; merely the kind of blow he was accustomed to give his other "Tender Brother" when they were informally rehearsing for their more serious efforts in public. But it was more than enough for poor Charles Lauri.

He howled more than realistically; retired to his kennel, and, metaphorically speaking, did not emerge from it again for quite three days.

Dan Leno's second Drury Lane pantomime was *Jack and the Beanstalk*, in which he again appeared as the down-trodden mother of the heroic Jack. Here he gave a most amusing study of an elderly lady endeavouring to sing a serious love ballad, and being constantly thwarted in her endeavours by a rival concert of cats immediately outside her window.

It is also to be noted that, although he had parted with his clogs, he had by no means parted with his dancing. He had merely changed from one style to another that was apparently better suited to the taste of the metropolis; because in a notice of this pantomime we read:—

"Mr. Dan Leno's dances must be seen to be believed in. They are electrical."

Up to this, Dan had only been seen by Drury Lane audiences as a woman, and the idea struck Sir Augustus Harris that he might do worse than give him a chance to show what he could do as a member of the male sex.

"Dan," he said to him one day with this thought in his mind—"Dan, how do you think you'd be as a man?"

"Well, I don't know," returned Dan modestly. "But I think I *ought* to be all right; because, you see, I was born that way."

So it came to pass that on the following Boxing Day, Dan appeared as Sir Lombarde Streete in the pantomime of *Beauty and the Beast*. Among the ladies who played in this pantomime were Vesta Tilley and Belle Bilton.

Man or woman, it was all the same to Dan; whichever he was, he amused his audience, and his audience loved him for it.

As Sir Lombarde Streete we read:—

"Mr. Dan Leno, who impersonates Beauty's father, was most certainly 'lively on,' and we doubt not was also 'lively off,' for he always came up, if not smiling, yet full of drollery, and prepared for speech, song, dance, or business to add to the fun and increase the merriment."

He further seems to have succeeded in playing a "drunken scene" without unduly offending the susceptibilities of press or public, for the critic goes on to say:—

"Those who saw Sir Lombarde Streete in his tortuous movements, on being conducted from the palace

after a too liberal allowance of the wine-cup, are not likely to forget him. It was a piece of pure comedy from start to finish."

Dan Leno was now just as much a standing dish at the Lane as was Herbert Campbell, albeit smaller and of a different flavour, and the following year, in the pantomime of *Humpty Dumpty*, these two comedians, so widely different in their methods, yet so perfect in alliance, began that successful series of "double scenes" with which the later generation of playgoers so inevitably associates them.

As the King and Queen of Hearts they pervaded the pantomime together, Herbert's calm stolidity contrasting finely with Dan's "verve" and "go," while Dan's excitable methods made Herbert appear to be the most abnormally and comically placid monarch ever seen upon the stage. It was an ideal partnership, and was then and there perpetuated only to be broken by death.

It was in this pantomime also that they sang their first topical duet—the forerunner of many—entitled "It Made no Difference."

After this followed in regular yearly succession :—

*Little Bo-Peep, Robinson Crusoe, Dick Whittington and His Cat, Cinderella, Aladdin, The Babes in the Wood, The Forty Thieves, Jack and the Beanstalk, Sleeping Beauty and the Beast, Bluebeard, Mother Goose, and Humpty Dumpty*, which, alas! completed the tale both for Dan Leno and his trusty lieutenant, Herbert Campbell. It is a wonderful record for the pair; a record

which it is not likely will ever be equalled, still less surpassed.

In casting one's mind back over this vista of departed pantomimes, pleasant memories of this or that performance keep cropping up, and somehow or other whoever else occurs occasionally in these memories, Dan Leno occurs in them all.

For instance, in *Dick Whittington* I see an eccentrically active Idle Jack arrive outside the village church for the purpose of getting married therein. I hear him enter into a long, explanatory conversation with a deaf sexton—a very deaf sexton indeed—so deaf, in fact, that he reduced Idle Jack to such a fearful state of mental anguish because he could *not* make him understand that it makes me laugh now when I think of it.

In *Cinderella* I have a vision of a stout, unemotional Baron and a vivacious, somewhat acidulated Baroness being refused admission by a haughty flunkey to the Prince's ball.

The Baroness explains at length, while the Baron "stands by," and puts in an occasional remark—short, but generally to the point. They are the Prince's bosom friends, and what if they *do* happen to have lost their tickets? That kind of accident might happen to anybody.

Then come the various little stratagems designed to frustrate the flunkey's vigilance, Dan going in backwards to look as if he was coming out—Herbert's idea of passing in without being noticed! Finally, an entire change of the situation, when Dandini enters to rebuke



the flunkey and commands him to let the worthy pair pass in at once.

Then ensues the triumph of the Baroness. She really doesn't care whether she goes in or she doesn't. It isn't worth while to make a fuss about it; but, just to show that no flunkey can interfere with her, she *will* go in.

Yes, and just to show that she is perfectly free and independent, she will come out again, and what's more, she will keep on going in and coming out as long as she likes—and she does it with a "Now I'm in! See?" and "Now I'm out! Eh?" directed at the flunkey each time she passes him.

Since then I have heard in various parts of the country very many Idle Jack's talk to deaf sextons, and I have seen many Baronesses in difficulties with flunkies at palace gates; but, in my memory, those parts are still ineradicably embodied in Dan Leno.

I turn to *Aladdin*, and I chuckle as I think of the Widow Twankey entertaining the Slave of the Lamp, who happens to be Paul Cinquevalli, in her humble kitchen.

I see Cinquevalli open his "bag of tricks" by doing marvellous things with a humble saveloy, and, as he continues to show his feats of magic to the spell-bound Widow, she can only reassure herself that her reason is not departing by picking up the saveloy between each feat, and remarking to herself encouragingly, "Yes, it is so! That's a saveloy right enough!"

*The Babes in the Wood* remind me of a peculiar boy,



"ABDALLAH"



with a very fine and large sister—a boy who carried dead rats in his pocket and recited Hamlet to his sister's Ophelia on prize-day at school. I see him grow up and, to his great dismay, develop whiskers, and, above all, I see him climb on a stable roof, thereby to enter and poison a horse, explaining to his unimaginative sister, who tells him the door is open, that "no real burglar ever goes through a door."

*The Forty Thieves*, where a certain quaint lieutenant presided over a truly remarkable board meeting, and *Jack and the Beanstalk*, in which an embarrassed widow, having promised to marry two men on one and the same day, arranged two wedding feasts in two different rooms in the same house, and was consequently kept on the run between the two, are recollections I would be very sorry to part with.

In the second scene of *The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast* four attendants entered bearing with them two curtained palanquins, which they set down on the stage and departed.

Curiosity was rife among the audience, but the mystery was solved when Herbert's voice was heard from one interior inquiring, "Have you anything to do this afternoon, my dear?" and Dan replied from the other, "No, I have nothing on!" A roar of welcome went up from the audience, which was renewed when the flunkies, returning to bear away the palanquins, the bottoms fell out, and the unmistakable voices were corroborated by the equally unmistakable feet.

To enter and exit unseen, and yet to gain an enthusi-

astic reception, is, I should say, a feat no other actor has ever successfully accomplished. Thereafter I can recall Dan's genuine dismay and disgust when, after their hundred years' sleep, the old King and Queen return to find their monarchy transformed into a republic.

I can see him perched on a balcony, and trying in vain to enter the museum, by means of an elusive window, for the purpose of recovering the crown jewels, and I can see him lying on his back, under a broken-down motor-car, explaining to Herbert exactly what was wrong and how to remedy it.

It was during the run of this pantomime that I was privileged to witness an unrehearsed scene between the two, a scene that Dan had evolved in a pure spirit of mischief.

The fulness of it was not apparent to the audience ; but, as I happened to know what Dan was driving at, I enjoyed it immensely.

It was Herbert's invariable custom to dine at home between the matinée and the evening show, and, as he always followed up his meal with a twenty minutes' nap, he had very little time to spare.

He managed it by having his brougham ready at the stage door for him. Directly the curtain fell he would, without changing much of his stage attire, or removing a great deal of his make-up, get in the vehicle, and be driven to Canonbury and back at express speed, the coachman waiting in readiness at the door the while Herbert dined and slept.

Naturally, it was always more or less of a rush ; so it

is not to be wondered at that Herbert was never eager to unduly prolong the performance at a matinée.

Dan knew this very well, and he was sometimes tempted to play tricks, as he did on this particular afternoon.

When they came on the stage together, to play the scene in which they stole the crown jewels, I noticed that Dan was an unusually long time in "coming to cues."

He talked about this, that, and the other, all very amusing, but not at all relevant to the matter in hand. Herbert followed him loyally, as he always did when Dan launched out upon these unexpected and wordy excursions; but, after a time, as the latter showed no sign of coming to a speedy and definite ending, Herbert grew anxious.

"My dear," he said, "I don't like to interrupt a lady and a Queen; but—what about the crown jewels?"

Dan turned upon him a face indicative of the utmost surprise.

"Crown jewels?" he queried. "*What* crown jewels?"

"*You* know!" returned Herbert. "*The* crown jewels! *Our* crown jewels!"

"I know nothing whatever about any crown jewels!" retorted Dan, with an air of finality, and wandered forth again into the realms of fancy.

Herbert began to look rather worried. The precious time was fast slipping by, and, although he attempted to check Dan's loquacity by himself preserving the strictest silence, Dan seemed on this particular after-

noon to be quite capable of going on by himself for hours.

"Look here," he said at last in desperation, "it isn't good enough. You know perfectly well that we came here to talk about the crown jewels."

"You surprise me," exclaimed Dan. "Of course, you have a perfect right to talk about what you like, but you mustn't dictate to me. I came here to talk about dinners, and do you know, King, that's what I like so much about you—you would always rather dine in your own palace with your own little Queen than you would have the best dinner the biggest hotel can give you."

"I'll tell you what it is," replied Herbert with determination, "unless you're going to settle about those crown jewels at once, I'll have the motor-car brought on."

The motor-car scene followed the crown jewels scene, and, if Dan had not judiciously yielded at this point and given Herbert the necessary cue, it is certain that there would have been no burglary at that performance. This was not the only trick of the kind that Dan Leno played on Herbert Campbell, but in the *Forty Thieves* Herbert contrived to look after himself.

In one scene Ali Baba (Johnny Danvers) and Abdallah (Dan Leno) engaged in a fierce and occasionally prolonged battle; while the fair Zuleikah (Herbert Campbell) looked on anxiously (especially at matinées) and wondered how long they were going to be.

In this case, however, the remedy lay in his own

hands, because the signal for the change of scene being the firing of a gun, and that gun being within Herbert's reach, he could always stop the proceedings by whispering, "Come on, Dan, that's enough. Another minute, and I'll fire the gun."

And, on more than one occasion, he *did* fire that gun in self-defence.

In *Bluebeard* Dan Leno gave a magnificent study of the character of Sister Anne.

There was no suggestion of the elderly lady who has seen trouble in this Sister Anne.

She was a sprightly, somewhat below middle-aged person, who was of a "coming-on" disposition, and who had not yet abandoned hope.

The more Fatima repulsed Bluebeard, the more tenaciously did Sister Anne cling to him. She saw that Fatima was preferred to her, but she could not understand why; and when, after dancing before Bluebeard to show him that she could charm as sweetly as any Fatima, she was rudely told that she was "as graceful as a steam-roller," her pitiful droop, as she sadly communed with herself, "I wonder if I push myself forward too much," was a study in sentiment.

Or again, who that saw Sister Anne can ever forget when, having learnt the harp, specially to amuse "Bluey," she sang "When the Heart is Young," accompanying herself on and mixing herself with the instrument until the whole entertainment ended in a confused and inextricable mass of harp, music-stand, and Sister Anne.



In *Mother Goose* Dan Leno, in the opinion of many, achieved the greatest triumph of his pantomime career.

At his very first entrance (which was specially devised for him by Arthur Collins) he aroused his audience to a degree of mirthful enthusiasm such as even he had never seen surpassed, and all through his performance he never lost this advantage for a moment.

Picture Dan Leno, attired as a humble rustic widow, seated in a little cart, alongside a crate containing live geese, and peacefully driving a pair of donkeys along a Surrey lane. As the cavalcade reaches the cross-roads a motor horn is heard, and a car, driven by a huge gentleman, enveloped in the orthodox furs, dashes broadside into the little country cart.

Over goes the cart, and there ensues a scene of the wildest confusion, amid which one has visions of Dan Leno in all parts of the stage at once; Dan Leno raising the struggling donkeys to their feet: Dan Leno rescuing geese that have escaped from the crate, and are wandering down the stage to investigate Jimmy Glover, and, finally, of Dan Leno firmly grasping by its neck an excited and struggling goose in either hand, and alternately "slanging" the chauffeur in English, French, German, and Italian.

It may be mentioned that, after the first few nights, "property" geese were substituted for live ones, because the latter developed an unfortunate habit of straying to some bourne from which they never returned.

In the hands of Dan Leno *Mother Goose* went through many phases:



THE GOOD OLD ORIGINAL MOTHER GOOSE



Poor ; but contented.

Wealthy ; but plain, and not a little haughty.

Young, beautiful ; but penniless.

And finally—

The good old original Mother Goose who began the story.

In all these phases his Mother Goose was consistency itself.

When she was poor, she was humble and unassuming.

When she was wealthy, she had the "grand air" obviously put on with her riches.

When she was young and beautiful, she was as coy and skittish a young creature as one could wish to see.

And, when she returned to her pristine state, it was with a sigh of relief that she welcomed back her old familiar "top-knot" and even her bunion.

At times screamingly and irresponsibly funny, he treated the part where it required to be thus treated quite seriously.

When Mother Goose first discovered that wealth without beauty was not everything, and lamented that her face was sufficient bar to her ever marrying a title, and, again, when she found out that beauty without wealth is even a greater drug in the matrimonial market, it was no uncommon thing to hear people in the audience, in the intervals of spasmodic laughter, remark with feeling, "Poor old soul! She makes me feel quite sorry for her."

At the end of the run of this pantomime the directors of Drury Lane Theatre made a double presentation of a handsome service of silver plate, both to Dan Leno and to Herbert Campbell, in recognition of their unique services.

Dan was the first recipient, and the presentation was made, in the saloon, by Mr. Birch, the chairman of the board. Mr. Birch stood by the table, on which, carefully covered, lay the plate in question. Arthur Collins stood by his side, and Dan, who knew nothing whatever of what was going to happen, sat at the far end of the saloon.

In a highly appreciatory speech, the chairman spoke of Dan's career; of his more than excellent work at Drury Lane; of the high esteem in which he was held, and ended up by uncovering the presentation, and, in the name of the directors, begged Dan Leno's acceptance of the same.

Then everybody applauded vigorously and turned towards the recipient.

Dan had watched the proceedings with a pleased smile; but at that time he was unfortunately afflicted with deafness, so had not heard one single word of what had been said.

However, seeing from the faces round him that he was expected to say something, he rose to his feet, and, waving his hand to Arthur Collins, remarked—

"Governor, it's a magnificent present! I congratulate you, and you deserve it."

When his mistake was explained to him, he was so



THE WEALTHY MOTHER GOOSE



surprised and overcome as to be unable to say anything in reply for some little time.

Surprise presentations are not always genuine surprises, but, if ever any man experienced the happening of the unexpected, it was Dan Leno on that night.

He had a lively experience, by-the-by, on his way home after the function. The horse in his brougham, possibly excited by bearing so much wealth, bolted in the Clapham Road ; the coachman was thrown off the box, and a catastrophe seemed imminent.

Here it was that Dan displayed an amount of pluck and presence of mind that stood him in good stead.

He had with him in the brougham his youngest boy and one of his juvenile friends, who, placidly seated on the floor of the conveyance, were comparing marbles in blissful ignorance of the danger they were in.

Without alarming them by disclosing the true condition of affairs, Dan took down the front half of the movable hood and clambered on to the box seat. From there, holding on to the harness with both hands, he crawled along the shaft, seized the dangling reins in his teeth, and, returning as he came, succeeded in pulling up the frightened animal. Having done this, he drove back to pick up the fallen coachman, and, finding him injured, took him at once to St. Thomas's Hospital.

Finally he drove home, feeling, I have no doubt, that he had been through a very strenuous and eventful day, but turned up on the morrow at the Drury Lane Annual Dinner as if nothing particular had happened to him.

*Humpty Dumpty* was his last pantomime, and if, in



view of the illness that was then hanging over him, he was given less to do for fear he might not be able to bear the strain, yet in all he did he stood out pre-eminent as of old.

It was after a prolonged absence from the stage that he appeared on Boxing Night, 1903; and the public rejoiced to see his welcome face again, and hoping that his cure was a permanent one, gave him a reception that nearly lifted the roof off old Drury.

Once more, but for the last time, did he play Queen to Herbert Campbell's King, and the scene where Her Majesty produced a miniature pair of braces as a birthday present for her loving but stalwart spouse, and shrieked with laughter because she had, inadvertently, "brought home the wrong parcel," was quite in Dan Leno's very best form. So also were his two duologues with Harry Randall, the cook, in the kitchen anent certain provisions the cat had consumed; and under the Tree of Truth, that dropped its fruit on the head of him or her who sat beneath its shade and told a lie.

In a word, Dan Leno's pantomime work was in itself quite sufficient to earn him the highest fame as a quaintly eccentric yet withal innately truthful comedian.

We are taught to believe that, by a merciful provision of nature, no man has ever lived or ever will live who is absolutely necessary and cannot possibly be dispensed with, even in his own sphere of action. Granting this, we must admit that Dan Leno came as near to achieving the impossible as any man, and his loss is keenly felt by all who heard him utter the last words he ever uttered on



THE BEAUTIFUL MOTHER GOOSE



Drury Lane stage, when, on the last night of *Humpty Dumpty*, he and Herbert Campbell sang, in duet, and with clasped hands—

“ In the panto of old Drury Lane  
 We have both come together again,  
 And we hope to appear  
 For many a year  
 In the panto of old Drury Lane.

## CHAPTER VIII

### DAN LENO AT REHEARSAL

**M**Y first personal experience of Dan Leno at rehearsal was, naturally, at the first Drury Lane pantomime with which I was connected.

As I was walking along towards the theatre he passed me in his brougham, or, to speak more correctly, *on* his brougham, because, the day being fine, he rode on the box-seat beside the driver, as was always his custom under such conditions.

He arrived at the stage-door only about fifty yards before me. There was the usual nondescript crowd hanging about, and two seedy gentlemen standing near where I was suddenly shouted excitedly, "There he is," and set off at a swift run to swell the ranks.

When the brougham stopped I saw Dan, to my surprise, jump from the box-seat as if it had been a spring plank and dive through the stage-door in the manner he was once wont to dive through the "grave-traps."

As I got to the door a part of the crowd was slowly dispersing, and I caught such disjointed remarks as "Missed 'im that time!" "Never mind! He's bound to come out again." "Rehearsal's over at six!" "'E's

worth waiting for—'e's good for a quid if you *do* catch 'im and tell 'im the tale," etc., etc.

I remarked to the stage-door keeper as I went in, "Mr. Leno seems to be in a hurry this morning," to which that experienced official replied—

"And he's a jolly good judge, too! He's that soft-hearted that three minutes among that crowd outside there would cost him over a tenner."

Which, from later observation, I discovered to be absolutely true.

His first greeting of me, a comparative stranger in the place, was enough to encourage the most faint-hearted.

Shaking me by the hand, he said, "Arthur Collins says you've done your best for him. Arthur Collins always does his best for everybody, and I'm going to do my best for both of you to make it a success."

And, as he promised, so he did, and a success it was.

Dan Leno at rehearsal was, as he was everywhere else, kindly and unassuming.

He was always ready to help those with whom he played, and ever the first to set the very necessary example of deferring to the management. Although his salary rapidly increased, his demeanour to those around him remained unaltered.

To those who met him and worked with him when he began his long list of Drury Lane engagements at a salary of £20 a week, he was still the same Dan Leno when he was drawing the princely remuneration of £250 for seven performances.

When Sir Augustus Harris, who first engaged him at

Drury Lane, died, he transferred his allegiance to Arthur Collins, and served him as loyally as he had served his former chief.

To be sure, Arthur Collins was no stranger to him, as he had, for some years previously, had practical control of rehearsals as stage manager; but, apart from this fact, Dan had a genuine regard for him and an immense belief in his capabilities.

In the accepted meaning of the phrase, it cannot be said that Dan Leno ever "learnt" a part. Neither did Herbert Campbell.

That is to say, instead of taking the "scrip" home, studying it, and arriving at rehearsal letter perfect, with nothing but the "trimmings" to add, they preferred to assimilate it by a process of constant repetition on the stage, during which they put on the "trimmings" as they occurred to them, and as they went along.

To those who did not understand their methods, it was a somewhat unpromising spectacle to see the pair rehearse a scene together.

They were generally supplied with long, printed "galley-pulls" apiece, and from his, with the aid of a pair of gold-rimmed eyeglasses, Herbert read his part with the air of a benevolent rector reading the lessons in church.

Dan, who had to be supplied with a fresh "galley-pull" daily, because he was in the habit of trailing it on the ground and accidentally walking over it when not in actual use, repeated his portion, with his head slightly tilted towards Herbert, a deeply puzzled expression in

his eyes, and every now and then a quizzical expression at the corners of his mouth, when he came across a line or a bit of "business" that suggested to him possibilities.

The rest of the company conversed quietly apart; Arthur Collins stood in front of the pair ready either to give or accept ideas; while the prompter, book and pencil in hand, hovered immediately behind him, waiting to record any fugitive "gag" that might be worth keeping, because Dan had a way of saying good things at rehearsal and then forgetting all about them.

To take a rehearsal of *Mother Goose* as a fair example, the general effect was something as follows:—

*Herbert (stolidly).* I say, mother, you *are* a swell!

*Dan (wearily).* Do you think I look expensive enough?

*Herbert.* Rather! You look like a walking Bank of England.

*Dan.* Of course, in *my* position I want to look wealthy.

*Herbert.* Yes! That dress must have cost a lot of eggs.

*Dan.* I don't care, but I *do* grudge having so many expensive things underneath I daren't show— (*To Collins.*) I say, Arthur, I suppose Comelli designs these expensive things for me.

*Collins.* Well, I don't know, Dan. We can't afford to pay Comelli his price for designing things you daren't show.

*Dan (with a twinkle in his eye).* Yes! But you might have a line in the programme to say that, as these things were executed by Alias from Comelli's designs



the management had decided they were too good to waste, so——

*Herbert (strictly on business).* Come on, Dan, let's get on with it. Play the game.

*Dan.* All right! All right! (*Refers to part.*) Let me see. What do I say now?

*Herbert (severely).* You don't say anything at all. It's me. (*Reads.*) It's the same with me. I've got seal-skin socks on this very minute.

*Dan.* I'm sure we all ought to marry into the aristocracy, you and Jill and I.

*Herbert.* What? You get married? (*With intense solemnity.*) Ha, ha, ha! (*To Dan who has paused.*) Go on. It's *your* turn.

*Dan.* I'm waiting for my cue!

*Herbert.* Well, I gave you your cue!

*Dan.* No, you didn't! My cue is—"Jack laughs."

*Herbert.* Well, I *did* laugh! (*To Collins.*) Didn't I?

*Collins.* Yes, Dan. It's all right. He laughed!

*Dan (innocently surprised).* Was that a laugh? I thought he had the croup. (*Refers to part.*) Why not? I've *been* married, haven't I?

*Herbert.* Yes; but that was to father—not to a stranger——

*Dan (aside).* I've heard that one before.

*Collins (to rest of company, whose conversation has gradually risen to flood-tide).* Will you ladies and gentlemen please be quiet? We can't hear a *word* we're saying here.

*Herbert (resuming).* I'm going to marry Gretchen.

*Dan (turning over "galley-pulls" and getting somewhat entangled therein).* Well, that's what I came here to do.



MOTHER GOOSE GOING TO THE HUNT



I've no particular reason for doing anything or being anywhere. I'm really going somewhere else. Come, Priscilla! (*Surprised.*) That's funny! I appear to go off here with a goose! When did the goose come on?

*Herbert (judicially).* There's something wrong: my next speech doesn't fit in.

*Collins (coming to the rescue).* Let me see. What page are you on, then?"

*Dan.* Page nine!

*Collins.* Oh, you've turned over two pages! (*Puts things straight.*) Now you're all right. Go ahead!

*Dan.* Oh, by-the-by, Jack, I've been buying some ancestors.

*Herbert.* What are ancestors?

*Dan.* Don't you know? They're relations who grow on a family tree.

*Herbert.* What kind of a tree is that?

*Dan.* It's a—— (*drops "galley-pull" and picks it up again.*) Yes, it's true! I am beautiful! I'm—— (*stops abruptly.*) That sounds silly.

*Collins (again coming to the rescue).* You've got on the wrong page again, Dan. (*Rearranges.*) There you are! Go on!

*Herbert (meditatively).* You know I fancy this scene is going to turn out very funny.

*Dan.* Yes, I can see a lot in it. (*Resumes.*) A family tree is a kind of a—sort of a—— Give me a piece of chalk!

*Herbert.* Here you are! (*Tentatively to Collins.*) I suppose this is where I give Dan the chalk?

*Collins.* That's right.

*Dan.* This is the tree; this is the trunk, and—— (*Pauses.*) What do I do with the chalk?

*Collins.* Oh! There'll be pictures on the stage, and you'll turn one round and draw on the back of it.

*Dan (relieved).* I see! (*Resumes.*) These are the branches, and these are the tree-roots that—(*crawling on hands and knees down stage, chalking and improvising as he crawls*)—the tree-roots that go right away down into the main sewer.

*Collins (to prompter).* Put that down!

*Herbert.* Right! (*To Dan.*) And when I say "parsley-bed," you put your foot through the picture and everybody comes on. (*To Collins, encouragingly.*) That'll be all right, governor!

*Dan (agreeing).* Yes; I can see a lot of fun in that scene.

*Collins.* All right! (*To rest of company.*) Come along, ladies and gentlemen, picture scene over, everybody on!

To the uninitiated such proceedings as these held out small hope of success, and I have heard new-comers to Drury Lane inquire doubtfully of each other at rehearsal, "Are they *really* going to be funny?"

A decided answer in the affirmative was, however, always forthcoming on the first night, for it was upon these apparently shaky foundations that Dan Leno invariably built his masterly edifices of humour. One might well be pardoned for doubting during the experience of a first rehearsal; but after having once been privileged to see the inception, the gradual growth, and the complete result, one could never doubt again.

Dan Leno's method of rehearsal was, I fancy, largely induced by his memories of early days; days when a

rehearsal of such subsidiary things as "the words" was not considered to be at all necessary. A "run-through" with the "props" in the afternoon, before performance on the same evening, was all that was given or asked for, and the rest was left to luck and the mother-wit of the performers.

A tale he used to tell of one of his early rehearsals well illustrates this.

The company had engaged to appear for one night only, in some hall in a small market town, and the proprietor of the said hall, after having agreed to fit up a suitable stage, and to provide decent furniture, fittings, etc., at his own expense, basely endeavoured, at the last moment, to back out of his share of the undertaking.

There ensued a stormy interview between this gentleman and Dan's stepfather. A great many uncomplimentary epithets were exchanged without satisfactory result, and, in the end, the proprietor was distinctly given to understand that, the company being there, it would appear; but that it would provide no furniture or fittings of any sort, and, in the event of him (the said proprietor) failing to do so as per contract, the true reason would be announced from the bare boards to his eternal shame.

The proprietor, on his part, declined to definitely commit himself to any course of action whatever, and, under these strained conditions, the afternoon rehearsal began, with the proprietor as an interested spectator.

Dan's stepfather, with a baleful glance at his

adversary, opened the proceedings by calling out, "Dan, come on the stage to me!" and Dan obediently obeyed the call.

"My boy," said his stepfather, "I'm going to tell you what to do in this scene," and, speaking to Dan and *at* the proprietor, he continued—

"When you come on the stage you will find me sitting just here on a chair (although Heaven alone knows if there *will* be any chair here for me to sit on). I will be resting my elbow on a table (of course, that's always supposing the wretched proprietor of this hall is not too mean to provide a table). You put your arm on my shoulder (I can guarantee that effect all right, Dan, because this poverty-stricken company of ours provides the arms and shoulders that are necessary in *this* piece) and you hand me a letter. (By-the-by, Dan, just before I go on, let me know if the management of this place grudge you a bit of paper for that letter. If they do, go out in the market-place and beg a bit, and tell everybody why you are obliged to do it.)

"I will jump up and go to a desk that will stand in this corner (at least, it won't stand anywhere if the mean hound who runs this hall has anything to do with it); out of the desk I will take a photograph (which, by the way, means more expense for the grasping management), and I will say, 'Curse him!' (And if all the furniture and 'props' aren't there in their places to-night, you'll know very well who I mean when I say it.)

"When I do this, you will stand there in the moonlight (although the Lord knows if there'll be any moon; some people are capable of grudging you the light of heaven), you will turn your face to the audience (and I'll bet there's no audience if they know anything at all about the skunk that owns this barn), and, just as you say, 'Stay! he is your son!' the curtain will fall (and, when I say that, I'd like to lay long odds there won't be anything so expensive as a curtain provided for us here to-night)——"

Here the much-goaded proprietor broke in at last.

"Yes," he said, "and after that you'll come round to collect the receipts, and from what I've seen of your performance so far, I'm open to bet my boots that there won't be any."

And the sequel proved that the proprietor was almost, if not quite, correct in his estimate.

A pantomime rehearsal is not a very exhilarating function when you are thoroughly used to it; but Dan did his best to keep ours lively.

He was quietest when he was himself rehearsing; when he was not thus engaged, he was, so to speak, all the more actively engaged. Flitting here and there, chatting to one group; cracking jokes with another; dancing in secluded corners to amuse an admiring crowd of stage-hands; asking the children riddles, and equally rewarding with pennies those who guessed and those who didn't guess the answer—he was continually "on the go."



When he had a long wait he would sometimes vanish from the stage altogether, but roars of laughter and wild, weird noises would eventually enable the stage manager to track him to the saloon, where he would be discovered entertaining the chorus by singing a mock pathetic ballad, accompanying himself the while on the piano, in some mysterious and inharmonious manner known to himself alone.

He was particularly fond of teasing Herbert Campbell in a friendly way, and Herbert always accepted these attentions much in the same calm way as a big dog watches a frolicsome kitten playing round about him.

A little incident at one of the rehearsals, however, showed to all who saw it that Dan had a very warm corner in his heart reserved for Herbert.

The particular incident in rehearsal was "the start for the hunt." It was arranged that the comedians and some of the chorus should cross the stage on horse-back in order to make the scene more realistic; the necessary order was given to the property master, and he duly turned up on the stage at the appointed time with a selection of horses and mules and one odd donkey.

Nobody thought that Herbert Campbell would care to indulge personally in such active exercise, and it was, therefore, with some surprise that we heard him announce his decision to "have sixpenn'orth on the donkey."

Now all these animals had already acted together in a previous piece, and as a result of their former training

they had very firm ideas on the question of order of precedence.

Unfortunately, when the animal that the donkey had always been accustomed to follow started off, Herbert was not quite ready. The sagacious and conscientious beast, realising, like a good actor, that the success of a piece depends largely on attention to details, was with difficulty restrained while Herbert essayed to mount. In the end the donkey prevailed; for while Herbert was yet half on and half off its back, it broke away in a burst of dramatic enthusiasm and careered across the stage at a swift trot that was calculated to make up for a lot of lost time.

What we saw from the front, without knowing the cause thereof, was the sudden apparition of a small donkey, moving at a ridiculous pace, taking into consideration the fact that it was carrying Herbert Campbell, and Herbert himself perched on its back at a truly perilous angle, an angle that grew more and more impossible until the law of gravitation finally asserted itself and deposited him on the stage, leaving the donkey to "exit *solus*."

The swift and surprising ludicrousness of this spectacle caused all in front to unite in a hearty shout of laughter—all, that is, except one man—and that one man was Dan Leno.

"My God! he'll be killed!" he cried, jumping up from where he was sitting, and was through the iron door and by Herbert's side as soon as anybody.

Fortunately, Herbert escaped with nothing worse than

a fright and a slight shaking ; but Dan returned to his seat, still pale with apprehension, and shaking his head gravely, remarked, "I don't see how anybody could laugh at that. It might have been a very serious matter for a heavy man like Herbert."

Later on in the day, when a youthful member of the company—who probably did not realise the possible danger of the situation, as, indeed, none of us in the first surprise had done—suggested that, if Herbert were to perform the same feat nightly it would be the funniest thing in the pantomime, Dan turned on him and gave him such a wiggling as that youthful member has every reason to remember to-day.

As I have before remarked, Dan Leno in his later years suffered from deafness. This never troubled him during dialogue, as he seemed always to be able to pick up his cues, whether he heard them or not ; but it was sometimes a source of inconvenience when it came to the musical numbers.

Dan's voice was not a very powerful organ, and Glover was always faced with the problem of keeping his orchestra sufficiently "up" to enable Dan to hear the tune, while, at the same time, it was sufficiently "down" not to drown his voice altogether. I believe it is true that his accompaniments were always played in what was known as "Dan's key"—a key unknown to musicians at large, and only possessed by Glover and his men.

However that may be, Dan, although not a great stickler as to tune, looked upon time as a matter of

great importance, perhaps not so much so when he was merely singing a song by himself, but certainly when he was engaged in any finales or concerted numbers.

While learning these at rehearsal he used to assist himself by waving his right arm in a peculiar and semi-circular fashion, as if he were stirring porridge, and at the same time he would bob his head serenely to the particular rhythm in which he was singing.

This mannerism grew upon him until he was compelled to introduce it into his performance, and in the end Dan never sang a solo in a finale (unless he danced at the same time) without waving his arm and bobbing his head just in the same way as he did at rehearsal.

His deafness was responsible for one rather comic incident at rehearsal.

In the *Bluebeard* pantomime a very lofty tower had been built for the benefit of Sister Anne, and the first time the scene was set Arthur Collins asked Dan to go to the summit of this tower and rehearse his part from there as it was proposed to perform it on Boxing Night.

Dan cheerfully made the ascent, and was very shortly seen peering over the battlements on to the stage below.

"Can you hear up there?" asked Arthur Collins.

"Eh?" said Dan, putting his hand to his ear.

"The Guv'nor wants to know if you can hear," put in Herbert Campbell.

"Oh yes, I can hear," responded Dan cheerfully, which was not to be wondered at, because either from long association or from the quality of the voice, he

could always hear Herbert better than he could hear anybody else.

At this juncture the scene painter came round, and a long discussion ensued between Arthur Collins and him as to whether the scene fulfilled all its requirements. In the end it was decided that various alterations were necessary before anything more could be done in the way of rehearsing that particular part; so upon Collins instructing the stage manager to announce that the rehearsal was dismissed until eleven o'clock on the following morning, everybody left the theatre except Arthur Collins and those immediately concerned with the structure and working of this particular scene.

It was not until they had been engaged for some twenty minutes or so in discussing and arranging the necessary alterations that they heard a plaintive voice from above inquiring, "May I come down soon?" and looking up they saw Dan Leno forgotten, but still patiently waiting on the top of his tower.

Dan was not one to immediately jump at every fresh idea that was suggested to him at rehearsal. He generally preferred to consider it and see it from his own point of view before he accepted it fully.

It was suggested, for instance, that it would be a very funny scene if Dan and Herbert were to have a game at ping-pong together; the suggestion was generally approved of, and an up-to-date ping-pong table, with bats, balls, and net all complete, was duly provided.

The scene was roughly written in, and when the pair faced each other across the table for the first time

everybody gathered round, curious to see what they were going to make of it.

Dan surveyed the preparations blankly and in silence.

"So *this* is ping-pong," he remarked at length.

"So they tell me," agreed Herbert. "Go ahead, Dan, do something."

"It's all very well to say *do* something," returned Dan, "but what on earth can I do?"

"Hit the ball with your bat," suggested Herbert practically.

"Oh! if *that's* all," murmured Dan discontentedly, "I can hit a ball with a bat." Here he aimed at one and missed it. "I say, I can hit a ball with a bat as well as most people." At this point he made a second unsuccessful attempt. "I don't see anything in it," he concluded, throwing down his bat.

"It *is* rather a fool's game," coincided Herbert, and silence reigned as they gazed at the table thoughtfully.

"Now," remarked Dan, arousing himself from his reverie, "if that table were just an ordinary common kitchen table——"

"I see!" put in Herbert quickly. "With an onion net stretched across it instead of that fancy thing."

"That's the idea," Dan went on, "frying-pans for bats and potatoes for balls——"

"Property master," called out Arthur Collins, grasping the situation at once, "clear away all this stuff and get me a kitchen table, an onion net, two frying-pans, and a dozen large potatoes."

And that is how Dan Leno and Herbert Campbell made a funny scene out of a game of ping-pong.

On another occasion Dan required a little persuasion and some judicious coaxing before he would tackle an air-ship in which he eventually scored a very big success.

He and Herbert had read their parts on terra firma for some time before they were formally introduced to the machine itself, and Dan had taken scant interest in the matter, because he was confessedly of the opinion that "the whole thing would be cut out before dress rehearsal, like these kind of things always were."

When they were summoned to the stage, therefore, to see the air-ship in full working order, Arthur Collins led Dan up to it, much as a nervous horse is led to examine and see for itself the harmlessness of a motor-car or a steam-roller. Herbert followed behind, quite ready and willing to dare all that Dan dare.

Dan inspected the machine as it reposed peacefully on the ground.

"How high will it be when it's slung up?" he inquired distrustfully.

"Oh, only about six feet," said Collins reassuringly.

Dan grunted. "I see," he commented. "A gallon of beer a night, or down we come."

"Rubbish!" returned Collins. "You know very well that Drury Lane men don't do that kind of thing."

"Yes, and even if they did, what price me?" inquired Herbert. "You wouldn't get the worst of it."

"I would if you fell on me," retorted Dan gloomily.

With infinite tact and patience, Arthur Collins took



A LADY OF THE OLD SCHOOL.





Dan Leno in hand ; he explained this and explained that, until Dan got interested in spite of himself, and getting interested, began himself to do some explaining.

Collins, at this point, artfully retiring from the explanatory business, Dan took it up with growing enthusiasm, until, to make perfectly clear what it was he meant to do, he had to climb into the car and explain in a practical manner.

Herbert promptly climbed in after him ; they were slung up, and there they remained in mid-air, while jokes and "business" enough were suggested to make the fortunes of forty scenes.

As Herbert remarked confidentially to Arthur Collins after they had been lowered to the ground—

"I knew it was all right directly you got Dan to climb into the car. By to-morrow night the little beggar will be all over the rigging."

And after events proved Herbert to be a true prophet.

There is a curious sequel to this story.

Arthur Collins, after successfully launching the pantomime, went across to New York on business. He was away for some time, and during the whole period of his absence the air-ship worked without a hitch, and was one of the funniest episodes in the whole show.

When he returned to London he lost no time in visiting the theatre to see for himself how things were going on.

He arrived during the evening performance, at the

very time when the air-ship scene was in progress, and just as he reached the wings to interview the stage-manager, the machine, for the first and only time in its career, collapsed, and fell to the stage, carrying, of course, its occupants with it.

The whole affair was a pure accident, and, fortunately, it came down so gradually that nobody was hurt; but the coincidence was a very peculiar one.

The children employed in the pantomime had a great deal in common with Dan Leno. If they were full of high spirits and mischief, so was he, and, like them, he had a way of treating rehearsals as if they were capital fun.

On the occasions when the principals rehearsed with the full company it was impossible to chase those children out of the theatre so long as there was any likelihood of Dan going on the stage and doing anything whatever. They might be dismissed early in the evening, and told they would not be required again until next morning; but, instead of going home, they would retire in a body to some secluded corner of the pit and there wait unobtrusively but hopefully for the appearance of Dan Leno.

When he *did* come on to run through a scene, song, or dance, they invariably defeated their object and betrayed their presence by a burst of laughter or applause, which, coming from a totally unexpected quarter, startled everybody.

Then it would be a case of—

"Good gracious! What are those children waiting for?"

"I'm sure I don't know. They were dismissed an hour ago."

"Children, don't you understand? You may go now. Go straight home, and be on the stage punctually at ten in the morning."

Then the children, with hypocritical thanks, would vanish only to reappear a little later on in a fresh place.

It was their custom to perform a little pantomime of their own in the big ballet-room every year.

This was always written and performed entirely by themselves; the scenic artists on the staff would help them with the scenery, and it was Dan's delight to be among them superintending generally.

At the public performance of this yearly entertainment, which was given between the matinée and the evening show, and attended by the entire staff, Dan's place was always in the very centre of the front row of seats, from which position he would lead the applause and laughter with great heartiness and goodwill.

During the intervals a very small boy, bearing on his head a fireman's helmet several sizes too large for him, was wont to appear on the stage and exhibit a large placard on which was printed in prominent letters—

#### " FIRE-PROOF CURTAIN "

This was, I believe, Dan's idea, and was designed to show that, although the power might be lacking, the will

was there to comply with the regulations of the London County Council.

I have also seen Dan bribe this same diminutive fireman with sixpence to go and do his duty towards the managing director, who stood at the back, an interested spectator, smoking a cigarette.

To Dan's intense joy, the fireman earned his money by tapping the managing director on the shoulder and informing him with outward severity and inward trepidation—

“You mustn't smoke during the performance, sir!”

And, to the managing director's credit be it said, that, entering into the spirit of the thing, he humbly apologised and extinguished his cigarette at once.

## CHAPTER IX

### DAN LENO IN AMERICA

**I**T was not to be expected that such fame as Dan Leno achieved could for long be confined to his own country.

He received many offers to travel, but refused them all until, in 1897, he was tempted to cross the Atlantic and show them what he could do in the United States of America.

He contracted to make his first appearance there on 12th April at Hammerstein's Olympia Music Hall, in New York.

Americans who know the stage over there very well have since said that this was not, by any means, the place most suitable for Dan Leno's particular form of entertainment; but, however that may be, it is certain that the management heralded his advent loudly enough by placarding the city with enormous posters that proclaimed the appearance of

"DAN LENO,  
THE FUNNIEST MAN ON EARTH."

Whether this challenging and somewhat invidious announcement was good policy is, of course, a question for

the management alone; but it certainly gave Dan a very formidable reputation to live up to among strangers, who were naturally disposed to believe that they had one or two funny men of their own who were hard to equal and still more difficult to beat.

Decidedly he did not feel as if he were "The Funniest Man on Earth" when he landed in New York! He was lonely; by some oversight he was not met by any official from the Hall, but instead, he was seized upon by a crowd of American reporters, the like of whom Dan had never seen before in his life.

"Say! Are you Leno?" inquired the first one who captured him, notebook in hand.

Dan meekly confessed to his identity.

"Then," said the other, looking him up and down "I guess you've got to be mighty funny to realise the poster."

Dan, who had neither seen the poster nor knew anything about it, failed to understand the allusion, so they all made haste to explain to him—

"Why, you're the funniest man on earth, ain't you? Don't you know it?"

No! Dan was modest, and did *not* know it. He made no such lofty claim; he merely claimed to be Dan Leno, who had come over from London to fulfil an engagement in New York, and he proposed to do it to the best of his ability.

But they were persistent. They wanted to know all about him: what were his methods; what he did, how he did it, and *why* he did it; had he seen the American

comedian So-and-so?—was he at all like him? If not, where did he differ?—was he funnier than him?—was he as funny? Did he make them laugh in England?—did he expect to make them laugh in America? If so, he mustn't expect to do it easily, because it took a mighty smart comedian to make them laugh in New York; and so on and so forth, until Dan was reduced to a state of abject nervousness, which reached its climax when, as he rode through the streets, he saw the huge posters advertising himself.

How he struck New York on the first night may be best judged by the following extract from a daily paper. It is headed—

“DAN LENO'S SUCCESS,”

and goes on to say—

“When the New York public gets to know Dan Leno well, and Dan Leno gets to know the New York public well, there is no doubt about it, he'll be nearly as big a favourite here as he is on his native heath, meaning the London music-hall stage.

“Every Englishman in the city, and many English women, too, were at the Olympia last night to give Dan a welcome—and they gave it to him with a will.

“A few minutes before he went on the stage, as he stood first on one foot and then on the other, and the beads of perspiration stood out all over his face, Mr. Leno remarked with a spasmodic smile that he was as cool as a cucumber, and felt as if he had been born and brought up right in New York.

“Then he rubbed a little grease-paint on his cheeks, made a few dashes of black at the corners of his mouth



and round his eyes, pulled on a pair of trousers, a vest, and a coat, each of them a mile too big, and he was ready for his first song, 'The Lucky Horseshoe.'

"Meantime the audience was making all the noise it could—the way a New York audience always does when a new actor with a big European reputation makes his début. Suddenly Leno makes a dash into the centre of the stage, and the applause redoubles. Then it is all quiet, and the song begins. At the end, there is some applause, but an American remarks,—

" 'Well, I've heard better !'

"The next song, 'Wait till I'm his Father,' goes better ; but still it is the Englishmen who lead the cheering. 'The North Pole' is voted decidedly slow by the Americans anyway, and then comes 'Going out of Town,' which describes the joys of a man whose wife has been ordered away somewhere for her health. That is a situation every man present apparently understands perfectly, and before the song is half over the house is roaring its approval, and Dan Leno has made his hit.

" 'The Shop-Walker' goes even better. Such droll mimicry, such grotesque pantomime, New Yorkers had not seen before, and—well—you've all heard of deafening applause : that's what followed the performance.

"One lady in a box almost had hysterics, and gave vent to her feelings by shouting,—

" 'Give 'em "The Red Poppies," Dan !'

"And Dan forthwith proceeded to oblige.

"That closed Mr. Leno's turn, and four big floral pieces were passed over the footlights, while the audience shouted for a speech. Mr. Leno was visibly affected, and, when he could make himself heard, he explained

that he had been a little bit nervous at first, but that was all over now, and he hoped to show his appreciation of the public's kindness on future occasions. Flowers were usually sent to the beautiful, and he presumed—with an unusually grotesque twist of his features—that was why he had been so favoured.

"To top off the whole, he gave an amusing little recitation about 'The Robin Redbreast,' and danced a hornpipe. Then he retired, while the audience yelled itself hoarse, and clapped its hands sore.

"A few minutes later Mr. Leno might have been found in his dressing-room, bathed in perspiration, and radiant with happiness.

"'I was too nervous to do myself justice to-night,' he remarked, 'and the orchestra played on too low a pitch for me; but I'll do better hereafter, now I know what they like. Of course, I'll change my songs to suit the audience.'

Another paper describes him as follows:—

"Leno is short, thin, and hatchet-faced. His costume consisted of odd garments, each several sizes too large for him. Semicircular black eyebrows lent a peculiar expression to his features; his eyes he made seem tiny or large at will, and his mouth was all over the lower part of his face at different times, so extravagant were his grimaces. . . .

"A more active vocalist is rarely seen. When his arms had exhausted for the moment their powers of emphasis, a leg came into play, and invariably with as effective reinforcement. Not a tremble came to the singer's tones as he stepped backward six feet in one stride, and again and again he slapped the floor with a

wide-soled shoe, making a noise like a rifle-shot, that seemed only a fitting part of the performer's antics."

The real fact of the matter is that, while they liked Dan's comedy in America, they failed to appreciate the fulness of it as we did on this side of the water. Probably they were convinced that they saw all in it that there was to see; but I am inclined to doubt if they really did. Another of the New York papers sums up the situation in these words:—

"It was absurd to presume that a London concert-hall singer could throw a New York audience into paroxysms of laughter. The jokes and the humour of the English vaudeville stage are, as a rule, so terribly out of date, that the importation of them to this country is apt to be a failure.

"Leno was fortunate that he ever made a good impression. It is easy to see, however, how, on his native soil, he became the idol of the people who attend the London concert halls. He is just the kind of an Englishman you would think would naturally appeal to Englishmen. He has just the manner and the ways which every Englishman finds, for some reason or other, excruciatingly funny.

"In New York he is worth seeing only as a type—not as a humorist.

"People unfamiliar with the English comique should find him interesting as a study."

Well, if we read the above again; alter the words "London" and "English," wherever they occur, to "New York" and "American";—the notice, in my opinion, would very neatly apply to more than one American



AN INDIAN SQUAW



comedian who has come over here with a great reputation.

But whether he be English or whether he be American ; when we see a performer capable of interesting and amusing a great public composed of people quite as intelligent as ourselves, it seems to me to be only fair to confess that, if we don't like him, it is probably because we don't understand him.

Dan was sufficiently insular not to fall in with American ways very readily. He seems to have missed the accustomed comforts of his home life, while the general hustle and bustle of hotel life worried him a good deal.

Also, some of the hotel appliances puzzled him not a little just at first.

One day, while sitting in his bedroom, he was seized with the desire to write letters ; so, lacking pen, ink, and paper, he rang the bell. A coloured man appeared in response, and to him Dan explained his requirements. The man, without replying, merely pointed to the wall and left the room.

Dan waited patiently for some time ; but nothing happened, and no pen, ink, or paper appeared ; so he rang the bell again.

Once more the coloured man appeared, and looked very annoyed indeed when Dan repeated his request. He was not an argumentative man, however, because he once more simply pointed to the wall, and, briefly ejaculating " Thar ! " left the room as before.

Dan was mystified ; but, looking in the direction

where the darkey had twice pointed, he noticed a disc on the wall. He got up and examined it, and saw that on its face were printed the names of various commodities, such as "Soap," "Towels," etc., etc. He could make nothing of it beyond imagining it was some new kind of a round game, and, if it were such, wondering why it should be hung up on a bedroom wall.

He waited for another spell, and as he was still severely ignored he arose in his wrath to find the manager and air his grievances. . . . But he couldn't find the manager, and nobody appeared to have any time to help him to do it. As he wandered about the hotel, endeavouring to explain to the various officials he met how badly he was being treated, they one and all cut him short before he was half-way through with his story, and saying, "Ring the bell," or "Move the indicator," fled hastily, to make up for the time he had caused them to waste.

He returned to his room in a temper, and rang his bell fiercely, determined to have some satisfaction out of somebody.

The same coloured man entered for the third time. He was in a rage quite equal to Dan's, and took the wind out of the latter's sails by getting in the first shot.

"What in thunder do you want?" he demanded.

"Pen, ink and paper!" returned Dan firmly; "and if I don't get them, I leave this hotel to-night."

"Thar!" remarked the man, again pointing.

"So you said before," replied Dan. "But I'll bet my

salary against yours for the next three weeks, that you won't find any pen, ink and paper '*thar*'!"

The coloured man went to the disc, turned the indicator impatiently round to "Pen, Ink and Paper," ejaculated, with double emphasis, "Wall, THAR!" and retired with the air of a man who had done a great deal more than he was paid to do.

Dan rose and examined the disc more carefully, but still failed to grasp its full meaning. While he was thus engaged, the door opened and a boy entered, bringing with him the pen, ink and paper Dan had been so long worrying after.

"Oh, here you are at last!" exclaimed Dan. "Why didn't that nigger tell you at first?"

"Nigger!" said the boy, rather surprised. "No nigger told *me* anything!"

"Then who *did* tell you to bring up these things?" persisted Dan, anxious to get at the bottom of the mystery.

The boy gazed at him as if he feared he had suddenly taken leave of his senses, and then, pointing to the disc, said, "Why, that!"

"Oh, '*Thar*' told you, did it?" exclaimed Dan, beginning to understand.

The boy, now quite certain he was dealing with some eccentric gentleman who was not to be trusted, turned to go.

"Hey!" shouted Dan, just as he reached the door. "If you see a coloured gentleman loafing about outside



there, will you tell him from me that I think his machine has got a jolly sight more sense than *he* has."

It was in New York that an incident happened of which Dan was wont to make a good story against himself.

While walking along Broadway he noticed, on the pavement, a piece of paper that struck him as having a very familiar appearance. He picked it up, examined it, and saw that he had not been mistaken. It was a one-thousand-dollar bill.

Putting it in his pocket, he pursued his way to the hall where he was due to perform, and, after the show, producing it for inspection by some of the company, told the tale of how and where he had found it.

They all looked at it, and opined that it was better to be born lucky than rich. They absolutely scouted Dan's suggestion that he should give it up to the police; it was very evident, they said, that Dan knew nothing of their police; he had found it, and he had a perfect right to keep it.

In the end Dan agreed to their views, with the compromise that he would keep it intact for three days, and if, by the end of that time, the rightful owner had not advertised for it, or turned up in some way to claim it, he would stand them all a good supper out of the proceeds.

The story was made sufficiently public, and a great many people turned up to see Dan's thousand-dollar bill, and seemed to be greatly interested in it; still, in spite of this publicity, nobody appeared, as rightful owner,

to demand it, and although Dan daily searched the papers, he found no advertisement of such an article having been lost. So, on the evening of the third day, Dan considered the thousand-dollar bill to be his own, and prepared to entertain his friends out of it.

He did the thing really well, and his friends thoroughly appreciated his hospitality. He was called upon to narrate once more the history of the finding of the thousand-dollar bill; his health was drunk; the health of the original owner was drunk, after being proposed in sympathetic and feeling terms by one of the company present; a vote of thanks was passed to the bill itself for delivering itself up into the possession of such a worthy owner as Dan Leno; in short, it was a convivial evening, and everybody seemed to be as delighted, that Dan should have found such a treasure, as Dan was himself.

When everybody was tired of drinking healths, and the general opinion appeared to be that "enough was as good as a feast," Dan called for his reckoning.

When the waiter presented the account, there was a universal cry of "Pay him with the thousand-dollar bill," and Dan, seeing the suitability of the suggestion, laid his prize on the waiter's salver.

The man glanced at it, smiled slightly, and was about to make a remark, when one of the Americans stopped him, and told him to take it to the governor himself; to say it came from Mr. Dan Leno, and that he wanted change for it at once.

The man smiled again, but obediently departed, and

in less than two minutes the governor himself appeared at the table, with the precious bill in his hand.

"You're Mr. Leno?" he remarked interrogatively.

"I am," said Dan.

"And you want to pay your bill, and get me to give you change, out of this?" demanded the governor, throwing the bill on the table contemptuously.

"I do," returned Dan. "Why not? You're not the man who lost it, are you?" he added, as a sudden thought struck him.

"Lost that? No, sir," replied the other. "I guess the man who lost *that* one isn't losing any sleep over it."

"Why not?" asked Dan. "It isn't a bad one, is it?"

"See here, Mr. Leno," exclaimed the governor, fairly losing his temper, "they tell me you're a comedian, and I'm not going to deny it; but all I can say is, if a stale old joke like this goes down where you come from, they're a great deal easier to please than they are over here."

Dan, in perfect bewilderment, picked up the bill and gazed at it earnestly; while the others, unable to control themselves any longer, shouted with laughter at the genuinely puzzled expression on his speaking countenance.

The thousand-dollar bill was an artfully veiled advertisement issued by an enterprising New York tradesman, and although it was perfectly plain to the Americans, Dan's comparative unfamiliarity with the current cash of the United States had rendered him an easy prey to the deception. However, he could take a

joke as well as he could make a joke, and, if he had to pay the piper, it is safe to say that nobody enjoyed the tune better than he did.

As he was only in the States for four weeks, and was in New York most, if not all, of the time, he cannot be said to have explored America to any great extent.

He managed to see most of the sights in and around the metropolis, and was very specially interested in the Chinese quarter, where he spent a good deal of his spare time.

This choice neighbourhood seemed to have a great fascination for him, and here it was, he used to declare, that he met a buxom Irish colleen from County Cork, who had married a wealthy Chinese laundryman, and was the proud possessor of a Chino-Hibernian baby boy, who was, by his fond parents, christened under the all-embracing name of "Mickie Sing-Sing." Whether this is really a fact or an invention of Dan's, nobody is quite sure.

Although, in private, he used to tell many tales of his American experiences, he brought back with him no new types of comedy. One might have expected that from such a cosmopolitan store as New York he would have found something worth adding to his collection of eccentric characters ; but if he did, he never showed them to us on the stage.

He never visited America again ; nor, although he had many good offers, would he consent to journey as far as Australia.

In a sense it is a pity that he never gave our Australian

cousins the opportunity of seeing him; for there, surely, was a warm welcome and hearty appreciation waiting for him. Still, he was essentially a home bird, and could never have been happy for long in unfamiliar surroundings. America and Australia were, to him, alike foreign, simply because they were not England, and of him, as of the gallant hero in *H.M.S. Pinafore*, it might be truly said—

In spite of all temptations  
To belong to other nations,  
He remained an Englishman.

## CHAPTER X

### HIS INFINITE VARIETY

**WE** have the very best authority for stating that "one man in his time plays many parts"; but it is not easy to say exactly how many parts Dan Leno played in his time.

We know that after he settled in London he played in eighteen pantomimes, three burlesques, and one or two smaller farces at benefits. How many different characters he had portrayed before that time it is quite impossible to estimate, and I don't for a moment suppose that he was ever quite certain on the question himself.

In addition to this record we must count his songs innumerable; because in each and every song he played a separate and clearly defined part. He was never merely Dan Leno singing a song; but in make-up, gesture, and general demeanour, he was a consistent, if exaggerated, type of character.

In these performances he certainly had the stage to himself so far as the eye was concerned, but by his art he contrived somehow to make the imaginary people with whom he conversed, and about whom he spoke, almost as real as himself.

Considering, therefore, as we are entitled to do, that to him each new song was a new part to study, Dan Leno may be fairly said to have established a record.

To mention only a few of the many quaint beings he successfully impersonated is sufficient to prove that his range was both wide and varied.

He was, among other things, a Huntsman, a Recruiting Sergeant, a Shop-walker, a Beef-eater, a Fireman, a Grocer's Assistant, a County Councillor, a Highland Chieftain, a Professor of Anatomy, a Shoemaker, a Railway Guard, a Doctor, a Japanese, a Detective, One of the Unemployed, a Waiter, a Grass-widower, a Cavalier. He was every known kind of henpecked husband and universally crushed parent; he was the mischievous boy, and the boy's justly irate stepfather; and he was, in himself, a peculiar and extensive gallery of females, mostly middle-aged and garrulous, but each one artistically differentiated in some way or other from her sisters.

As has already been pointed out, Dan Leno, in the patter which was by far the greater portion of these songs, had a truly wonderful gift of peopling the stage with the purely imaginary characters who were helping him to play his little comedy.

You didn't see them, but you knew they were there, because Dan conversed with them so earnestly: and if you didn't exactly hear all they said to him in reply, you always managed to gather from his own disjointed repetitions of their remarks quite sufficient to enable you to follow the conversation intelligibly. Or again, when he was telling these people something about some



IN THE SONG "NEVERMORE"





third party, who did not happen to be present, he contrived, without actually describing this person in any way whatever, to convey to everybody concerned a very accurate picture of what manner of being he or she really was.

A striking instance of this occurs in a song entitled, "I'll marry him," which was written and composed by Mr. Herbert Darnley, the author of most of his later successes.

This song primarily deals with the fixed and grim determination of a certain lady—name and age alike unknown—to marry a gentleman in the building trade, known as Jim Johnson. The first verse and chorus deal exclusively with this idea, as follows:—

For twenty-five years I've been doing my best  
To make with Jim Johnson a match ;  
I've done everything except ask him point-blank,  
But he won't come up to the scratch.  
I really think Jim's very partial to me,  
Though never a word has he said ;  
But this morning I passed where he's building a house,  
And he threw half a brick at my head.

*Spoken:* Just to call my attention. You know we've been courting a long time—at least, I've done the courting ; Jim's so slow. You see, I do very well in my business. I'm a dressmaker's labourer. I think Jim's awfully fond of me. I'm very fond of Jim, but I can't stand his sister ; she's so mean. Oh ! she is a mean woman. She's so mean that she'll buy half-a-dozen oysters and eat them in front of a looking-glass to make them look like a dozen. But she shan't turn me against Jim.

*Chorus:* My mind's made up, I'm going to marry him ;  
He'll have to come to church ; if he won't I'll carry him.  
Five-and-twenty years I've had my eye on Jim ;  
If he won't marry me, I'll marry him.

At the end of the third verse we are casually introduced to a lady who is now well known to fame, although no human being ever saw her in the flesh; a certain Mrs. Kelly.

You see, we had a row once, and it was all through Mrs. Kelly. You know Mrs. Kelly, of *course*—Mrs. Kelly—*Mrs. Kelly!!* You know Mrs. Kelly? Oh, you *must* know Mrs. Kelly! Good life a-mighty! Don't look so simple. She's a cousin of Mrs. Niplett's, and her husband keeps the little what-not shop at the—oh! you must know Mrs. Kelly. Everybody knows Mrs. Kelly!

And long before Dan Leno had finished with her everybody *did* know Mrs. Kelly. They knew her so well that the song was christened "Mrs. Kelly," and is best known by that title to-day.

To my mind, this is a typical example of Dan's wonderful power of suggestion. When he first came across Mrs. Kelly in the dialogue written for him, she distinctly appealed to him. He formed a very vivid picture of her in his own mind, and having done so, he simply could not help making a feature of her. At the same time, without presenting any one of her salient features to his audience, he managed to give them the identical impression of Mrs. Kelly that he himself had.

I know that, having heard him for the first time discourse upon the lady, I came away feeling that I was intimately acquainted, not only with Mrs. Kelly, but also with her cousin, Mrs. Niplett, and her husband, who kept the little what-not shop.

On the other hand, Jim Johnson, about whom the song was ostensibly written, was, to me, a myth, simply

because Dan elected to throw him overboard to make room for Mrs. Kelly.

The true artist betrays himself, not only in the things he says, but, almost in a higher degree, in the things he leaves unsaid. And in this particular, as in all, Dan Leno was a true artist.

Take, for example, the song "Our Stores," of which, with Mr. Harry Wright, he was part author:—

Our Stores ! Our Stores !  
Our nineteenth-century stores !  
There's mutton and lamb,  
And beef and ham ;  
Sugar and spice,  
Everything nice.  
Our Stores ! Our Stores !  
Our nineteenth-century stores !  
There's eggs overlaid,  
And new marmalade,  
In our nineteenth-century stores.

Anon, he discourses on the ethics of eggs from the point of view of the conscientious assistant of a grocer.

"Where is there an article," he asks, "that will compel you to tell more lies than an egg? Do you know, I don't think we properly grasp eggs. There is something awfully artful about an egg—there is a mystery in it. Of course, there are three kinds of eggs—there is the new-laid egg (which is nearly extinct)—then there is the fresh egg, which is almost the same as the new-laid, but with an additional something about it that makes all the difference. Then comes *The Egg*; that is the egg I am talking about. That is the egg that causes all the trouble. It's only a little round white thing, but you can't tell what it's thinking about. You daren't kick it, and you daren't drop it. It has got no face. You can't get it to laugh. You simply look at it and say, 'Egg!'

"This morning a lady came in and said, 'How do you sell eggs?' I said, 'As quickly as possible.' She walked out again.

"On New Year's Day I made a lot of good resolutions. I made up my mind that, whatever happened, I would always speak the truth—whatever happened, I would never tell another lie as long as I lived—and I was feeling so happy and comfortable and angelic about it as I was taking down the shutters in the morning, when—What do you think? What *do* you think? The very first customer who came into the shop asked me straight out, 'Are those eggs fresh?'"

Not another word did Dan Leno speak; but two steps back and two hands spread out in helpless and despairing gesture told the rest of the story. There you saw, on the one hand, his duty to his employer, and, on the other, the probable overthrow of all his magnificent resolutions. What was the poor man to do? He mutely called us all to witness that he meant well, and that the fault (if there were a fault) was due to circumstances, and not of his own creating; and we both laughed and sympathised with him in his unfortunate dilemma.

Another example of Dan Leno's apparently intuitive knowledge of the precise psychological moment at which to finish, and thus secure the greatest possible effect, occurs to me.

In the chorus of his Scotch song he used to describe a species of burlesque "McGregor's Gathering," at which there were present representatives of all the clans ever heard of, and a few that Dan had invented for the purposes of the song. He always began very cheerfully with his list—

There were McGregor's men,  
And McPherson's men,  
And McTulloch's men,  
And Mc——

Here his memory gave out, and a worried look came over him. After a brief mental struggle he tried back, and began the chorus again——

There were McGregor's men,  
And McPherson's men,  
And McTulloch's men,  
And Mc——

No! It was no use! He stuck again at the same point. He thought, and thought, and thought—you could see him thinking harder than you ever saw any other man think in your life. He tried various little devices, such as murmuring the chorus to himself below his breath——

There were McGregor's men,  
And McPherson's men,  
And McTulloch's men,  
And Mc——

Stuck again! He stamped his foot impatiently as he said to himself, "I *know* there were some more men," and once more mentally reviewed his list.

It was all in vain; so, with a glance at the conductor that was half resignation and half apology, he said, "Never mind! Go on with the dance!"

Then the band struck up, and Dan apparently threw his whole heart and soul into the mad whirl of a Highland fling. Nobody, you thought, could possibly dance as he did, and have time to think of anything else, and

yet, in the very midst of the most exciting and riotous movement of all, you saw his face suddenly light up with a new-born joy, and you wondered what sweet thought had given rise to it.

Ceasing his dance abruptly, he clapped his hands as a signal to the orchestra to stop playing, and, coming well down to the footlights, he triumphantly remarked to the conductor,—

“McFarlane’s men !”

Then, having said this, and vindicated his memory, he went off the stage without finishing his dance or speaking another word.

Those who have seen it done will have no hesitation in saying that, as a finish to this particular song, the effect was much better than if he had continued his dance ; but how many men are there who could invent, or who would venture to try, such an original and daring experiment ?

“The Recruiting Sergeant” was one of Dan Leno’s most amusing creations :—

Recruiting ! Recruiting !  
Better far than shooting,  
Labouring and sabring with guns that will not shoot ;  
When dogs delight to bark and bite,  
And heroes, they go out and fight,  
It’s my delight,  
Both day and night,  
To capture a Recruit.

A short man was this sergeant, but with a ferocious little moustache, and a gleam in the eye that more than atoned for his lack of inches.

He carried a short cane, with which he smartly slapped his leg as, in the intervals of conversation, he remarked, in tones of the sincerest self-admiration, "Ha! what a life!"

He had received many medals in his time; so many, in fact, that he had to give up wearing them on his chest, because their weight was tending to make him knock-kneed. On the whole, he preferred promotion to medals, although he confessed that there was a large amount of uncertainty about the former reward:—

Promotion in the army is very like a whack on the nose; you never know you've got it till you get it.

But still, after all, there was no doubt that the life of a recruiting sergeant had many compensations:—

What a life! Oh, my word! Splendid life! Nothing to do but stand still and walk about all day! Dear, oh dear! A wonderful life! I was standing at the corner of the street the other day, and I saw a fine, handsome, dashing fellow—a man much after my own stamp. I thought what a fine soldier he would make. I walked over to him and said, "You want to be a soldier?" He said, "I don't. I'm waiting for a bus!" Oh dear! Oh dear! My word! What a life!

He was not too proud to own that he made occasional mistakes, as for instance:—

The other day I was standing at another corner of the street—I always stand at corners, because then I catch them both ways. A fine young fellow came up and said, "Governor, will I do for a soldier?" I said, "I think so!" I walked round him, and I noticed he walked round at the same time. When I got him before the doctor, the doctor said, "Smirks! you do find them," and we discovered he'd only one arm. Well I'd never noticed it because, you see, he kept the arm behind him that he hadn't got.



"Buying a House," we instinctively recall to our minds that celebrated river that wasn't really a river, but was, in fact, the overflow from the gas works—the river that was at the bottom of the garden in summer, and the garden that was at the bottom of the river in winter.

And so on, down to one of the last—if not the very last—song he ever sang, when the disconsolate wife of a gas stoker complained that the gentleman who lived next door (also employed at the gas works) brought home to his wife more money on Saturday night than *her* husband did, and opined the reason was that, being the smaller man of the two, he could get further up the gas pipes.

There is no doubt that Dan Leno took most of his characters from real life, and it must have been interesting, for instance, to be with him when he was studying the little peculiarities of the various shopwalkers whom he blended into the wonderful type that sang with so much success,—

Walk this way ! Walk this way !  
The sale's now on ; we've a grand display.  
Upon my word, we're giving them away !  
Step this way, madam ! Walk this way !

That he was continually on the look out for new types to portray, an incident within my own personal knowledge will show.

I was sitting with him in his dressing-room during a pantomime wait, when a card was handed in from the representative of a life insurance company, who asked the favour of an interview with him.

Dan agreed at once, at which I was rather surprised, because, as a rule, he did not care to be bothered with any business but theatrical business during performance. However, he had at the moment time to spare, and the gentleman was ushered in forthwith.

He had come with the idea of persuading Dan to insure his life, and Dan welcomed him in such an encouraging and cordial manner that he looked very hopeful indeed as he took a seat and prepared to open the campaign.

He began by producing the company's balance sheet, and discoursed therefrom on the subjects of assets and liabilities with great fluency, and at some length. Dan listened to him with rapt attention, and, when he had finished, asked to be allowed to look at the document.

It was handed over to him, and after a brief but apparently careful inspection, Dan gave it as his opinion that it was very nicely got up, and reflected great credit on everybody concerned.

Then, in a ludicrous travesty of the insurance man's manner, he proceeded to explain the various items to me in his own way.

I remember he told me with great gravity, among other things, that the "uncalled capital" was money that belonged to nobody in particular, and that they called it "uncalled" because they didn't know what to call it; that the "amount of claims paid" represented the profit that the company had made on defunct policy-holders, and that the "reserve fund" was not really money at all, but merely figures that were put

down for the purpose of making both sides of the balance sheet add up to the same total.

The insurance man, who was very much in earnest, and seemed unable to conceive the possibility of anybody making a joke out of such a serious subject as life insurance, interposed, and, with deference, ventured to suggest that Dan had not "got it quite right."

For this he had the pleasure of explaining it all over again, while Dan listened as politely and attentively as before.

"Splendid!" he commented, as the insurance man came to a conclusion. "And now, supposing I insure my life with you, what do I get?"

Out came the prospectus, and piles of figures were speedily quoted to prove that a life insurance policy effected with this particular company was the very best investment that any man could possibly make.

"I see!" murmured Dan meditatively. "The people who insure in your company make their living by dying, and from what you've told me, they seem to do very well out of it, too."

Certainly, the agent admitted, they did better in his company than in any other.

"I suppose," Dan went on, "that yours is the best company that is or ever was."

The agent confessed to it without a blush.

"Then," remarked Dan, with conviction, "the man who called on me yesterday must have been a liar."

"He certainly must have been," agreed the agent



"NELSON"



cheerfully, "if he represented a rival company and claimed supremacy for it."

"Well, it's this way," said Dan finally. "There seems to be an impression abroad that I want to insure my life, and for the last three weeks I've interviewed one insurance man a day. Every day a man calls with a better company than the man who called yesterday, so that's why I'm in no hurry. Up to now, you are the very best; but I think I'll wait until to-morrow, because I fancy a man is sure to call then with one that can beat yours."

After the agent had left the room, Dan turned to me and remarked—

"That chap wouldn't make a bad song, would he?"

I heartily agreed, and regret he never carried out what was certainly his intention at the time.

Although Dan Leno, to get his broad effects, naturally resorted to an extravagant make-up, he was really quite a master of the art.

We are all familiar with the abnormally elevated coal-black eyebrows, the very slightly rouge-tipped and inquisitive nose; the hat and suit, apparently built for a Herbert Campbell, that he wore as a man, and the corkscrew ringlets that he very often affected as a woman; but his scope was not limited by such as these.

As the Widow Twankey, dining out at a fashionable restaurant, and as the newly-enriched Mother Goose, he gave us pictures of really presentable, if plain-featured, elderly ladies. As Mother Goose made

beautiful, he presented a very colourable imitation of the typical village maiden ; and it is certain that on the first night of that pantomime, when he was discovered as a classic nymph reclining in a beautiful shell, nobody in the audience recognised him until he spoke.

It was, of course, his love of and taste for art that primarily helped him in perfecting these disguises, and his skill revealed itself even more markedly when he made up for his own amusement than when he did so for the exigencies of the stage.

At several of the Covent Garden balls he appeared in character, and when one examines the photographs taken of him in costume, one realises that Dan Leno could do a great deal more than merely make up for the halls.

There certainly is a suggestion of Leno about the eyebrows, if nowhere else, in his Charles I. costume ; but as Richard III., as Nelson, and as an Indian squaw, he is absolutely unrecognisable.

He always had a strange yearning to play the part of Richard III., and went the length of rehearsing considerable portions of it in private. How he would have played the part it is impossible to say, but to judge from his photograph he would have looked it.

It was at a Covent Garden ball that he met for the first and only time a character of whom he used to delight to talk.

He was a gentleman up from the country somewhere, and being anxious to taste all the delights of London before he returned to home and rustic bliss, he had des-

To my old friend Jack.



"CHARLES I"





patched an obedient wife to her bed in the hotel and sallied forth to his first Covent Garden ball.

He was evidently something of an enthusiast, and wishful to do things in a thorough manner, because he had arrayed himself as a mediæval knight in a suit of chain armour, and, when Dan first noticed him, was enjoying himself as well as he could be expected to do under very uncomfortable conditions.

The formation of his costume rendered it equally impossible for him either to dance or to sit down, so he had spent the whole of the night on his feet, gaining an occasional and much-needed rest by leaning against a wall or a pillar, or, provided there were no objection, even a fellow-creature.

He had, moreover, also seriously miscalculated his capacity for refreshment. He had consumed as much as a gentleman up from the country generally *does* consume before his accepted closing time of eleven o'clock, and then suddenly found himself confronted with a long vista of hours during which he had nothing on earth to do but "have another."

So, having just "had another," he took a walk round the room, and, suddenly feeling a strong desire to lean against something for a space, he spied Dan as the nearest object, and, without previous introduction, leant against him.

Dan pushed him away politely but firmly.

"How now, thou saucy Malapert!" quoth the indignant knight. "An thou jostlest me thus, I'll smite thee o'er the mazzard."

"Out upon thee!" returned Dan on the instant. "Out upon thee for a scurril knave! Get thee gone ere I cleave thee from chine to brisket."

"My dear fellow!" exclaimed the knight, shaking Dan by the hand delightedly, "you're the only sensible man in the room. I've been doing my best to keep up this character all night, and you're the first one who has helped me to do it properly. Come and have a drink."

"Ay, marry, that will I!" agreed Dan, and very soon the pair were at the bar, and the knight was loudly demanding—

"What ho, there, Verderer! Bring me a cup of sack."

When the waiters got used to being called "verderers"; when the lady assistants realised that to be addressed as "wench" was merely Early English, and nothing derogatory to their fair fame; and when the staff generally gathered that "cups of sack" and "warm possets" were but idioms that stood for more familiar and up-to-date liquors, they quite enjoyed hearing Dan and the knight converse in the mediæval tongue, while as for the worthy knight himself, he was enjoying himself as he never had enjoyed himself before.

When the time came for departure, Dan would on no account permit such a thoroughly consistent performer as his new acquaintance to go home in anything so distressingly modern as a cab; so, improvising one or two torches, he and some friends, as link-boys, escorted

*To my old Chum Jack.*



"RICHARD III"



him to his hotel. As the knight himself expressed it, it was a worthy finish to a great evening thus to arrive home in state, to which Dan added,—

“And, as your wife will probably tell you to-morrow, in your *usual* state.”

## CHAPTER XI

### FROM STRAND TO SANDRINGHAM

**M**ENTION has already been made of the fact that, in addition to his music-hall and pantomime work, Dan Leno played in three burlesques, and in the first of these he, as a matter of fact, made his initial appearance in the west end of London.

It was after his second pantomime at the Surrey Theatre, and before he appeared in his first at Drury Lane, that a burlesque entitled *Atalanta* was produced on November 17th, 1888, at the Strand Theatre.

The piece was written by George P. Hawtrey, and the music composed by Arthur Dyer, with additional numbers by William Corri and Edward Solomon.

The original cast was: Messrs. W. F. Hawtrey, T. Squire, F. Wyatt, Fleming Morton, F. Wensley, Rudolph Lewis, and the Misses Nellie Bennett, Florence Lancaster, Stephanie Baring, Stella Leigh, Mary Glover, Minnie Cunningham, Lulu du Cane, Jessie Collier, Carlotta Zerbini, Alma Stanley, and Marie Linden.

It was not a conspicuous success to begin with, and

after a run of three weeks or so Dan Leno was engaged with a view to strengthening the comedy generally.

In this respect there is no doubt whatever that he fully justified his inclusion. All London flocked to see him compete in a burlesque race with Alma Stanley, the fleet-footed, and the situation may best be summed up in a verse that parodied one of Mr. Tom's Squire's songs, and that appeared in a journal then published under the title of *The Hawk* :—

The booking went up, up, up,  
 They came from all over the town ;  
 But when Stanley or Leno  
 Were not to be seen, oh !  
 The booking went down, down, down.

As may be guessed from the opinion expressed in this verse, the management of the Strand Theatre were very anxious to retain Dan Leno's services, and Mr. Hawtrey approached Sir Augustus Harris more than once with tempting offers to induce him to release Dan from his engagement in pantomime. Sir Augustus, however, knew a good thing when he had got one, and he stuck to his prize.

Had he acted otherwise, who knows but that a burlesque and musical comedy career might have been in store for Dan, and that Drury Lane pantomime would never have known him at all.

There is no reason to suppose that he would not have been quite as successful in the one line as in the other ; but as it turned out he confined himself to music-



halls and Drury Lane pantomimes for the next ten years.

It was in 1896 that it occurred to Mr. Milton Bode that Dan Leno, touring the theatres in the principal provincial cities with a company and a piece of his own, would be a profitable investment.

So he communicated with Dan, laying before him his suggestions, and the result was a meeting between Milton Bode, Dan Leno, and Dan's agent.

The conversation was at first entirely between Milton Bode and the agent.

"To begin with," said the latter gentleman, "we are now only in the year 1896, and Mr. Leno is not disengaged until 1898."

"Very well," returned Milton Bode. "I am quite willing to engage Mr. Leno for the year 1898."

"Yes," went on the agent, "but he is only disengaged for six weeks in that year."

"Quite right," agreed the manager. "Then I am ready to engage him for those six weeks."

"H'm!" remarked the agent dubiously. "I'm afraid you don't know what salary he is asking just now."

"No," admitted Milton Bode, "I do not. How much does he want?"

"One hundred and twenty-five pounds a week," replied the other impressively.

"I'll give it to him," agreed the manager promptly, and in no wise dismayed.

"In that case," persisted the agent, swiftly pursuing his advantage, "he will also require a cash deposit of,

say, four weeks' salary—five hundred pounds down—before he signs the contract."

"I'll give it to him now," said Milton Bode, producing his cheque-book without a moment's hesitation.

Up to this point Dan had sat in perfect silence while the two were arranging his future for him; but the last remark induced him to join in.

"Do you mean to say," he asked, addressing Milton Bode—"do you mean to say that you are ready to engage me two years and four months ahead at a salary of one hundred and twenty-five pounds a week?"

"Certainly I am!" was the reply.

"And that you are willing to pay five hundred pounds on account down now?"

Milton Bode got his cheque-book and fountain-pen in order.

"I am more than willing. I am quite ready," he said.

"Then," said Dan, with decision, "there can be no question of deposits between you and me. Get the contract ready, and I'll sign it as soon as ever you like."

The piece in question was entitled *Orlando Dando*, and the subject, as well as the object of it, was, so far as anybody could make out, principally Dan Leno. Certainly no comedian ever worked harder or more constantly in a piece to earn his salary, and make the tour a success.

That he *did* make it a success is best proved by the fact that Milton Bode re-engaged him for another

and a similar tour at largely increased terms, the vehicle in this case being a piece entitled *Mr. Wix of Wickham*, which of course, like the first, was merely an alias for Dan Leno.

This also was a big success ; and such was Mr. Bode's belief in Dan's drawing capacity, that the salary he was ready to give him was practically only bounded by the seating capacity of the theatres he visited.

There is no doubt about it, however, that these tours, during which he had to sustain on his own shoulders the bulk of a three hours' entertainment, and the visits he paid to provincial music-halls, where he rarely got off under ten songs a night, were a great strain upon him.

On his first tour, as the company had some rather long Sunday journeys to negotiate between towns, a special saloon car was provided for his use ; but more often than not that saloon car ran empty, while Dan was to be found in an ordinary carriage among the boys, helping to enliven the journey for them in his own inimitable way.

On one occasion, the journey being practically an all-day one, dinner was prepared in the car for himself, his wife, and a friend.

Having examined the menu, which was, by the way, on a very generous scale, Dan strolled along the platform at a junction where the train pulled up for a quarter of an hour or so, and there saw the other members of the company preparing for their various and independent repasts.



"ORLANDO DANDO"



As he watched them producing their Bath buns and ham sandwiches out of their paper bags, he began to feel horribly and ineffably mean.

"What am I," he asked himself, "that I should be regaling myself on the fat of the land, while these people have to be content with such humble provisions? Why should I, just because I earn a good salary and can afford to buy my own dinner, be better treated than those to whom, for financial reasons, such luxuries as dining cars are barred?"

Then he thought of how he, when in his early struggling and poverty-ridden days, would have felt if some big theatrical "star," who lived in the lap of luxury, had taken him by the hand, and asked him to share his good fortune.

Thinking of this, his resolution was quickly taken.

"Boys and girls!" he exclaimed, bursting in upon the company seated in the various compartments, "put those things away, and save them up for tea. You are all coming into my car to have dinner with me."

And, just before the train started, he presented himself, beaming, and at the head of a procession of twenty or more people, to explain to an embarrassed dining-car attendant that he had invited one or two friends to lunch with him, and that he hoped plenty would be provided, because they all rejoiced in the possession of good, strong, healthy appetites.

It was while on tour in Glasgow that he wrote from there a letter to a friend which, if it is not always com-

plimentary to the second city in the empire, is, at least, amusing.

"I am in Glasgow," he begins, "and I live near the docks. Opposite my window is a shipload of lime, at which I gaze affectionately day and night, because I seem to see your face in it.

"It is raining; it has been raining, and it is going to rain. It has rained so much that it has washed all the figures off the Town Hall clock, and nobody in Glasgow knows what time it is.

"When you say to a Glasgow man, 'It's a wet day,' he always replies, 'Don't mention it.' That is, partly because he's ashamed to mention it, and partly because, as it is always raining in Glasgow, it isn't worth mentioning. When the rain forgets for five minutes, and leaves off, and you say to a Glasgow man, 'I think we shall have some rain shortly,' he looks surprised, and says, 'Of course.'

"He isn't surprised that we're going to have the rain, but he's as surprised as you would be if somebody said to you, 'I think the sun will rise to-morrow morning.'

"It is also cold. In fact, it is so cold that when I sent my dresser out for beer last night, the publican cut it off in lengths, and he had to bring it back with him in a brown paper parcel.

"In Glasgow they talk Scotch, and also do other things with it. They can't help talking Scotch, and they don't want to help the other things. When a Glasgow man is talking Scotch to you, don't swallow all he says, or you'll get drunk.

"There is a river here called the Clyde, and I sailed on it as far as Greenock—once. They say nobody ever

did it twice unless he was well paid for it. I said to the captain of the boat, 'The river's very high to-day, isn't it?' and he replied, 'Not at all. It's just the opposite.' So I said, 'Well, all I can say is, that you must have a bad cold in your head.'

"I fancy we meant different kinds of 'highness.'

"Glasgow is the second city in the empire; I don't know what's the third, but when I find out I'll wire you to back it for a place.

"We live in a flat entirely surrounded by human beings. The man who lives above us is a strong man, who juggles with mangles and grand pianos. He drops one occasionally, and if we're lucky before we leave, we shall have a grand piano to bring away with us.

"The man next door is learning to be a brass band, and the steamers on the river all hoot at him as they pass.

"When you go out into the streets for a rest, you find that they are paved with granite sets. This is done so that you can hear the traffic properly. Granite sets never wear out; they always wear you out first. . . ."

It was at a café in Manchester while on this tour that Dan was challenged to play a game at chess. It came about in this way.

The smoke-room of this café was well provided with dominoes, chess- and draught-boards, and other play-things wherewith the busy Manchester man was wont to while away his dinner-hour.

Here Dan saw a spectacled youth of earnest and scholarly appearance, poring over a chess-board, and occasionally referring to a newspaper spread on the



that Dan afterwards described as being very like the zigzag flight of a snipe.

This was far beyond the powers or understanding of Leno the novice ; so he, following the accepted custom as he had observed it among people who played chess, planted his elbows on the table, buried his head in his hands, and gazed steadily and raptly at the chess-board.

This species of passive resistance he prolonged so unduly that his opponent, growing impatient, felt himself constrained to remark, in a tentative manner, "Your move, I believe!"

"I know," said Dan briefly, and without raising his head.

Another period of inaction ensued, during which the youth waxed mildly sarcastic. "I suppose you wouldn't care to play with a time limit, would you?" he asked.

"Oh, no!" replied Dan politely. "Don't worry about me. I've plenty of time, thank you."

With which remark he resumed his reverie, and maintained a masterly immobility that declined to be shaken by impatient coughs, shuffling of the feet, hints either mild or strong, or, in short, by any plan his antagonist could devise whereby to goad him into action.

At last the latter, being able to bear the strain no longer, looked at his watch, rose abruptly, and shortly remarked, in a very gruff tone of voice, "Good afternoon!"

"What! Must you go so soon?" asked Dan, looking up in innocent surprise.

"Soon!" echoed the other bitterly. "I'm ten minutes overdue at the warehouse now, and all through you!"

"Then it's a drawn game," announced Dan, rising from his seat with a sigh of relief.

"I should think you've played a good many drawn games in your time," commented the youth sarcastically.

"No," returned Dan, "this is the only one."

"There's one thing certain," went on his disappointed adversary, buttoning his coat fiercely. "You'll never be beaten! Life's much too short for that."

"Quite right!" agreed Dan, with unruffled composure. "I've never lost a game of chess in my life."

"I don't believe it," retorted the other explosively. "No man who could play chess at all would have sat for the best part of an hour worrying over a perfectly simple move such as that one was."

"I daresay you're right," returned Dan. "But then, don't you see, I *can't* play chess at all."

"You—can't—play—chess?" exclaimed the youth, now goaded to the fiercest indignation. "Then why on earth didn't you say so at first?"

"I'm not quite sure," was Dan's reply, "but I think it must have been because it never occurred to you to ask me."

Dan Leno, although, in his varied career, he did most things in the performing business, never cultivated the society or drawing-room entertainment. He knew that

his best place was on the stage and behind the foot-lights, and as both his inclination and his interests combined to keep him there, he had little or no temptation to appear in the rôle of after-dinner performer at country house or West End mansion.

He did it more than once, however ; but principally in the cause of charity, for which he was ever ready to do a great deal ; and he had at least one good story of his experiences with thoroughly select and exclusive audiences.

He had been giving a selection of his songs at one of these functions, and was just preparing to depart, when the son of the house entered the retiring-room and greeted him effusively.

"I say, Mr. Leno," said he, "I must tell you how much I enjoyed your comic songs. I think they are awfully good, and I can assure you I laughed immensely."

Dan was gratified, and said so in suitable terms.

"Yes!" continued the young man with enthusiasm, "they were ripping—every one of them ; but there was one that I liked, if possible, better than any of the others. I forget the name of it, and I'm not quite sure what it was about ; but I know you mentioned a frying-pan in it, and that appealed to me very much ; I quite understood that one, because I've seen a frying-pan, don't you know."

But if Dan's appearances in high society were few, he was fortunate enough to attain what is, I take it, the

honour that every artiste appearing before the public most prizes; that of appearing in the highest society of all; the honour of giving a performance before their Majesties the King and Queen.

The news was quite unexpected; so much so, in fact, that he did not at first grasp the idea, and when he was first informed that His Majesty required his presence at Sandringham on 26th November, 1901, his ingenuous reply was, "I'm very sorry; but I can't possibly go. I'm due at Sheffield on that night."

When the nature of a Royal Command was explained to him, and he fully realised the honour that had fallen to his lot, he was at first rather taken aback, and inclined to have a severe attack of nerves.

On reflection, however, he consoled himself with the thought that Royalty at Sandringham would be the same Royalty that he had already succeeded in entertaining and amusing in more than one Drury Lane pantomime, and if he could do it in one place, why not in another?

That he was still somewhat nervous and apprehensive when, on the 26th November, 1901, he and his accompanying party set out for Sandringham, we have his own word to prove; but that, even then, he was too buoyant to be utterly crushed by his surroundings, the following incident will show.

On alighting at Wolverton Junction, they found the royal omnibus waiting ready to convey them to Sandringham.

Into this omnibus they all climbed, Dan Leno last of

all. As he got in he looked up at the tall footman who held the door open for him, and, pointing to the other inmates of the vehicle, remarked interrogatively, in a tone reminiscent of Bow Street experiences, "Night charges?"

He need have been under no apprehension as to the success of his part of the entertainment. He found, as he had hoped and expected, that Royalty at Sandringham was quite as kind and appreciative as it is everywhere, and he has always declared that he never played to a more delightfully sympathetic audience.

At the end of the performance he has recorded of himself—

"The King, the Queen, and the Prince of Wales all very kindly shook hands with me, and told me how much they had enjoyed it. The Princess of Wales was just going to shake hands with me, when she looked at my face, and couldn't do it for some time, because she laughed so much. I wasn't intending to look funny—I was really trying to look dignified and courtly; but I suppose I couldn't help myself."

After this Dan naturally thought that all was over, and retired to his dressing-room to get ready for his journey home. Judge of his surprise and embarrassment, therefore, when a message was conveyed that the King wished to see him in the smoking-room.

At once there ensued a frenziedly rapid hunt for his dress suit. The coat and waistcoat were unearthed at last; but where were the very necessary trousers?

Naturally, there were no trousers. There is always some little thing like that missing on these historic and vitally important occasions.

What was to be done? His Majesty must not be kept waiting; but the trousers of Dan's walking costume were of a very light check species—a pleasing pattern in itself, but too striking a contrast to the dress coat and waistcoat to pass unnoticed and unchallenged.

Happy thought! Dan's dresser was wearing a pair of dark-blue serge trousers that, in a dim light, might very well pass for black ones. The dresser was both taller and stouter than Dan; but that didn't matter; there was no time to stick at such trifles as a mere difference of a few inches in height and girth. The dresser, rising to the occasion, nobly and cheerfully surrendered the portion of his wardrobe that was so urgently demanded. How he managed on his own account is not stated; but he certainly could never have got into Dan's light checks, because Dan was able to keep the blue serge articles in place only by means of taking the waistband in with a row of safety pins.

So far, so good; but there was fresh trouble in store. Where was the dress tie? Presumably with the dress trousers, since it was not to be found anywhere on the premises. So a fresh hue and cry was instituted, and the first available substitute, which happened to belong to a big man who took eighteen and a half in collars, was eagerly seized upon.

As Dan had no time to fasten this tie twice round his neck, he had to use the extra material in building an

abnormally huge bow. The effect of this was to make him, in his own eyes, resemble the corner-man of a nigger minstrel troupe, and, thus attired, he was ushered, in a very flustered and highly nervous condition, into the presence of his King.

His Majesty, however, with his usual unfailing kindness and tact, quickly put Dan quite at his ease. He chatted with him in a friendly way for some time, and wound up the interview by presenting him with the breast-pin that, it is not too much to say, Dan thereafter prized and treasured more highly than anything else he possessed on earth.

Dan emerged from the royal presence slightly dazed with pleasurable excitement; so, with a view to cooling down and thinking events over calmly by himself, he strolled out among the shrubberies until it was time for him to start for the train.

It was very dark, and he had not been out very long, when, as he was walking along, communing with himself, he was, to his great dismay, suddenly seized from behind, and a stern voice peremptorily wanted to know "What he was doing, lurking about there in the dark." Dan earnestly protested that he was a perfectly innocuous individual who was neither doing nor meditating any harm whatever; but his captor kept firm hold of him, and drew him into the light.

Having done so, as the rays of a lamp fell on Dan's agitated countenance, he dropped his arm with a laugh, and exclaimed :

"Good gracious, Mr. Leno! I beg your pardon! I'm







sure I ought to have known you, because I've seen you often enough at the Pavilion in town."

Thus Dan Leno escaped from the clutches of the detective, and so ended a delightful experience such as falls to the lot of very, very few to enjoy, and on the memory of which he dwelt with the keenest satisfaction to the end of his days.

## CHAPTER XII

### DAN LENO AND THE PRESS

**I**F Dan Leno did not actually write a great deal, it is certain that in his time he supplied a vast amount of copy to the daily Press. I daresay that, in the height of his fame, he was the most frequently interviewed, sketched, and paragraphed man of the day. Not that he ever went at all out of his way to seek this publicity; but the Press, knowing well that the British public took an absorbing interest in him and all he did, took care to supply the demand.

The number of Press cuttings that were sent to him daily was something astonishing, and he must have been a small fortune to the agency that supplied him.

His career as an actual journalist was a very brief and casual one; but it may be claimed for him that, nominally at least, he climbed to the top of the tree in this department with considerably less trouble than any other journalist in existence.

It is not given to every Pressman to attain the giddy altitude of the editorial chair; but Dan occupied that eminent position on two occasions. In both instances, it is true, his reign was a brief one; in fact, in the second

case his tenure was for one day only ; but, if short, his editorial existence was a merry one.

It was in the early days of 1898 that it struck Mr. Peter Keary, of Messrs. C. Arthur Pearson, Limited, that Dan Leno might successfully edit a comic paper.

The thought that originally came to him in the semi-somnolent hours of the early morning stuck to him after he had risen and was thoroughly awake, and the more he turned over the idea in his mind the better he liked it.

The outcome of his further consideration was a visit paid to Dan Leno in his dressing-room, where the matter was quickly and satisfactorily arranged between the two. Terms were settled on which a paper, entitled *Dan Leno's Comic Journal*, was to be published by Messrs. Pearson. Dan Leno was to take a real and personal interest in the publication, and Mr. Keary, on his part, promised that nothing personal to him should appear in the paper without being first submitted to him and obtaining his sanction.

This censorship he exercised rigorously so long as the paper ran, and, in the words of Mr. Keary, he "killed a good deal of stuff every week."

The first number of the *Comic Journal* was published on February 26th, 1898, and its instantaneous and marvellous success was a striking tribute to Dan Leno's wonderful personal popularity.

Adopting for its motto the appropriate phrase, "One touch of Leno makes the whole world grin," it was eagerly bought up as soon as it made its appearance, and 350,000 copies were sold of the first issue.

Whether the man in the street fondly imagined that in purchasing the paper he would succeed in tapping the hidden sources of Dan's peculiar humour, or whether he thought that a perusal would be a cheap equivalent for a visit to theatre or music-hall, it is hard to say; but it is certain that on the 26th February, 1898, it was rare to meet anyone about the Stand, or its vicinity, who was not bearing with him a copy of *Dan Leno's Comic Journal*.

The paper, which was only devised for a rapid and lucrative "boom," ran rather longer than had been expected, and answered its purpose admirably. Dan, in the pressure of his other work, lost interest in it personally; so, after a brilliant and meteoric career, it was allowed to die.

It was not until four years after the first publication of this journal that Dan ventured to blossom out once more as an editor. This time, feeling no doubt that his previous experience justified it, he dared to tackle a daily paper. It must be admitted that he retired from the fray after one day's toil; but he retired honourably, and as a proof that, at any rate, he did no harm, it may be triumphantly pointed out that the paper in question still exists.

On the 27th March, 1902, a highly-amused postman delivered an elephantine post card at my door with the remark, "He's a corker, is Dan. I wonder what he'll be up to next."

Somewhat mystified I examined the card, and found on the address side a picture of Dan basking in the sun,

and, as he pointed to the figure of Herbert Campbell in the background, remarking, "That's my sub-editor going to get a cup of tea."

Turning it over in search of further information, I read as follows :—

*"The Sun,* TEMPLE AVENUE,  
"27th March, 1902

"DEAR SIR,

"I am editing *The Sun* on April 1st. I don't want to make such a mess as Joshua did when he commanded the sun to stand still. Can you give me a hint?

"Drop me a line, there's a good fellow. Remember, 'One good worm deserves a turn.'

"Of course, this is strictly private. 'Mum's the word!'

"Yours truly,  
"DAN LENO"

As these massive post cards were sent out to all sorts and conditions of men, Mr. Editor Leno was, naturally, flooded with the advice he so rashly asked for; but, to his credit be it said, he followed none of it.

In his editorial he began by apologising for his existence in such a capacity :—

"Some men are born great guns; others grab greatness on their own, and some have a lot of greatness thrust upon them, as the poet said. To-day I am suffering from thrustness."

But further on in the same article he fully justified his fitness for the post by the following excellent advice :—

"When your face wants to slide into a smile, let it;

when it doesn't want to, make it. A merry-minded man is a perpetual slab of sunshine, and brightens up the work-a-day world a sight more than a circus procession or a check-suit. A sad-eyed sinner is no use to anyone, and a nuisance to himself."

Having, as a preparation for the responsibility of editing a London evening paper, visited, with his sub-editor, Herbert Campbell, the House of Commons during debate, he opined that it was a very dull show, and would be greatly improved and generally brightened and lightened by the introduction of a piano.

Finally, after surmising, "It's a wise *Sun* that knows its own editor," he concluded:—

"I apologise to the public if there is anything they don't like in this number. Don't blame me. It is the fault of the sub-editor. There is a petty jealousy between us, but he has got the most of it."

Thus for the second time did Dan Leno triumphantly vindicate his claim to be a successful editor.

*The Sun* of the 1st April, 1902, had a most enviable sale, and Dan, quite content with his wonderful record, retired on his laurels the same evening.

With the ways and methods of interviewers he was perfectly familiar, and no wonder, for an interview was, to him, quite an ordinary occurrence, and all in the day's work. Although he never offered, he never refused information to the Press, and was as popular with its representatives as every man who treats his fellow-men with kindness and consideration deserves to be.

TOM BROWNE

urry up, Danny dear.  
machines waiting.



EDITING "THE SUN"





In this connection the following scene rises before me:—

Dan having granted three interviews during a pantomime *matinée*, and having just dismissed the third man, suddenly appeared in the dressing-room, attired in somebody else's silk hat and frock-coat, which he wore over the skirts of the particular old lady he was representing at the time, and, armed with a large notebook and a pencil, approached Herbert Campbell with a stern air indicative of great determination.

"Herbert," he announced, "I'm tired of being interviewed. It's beginning to worry me."

"Serve you right," said Herbert. "You've no need to worry unless you like. Look at *me*!"

"Herbert," he went on, "you're going to be worried. Were you ever interviewed?"

"Not since I was an infant prodigy," replied Herbert.

"Then it's time somebody took some notice of you," remarked Dan, and, opening his notebook and grasping his pencil firmly, he began—

"Excuse me, you are Mr. Herbert Campbell, I believe?"

*Herbert (apathetically).* Yes.

*Dan (insinuatingly).* Thank you. I am delighted to meet you. I am the representative of the *Daily Miracle*—my card!

*Herbert.* *Daily Miracle!* Never heard of it.

*Dan (annoyed).* No! No! You mustn't talk like that. You must say, "*The Daily Miracle!* Ah (*in a delighted tone*), I read it every day."

*Herbert (resignedly).* All right. I read it every day.

*Dan.* Our readers would be so grateful if you would kindly let them have a few particulars about yourself.

*Herbert.* Then your readers are jolly hard up for something to read.

*Dan.* For instance, you were born—er—you were born——

*Herbert.* No! I was only born once.

*Dan (impatiently).* Can't you see that I'm asking you *when* you were born?

*Herbert.* No! You've never asked me anything yet.

*Dan (wearily).* No wonder men don't come to interview you! (*shouting*): When were you born?

*Herbert.* Three o'clock in the morning.

*Dan.* What day?

*Herbert.* Don't know.

*Dan.* What year?

*Herbert.* Don't know.

*Dan (writing in his notebook).* "As Mr. Campbell possessed at the time of his birth no calendar, but simply a silver watch, he can only record the time, and not the date when he was born."

(*Resuming*). Let me see, you are a total abstainer?

*Herbert (indignantly).* No, I'm not.

*Dan.* Then prove it.

*Herbert (helping himself to whisky and soda).* Good health.

*Dan (tentatively).* It's a very curious coincidence, but I am also not a teetotaler.

*Herbert (uninterestedly).* Is that a fact?

*Dan.* I assure you it is so (*pause*). This is where you ask the interviewer to have a drink, you know.

*Herbert.* What for?

*Dan.* Well, it's customary, and only common politeness.

*Herbert.* No, I think newspaper men drink a great deal too much. I'm not going to encourage them.

*Dan (seizing bottle, and pouring himself out a dose).* Herbert, I have come here to show you the proper way to be interviewed, and I'm going to do it, however much it costs you. (*After drinking, writes in notebook*): "Mr. Campbell is the soul of hospitality, and was never known to send any away empty."

*Herbert (looking at remains of whisky).* Except a bottle.

*Dan.* What is your favourite part?

*Herbert.* Shylock!

*Dan.* Why?

*Herbert.* Because I've never played it, and never will, if I've any luck.

At this point the interview was cut short by the insistent cries of the call-boy for "Mr. Leno" and "Mr. Campbell," and Dan and Herbert, having succeeded in amusing themselves and each other in the dressing-room, hurriedly repaired to the stage, there to, as successfully, amuse the audience.

As has been truly said by more than one paper, the space occupied by Dan Leno on the bills and in the contents of the daily press was about equivalent to that

generally accorded to an influential Cabinet Minister. It is difficult to select out of the mass of appreciatory articles that were written about him; but one or two may be recorded as showing that Press and public were both agreed in their estimate of this unique comedian.

The *Times* says of him :—

“ Mr. Leno had not only a rich fund of comedy in his own quaint face and person, he had that far rarer gift—the intelligence to make use of it. . . .

“ He had imagination. He was not content to trade solely on what nature had given him. He could hardly walk, and certainly never dance, without raising a smile; but he had a hundred different ways of walking and dancing, each appropriate to the person he was representing. His brains were as much to thank as his face or his voice for the roars of laughter he could raise for fifteen minutes without a break in a packed house at Drury Lane, and though it is no secret that he did not invent all his quips for himself, he gave them all new point.

“ In all but the root idea, the long list of characters he performed in pantomime or music-hall were the children of his own imagination and his own minute care for detail. Everything he did showed observation and thought, as well as natural—if we may use the word—absurdity.

Many comedians—some of them almost as naturally absurd as Mr. Leno—fall down, for instance, on the stage; we rarely laugh, but when Mr. Leno, as chairman of the board of directors, fell down and got into confusion with the table, or, as professor of anatomy, fell down and got into confusion with the blackboard,



THE EDITOR AND HIS SUB.



he did it so wisely and so well that the sides of his audience ached. To find anything like a close parallel to his style we should probably have to go back to the Italian 'Commedia dell' arte,' or to any of the farces in which the actors extemporised their parts, the general drift being laid down for them and the details left to their own readiness of invention.

"That readiness of invention was Mr. Leno's in extraordinary measure. His store of quaint words and phrases was inexhaustible."

In the opinion of the *Daily Telegraph* :—

"There was only one 'Dan.' His methods were inimitable; his face was indeed his fortune, and his patter was of so quaint a fancy as to make his memory as lasting as that of Charles Mathews. . . . Who has seen him in any of his disguises and has failed to laugh?"

From two others I may also venture to quote, as being written by men who have evidently studied and thoroughly appreciated their Leno.

The first is by "John o' London," in *T.P.'s Weekly* :—

"It needs no courage or jugglery of speech," he writes, "to say that Dan Leno was a genius. It is merely by habit that we narrow this term to men who are masters in art, literature, music, or research. Genius has been defined as the 'dint of the inimitable.' The man who in any calling or accomplishment adds something to all that effort can attain has genius. Dan Leno had genius.

"Let anyone call up the scene and atmosphere of one of his performances, and then shut his eyes and remember and compare; and he will see that Dan Leno



brought something upon the stage that was not in his song, or in his talk, or in any of his nameable qualities ; not even in his humour. None of these really distinguished him from the others. Behind all lay a unique quality to which one cannot put a word.

" However, Dan Leno's genius came from the recesses of his character rather than from the recesses of his talent.

" There was an extraordinary flow of sympathy from the little man. Who can forget that dry, rushing, pleading, coaxing, arguing voice, hoarse with its eagerness, yet mellow with sheer kindness and sweetness of character? . . .

" His humour depended on its delivery ; it was a lightning gift from man to man ; an exquisite, reckless, irresistible fandango of fun round the little foibles of some familiar character—a doctor, a waiter, a shop-walker, a beef-eater—yet so loosely tethered to its subject as to be free to indulge in any number of irresponsible drolleries of speech, verbal contortions, and what not.

" The unifying quality was the man's amazing rapidity and gusto. He drowned drollery in drollery, he annihilated thought ; he seemed to absorb all the earnestness in the house, and use it before our eyes to make us laugh. And there was nothing merely expert in his rapidity ; the expertness was there, but it was the rapidity of expertness in the temperature of kindness.

" This abounding kindness and explosive frankness gave to all Leno did its supremacy. Dozens of music-hall singers used the same comic materials, but no one approached him in the art of button-holing an audience, say, rather, in the fact of loving it. The tone of

sympathy, of privacy, never left his voice. He was for ever making a clean breast of it, and beginning again in a new frenzy of confidence or warning. In all of which you felt that he was only acting with the stream of his character, that he was indeed the kindest and most ebullient of men, and a delicious observer."

Another fine appreciation of him is by Mr. Max Beerbohm, in *The Saturday Review*. He says :—

" Dan Leno's was not one of those personalities which dominate us by awe, subjugating us against our will. His was of that other, finer kind—the lovable kind. He had, in a higher degree than any other actor I have ever seen, the indefinable quality of being sympathetic. I defy anyone not to have loved Dan Leno at first sight. The moment he capered on, with that air of wild determination, squirming in every limb with some deep grievance that must be outpoured, all hearts were his.

" That face, puckered with cares, whether they were the cares of the small shopkeeper, or of the landlady, or of the lodger ; that face so tragic, with all the tragedy that is writ on the face of the baby monkey, yet ever liable to relax its mouth into a sudden wide grin, and to screw its eyes up to vanishing point over some little triumph wrested from Fate, the tyrant ; that poor little battered personage, so 'put upon,' yet so plucky, with his squeaky voice and his sweeping gestures, bent but not broken, faint but pursuing, incarnate of the will to live in a world not at all worth living in—surely all hearts went always out to Dan Leno, with warm corners in them reserved to him for ever and ever. . . .

" I think I myself shall ever remember Dan Leno more

vividly and affectionately as the shoemaker than as anything else.

"The desperate hopefulness with which he adapted his manner to his different customers.

"One of his customers was a lady with her little boy.

"Dan Leno, skipping forward to meet her, with a peculiar skip, invented specially for his performance, suddenly paused, stepped back several feet in one stride, eyeing the lady in wild amazement.

"He had never seen such a lovely child. *How* old did the mother say? Three?

"He would have guessed seven at least, 'except when I look at you, ma'am, and then I should say he was one, at most!'

"Here Dan Leno bent down—one hand on each knee—and began to talk some unimaginable baby language. . . . A little pair of red boots with white buttons?

"Dan Leno skipped towards an imaginary shelf, but in the middle of his skip he paused, looked back as though drawn by some irresistible attraction, and again began to talk to the child. As it turned out, he had no boots of the kind required.

"He plied the mother with other samples, suggested this and that, faintlier and faintlier, as he bowed her out.

"For a few moments he stood gazing after her with blank disappointment, still bowing automatically.

"Then suddenly he burst out into a volley of deadly criticisms on the child's personal appearance, ceasing as suddenly at the entrance of another customer. . . .

"I think I see some of my readers—such as never saw Dan Leno in this part—raising their eyebrows. Nor do I blame them.

"Nor do I blame myself for failing to re-create that which no howsoever ingenious literary artist could re-create for you. I can only echo the old heart-cry, '*Si ipsum audissetis.*'"

"Some day, no doubt, the phonograph and the bioscope will have been so adjusted to each other that we shall see and hear past actors and singers as well as though they were alive before us.

"I wish Dan Leno could have been thus immortalised. No actor of our time deserved immortality so well as he."

This article bears on it the unmistakable stamp of sincerity, and could only have been written by one to whom Dan Leno's humour appealed vividly and in the fullest sense.

I cannot, however, agree with the writer in lamenting the lack of a combined phonograph and bioscope wherewith to reproduce Dan Leno before us, because I am unable to conceive the possibility of such a desirable miracle ever being worked by any effort of mere machinery.

Human substitutes for combined phono-bioscopes we have with us now in the shape of the numerous professors of the art of imitation whom we meet so often on the halls and at smoking concerts.

None of these considered their stock complete without an imitation of Dan Leno ; whoever else they crossed off their list, he must on no account be omitted. The result was that some imitated him very well indeed, some very indifferently, while others, under the guise

of imitation, appeared to be content to sing all his copyright songs and speak his own original patter in their own way.

The existence of the third species Dan resented strongly, and it is small wonder that he should have done so. Some of them were unrestrained by incompatibility either of build, feature, age, or even of sex ; and their performances were well calculated to remind one of the old Scotch professor who described golf as being a game that was played with instruments very ill adapted to the purpose.

Of those who, on the other hand, were capable of giving a really clever imitation of Dan Leno, I have seen and admired several. There was the quaint, familiar attire to a button ; there were accurate copies of expression, make-up, and gesture ; there was reproduced faithfully the intonation of the voice as it gave forth the song and the joke we all knew so well ; in fact, everything was there except Dan Leno himself. The better the imitation, the more one felt how fatal was this naturally unavoidable omission, and how impossible a task it was to attempt to reproduce such a personality with fidelity to nature.

I have often heard the expression, " So-and-so imitates Dan Leno so well that, if you shut your eyes, you would swear that Leno himself was on the stage." As I have said, I have seen and heard some very excellent imitations of Dan Leno, but to experience the effect aforesaid I would have had to shut more than my eyes.

Dan Leno listened to imitations of himself on more than one occasion. As a rule, the performers were mercifully unaware of his presence among the audience either before or after the event ; but there was one sea-side performer whom the fact of Dan being present as an interested auditor did not affect in the very least.

Dan, taking a "busman's holiday" by the sea, found himself in the front seats of the regulation concert-hall one afternoon, and, being quickly spotted there by the performer then occupying the platform, was somewhat taken aback when he heard him announce, "I will now give my celebrated imitation of a gentleman who is at this moment among the audience—Mr. Dan Leno!"

The announcement was, of course, greeted with great applause, and thereafter, for nearly half an hour, Dan had the pleasure of listening to his own songs and patter, proceeding from the lips of another, in a curious travesty of his own style. He stood it patiently and well, making no sign either of approval or disapproval, save an occasional murmur, "Good gracious! am I like that?" to a companion by his side. At the end of the performance he went round to the dressing-room and presented his imitator with half a sovereign and the complimentary remark: "This isn't for your talent; it's for your confounded cheek!"

Reverting to his connection with literature and the Press, it may be recorded that in the year 1899 he published a small volume of his reminiscences, which he entitled *Dan Leno: His Book*.

This title led to a peculiar mistake, because after the book had been catalogued the publishers received a letter from a well-known mission preacher in the north of England, requesting them to forward immediately several copies of *Dan Leno's Hymn Book* for the use of his flock.

Whether he ever got them, and what he thought if he did, is not stated.

As a final example of the practically unanimous chorus of Press approval that Dan Leno elicited, the words of the late Clement Scott are well worth noting:—

“During the best part of the last half-century I have seen all the best, the drollest, the most pathetic and tragic comedians, whose humour, variety, tenderness, and intensity have delighted the playgoers of the world. Among these representatives of art, and sometimes genius, Dan Leno holds his own bravely indeed. Nay, I am not sure that in certain gifts of expression, variety, and, if I may so express it, tornado or instant comic farce, Dan Leno has ever had a rival. . . . He catches every expression, every trick, every attitude, every inflexion of voice, and all is done without offence or a suspicion of vulgarity. In his grim earnestness consists his humour.

“Whenever he is on the stage, be it theatre or music-hall, he literally holds his audience tight in his power. They cannot get away from him.

“He is monarch of all he surveys. Long, then, may the reign of King Dan Leno last; long may he be spared to us to delight the children at pantomime time,

and to make those who, though going downhill, are not ashamed to laugh as young, at least in heart, as the little ones by their side."

And yet the eulogies of the critics in no wise elated Dan Leno unduly; indeed, it may be said that they left him unaffected in any way, because he had no desire to be analysed. He preferred to be simply and unquestioningly accepted for what he was.

He had peculiar views on the subject of his own popularity, and well I remember him, on the afternoon of a certain Boxing Day, some three hours before performance, turning to me with a most doleful expression on his countenance, and gloomily remarking, "Nobody cares for me—nobody!"

In reply, I ventured to point out to him (as actually happened afterwards) that his appearance on the stage that evening would be the signal for such a shout of welcome only one other actor could awake within the walls of Drury Lane Theatre.

He merely remarked, in the same pessimistic tone—

"Yes; but that's not for *me*! It's for what I've done!"

He was never at his ease on Boxing-nights, among the critics and first-nighters; and on these occasions invariably gave the worst performance he ever gave during the entire run of the pantomime. Not that he ever gave a bad performance—he could never do that—but he seemed to miss some sympathetically indefinable something that he required to inspire him to his best



efforts. He had a feeling within him that impelled him to say after the show :

"I hate first nights ! I always feel as if there were a brick wall between me and my audience.

"I never feel properly at home with my part until the first matinée, when"—here his face would light up—"when the kiddies are in front."

## CHAPTER XIII

### OF HIS INFINITE CHARITY

**I**T is reported of a certain philanthropist who bestowed infinitesimally and trumpeted out of proportion loudly, that, being blamed for his methods of self-advertisement, he replied that he saw no reason for hiding his light under a bushel. To this the ready retort was forthcoming :

“ Why should you, when a thimble can cover it ? ”

Such was neither Dan Leno's charity nor his method of distribution.

Although no human being, except Dan himself, ever knew the fulness and extent of Dan's charitable light, it shone too brightly for any bushel to conceal altogether. He never made any display of it ; but it could not possibly be hid.

Mistakes he made in plenty, and was well aware that he did so ; but, as he always argued, it were better to assist twenty frauds than send one deserving case empty away, and on this system of lavish, if irresponsible, generosity he acted throughout his career.

He had known what it was to be poor—to be cold—to be hungry ; and he seemed to have made up his mind, as

soon as he turned the corner to wealth, that he would, so far as in him lay, alleviate the lot of all those who, crossing his path, he found in a similarly distressed condition.

The pity of it was, and it was inevitable that it should be so, the frauds found him out more quickly and numerously than the deserving cases; but Dan, although he helped far too many of the former, went out of his way many and many a time to unearth and practically relieve the sufferings of the latter.

It is a safe calculation to say that, for him, a walk along the Strand, or any other Thespian promenade, meant an expenditure, in various small sums (all loans, never to be called up) of anything from half a sovereign upwards, the hire of a cab being, under these conditions, a very distinct economy.

He was so well known and looked after that, wherever and whenever he walked, his progress was not without incident.

Picture him as he emerges from the Pavilion stage-door and turns into Shaftesbury Avenue. A tall, shabby-genteel, and clean-shaven man, who has been anxiously watching that door for some time, darts across the street and overtakes him.

"Good morning, Mr. Leno!"

"Oh, good morning!" Dan glances at him, and, recognising the type, instinctively puts his hand in his pocket.

"I suppose you don't remember me, sir?" This is part of the formula, and is invariable.

No, Dan does *not* remember him.

"I thought not, sir! I was one of the crowd at the Lane three years ago, when you made your big hit in *Aladdin*. I was the one you gave your cloak to when you took it off in the ninth scene, sir!" All this with the fluency and certainty of carefully pre-ascertained knowledge.

"I was never a second late for that cloak all the run, sir, if you remember."

"Oh! Ye-es!" with very doubtful memory.

"But I've had a lot of trouble since then, sir."

"Ah!" and Dan, diving further into his pocket, selects a coin unseen.

"Yes, sir. I was touring with *The Lively Girl*, and got badly bitten while we were showing at Margate."

"You ought to be more careful in selecting your lodgings at these seaside places. Some landladies are very careless," remarks Dan, fingering his coin, but with a twinkle in his eye.

"Oh, no, sir! you mistake me—it wasn't those—it was a dog, bit me through the wrist and the ankle."

"Wrist and ankle? What were you doing? Scratching your leg?"

"No, sir; separating two dogs—they were fighting, sir. I was laid up three weeks in hospital, sir. When I came out, my place was filled up, and I've been out of a shop ever since."

"Hard lines!" murmurs Dan sympathetically. A coin changes hands, and the bitten one departs jubilant.

Dan goes on his way, and, turning a corner suddenly,

nearly collides with a short man, of shifty expression, who holds a child with either hand.

"Can I have a word with you, Mr. Leno?" inquires the short man mournfully.

"Certainly not!" returns Dan with immense decision, "I'm surprised you dare speak to me. You know very well that I found you out for a fraud long ago."

"Yes, sir," the other agrees, "and I daren't have come near you ever again if it wasn't to help these," indicating the children. "Call me what you like, sir, but it's not *their* fault that I am what I am. Don't let them suffer for what I've done."

Dan looks at the children; they smile at him, and his heart melts.

"I never knew you had any children," he says, at length, in a changed voice.

"No, sir; I daresay not. I try to keep them right out of the kind of life I lead. I know I'm not fit to be in charge of the innocent little dears; but what am I to do? Their mother's gone, and——" further utterance choked by sobs.

"Well, it's for the last time, remember, and it's only because of the kiddies." Another coin is passed over, and the short man goes on his way rejoicing.

"Good heavens, Dan!" exclaims a friend, who has just arrived in time to see the end of the transaction, "you don't mean to say you've given that fellow money, after all you know about him?"

"He had two children with him," argues Dan apologetically and weakly. "Didn't you notice them?"

"Notice them? Yes!" says the other scornfully, "but those are not *his* children! I happen to know he hasn't got any. He must have borrowed or hired that couple on the off-chance of meeting you."

"You don't say so! I never thought of that," replies Dan, looking rather crestfallen. "Still—there they were—whatever they belonged to, they were real children, and——" brightening up at the idea, "perhaps what I gave him will help to pay for their hire!"

Such incidents were all in the day's walk with Dan, and it was a poor beggar who failed to get something out of him.

In giving much, he wasted much; but, happily, there is another side to the picture, where, in giving casually, he gave deservedly and well.

He was performing in Douglas, Isle of Man, one summer, and while strolling on the promenade during the afternoon, was accosted by a ragged boy, who asked him for help because they "were starving at home."

Dan lent a ready ear, as he invariably did to tales of distress and woe, and having heard what the boy had to say, gave as ready a pecuniary response. The boy, hastily thanking him, darted off with the gift, and Dan, curiously wondering whether the case were genuine or otherwise, quickly followed to discover, if possible, his final destination.

Up back streets and down alleys went the boy, with Dan Leno after him, until he finally pulled up at the door of a poverty-stricken house situated in a wretched

passage, and gave his money into the hands of a woman who was sitting disconsolate on a step.

Dan at once went up to her, explained who he was, why he had come, and expressed his delight at the fact that the boy, whom he had relieved haphazard, should thus so quickly have proved to him that his charity had not been misapplied.

The woman, encouraged by the presence of a sympathetic listener, poured forth her sad tale of widowhood, stern privation and distress, the immediate result being a several-fold increase of Dan's original gift, and a promise (which was rigidly kept) of his influence towards procuring suitable work for both her and her boy.

That night, in his dressing-room, there was handed to him, among his letters, a small parcel wrapped in a dirty piece of paper. He opened the parcel, and a letter fell out, which ran as follows :—

“DEAR MR. LENO,

“You have saved my life to-day. Until you came and put fresh hope in me, I had fully made up my mind to end it all by taking the contents of the enclosed to-night. God bless you!”

“The enclosed” was a bottle of poison.

On another occasion, of which his friend Johnnie Danvers speaks personally :—

Dan Leno and Danvers were in Brighton, when they accidentally came across an official engaged at one of the music-halls in the town.

He stopped them, and, producing a subscription list, began to explain how a certain old woman employed as an occasional cleaner at the establishment had met with a great misfortune. Her only son, to whom she had looked for her main support, had, for some offence, been sent to prison.

As the official pointed out to them, it was not a question whether the son was innocent or guilty; whichever it was, he had been the chief breadwinner, and the old woman was bound to suffer in consequence.

He went on to say that he had attempted to get up a subscription for her, but had met with a poor response; he had collected fifteen shillings only, and was then on his way to take that sum to her.

With these words he held the subscription list invitingly before them. Danvers at once offered to give the necessary five shillings to make up the sovereign, but, to the surprise of both, Dan made no offer whatever.

As, however, they were not particularly occupied at the moment, they went with the official to see the old lady, and assist in making the presentation.

This was done in due course, and amid many expressions of thankfulness from the grateful recipient. Dan said little or nothing, and listened, without much apparent interest, as the prospects of her ability to keep the wolf from the door unaided were freely discussed.

He left the house with the other two, but, after walking on for a few minutes, suddenly remembered that he



had left his gloves on the kitchen table, and ran back to fetch them. He soon overtook the others, and, talking of various subjects, the old woman's troubles were, for the time being, dismissed from their minds.

It was more than a week after this event that the official met her and said :

"I'm sorry I couldn't do any more for you, Nancy ; but I did my best."

"Goodness me !" said she ; "I'm content."

"Yes, I daresay you are," he continued. "But the little gentleman that came to your house with me the other day was Mr. Dan Leno, and I thought he would have done something to help you. He's usually so generous. I can't think how it is that he never gave you anything."

"Lord love you !" she cried. "Is it the little gentleman with the funny face you're talking about? Why, after you'd gone, he came running back, put a ten-pound note on the table, and ran off like as if the police was after him."

In Dan Leno all the theatrical and music-hall charitable funds that appealed to him for assistance found a ready and willing subscriber. Among his other rôles, he has been the president of the Music Hall Benevolent Fund, and he was one of the founders of the Music Hall Railway Artists' Association. The object of the first charity is sufficiently indicated by its name, and the second institution (although not a charity) has been the means of reducing, very considerably, the travelling expenses of many a small-salaried artiste upon whom

the weekly toll necessarily levied by the railway companies weighed heavily.

At benefits of all descriptions he was in universal demand, and being too good-natured to refuse, he practically gave his valuable services to all and sundry. Many and many a time was his kindness abused by those who either had no thought or conveniently ignored the fact that what was play to the audience was sheer hard work to the comedian, and to this systematic and serious encroachment on his hours of rest his early breakdown may be largely attributed.

Here is a specimen of the work he managed to get through in one day, which may be taken as a fairly typical example of what he was able to endure.

In the morning he travelled to Dudley, in Staffordshire, and there performed the ceremony of opening a new music-hall.

Having received and replied to several addresses, he returned to London, and in the afternoon appeared at a charity concert in St. James's Hall, where a delighted audience declined to part with him until he had sung six songs.

After these restful episodes he repaired to a charity dinner at the Trocadero, where he occupied the vice-chair.

In the middle of the dinner, after making his preliminary speech, he left to begin what the public might consider to be his sole day's work—that is, he went to the Pavilion Music Hall, there to fulfil his engagement, and after a fairly long turn returned to the

Trocadero and completed his duties as vice-chairman at the dinner.

After this, he was free to go home, and for all anybody knew, to rest. But he had not yet had any time to look at his correspondence, and as every day brought with it a pile of letters that he invariably looked through and answered personally, the birds in his garden were up and singing long before Dan went to bed and dreamt of a lot of things he had to do when he woke.

At the yearly Music Hall Sports, whereof the proceeds were equally divided between the professional charities and various public hospitals, Dan Leno was absolutely indefatigable, and his presence alone went far towards ensuring the complete success of the gathering.

Whether he was playing a game of cricket according to his own original rules, and thereby incidentally scoring millions of mythical runs ; whether he was playing football on some code understood only by himself, and kicking extraordinary goals, as to the legitimacy of which he was the sole and self-constituted referee ; or whether he was riding and invariably winning comic bicycle races—he was, at all times, the cynosure of all eyes, and he spared neither brain nor body to devise new and original methods wherewithal he might diffuse mirth among the spectators.

Although he was no sectarian, and thoroughly catholic in his charitable sympathy, I believe such was his intense love for children that all other charities would have had, if necessary, to give way, so far as Dan was



AT THE MUSIC HALL STOPS



concerned, to make room for one in which the little ones were vitally interested. I am sure it would have caused him the greatest joy could he have known that, at the present time of writing, a "Dan Leno" cot was about to be dedicated, for the benefit of the small community he loved so well, in the Belgrave Hospital for Children, in the Clapham Road, at a cost of £1,000.

Dan Leno, it may be mentioned, was a vice-president of this hospital, and took a very real and practical interest in its welfare.

In his numerous chairman and vice-chairmanships of charitable dinners and other gatherings Dan was, of course, obliged to make frequent speeches.

His style of oratory was, like himself and all he did, strictly original, and more than a little amusing.

He was always absolutely extempore, and the only demand he made on his hearers was, that they would not expect that he would confine himself to, or even incidentally mention, the particular subject upon which he happened to be supposed to be speaking.

One of the last occasions on which I heard him speak in public was in the capacity of chairman at the Music Hall Benevolent Fund dinner.

He certainly proposed the loyal toast with every regard for the subject-matter, although, even with these, he contrived to interweave various personal and amusing reminiscences of his adventures at Sandringham and other places. But when he came to propose the toast of the evening he fairly let himself go.

Behind his chair there stood a tall toast-master of

lugubrious appearance, who, it is only reasonable to suppose, was selected for the post because of his physical inability to smile. At any rate, the popular idea among all present was that, as he never *did* smile throughout the entire evening, the reason was that he couldn't.

When this functionary announced in sepulchral tones—"Silence, gentlemen, for your chairman, who is about to propose the toast of the evening, 'The Music Hall Benevolent Fund,'" there was great applause as everybody in the room looked towards Dan. Dan twisted round on his chair, and gazed up at the toast-master inquiringly, but with a mischievously quizzical expression of countenance.

"I beg your pardon, were you speaking to me?" he asked.

The toast-master repeated his message without in any way relaxing his stern expression.

Dan listened to him attentively, and, when he had finished:

"Thank you very much," he said politely and gratefully, and rose to his feet.

Leaning well back as he stood, he so contrived it that it was at once apparent to all present that the top of his (Dan's) head was on a level with the third button of the toast-master's waistcoat.

A universal roar of laughter proclaimed the fact that this effect had been duly noticed. An instantaneous and shocked surprise overspread Dan's features when he heard this outburst of merriment. For a moment he



THE CORRECT ATTITUDE





stood there silent and puzzled, and then, as if the solution of the mystery had just struck him, he turned round and gazed sternly at the toast-master, standing there unmoved, with a weary and far-away look in his eyes.

"You're at your old games again, I suppose," said Dan to him severely, "always clowning behind my back." The idea of "clowning," as applied to such a highly respectable individual, struck the company as being droll, and again they shouted with laughter.

Dan, who had turned round to face his audience, spun back again like lightning, as if endeavouring to catch his enemy in the act of grimacing or otherwise misbehaving himself.

"He's too quick for me," he explained, with a sigh after a prolonged scrutiny, which the other endured with unimpaired gravity.

Then Dan condescended to begin his speech.

"When I was on tour with my stepfather," said he, and, with these opening words he embarked on a sea of amusingly anecdotal personal recollections, the chief feature of which seemed to be that every one of them reminded him of another one.

Every time his audience laughed (and they laughed a good deal) he was round in a vain endeavour to catch the toast-master at his tricks, and, failing to do so, was fain to content himself with some warning remark before resuming his speech.

This jovial entertainment went on for some time, and was meeting with high appreciation and approval, when Dan suddenly paused in the midst of some most inter-

esting recollection, and turned helplessly to the toast-master :

"What is this toast I'm talking about?" he inquired pathetically.

"The toast of the evening—'The Music Hall Benevolent Fund,'" responded that worthy promptly but unemotionally.

"Many thanks," said Dan urbanely; and then turning to the audience and jerking his thumb towards the toast-master, he remarked in an explanatory manner, "My stage-manager!" and once more urged on his wild career of anecdote.

When he had exhausted his stock, and his hearers with laughter, he sat down, and the toast-master, in his severest and most official manner, proclaimed, "Pray charge your glasses, gentlemen, for the toast of the evening: 'The Music Hall Benevolent Fund.'"

At these words Dan jumped up again with alacrity. "There!" he exclaimed, "I knew I had forgotten something—and you promised to remind me," he added to the toast-master in a tone suggestive more of sorrow than of anger. With which protest he formally proposed the toast himself, and it was duly honoured.

In private life Dan "tipped" as lavishly as an American on his first visit to Europe, and of this propensity of his used to tell a good story against himself.

He was spending a spare half-hour in a social club, of which he was a member, when he chanced to discover that he had a bad half-crown in his possession. Drawing the attention of some friends to the fact, he announced

to them his intention of having a joke with one of the club waiters, who was a well-known character.

Calling the man up to him, he ordered drinks round. The order was taken, and when the drinks arrived Dan gave him half a sovereign in payment, and, in addition, presented him with the bad half-crown. "For yourself, my boy, because you've always been very kind and attentive to me."

The waiter took the half-crown with every symptom of gratitude, thanked the donor, disappeared, and, in due course, returned with the change for Dan's half-sovereign.

"Now, I suppose you think I was a fool to let anybody pass that half-crown on me," remarked Dan to his friends, "but you can all see for yourselves how very easy it is to do it."

And they all agreed with him. Just before they left the club, Dan, who, of course, had no idea of saddling the poor man with a bad half-crown and leaving him in blissful, because ignorant, possession of it, again called him up.

"They tell me you're a very smart waiter," said he. "Is that a fact?"

The waiter was modest. He didn't really know, but he supposed he was about as smart as it was necessary for a man in his position to be.

"You never get done out of money or anything of that sort?" pursued Dan.

No! The waiter was able to speak with some confidence on that score. He was always particularly

accurate and correct when he had to deal with pecuniary affairs.

"Then," went on Dan, skilfully following up his advantage, "you fancy you could always spot a piece of bad money if you saw one."

"Oh yes, sir—at once! Nobody's ever passed any bad money on me."

"Now I'm going to show you that you don't know everything," exclaimed Dan triumphantly. "You've got a bad half-crown in your pocket at this very moment."

"Oh no, sir, I've not! You're quite mistaken."

"I'm not mistaken! Count up your money and see for yourself."

The money was produced and counted carefully, but no bad half-crown was forthcoming.

"Then what have you done with it?" demanded Dan.

"Done with it, sir!" repeated the waiter, with a real or affected air of bewilderment.

"Yes! You must remember that only a quarter of an hour ago I gave you a half-crown," Dan explained. "Very well, that half-crown was a bad one."

"Oh, I see what you mean now, sir," returned the man, suddenly enlightened. "I spotted it for a bad one directly you gave it me, sir; but I didn't like to say anything, as it was a present, so I gave it back to you among your change."

And when Dan turned out the contents of his pockets he found the bad half-crown among them.

Being himself ultra-generous by nature, it followed

that Dan Leno naturally hated a mean man. On him who could, but would not give, he had no mercy.

On one occasion, when he and a few other kindred spirits were organising in the club a sort of private "whip round" to relieve the immediately pressing necessities of a fellow-member of the profession, there entered a certain member, whom we will call Brown, and who was more famous for his power than for his will to do generous deeds.

"Hallo! there's Brown," said Dan, *sotto voce*, "we'll make him give something!"

"How do you propose to do it?" queried one of the company, who knew Brown very well. "Are you going to knock him down and rob him?"

"We'll spoof him into it," replied Dan, with easy confidence.

"Spoof him? How?" was the natural question.

"Let's have a sweep on the Cambridgeshire," suggested Dan, with apparent irrelevance, as he picked up some of the club notepaper and began to tear it into slips.

The rest looked on in mystified silence at his operations.

"Hello, Brown!" exclaimed Dan, genially greeting the new-comer, "will you go in with us for a sweep on the Cambridgeshire? Sovereign a head."

An occasional sweep was a luxury that Brown permitted himself, so, "Who's in it?" he inquired.

"Just the boys here," answered Dan, indicating the others present. "They've all paid, and we just want one more to make the first prize into a tenner."

"All right," agreed Brown, and risked his sovereign, while the others, who began to see a definite method in what Dan was doing, helped him to write down the names of the various horses and prepare for the draw.

All the papers being well shaken up in the hat, Dan drew first—"Grey-Legs!" he remarked, with satisfaction, as he showed his paper to one or two of his friends. "Second favourite!" commented one. "You're in luck, Dan!"

The next man drew, announced the name of his horse as he pocketed his paper, and so it went on with varying fortune, until it came to Brown's turn. He drew, and all crowded round eager to see the result.

"A blank!" he announced in tones of bitter disappointment.

"Hard lines, old man!"

"Rough luck, I call it!"

"Never mind, there's another round!"

"Better luck next time!"

Such were the remarks that were made as the hat went round for the second and last time.

Again some drew horses and some drew blanks; Dan, amid cheers, announced that, at the second attempt, he had drawn the first favourite, and one temporarily forgetful gentleman nearly caused an unpleasantness by reading out the name of a horse that had been previously claimed by somebody else in the first round. This was, however, soon put right by Dan admitting that he had, in error, written the name of that particular horse twice; and on this explanation both gentlemen

amicably agreed to equally share the prize if there should be any.

Then Brown drew again.

"Another blank!" he said disgustedly; and left the club.

When they were quite sure he was clear of the premises the conspirators laughed loud and long, and gathering up the papers on which they had pretended to write, and from which they had pretended to read, but which were, as a matter of fact, *all* blanks, they burnt them as a precaution against immediate discovery.

Then they sent their contribution (including Brown's sovereign) to their fellow-member in distress, and appended the names of everybody (including Brown) who had subscribed thereto.

And so it happened that shortly afterwards Brown was sorely puzzled on receiving a grateful letter thanking him and his friends for so kindly and unexpectedly coming to the writer's aid; nor did he discover until after the race had been run, and he began to make searching inquiries as to who actually held the winner, that the sweep on the Cambridgeshire had been got up more in the interests of charity than of sport.



to review my past life, wondering for which of my many sins I was being 'shadowed' at this particular stage of my career.

"At last, after searching every place I could think of, likely and unlikely, without success, I started back for the house, with the uneasy conviction that the christening was going to take place minus a father. The solemn man, I may mention, stuck closely to me, and returned to the house also immediately at my heels.

"As I was reporting the ill-success of my mission, and we were all wondering what to do next, we heard the sound of a post-horn as played, very evidently, by a novice, and looking out of the window, beheld Dan perched on the box-seat of a very well-appointed coach, blowing the horn atrociously. The coachman brought up his four spanking horses with a professional flourish at the door and we all realised that this was Dan's 'little surprise for everybody.'

"As I went down to the gate to meet him, I found him shaking hands cordially with the solemn man, who had evidently been waiting there while I had been discussing the situation in the house.

" 'You'll pardon me, Mr. Leno,' he was saying, 'but I heard your friend say you were missing, and, as I knew nobody else in the party, I thought I'd stop outside until you turned up.'

" 'It's all right,' returned Dan agreeably. 'I don't see that you need apologise to me for not going in my house when you've never been invited.'

" 'Oh!' said the solemn one. 'You forget, Mr. Leno!



BIRTHDAY PRESENTS



You invited me three days ago—in fact, you made quite a point of it. You said you would be deeply hurt if I failed to be present.’

“‘Very likely!’ replied Dan. ‘I believe I have invited half London in those very words. I haven’t the least idea who you are, but you are heartily welcome.’

“So the solemn man joined us for the day. We never inquired who he was, and he never volunteered the information; but my own impression is that he was an undertaker who saw and seized the chance of a holiday.

“So we rode in the coach-and-four to church, and there christened Johnny, after which, leaving the infant hero of the day at home with his nurse, we drove to Carshalton to spend the afternoon and evening.

“The landlord of the inn there had cause to remember the merry christening party that disported itself in and around his pretty garden on that day.

“In the first place, Dan, espying an urn of flowers mounted on a stone pedestal, must needs remove the former from its position. In doing so he broke the urn, a fact that was duly recorded in the bill afterwards, and the necessary payment for the damage looked upon by Dan as part of the day’s delightful pleasure.

“He then got on the pedestal himself, and there danced a clog-dance to the admiration of his own party, the hotel staff, and any other stray spectators who happened to be present.

“Having let off a little steam in this manner, he further relieved his feelings by standing on his head upon the same perilous eminence amid universal applause.

"Finally, he concluded his entertainment by seizing a bottle of champagne, and, with this in hand, scrambling up the ivy on to the roof, where he drank his boy's health and delivered an address on the advantages and responsibilities of being the parent of a fine son.

"And throughout the whole of that day he had one reply, and one only, for all who expostulated with him and urged him to keep calm and cool—'You mustn't talk to me like that, because I am the father of a very large child.'"

When one considers the amount of work Dan Leno got through in public, one cannot but be amazed at what he was able to find time to do at home.

He had a very decided taste for carpentering and mechanics generally, and was never happier than when, in company with his children, he was building them stages, booths, or model theatres in which to perform their own plays. He was good at fashioning models of all descriptions, and an adept at making and painting fire-screens, as many of his friends who are fortunate enough to possess specimens of his handiwork are able to testify.

This gift he has bequeathed to more than one of his sons, notably to his eldest, who has adopted the manufacture of cycles and motors as his profession, and to another who, although still quite a boy, has modelled a very quaint and original cake as a prize in a private cake-walk competition, which was organised by Dan and taken part in by the entire family.

As is well known, he also found time to follow his





THE PANORAMA

hobby of painting both in water-colours and oils, and of both classes he turned out some excellent specimens.

The *magnum opus* of his hours of recreation may, however, be said to be his panorama.

The original idea that he had in his mind when he started this colossal undertaking was that it would provide some occupation for his stepfather, who was becoming restless in idleness, the notion being to present it to the old gentleman when complete, and thus fully equip him for a lecturing tour in country schools.

When, however, his death rendered it useless from that point of view, Dan simply went on with it at his leisure, and for his own amusement.

From start to finish it took him twelve years to complete. He then sold it to Lieutenant Cole, the ventriloquist; but, as the purchaser found no immediate use for it, Dan bought it back again, and kept it in full working order in his own house.

With the sole assistance of Danvers, the thing was begun, carried through, and finished at home.

The general scheme of the panorama was the comprehensive one of a tour round the world; but Dan, with his usual quaint originality, preferred his own eccentric route to any of those more generally accepted by such as tour with Gaze or Cook.

He elected to begin with a picture of the Great Fire of London in 1666, and then breathlessly and instantaneously rushed his spectators into Liverpool Street Station. From there he ruthlessly hurled them into the volcanic



regions of Vesuvius, and, before they had time to recover from the shock, landed them in the middle of Prince's Street, Edinburgh.

It was, indeed, an excitingly erratic journey as originally devised, and one to which I feel sure Mr. Leno, senior, would have done full justice in his lecture if he had been permitted to avail himself of the opportunity.

The canvas was erected and the first outline sketched in an empty shop which Dan had hired for the purpose. The proprietor of this shop was an elderly gentleman of penurious habits and a distrustful nature, who, having let the premises to Dan at a rental of five shillings weekly, made a point of being on the spot personally and continuously, nominally because of his interest in the painting, but actually to make certain that there was neither damage done to his premises, nor any possibility of a sudden departure with arrears of rent still unpaid.

His constant presence, peering over the shoulder of the painter at work, used to annoy the latter considerably, and many a time and oft has Dan, stepping hastily backwards to get the effect of distance on what he had done, with his brush sloped at the approved angle over his shoulder, accidentally (or otherwise) filled the eye or the mouth of the suspicious landlord with paint.

Johnny Danvers says that he used to think the movement was purely unpremeditated, so unconsciously and well was it executed ; but after it had occurred some ten or a dozen times, he began to see in it a precision

of aim that was something more than a mere coincidence.

For this and other reasons Dan decided to vacate the shop and to build a studio in his own garden, and, disdaining the aid of the British workman, he and Danvers, after many trials and tribulations, triumphantly succeeded in accomplishing this task.

The studio, which was a wooden structure, took many days to erect, and those days were full of incident.

The amateur workmen, who were nothing if not thorough, repaired to a neighbouring wood yard, and carried the necessary timber home on their own shoulders. This, of course, showed a truly praiseworthy spirit of independence, but led to disaster on the very first day.

As they were toiling along the street under their first load of uprights, a mischievous boy, seeing in Dan merely a small man staggering under the weight of a long plank, got behind him, and, seizing hold of the extreme end of the upright, gave it a vigorous spin round. Dan naturally spun round also, and with such velocity that he overbalanced and fell. Danvers, who was crossing the road immediately in front of him, heard the crash, and, for the moment forgetting that he also had a plank on his shoulder, turned abruptly to see what was the matter. The result was dire confusion among the traffic, and the narrow escape from total demolition of a horse and trap, together with the occupant.

By the time matters were readjusted and apologies

made and accepted, the boy who had caused all the trouble was judiciously in the next parish, so the insult to Dan had to pass unavenged.

The next trouble was all through his own fault, because he insisted on carrying the planks through the house. At the very first attempt he demolished the hall lamp; the second fully accounted for a window or two; so, after a brief but exciting experience, he decided that the game was too expensive, and carried his timber to the garden by a more circuitous but safer route.

They crowned the edifice with a corrugated zinc roof; but the very elements were against them, for, a very few nights after their work was, as they fondly hoped, quite completed, there arose a great storm of wind that lifted their zinc roof from its position and contemptuously flung into the next garden.

There it was found on the following morning; but that was not the worst.

After the wind had removed the roof, the rain descended upon the unprotected and partly completed panorama in a perfect torrent, until it converted it, for the most part, into a sodden and unrecognisable blur of paint.

Some of the scenes were ruined for ever, while others had fondly intermingled to such an extent, that, as Dan used to say, he spent the best part of a week trying to separate the Great Wall of China from the Falls of Niagara, and scraping the Pyramids of Egypt off Piccadilly Circus.

When Dan was painting, he always affected a strictly workmanlike costume, and in the immediate vicinity of his own house, where he was almost universally known, he did not always trouble to change his attire if he had occasion to take a short excursion in the midst of his labours.

One morning, while, clad in his oldest and shabbiest suit, and wearing a very disreputable cloth cap on his head, he was hard at work in his studio, he suddenly remembered that he had an appointment at the Duchess Music Hall in Balham ; so, throwing down his brush, he departed, just as he was, to attend to the business in hand.

He was detained rather longer than he had expected, and knowing that it was some time past the family luncheon hour, he turned into a newly opened restaurant, with the idea of getting something to eat.

He had intended merely to order something very trifling and inexpensive, but the proprietor, who was by nature and nationality a thoroughly polite Italian, eyed him with such extreme suspicion as he took his seat at one of the tables, that he changed his mind about it.

"To begin with," he airily remarked to the waiter who handed him the bill of fare as if he rather expected him to rise and run for the nearest "Lockhart's" when he had studied the prices, "to begin with, I'll have a nice sole."

The proprietor, who was alert and listening, coughed, and the waiter went over to him. There was a brief

discussion in Italian, and the waiter returned to where Dan sat, still studying the bill of fare.

"The soles," he remarked, in a warning and distinctly discouraging voice, "are two shillings each."

"I didn't ask you how much they were," retorted Dan. "I'll have two of them."

The waiter, from force of habit, started for the speaking-tube that communicated with the kitchen; but the proprietor coughed again, frowned, and shook his head decisively, so he returned without delivering any message.

"After that," went on Dan placidly, and apparently not noticing this by-play, "I will have some nice lamb chops."

The waiter murmured that lamb chops were expensive.

"Understand me," said Dan severely, and taking no notice of the interruption, "they must be cut from a lamb—none of your small sheep for me; but a *lamb*."

The waiter listened, but, so far as the kitchen was concerned, committed himself to nothing, while the proprietor watched the proceedings with growing suspicion.

"The wine list, please," demanded Dan with easy confidence.

After a faint suggestion that the lager beer was very good, the waiter meekly obeyed his behest, with a nervous eye on his master.

"A bottle of '84," announced Dan firmly, deliberately selecting, after perusal, the most expensive article he could find.

The waiter turned slightly pale, and repaired once

more to his superior for advice and help in this his hour of need.

There ensued another consultation in the Italian language (with which Dan sorely regretted that he was unacquainted), which ended in the proprietor himself approaching his mysterious customer, and informing him, with great diffidence and much gesticulation, that it was his invariable custom to ask for a deposit before fulfilling an order.

"Most certainly not!" objected Dan. "I have dined at the best restaurants! I have never been asked for a deposit in my life, and I am not going to pay one now."

Then the proprietor was sorry to say he would be unable to provide the gentleman with what he asked for. He regretted it very much; but it was the rule of the establishment, and so, under the circumstances, he had the honour and pleasure of wishing him a very good day.

But Dan sat still.

"I wish you a good day, sir!" repeated the Italian urbanely, but with visible apprehension, while the waiter stood at the door ready at a sign from his master to call in a policeman.

Dan fumbled in his pockets, and "My card!" he remarked, finding one, and handing it to the proprietor.

The worthy but distrustful gentleman accepted and read it, started suddenly and violently, gazed at Dan Leno, apparently recognised his features, and rushing to the speaking-tube poured into it a passionate flood

of Italian that brought up the chef and three additional waiters in five seconds.

Mr. Leno's requirements having been thoroughly explained with great minuteness of detail to the chef, that important functionary departed below in hot haste to fulfil them. During the interval, the original waiter, now reinforced by the other three, produced a clean tablecloth, a clean serviette, a sufficient number of steel and silver implements to see a man comfortably through an eighteen-course dinner, and about a score of glasses of all descriptions, ranging in size from the imperial pint to the liqueur.

The proprietor, meanwhile, hovered round anxiously, occasionally disappearing into the kitchen to harass the chef into greater activity, and invariably returning with an Italian newspaper which he bestowed upon his distinguished customer, apparently quite oblivious of the fact that he couldn't possibly read it.

The lunch was a distinct success, and Dan, after partaking, paying his bill and tipping the waiters, told his host as much.

"It was well cooked, and well served in every way," he said, "and I will certainly recommend all my friends to come here and give you a trial."

The proprietor was so completely overcome by this unsolicited tribute and generous promise, that he absolutely did not know what to do to sufficiently express his gratitude.

Suddenly a brilliant idea struck him.

It was about three o'clock and a beautifully sunny

afternoon in June ; but excitedly rushing round the room, he switched on every electric light he had, and Dan, wearing his dirty cap and paint-besmeared clothes, was obsequiously bowed out in a perfect blaze of glory by the entire strength of the establishment.

Dan Leno, among his other domestic hobbies, had a universal and catholic fondness for birds and animals of all species. Having plenty of ground space to spare where he lived, he availed himself of the opportunity to keep various pets, and in addition to his horse and dog, he found at various times a hospitable home for pigs, parrots, hens, canaries, geese, and, on one memorable occasion, for a donkey.

This particular animal he purchased for the use and enjoyment of his children, it having been recommended to him as quiet to ride or drive, and very good in harness.

This description turned out to be, to say the very least, somewhat deceptive.

What it actually was in harness he never knew, because it never could be persuaded to wear any ; but neither he nor any of his family ever ventured to ride it, and it would neither consent to be driven nor led. So it was turned out into a paddock adjoining his garden, a very Ishmaelite of a donkey, there to lead a morose and solitary existence.

Into this paddock one day Dan incautiously ventured, and the donkey, either seeking revenge for some imaginary wrong, or from sheer hatred of the human race, laid its ears well back and went for him.



Dan, recognising the symptoms while still some little distance from the animal, judiciously fled at once, in order to make the most of the slight advantage he had in the way of start. But the donkey, having four legs, made light of this small handicap, and overhauled Dan's active couple so rapidly that Dan, to save himself, was compelled to dive into the friendly shelter of an adjacent pigsty.

Into the inmost recesses of this building, where the roof was so low that no donkey, however determined, could possibly follow him, Dan rushed in a hurry, and bent almost double.

There were no pigs at home, but he was greeted by a sitting hen, who, evidently fancying that here was some marauding egg-hunter who must be repelled in the interests of future chickens, promptly and fearlessly flew in his face.

Dan, darting back to avoid, was caught and securely fixed by the waistband of his trousers to an iron hook that was fastened to the very low ceiling, and his chapter of disaster was complete.

Try as he would, he could not, in his awkward position, free himself from the iron grip of the relentless hook, and, although he shouted his loudest, the house was some distance away, and nobody was near except the donkey, who, having got him into the mess, went away and took no further interest in the matter.

So Dan, being left absolutely on his own resources, evolved one of those inventions that necessity often compels into being.



IN THE BOSOM OF HIS FAMILY



Raising his feet from the ground, and disposing of his body in the attitude of swimming, he depended his entire weight on the iron hook and trouser waistband, and earnestly hoped for the best.

Naturally, it was the waistband that gave way in the end. It did not yield suddenly, but reluctantly and lingeringly, as if anxious to testify on behalf of its manufacturer that it was good material, and well put together.

When at last, with an angry and disappointed rip, the iron hook released its prey, Dan fell forward on his hands and knees. He quickly picked himself up, and after a careful survey to satisfy himself that the donkey had definitely abandoned the chase, returned to the house fully determined to be very angry with everybody for not hearing and helping him in his trouble.

When he began to tell them what had happened to him, however, they all laughed so much that he quite forgot he was angry, and before he was half-way through with his tale of woe he was laughing as much as any of them.

In the end he heartily agreed with the family that it was the best bit of genuine fun he had ever experienced in his life, and that he wouldn't have missed it for worlds.

In his house he had a most extraordinary collection of curiosities that his various admirers had sent him from all parts of the world. The rattle of a rattlesnake, a scorpion's nest, nuggets of gold, sharks' teeth, pieces of shell from Mafeking, cartridges from a Boer rifle—

such were some of the many presents that were made by people who were, to him, personally unknown.

Many were the letters written to him by soldiers who, camping out in South Africa and thinking of home, felt impelled to write a letter to "dear old Dan." In one of these was enclosed a scrap of grey hair, which the writer described as "a piece of Cronje's whiskers," and added the message, "I will send you Kruger's later on." In this curio cabinet of his he kept hoarded up with the rest a few articles, such as rusty knives, old nails, etc., which nobody knew quite what to make of, because it was impossible to find out whether he kept them as a joke or took them seriously.

For instance, he once handed me out of these treasures a pair of broken scissors. "These scissors," he explained reverentially, "are the identical pair with which the first clown's dress that Grimaldi ever wore was cut out"; then, without giving me time to make any comment upon the statement, he went on to say with equal seriousness, "And that's the biggest lie I ever told, because I've just found them in the garden." With which contradictory words he replaced them in the cabinet with the others as carefully as if he considered them to be the gem of the collection.

My own belief is that he kept, among his genuine curios, a few "spoof" articles, over which he would induce the unwary to go into raptures of enthusiasm for his own private edification, and, for the purposes of the joke, he was just as likely to decry the former as to attach a fictitious value to the latter.

For he was a man who could enjoy a joke none the less for having it all to himself.

I remember a pianola merchant telling me that he had been trying to sell one of his machines to Dan Leno, but without success.

Dan admitted the cleverness and utility of the machine, he said, and he agreed that, so far as mere value went, the price of sixty guineas that was asked for it was not at all exorbitant; but he added, "You can see for yourself, my dear fellow, how ridiculous it would be to put a sixty-guinea pianola on to play a twelve-pound piano."

"Of course," remarked the pianola man when he told me, "I had to admit that it *would* be absurd; but it seems a strange thing to me that a man in Mr. Leno's position can be content with a twelve-pound piano."

So I had to explain that Dan would have his little joke, even if it entailed the maligning of his Broadwood.

At the Drury Lane annual dinners, held, as a rule, the week following the end of the pantomime run, he fairly revelled in the fun, that was partly improvised on the spur of the moment, and partly prearranged.

He was generally good for a song, half a dozen speeches, a score of amusing and personal reminiscences, and irrelevant interruptions innumerable.

Presentations of a humorous nature, but made and accepted in the most solemn and serious manner, were a great feature of these friendly gatherings. In these Dan naturally delighted.

When he presented Arthur Collins with an egg as a precursor of "Humpty Dumpty"; Jimmy Glover with a broken chip as a conductor's *bâton*; Comelli with a doll, dressed up in a horrible travesty of one of his own designs; or Sidney Smith with a bill order for two to the pit, he did it with a deadly earnestness well calculated to deceive the most sceptical. Then, after one or two of these pieces of humbug, he would rise and say, in all seriousness:—

"Gentlemen,—We have hitherto been making fun of each other, and very good fun it has been. A joke's a joke, and I think everybody here can appreciate one; but there is a time for everything, and, having come to the end of my list, I must now claim your attention for more serious matters. We have here with us to-night our good friend, Mr. So-and-so——"

Here would follow a truly magnificent eulogy on the qualities of Mr. So-and-so, delivered with such apparent sincerity that more than one in the room secretly wondered whether Dan was really serious this time, and Mr. So-and-so was to be rewarded with a genuine testimonial. The sequel, however, would be the presentation of something more supremely ridiculous than anything that had preceded it.

In my first experience of these functions I was selected as the first victim before the joke (of which I knew nothing) was given away. I remember sitting, in mingled doubt and wonder, while Dan, in a speech full of emotion, endowed me with attributes that I was

honestly surprised to hear any man could suspect me of possessing.

The oration was ably seconded by the cordial "Hear, hears!" and the sympathetic applause of the rest of the company, and the climax was the handing over to me of a pair of scissors and a paste-pot.

Dan Leno was not, in any sense, a sporting man. I never heard of him taking any real interest in racing, rowing, or contests of a similar nature. He played cricket and football only on burlesque lines, and for charity, and he absolutely declined to be lured into golf.

His objection to this last insidiously fascinating form of amusement was that it distinctly encouraged incompetence, and he based his argument on the fact that the further you drove the ball, the further you had to walk.

His favourite outdoor recreations were cycling (which he shared with the entire family), walking, and on occasion gardening.

Out of the flood of anecdotes concerning Dan at play it is difficult to select, but a couple may be taken at random.

At one time, for the improvement of his garden, he employed his spare time in building a rockery, and on a certain morning he was thus engaged, when a seedy-looking man entered to him, and began, familiarly and without preamble, in a very decided Lancashire accent—

"Hallo! Dan, tha'll recollect me in Manchester, I suppose. I'm in a bit of a fix, and I've come to you to get me out on it. What am I to do, Dan? What *am*



I to do? I've got a wife and child starving over yonder." Here he pointed vaguely in a northerly direction. "Tell me, Dan, what am I to do?"

Dan, who neither recollected him in Manchester nor anywhere else, briefly suggested "Work!"

"Ay," responded the man bitterly, "that's what they all tell me. 'Work,' they say. It sounds easy enough, but I tell you I'm a man what's got a wife and child starving over yonder," and with these words he distinctly pointed due east.

"Well," suggested Dan, rather moved by his earnestness, "suppose you help me to build this rockery."

"Rockery!" echoed the man from Manchester, viewing the partially completed edifice with distinct disfavour. "Rockery! Well, I never thowt I should come to it; but what's a chap to do when he's got a wife and child starving over yonder?" This time he indicated the south-east.

Dan, who began to suspect him of having starving wives and children at all points of the compass, felt really sorry for him in his embarrassing position.

"I'll give you ninepence an hour," he said.

"It's not much for th' kind o' work," commented the man, "but it'll keep th' wife and th' child from starving over yonder. Say no more, Dan. What am I to do?"

"First of all, we must go with this wheelbarrow to that pile of stones," instructed Dan.

"I see," said the man agreeably, but making no move to do anything whatever. "Go on, Dan. I'm with you."

So Dan wheeled the barrow to the pile of stones, while his assistant strolled by his side with his hands in his pockets.

"Then we fill the barrow with the stones," went on Dan, suiting the action to the word.

"I see," remarked the other, sitting down to watch. "By gum, Dan, you *can* shift stones for a little un!"

"And then we wheel them back over here," explained Dan, as he did so, followed by the labourer at ninepence an hour.

"It's a rum job, this rockery business," said the man, as he watched Dan laboriously putting the stones in their appointed places.

"I daresay it is," returned Dan, waxing indignant, as he realised that he was doing all the work, "but I don't see that you've got anything to do with it at all."

"You're right, Dan—you're quite right," consented the man cordially. "I've been watching you, and I've come to the conclusion it's nowt in my line. Still, you said ninepence an hour, and as I've been here th' best part of half an hour, you won't be hard on me. You must remember I've got a wife and child starving over yonder," indicating an entirely new and original direction.

Dan, who was now thoroughly convinced of the numerical value of his wives and children, put his hand in his pocket, and presented him with a shilling.

"Go away," he commanded briefly.

"I shall have to walk to Manchester," suggested the

man, accepting the shilling without comment and gazing at his boots reflectively.

Dan followed his gaze, and saw that the boots were, at least, quite as likely to hold water as was the statement; so he said, "I'll give you a pair of boots," and, taking him into the house, fitted him according to promise, and saw him off the premises.

After a few hours of toil, Dan, in search of society, rest, and refreshment, repaired to a neighbouring hotel.

As he was chatting with a friend, a familiar voice struck on his ear, and he turned round to see his former assistant.

"Them boots didn't fit me, Dan," he explained, "so I pawned 'em. I wouldn't have done it, only I've a wife and child starving over yonder——"

Without waiting to see in which direction he pointed, Dan fled.

The same evening he climbed on to a bus that was going Strand-wards, and sat on a seat immediately behind the driver.

It was a sultry June night, and he remarked as he mopped his brow—

"Very hot to-night, driver."

Before the driver could reply, a voice from the back broke in, "Ay, it may be hot for you, Dan, but it's a jolly sight hotter for a chap as has got a wife and child starving over yonder."

As Dan got off the bus in a hurry, he imagined he saw the man from Manchester pointing towards the sky.

The next night he chanced to meet Eugene Stratton.

"I helped that friend of yours, Dan," said the impersonator of coons.

"What friend?"

"Oh, the fellow you sent to me—a fellow from Manchester, who's got a wife and child starving."

"Over yonder?" was the eager question.

Stratton nodded.

"In which direction did he point when he said it?" inquired Dan anxiously. But Stratton had either forgotten or not noticed. So Dan never knew the precise number and geographical position of the starving wives and children possessed by the man from Manchester.

The second story deals with what he always considered to be his most remarkable pedestrian feat, during which he used to claim he created a fresh record between Brighton and Worthing.

He was staying at the former seaside resort, and one night announced his intention of getting up early on the morrow and having a real good day in the open air.

The necessary instructions were issued and attended to, and on the following morning, after an abnormally early breakfast, Dan issued forth, clad in Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers, with the stern determination to walk as far as Worthing.

Brighton was, as it generally is, fairly full of the theatrical and music-hall profession. So he had not proceeded very far before he met an old acquaintance, who was just returning from his morning bathe.

"Hallo, Dan, where are you off to so early?" was the greeting.

"I'm going to walk as far as Worthing," was Dan's reply.

To Worthing? How curious! Why, that was just what his friend had thought of doing. If Dan would only wait for a quarter of an hour while he had his breakfast—he wouldn't keep him longer—just to swallow a cup of tea and an egg, that was all—he would walk to Worthing with him.

Dan, after some demur, agreed; and, after an interval of rather more than an hour, the two set off together.

They had hardly started before they came across two more friends, and the same query and reply ensued.

It turned out, strangely enough, that these two also intended to walk to Worthing, but were not quite ready to start. One had a couple of letters to write, and the other had promised to do a little shopping for his wife; but it was only a matter of twenty minutes at most, and, if Dan and friend No. 1 would only wait for them, they would make up quite a jolly little party.

So Dan and friend No. 1 good-naturedly took a seat on the sea-front and waited until the other two were ready.

This was in an hour and a quarter, and the company being now four strong, the walk was recommenced.

As luck would have it, while they were passing an hotel, a figure, familiar to them all, emerged. It was that of a well-known music-hall artiste who, having been on an extended tour through America, Australia,

and other strange lands, had only just returned home, and was staying at Brighton to recuperate. They very naturally, after this prolonged absence, welcomed each other with open arms.

Where were they going? To Worthing? Capital! He would go with them; but, before they started, they must come in and have a whisky and milk with him while they chatted over old times.

So they chatted over old times until Dan began to feel very hungry. He looked at his watch, and, seeing it was very nearly one o'clock, he remembered his early breakfast, and was not surprised.

He mentioned the fact, and it was at once unanimously agreed that they couldn't possibly walk to Worthing until they had had something to eat. So lunch was ordered, and lunch proved to be a very prolonged repast. After lunch, they all looked at each other furtively, and secretly wondered who was going to suggest the desirability of a fresh start for Worthing. Apparently nobody felt that way inclined; but a reference was made to possible coffees and liqueurs in the billiard-room.

By the time these were disposed of it was universally, if tacitly, agreed that it was too late in the day to walk to Worthing or anywhere else; so instead of the excursion as originally planned, they all took pedestrian exercise round the billiard table.

When, about seven o'clock that evening, Dan walked briskly back to his rooms, he was greeted with effusion. What a lovely day it had been! How he must have

enjoyed the walk! He looked very much better for it! Yes! And he didn't even look tired! He *must* be hungry after such a long day in the fresh air!

Such was Dan's greeting, and everybody seemed to be so pleased that he had walked to Worthing that he hadn't the heart to undeceive them.



OUT FOR A LONG DAY IN THE FRESH AIR!





## CHAPTER XV

### THE END

**I**F Dan Leno's professional career may be said to have begun too early, it is more painfully certain that it ended, alas! all too soon. As he started, so he finished, long before his natural time; but he contrived to crowd into his comparatively brief span of forty-four years more genuinely hard work than most men could manage to get through in three score and ten.

Speaking personally, I can honestly say that I never saw him absolutely at rest. He was always doing something, and had something else to do afterwards; or he had just been somewhere, was going somewhere else, and had several other appointments to follow. If it is, as is said, "better to wear out than to rust out," then most assuredly Dan Leno chose the better part.

To the casual observer he was a wiry, tireless little man; as such, he liked to consider himself, and others to consider him; but it was, for years, only the unquenchable spirit that galvanised the body into ceaseless activity, and for this Nature exacted her penalty in the end.

After his first breakdown he, recuperated by a brief

rest, showed such signs of undiminished power in the pantomime of *Mother Goose* at Drury Lane, that all who knew him were delighted to believe that his cure was permanent and lasting. That he himself thought so is made apparent by the fact that he resumed his strenuous life, and spared himself no more than he had done before his illness.

Then followed another and a more serious collapse, that necessitated his retirement for a lengthened period. In the home to which he went to recover from his brain fag they have many pleasant memories of him, and abundant proof that, although his mind was weary, his humour was unabated.

On the second day after his arrival, it is said, he got up an argument with one of the attendants about the correctness of the hall clock. "That clock's wrong!" he said, referring to his own watch.

"No, sir," contradicted the attendant, "the clock is quite right."

"I tell you it's wrong!" persisted Dan.

"No, sir," repeated the other, "it's quite right!"

"Then," said Dan, with the old gleam of fun in his eyes, "if it's quite right, what's it doing here?"

Complete rest again restored him to comparative health, and he was able to appear once more at Drury Lane in the pantomime of *Humpty Dumpty*, the shout of welcome that greeted him when he first walked on the stage, after his long retirement, being one that must live for ever in the memory of all who were privileged to be present and hear it.

In the spring and early summer following on this appearance he attempted to combine work and recreation by appearing at various seaside and watering-places. Needless to say that the enthusiasm he aroused wherever he went, and his earnest desire to give to his audiences both the quantity and quality he felt that such hearty greetings deserved, entailed upon him more work than recreation.

For this tour he had booked his own dates, and on one occasion at least he must have wished for an agent to blame.

The usual Monday morning rehearsal was proceeding in the concert-room of the pier at Folkestone, when, to the surprise of everybody, Dan Leno walked in, bearing with him an armful of band parts.

He sat down and waited until everybody had finished; but hearing the conductor then dismiss his band, he jumped up.

"Aren't you going to play over my songs?" he asked.

"There's no good playing them over this morning, Mr. Leno," replied the conductor. "The men would forget them again before next week."

"But I appear to-night," said Dan.

"No, sir, a week to-night," corrected the conductor, and when the manager was referred to, it was established beyond doubt that Dan had by mistake arrived a week too soon.

"It's all right. It's quite right," remarked Dan affably. "In fact, I'm rather glad. I'll stay here and take a week's holiday."

With which philosophical words he retired with his band parts, and spent the better part of the week crossing between Folkestone and Boulogne, amusing the passengers *en route* and astonishing the natives on the other side.

It was at this period that the sudden and unexpected death of his old comrade, Herbert Campbell, took place. This very naturally upset Dan completely for a time.

The day after the sad event I met him accidentally as he was travelling from Harrogate, where he had been performing, back to London, and throughout the entire journey he could literally talk of nothing but the death of his old friend.

"Dear old Herbert!" I remember him saying, with tears in his eyes, "I'd give a good deal to smell one of his cigars just now."

This was in allusion to the fact that Dan, who never smoked, used to complain, apparently in bitter earnest, but really in fun, of the quantity and quality of the cigars Herbert was wont to smoke in their joint dressing-room at Drury Lane.

"Thank goodness he knew I didn't mean it, and just went on smoking," he added, after a pause.

The last engagement he fulfilled was at the London Pavilion. It was only too apparent to all who then saw him that what he had formerly done with such consummate and spontaneous ease had now become to him a burden greater than he could bear.

Still, the indomitable pluck of the man kept him going

under a weight that would have crushed most men, and he struggled on bravely to the inevitable end, dying, as he would have wished to die, practically in harness, on the 31st day of October, 1904.

His funeral was made the occasion of one of the most remarkable demonstrations of popular sympathy that London has ever seen. The people assembled in their thousands to follow their lost favourite to his last resting-place, and, in variety as in numbers, the great crowd gave striking testimony to the fact that Dan Leno had captured the hearts of classes and masses alike.

So ended, full early, the career of as unique a personality as the present generation has seen. We know that theatrical reputations are ephemeral, and that to the next generation Dan Leno will be merely a name, as Grimaldi is to us now. We know that our grandchildren will listen, with polite incredulity, to what they may describe to themselves as our senile babblings, when we claim for Dan Leno a crushing superiority over some comedian yet unborn ; but to us, who knew him, his will ever be the gracious memory of a man who did much to brighten a dull world ; who strove and endured cheerfully and uncomplainingly, gave freely and generously, nor was ever known to refuse help to a fellow-creature, and, finally, entered into his rest without leaving a single enemy behind him.

Mr. Arthur Collins, of Drury Lane Theatre, and Mr. Frank Glenister, of the London Pavilion, who, by reason of their long and intimate business relations with him, are eminently qualified to judge of his character-

istics, have kindly added their quota to this book in the following impressions of "Dan Leno as I knew him."

Mr. Collins writes :—

"Dan Leno the comedian or Dan Leno the man? I wonder now which of the two I appreciated the more highly? Probably the latter, because I shared the comedian with the world, the man only with his intimates.

"I have watched Dan Leno the comedian grow from a comparatively small salary to a princely remuneration, and, during the process, the nature of Dan Leno the man changed not at all. He was as loyal, honest, and true a worker at the end as he had been at the beginning.

"If genius be really 'an infinite capacity for taking pains,' then Dan Leno was indeed a genius. To those who merely saw the bright and apparently spontaneous performance, it may seem absurd to write of Dan as 'taking pains,' but those who, like myself, have watched and marked the gradual evolution of the idea, can testify to the fact that he tried, that he tried hard, and that he tried every time. He worked for his reward, and I am convinced that, the higher his salary grew, so he worked the harder to satisfy his own mind that he was loyally and conscientiously earning it.

"With such an artiste it was, of course, impossible for a manager to be on any but the very best of terms, and on such terms we were. From long and intimate association we understood each other, I should say, as well as men in our relative positions possibly *could* understand one another. Suggestions he was ever ready to give or take; improvements he was quick to see and to act upon, and throughout his pantomime career he

worked not for himself alone, but for the success of all concerned. Of the excellence of his many performances at Drury Lane it is needless for me to speak, since his name is written large in the history of that theatre. Mingled with my deep regret at his loss, there is a feeling of pleasure that I was for so many years associated with him in his work there, and looking back upon those years, I can gratefully think of Dan Leno as I knew him at all times—an ever-cheerful worker and an ever-loyal friend.”

From Mr. Frank Glenister we have the following brief but sincere tribute :—

“To me Leno was always a genial companion in our business relations, and his loss to us was indeed very great.

“He will be greatly missed by the many who received help at his hands, as he had always a thought for those in need, and did many charitable actions that were unknown to the outside world.”

And, finally, this record of Dan Leno's career may be fittingly concluded by the quotation of a few extracts from two of the most striking of the many memorial notices that were written after his death.

The first is by “Tacitus,” and appeared in *The Outlook*.

“In Dan Leno,” he writes, “England loses a man of genius, whose end is yet another reminder (*pace* Charles Lamb) that great wits are sure to madness near allied. Not that he was precisely a great wit; rather a great droll; but great within his limits he certainly was, and probably no one has ever caused more laughter, or



cleaner laughter. That was, perhaps, Dan Leno's greatest triumph, that the grimy, sordid material of the music-hall low comedian, which, with so many singers, remains grimy and sordid, and perhaps becomes even more grimy and more sordid—in his refining hands became radiant, joyous ; a legitimate source of mirth.

" In its nakedness it was still drunkenness, quarrelsomeness, petty poverty, still hunger, even crime ; but such was the native cleanness of this little eager, sympathetic observer and reader of life, such was his gift of showing the comic, the unexpected side, that it emerged the most delicious, the gayest joke. He might be said to have been a crucible that transmuted mud to gold. . . . Only those at all familiar with the music-halls know what a loss Dan Leno is. His nature and influence always made for sweetness. . . . He will be remembered as the sweetest-souled comedian that ever swayed an audience with grotesque nonsense based on natural facts."

The second is from the pen of Mr. T. P. O'Connor, who writes of him in *M. A. P.* as follows:—

#### "LENO'S LOVE OF CHILDREN.

" It was perhaps their sense of his love for them that inspired children with such an instinctive love for him. And this love was not a mere thing of words. As everybody knows, a large number of children are employed every year in the Christmas pantomime at Drury Lane Once, at least, every week Dan Leno provided these children with a big tea, and, what is more, he never relaxed his rule of taking tea along with them. Here again you see that he was thinking of the days of wretchedness which his own childhood had known. This it was that gave him the power of ready sympathy, and



DAN LENO, HIS WIFE AND FAMILY



the need for charity to the children of other parents and other times. It was his dead self he was tending when he tended them."

In reading these and other analyses of Dan Leno's characteristics it is obvious that, while he appealed to the public at large as a comic genius, he was quite as fascinating a study to the thinking few from the point of view of a wonderful and striking personality. To many the man himself was more interesting than the comedian.

That he was many-sided is best shown by the fact that, despite the myriad articles written about and around him, so many observant writers were able to discuss him from their own original standpoint, as he appealed to them personally ; and yet, while each critic found some dominant characteristic that struck him more forcibly than the rest, they were all agreed on two points—he was a great comedian and a lovable man.

His loss we feel deeply, and yet, realising that it would have been a still greater loss to us had we never known him, we repeat, as we think of him, with mingled pride and regret, the words of Hamlet :

"Alas, poor Yorick ! I knew him well."

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