

EARLIEST STAGE EXPERIENCE OF MR H. R. ROBERTS.

Mr H. R. Roberts, who is now in Sydney preparing for his forthcoming tour of New Zealand in the "Prince Chap," is the only Australian actor who has graduated from the local stage and has become a star in London. His earliest experience in serious work, as told to an interviewer, should thereafter be vested with more than usual interest.

"When a very young and extremely ambitious actor," said Mr Roberts, "I accepted an engagement to go to Tasmania to open in a play called 'Face to Face' as the leading heavy man of the company. Why I was chosen for this weighty part I do not know, for I was fair and slender and about as heavy as two matches put together. I necessarily thought that all villains should be heavy bewhiskered, so I proceeded to Aldred's, the wig maker, and asked him to fix me up as cheaply as possible with a beard and wig of the most villainous description. There was no time to make a regular beard, so he told me if I got a lady's hair pad, picked it to pieces and stuck it on my face, that I would present a sufficiently horrible spectacle. I did as I was bidden. The great night came. Never did a villain's heart beat faster than mine as I entered my dressing room—occupied by about six others. My comrades regarded me respectfully. I was the leading heavy man. I proceeded to stick on the hair, piece by piece, and as though my life depended on there not being a bald spot left on my face. I had a black ringlet wig though it was a modern play. I had not allowed for the size of my hat which consequently sat upon the top of this ferocious looking head in the most jaunty fashion. As I made my way to the entrance I became painfully aware that I was the object of curiosity on the part of the other members of the company. My cue came. My heart fluttered. My hat wobbled. I dashed upon the stage. It was an intensely dramatic scene. My wife was supposed to be starving. She implored me to give her money for food, but with heavily knit brows and in guttural tones I refused. At least that is how it should have been, but as soon as the audience saw me they forgot the pathos of the scene. They simply shrieked. 'Ye gods, how they laughed!' And remember I was the leading heavy man who was to appeal to their sense of all that was most brutal. Every time I met the leading man he frowned ominously at me. After the second act there was a big call for the principals. But I was not on in that act. After the performance the manager sent for me. Let the secrecy of that interview be sacred. Next morning a rehearsal was called. Nobody spoke to me. I was a thing tabooed. The man-

ager had taken the first boat to Melbourne to get another man. Parts were handed out for the next play, but none came to me. The others filed out of the theatre and I was left alone with the hideous consciousness that I was a failure. I realised that acting was a serious profession. My father had been a successful actor before me. I had thought that I could easily follow in his footsteps. Heartbroken I went to my dressing room. My salary was to have been four pounds a week. I was offered thirty shillings. I accepted it without a murmur."

A SILENT PLAY.

To demonstrate their remarkable facility of communication, the deaf and dumb people in London arranged an entertainment on a recent evening at the St. Saviour's Social Club, Oxford street. A one-act play was staged in which actors, scene shifters and stage managers were all deaf and dumb—as were the audience who witnessed the performance. The scene was an extraordinary one (says the "Daily Mail"). Not a sound broke the stillness of the hall during the whole time the play was on, both action and dialogue being accomplished in silence. The actors, with mobile faces, gesticulated quaintly under the limelight, reeling off their parts upon fingers which moved with a lightning-like rapidity.

A NEAR THING.

The new Theatre Royal, Christchurch, had a narrow escape from fire on Thursday evening (says a Southern paper). At the conclusion of the performance of "His Highness the Bey," the juveniles were arranged on the stage for a flashlight photograph. While this was being taken a fire broke out in one of the dressing-rooms. It was discovered just in time, for the flames were beginning to spread behind the lining of the wall, in which case the conflagration must have become serious. Dense volumes of smoke rolled out into the auditorium, but the fire appliances in the building were sufficient to suppress the outbreak. It is estimated that £25 will cover the damage.

IN CASE OF PANIC.

At a recent meeting of the Royal Institute of British Architects, London, a paper on "Safety Exits for Theatres," by Mr S. Hurst Seager, of Christchurch, New Zealand, was read. The London County Council's regulations, it was stated, merely required a minimum number and a minimum width of openings; they made no attempt to show how they should be constructed, except in the case of stairs, which in times of panic would be likely to lead to disaster. The mode of construction

WOLFE'S SCHNAPPS

The family stimulant.

of exits was of infinitely greater importance than their number and widths. Many places of amusement, lecture halls and places of worship, though fulfilling the requirements of the City Council, would prove to be veritable death-traps in times of panic; a very large proportion of the audience would never be able to reach the exits, and a great many more would either be crushed in them, or in the corridors or stairs leading to them. The problem was to arrange exits so that irresponsible people in any part of the building should be impelled to move towards the one designed for their use, through which they must be able to pass to the street without any danger of resistance either from the structural arrangements or from opposing active forces. The author's safety exit aimed at the elimination of all resistance to outward progress by means of curved solid dwarf partitions, about 4ft 6in high. They might be constructed of double plates of sheet iron, and should be permanently and strongly fixed, and perfectly smooth. Applying his scheme to an already existing exit, an illustration was given of the exit being divided into three parts, the outer ones equal in width to the gangways at the ends of the seats, and the central one proportionate to the number of people using it. By this simple device any pushing would not create pressure at the exit, but would only tend to hurry the audience more quickly into the street or corridor.

THEIR LAST LONG HOME.

The graves of genius are widely separated. Mrs Jordan sleeps at St. Cloud; Astleys (father and son), in the cemetery of Pere la Chaise, John Edwin (the Liston and Matthews combined of his day), at St. Paul's, Covent Garden; Kemble (John), at Lausanne Suet, in the ground of St. Paul's Cathedral; Kean (without a stone to mark the spot), in Richmond churchyard; Elliston, in St. John's Church, Waterloo Road; old Johanna, at Bathwick (old) churchyard; Macklin lies under the chancel of St. Paul's, Covent Garden, in which churchyard his once boon companion, Tom King, rests; Tom D'Urfey, in St. James's, facing the gate in Jermyn Street; Joe Miller, in the ground in Portugal Street; John Palmer, at Wootton, near Liverpool; Quin, at the Abbey Church, Bath; Wilks, near Macklin, not far from the grave of Wycherley, in the church of St. Paul, Covent Garden, where,

nearly a century and a half since, Joe Haynes was consigned to earth.

A story of southern life in America, vivid with colour and humour, is told by Mr Harry Roberts, the popular actor, who is about to tour Australasia in "The Prince Chap." The incident occurred while he was starring in the southern states as Petronius in "Quo Vadis."

"One Sunday while in Atlanta I went into a church and found that it was one of those negro places of worship of which I had read and heard so much. I might have left and proceeded to my own church had not the exaggerated methods of oration adopted by the preacher held my attention, while at the same time his sincerity touched me deeply. The text was 'Faith' and the preacher was instancing many great things which had been accomplished by faith.

"Yea brethren," he said, "even Dan'l in de den of lions saw dem lions simply walk down and sit in de cornah. Cos why? I ask you again why? Mah dearly beloved brothers, mah sisters too and all de little children, I ask you why did dem lions lift up their massive paws when dey seed Dan'l comin' and den go and sit in de cornah? Cos Dan'l had faith."

A very old man, sitting behind a pillar popped his bald head round the corner and holding one hand up like a child asking its teacher if it may go out, asked in a tremulous voice: "Scuse me Mr Preacher, but was dey dem same lions what was round here last fall with de circus?"

Then an outburst from the preacher: "You are de most ignoramus nigger in de whole of dis great and glorious congregation. Circus indeed. Don't you know dat this occurred hundreds and thousands and millions of years ago—B.C., before circuses!"

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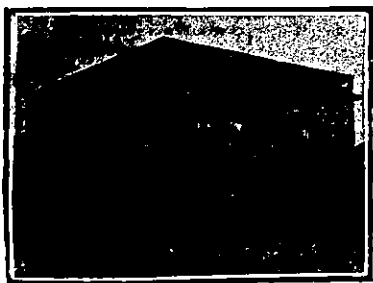
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