

A RICH PAGEANT OF LIVING

Looking back many years past, I can remember my first appearance in Show Business. It was at the Hippodrome, Wolverhampton; I was just over four and a half years old. I was dressed as a little girl and my father carried me on in a Gladstone Bag and when I popped out it was a surprise for the folks out front, there were laughs and applause. I stood on my head; my father picked me up by the feet, over his head a full twist, feet to hands and down. Then I swung the baton and finished up with butterflies round the stage, in which I was considered perfect. Exit to big applause.

Very soon after I started in the act with my sisters and brothers, top mounting, and travelled all over the globe. My sisters were very talented and performed some wonderful tricks, one which my father originated. The famous pedestal trick; a steel tube fourteen feet high, on top a small platform sixteen inches square. My sister Minnie stood on the platform working onto the toes, at cue she turned a lay out somersault and sister Jessie caught her perfectly on her shoulders. It was a beautiful trick for two girls and was never copied. My brother Albert and I always worked as girls, as Dad's contracts stated six and seven girls. We were big favourites on the Continent playing all the principal Music Halls and Circuses, also all the principal tours in England, including the West End Variety Halls in London. This was when I remember playing with all the famous old time stars at the Empire, Leicester Square, the Alhambra, the Pavilion, the Palace, the Old Canterbury and, I reckon, every variety hall in London working turns. Father Ted Leopold was a wonderful horse trainer. We had four horses and two ponies. The horses were named after my sisters, Jessie, Minnie and Katie, also Victor, they were all thoroughbreds. Jessie and Victor used to pull our brougham for working turns. We were never late. I recall some of the artistes when working the Canterbury Music Hall, the same time as the London Shoreditch. At the Canterbury were Dan Leno, George Lashwood, Kate Carney, Vesta Tilley, Little Tich, Gus Elen, Daisy Dormer, The Egberts, etc. We used to pull up at The Tankard Public House on our way home after two, sometimes three,

By MARIOUS LEOPOLD

turns. Dad used to treat us to a "black velvet" each, then home to Cranmer Road, Brixton to a well-earned supper.

INTERNATIONAL TRAVELS

We were always in demand on the Continent, so we were backwards and forwards through the years. We played practically every country in Europe, as well as North Africa and South America. We certainly got around in those days. There were no cars or planes then. For instance, I was born in Prague; my brother Albert in Danzig, Germany and brother Walter in Stockholm, Sweden. I have a sister buried in Barcelona; a brother buried in St. Petersburg (as it then was) Russia, and yet another buried in Paris. I reckon my dear mother was a wonder to travel with us all over the world, looking after us all, and seeing that we had the right food, sometimes cooking in difficult conditions. We always had our roast beef and Yorkshire Pudding no matter where we were. I think my dear mother deserved the M.B.E. for what she must have gone through, but there were very good times as well as tough ones. Once while playing at Cirque Medrano in Paris, which we worked several times, we were picked to appear for what I think must have been the Greatest Command Performance of all. It was to appear before all the Crowned Heads of Europe's Kings and Queens — it was called The Royal Midnight Fete. Every country was represented with acts of each nationality. We represented Great Britain. This was a great honour for us all. Not so long after father was specially booked by Old Man Barnum for their first visit to Paris and we had the Centre Ring — another feather in our caps — as left and right rings the acrobats were Italian and Spanish. We also did the vaulting off the highboard with the rundown. My brother Albert did a forward somersault over four elephants and then they took three away leaving the gap to clear the fourth at the end of the gap, which he did with a lovely layout forward somersault. On the opening night one of the American vaulters was leaping over two elephants, he missed the landing net and landed on the con-

crete. His neck was broken and this made a very sad opening. My poor brother had to follow him with the next leap. There were lots of accidents and casualties every performance. No wonder they were called The Greatest Show on Earth — it really was a stupendous show and played in Paris for six months until Christmas when Mr. Barnum gave all us youngsters a wonderful party set out amongst the animals and freaks. It was a wonderful experience to be with this show. The crowds were turned away at each performance and the building held at least fifteen thousand people. I think it was called the Palais de Machine. At the end of the acts they put on the most spectacular turn out. It was the Queen of Sheba: all the artistes and every animal of all kinds; a marvellous pageant, and us youngsters thoroughly enjoyed working with it, specially riding on the elephants.

BACK HOME

Afterwards it was back to England, working the turns, sometimes big and sometimes not so big. I can recall working the old Tivoli, Barrow-in-Furness when they still had the footlights and batters with gas burners. I was doing top mounting and when I was up three high it was like working over a furnace, the heat was terrific as I was turning a somersault. Once we worked the old Varieties in Pitfield Street, Hoxton, London. I think at one time Jack the Ripper used to be about this district. One night we were ready to go to our next hall when we found our carriage lamps had been pinched. It was not a nice neighbourhood but it was a popular hall in those days. We were in Holland during the Boer War, in Rotterdam, at the Circus Variety. My sister Minnie just before she was about to do her somersault from the pedestal, pulled a small Union Jack from her dress and waved it. I recall seeing in some shops postcards of Queen Victoria sitting on a chamber pot. I thought this was disgusting. We went on to Amsterdam and there the Great Blondin was on the hill, and one night he took my brother Albert across the tightrope on his back. I did not fancy it. We came back to London. Father was booked for a fortnight at the Empire, Leicester Square. We were a big success and stayed on for six weeks. I remember well Lottie Collins was on the bill at the time and was singing a song called "Drop a Penny in my Tambourine". She was dressed

in Salvation Army dress and the money used to pour on to the stage. We followed her and there were half-crowns and crowns on our mattress which used to roll under the cloth. My brother Albert when doing a row of flip flaps would pick up odd five shilling pieces and hand them to Dad. He used to hold them up for the audience to see, and got a big round of applause for this. Whilst playing the Empire we were also working Collins Music Hall and I recall one fine artiste I used to love to watch; it was the ever-popular George Gray in "The Fighting Parson". He was an old friend of my people and my uncle, John Leopold.

BACK AGAIN ON THE CONTINENT

We played twice in Budapest, four and six months. Once at the Art Budevar Amusement Park and next with the Circus Bekatoff. It was such a lovely town in those days. Then we played Vienna. We were there for three months. I think it was the most beautiful town I have ever been to and then Prague with Circus Max Schumann. At one time, which I cannot remember well, we played Constantinople (now Istanbul) Turkey, and on to Persia, Baku, Teheran. I do not remember these times as I was only a baby. Father used to tell me of all these experiences, but I do remember very slightly Moscow and St. Petersburg (as it then was). The manager of the Zoo gave us a young parrot. He travelled everywhere with us and learned to speak in French and German, but best in English. Dad used to tell me of his early days when things were very hard. My dad and Nathan Jackley, George Jackley's father, Nat's granddad, worked the long perch act, Nathan on top, Dad balancing the pole. They worked the market squares busking the second floor windows. Also Dad was one of the first to do the throwing Clowns Hats with my Uncle Harry. They were a big success in Madrid at the Cinqvoparish.

(I am sorry I have to keep on jumping back and forth in this article, but it is impossible to remember all the details of such a vast experience and travels from four and a half years onwards, but I am trying to do my best to recall the interesting things regarding our travels, with different circuses in Germany; Circus Reinsch Schumann, Bush Carrie, etc. In France, the Cirque Plege, three tours;

BRITANNIA THEATRE



A unique poster from Ray Mackender's private collection showing Marius dressed as a girl along with the rest of the troupe, as they appeared at the 'Brit'.

Cirque Rancy, two tours, all over France as far as Bayonne. Circus Salamonski in Poland and Russia. Orlando in Denmark, Sweden, Belgium, Cirque Lossman, etc. In Berlin, the Winter Garden Circus Bushmore, Passage Theatre, Unter den Linden. Berlin was a wonderful town in those days, and we had lots of friends there. In Copenhagen we were with the Circus Carre and at the Tivoli Gardens. In North Africa with the Cirque Fillis.)

THE CHALLENGE OF GLASGOW

It was always good to be back home again in England after a long spell abroad. My dear mother used to say to my father, "Now, Ted, it's time the boys and girls had a holiday". But it was not for long, the agents seemed to be waiting for our return, and off we would be working turns again and West End Music Halls; the provinces in the North and Scotland. One I remember well in Glasgow, the old Queens and Tivoli we worked the two with the brougham. George Formby was on

the bill, they used to have an amateur night. This was great fun. I remember they had a big wire cage over the orchestra to protect the musicians. I reckon the audience used to come specially for the fun loaded with all kinds of ammunition. The Stage Manager had a fairly long pole with a sort of net or cage on the end, and when things were getting too hot, he would drop the net over the person's head and pull them off quickly. I can imagine some of the long-haired pop singers of today working there or the Hippodrome, Greenock, the Lyceum, Govan or the Pavilion, Clydebank. I think it would have brought the Police and Fire Brigade out. But there were halls in London that were also tough. For instance, the Fred Boar tour; the Foresters and Sadlers Wells; Bow Palace and Battersea Palace, which we worked later with Carlotta, De Yonsons "Sexton Blake and Tinker and Pedro". There were some nasty swear words and hefty raspberries from the gods for the villain. This was a long time after our big act had ended. We also played the Old Vic for the Misses Bayliss several times. Going away from England again we did a season at Jersey. My father and Ginnett's Circus, also with us in the show was Dickie Dagmar, Richard Hearne's father, an old friend. Young Dickie was a fine tumbler. We did the old sketch 'Black Justice'. The show was a terrific success. I remember Richard when he was very young, also the Cycling Hearnese, his uncles, whilst working on the Continent earlier. All my sisters and brothers were all round athletes and sportsmen and women. We always had two or three footballs and cricket sets with us. Sometimes I think we were about the first to introduce cricket and football on the Continent. I remember once in Dresden, Germany whilst playing in a park the German lads and lasses began to get very interested, but had no idea of the game. We certainly got the Dutch and Danes very eager to play cricket and they used to join in our games. My sisters were great swimmers. Whilst working Sangers at Margate, they used to swim from Margate Pier to Ramsgate Pier, when Finney was training for his Channel swim. By the way, I forgot to mention that whilst working in Teheran, Persia Dad was approached to appear before the Shah, and did so with success. My dad was presented with a Persian carpet. I could fill a whole large book and more with our travels and experiences throughout the world.

BREAK UP OF THE BIG TROUPE

When the big act had to end, owing to my sisters getting married, it was not possible to find girls to replace them, so us four brothers carried on with the act and a very fine act it was. We still did our famous pedestal trick and played some big time Music Halls, and also another tour all over France with Cirque Nancy. Cirque Nancy was one of the finest tenting shows. The dressing tent was boarded and carpeted and heated in cold weather. From the dressing tent to the Ring doors it was all boarded and covered with cocoanut matting. There was also an up-to-date restaurant that travelled with us and it was possible to obtain almost anything to eat and drink. All we did was our act and we travelled by rail. It was a wonderful show and the Rancys were such nice people. We also did one more tour with Bech Holson Circus through Denmark. Previous to the same we were booked with Bob Connors Circus in the Isle of Man. We were billed as the Four Kellys, as at the time Florrie was playing with Derby Castle and her song hit was 'Kelly from the Isle of Man', hence the Four Kellys. Our old pal, Whimsical Walker, was with us and the famous Clarks, a wonderful talented family. Little Bishop and Chester. We played the Douglas County Cricket Team, a Charity Match, and I bowled the Captain with my third ball. I have an idea we were the last to work Henglers Circus in Oxford Street before the bailiffs came. My brother Albert did a forward somersault over a group of Guards with fixed bayonets and they fired a volley as he went over the bayonets—a really fine trick. This was off the high leaping board. We worked there again when it was the Palladium. We also worked the old Standard, Pimlico, now the Victoria Palace. On the bill was Little Tich, Harry Champion, Tom Costello and I think Hetty King. I would like to go back to our first season in Budapest. I was about eight years old. We had a very nice large flat, very clean, but most nights, after we had been in bed for a while, the bugs appeared. I recall my sisters and myself knocking them out with slippers. It was the same when we went back the second time, it seems they had always had them. I think the name Budapest has something to do with bugs, but it was a lovely town. I used to draw the Hungarian water from the pumps in the streets; it was very hot, very good for rheu-

matism for my mother. There were some lovely walks along the Danube River; also it was where I first picked up step dancing from the Georgie Coons, who were on the bill with us. A lad called Amos Howard had Gold Medals for buck dancing and I picked it up very fast. They were a great lot of boys and girls. By the way, I forgot to mention when we toured with Cirque Plege, my brother Albert and I used to dance in all the ballets with my sisters and the other girls, in their pantomimes. It was all mime, no speaking. Whilst working Bayonne once with this circus King Edward VII was spending a holiday at Biarritz and he came to the circus several times. Mr. Andree Plege had a special box for him. It was a great show and he seemed to thoroughly enjoy it. We saw him again when we were at Chambrie and other towns on the French Swiss Lakes. He used to walk about wearing his Norfolk jacket and smoking his pipe, just like an ordinary tourist, looking in the shops which used to stock his kind of pipe. Whilst we were in Bayonne we used to take the steam train to Biarritz through the woods, it was only a quarter of an hour's ride, and such a lovely little place, with a grand view from the mountain top over the Atlantic. Also we used to have fun in the bull ring with the very young bulls. We soon jumped over the fence when they chased us. Father allowed us a litre of wine a day, the real stuff from the Rhone Valley. We had a wonderful time in Bayonne.

TRAP WORK IN HOXTON

Returning home again we were booked for two seasons at the Crystal Palace for the big pageant in which hundreds of people took part. We did acrobats and leaping and also Chariot Racing. This show was run by Lord Harewood and Pains Fireworks. The Royal Family were regular visitors, mostly the young princes and princess, the children of King George V. Sir Dan Godfrey was the conductor of the Military Band. It was a wonderful show. That same year we played pantomime at the Old Britannia, Hoxton with the Conquests. It was a success. We did our act and a wonderful trap scene and also the comic scenes. We have taken part in at least fifty pantomimes. I remember my first one at the Standard, Shore-ditch for Walter Melville's father. Our trap scenes were always a terrific success. My brother Albert was, I reckon, the greatest at this work and could take off jump 16 feet from the

star trap easily, once doing a forward somersault from the take off. At the Theatre Royal, Exeter we stopped the panto for a long spell, and with Tom Arnold's "Sleeping Beauty" and Bert Montague's "Mother Goose", they usually had to black out at the end of the trap scene to kill the applause. I feel sure both Mr. Arnold and Mr. Montague will agree we were the best in this line. We did several years with Tom Arnold's "Sleeping Beauty" with lovely Evelyn Laye—the perfect Principal Boy, and such a charming lady to work with. She always called us 'my two fighting pals', her photos are the top of my bill. Not forgetting Dorothy Ward and Shaun Glenville with whom we did the Royal Command Show at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane in 1950 and appeared on T.V., with Vic Oliver.

We worked the big circus at the Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924 and 1925 doing the high leaping, Brother Albert performing a somersault over three page cars. This was where we got young Richard Hearne doing the Lions Leaps off the high board. I wonder if he remembers. Going back a number of years I recall working the Palace, Shaftesbury Avenue with G. H. Chirgwin, Blind Boy. I think we were both working the same halls and he took me in his new electric car. I have played on the same bills with all the great stars of those dear old days. I remember them all and what great people they were to work with.

IMITATING OUR PAL CHAPLIN

Many of them lived near us in Brixton. The Floradors lived just opposite us in Cranmer Road and Fred and Joe Evans were our pals. We were a bunch of terrors. I remember we went up on Epsom Downs and found a pitch and performed some acrobats. A crowd gathered round and Fred started bottling. Someone said we should be on the halls. That same week we were working the Alhambra, Leicester Square. We thought it was great fun but dared not mention it at home. We were scared stiff of being found out. Shortly before the 1914-18 War broke out we put a new act on and got booked up well, opening at the Chiswick Empire for the Stoll Tour. Brother Albert worked as Charlie Chaplin and he was perfect in the character. The act was billed as 'Charlie's Opium Den' and it was a success as it was very original. We

kept going for some time during the War and worked the Alhambra in Paris. From Paris we sailed for South America and opened at Rio de Janeiro, going on to Montevideo and to Buenos Aires. We were such a success in Buenos Aires we were booked for an extra three months and they wanted us to make a film. Unfortunately we had to return to England for military service. We sailed for home from La Plata on the R.M.S.P. Darro carrying thousands of tons of beef for the troops and we were chased all over the Atlantic by German subs. and as we were armed fore and aft with four pairs of Naval guns we were a natural target for the Jerries. It was not a very pleasant journey and I did not forget that trip in a hurry. However, we arrived safely after a long out-of-the-way journey and sailed into Le Havre, and it was great to be back again. As we could not carry on with the act until two of my brothers were out of the Army brother Albert and I soon got our double act going successfully becoming well booked up. We were engaged to play in Walter Melville's Lyceum Theatre pantomime "Mother Goose" and were a big success with the Rolling Track, etc. After playing an I.T.V. Tour we waited for the boys to join us again and then we carried on with the Opium Den Act. At this time my sister-in-law, Florrie Irving, came in with the act with her violin and lovely voice. It was a big act and very original. Florrie Irving was Randolph Sutton's leading lady soubrette in his revue, 'Spare Parts'. I guess Mr. Sutton will remember Florrie and my brother Walter. They had a long run with him. When we finished the Opium Den, etc. brother Albert and I went back to our double act again.

BRIXTON — HOME OF THE PRO'S

Reverting again to the good old

days of variety and turn working when living at Leopold Villas, Cranmer Road, Brixton, nearly all the old pros and stars of that time lived in Brixton. Many of them used to call in on us at times where they always found plenty of food and drink. Dan Leno lived around the corner. As already previously mentioned the Floradors lived opposite us. There was also nearby the Bunnells; the Egberts; the Maples; the Avalos; the Lloyds; the Craigs; the Whiteleys and the Lupinos who, I think, are second cousins of ours. The Bros. Horne, the Poluski Bros. and lots of other top liners. My dad made a bet that he would drive from our place to Paris in a certain time as we were due to open again at Medranos. We started from Brixton with Minnie, our trotter, in the trap, us two lads, Mum and Dad drove to Newhaven, over to Dieppe and on to Paris. When Minnie saw the Eiffel Tower she shied and started performing on her hind legs. Well, Dad won his bet. We arrived an hour before time. When we were home working in London often on Sundays we all used to drive down to Brighton in the early morning for a nice swim, it made a break from working turns. I remember working with G. H. Elliott at the old Palace, Plymouth when he was just a youth. That's going back a bit. I worked with Charlie Chaplin when he was with the Eight Lancashire Lads. Mr. Mackender has a programme of the Oxford Music Hall in 1900, and what a bill! all the top stars of the time and the Original Leopolds.

GERMANY — HOME OF THE AUTOMATS

Mostly when we went over to the Continent we left by Harwich to The Hook and down the Maas to Rotterdam where Dad's agent, Fritz van Haarlem, would be waiting on the

landing stage. After greeting us all his first words were, "My dear friends, can you open tonight". After playing Rotterdam, Amsterdam and The Hague we would return to Rotterdam and take the Rhine boat to Bonn, the home of the famous composer, Beethoven, a real beauty spot, and Coblenz, Frankfurt, Mannheim, on to the Moselle, to Wiesbaden and Heidelberg. I suppose we must have played about every town of any size in Germany. We loved travelling on the Rhine steamers. They were so pleasant after the trains with their hard, wooden seats. Even in those days the steamers had nice soft seats below and on deck and a good restaurant. It was a lovely trip, with magnificent scenery all the way along. We went on to play Wiesbaden and Heidelberg, two beautiful towns, and many other places. As kids we used to love the Automat where you put ten pennings in the slot and received a sandwich of smoked salmon and caviar, coffee and Manchin beer, or for one mark a three course dinner. No matter what time you travelled on the railways the station restaurants were open both night and day and you obtained a splendid meal any time.

Whilst working with Cirque Pledge in France we had two portable wooden buildings. We only played the bigger towns, while we were playing one town the second building was being built up in the next town. I remember well whilst playing in the town of Nancy, a man was beheaded in the public square. The place is hidden from the public. It was a nasty experience for us youngsters as we lived near the Square where it took place.

Coming back to England again I wonder if any of you remember Gilberts Old Wooden Circus building in Great Yarmouth. We played there many years ago. Little Billy Richards



The Original William and Walter Leopold



Albert and Marious Leopold

'Rabbit' was august, one of the finest in the business. Also can anyone recall Claud Ohmys Circus. Dad ran a circus with him at Morecambe Bay, and business was good. Dad lost money in the Central Pier. At the time our two horses, Jessie and Victor, won some races which must have pleased Dad.

CURTAIN DOWN

Well, I could go on and on for ages. I am sorry about jumping about all over the globe but it is almost impossible to remember every little detail and dates with such a very long experience in all round show business from four and a half years old.

I would like to mention a few more items. We were in Dublin for pantomime with Barney Armstrong at the Empire during the Rebellion. It certainly was a tough run. One of the chorus girls was shot dead leaving the stage door and a man was shot in the stalls while we were working. Nervo and Knox were playing pantomime at another theatre at the time and we all lived in the same digs. We used to sit up at nights playing cards and watch the Black and Tans raiding. I was not sorry to finish that pantomime. Just after Dublin we were working the Stoll Halls and I recall working with Griff Blowing Bubbles, a great act, and Cruikshank in 'The Old Bass Bottle'. My sister was called 'The Beautiful Jessica'. She did a lovely tight wire act and also worked with elephants. She married Sam Elton, 'the Man who Made the Shah Laugh'. By the way, until I was nearly fourteen years old I had long curls nearly to my shoulders, as did my brother Albert. They could not tell we weren't girls. We often had boxes of chocolates sent round after the Show but I was tired of long hair and used to hide it under my hat. It is true, I believe, that whenever the Leopolds played the Hippodrome, Wigan the miners used to pawn their clogs to go and see 'Frivolity'. Billy Merson, Billy Danvers, George Collins, the Lagons Trio, and others started with this show.

I must not forget Dorothy Ward and Shaun Glenville, with whom we did a Royal Command Show at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane in 1950. Actually the show was called "Yesterday and Today", and was an all-star matinee in aid of the Irene Vanbrugh Memorial Fund to help rebuild the Vanbrugh Theatre for the students at R.A.D.A. It was on November 6th, 1950, and there was an unbelievable

cast. The finale was a masque incorporating the first scene of "Carousel", with the entire Drury Lane cast and 171 stars of stage and screen. I noticed Tyrone Power and Jackie Cooper, Ivor Novello and Eilaline Terriss, and scores of others. I would imagine that never before has Drury Lane put on a show with such a cast. Albert and I were in the 'Pantomime Cavalcade' which included Marie Burke, Binnie Hale, Dorothy Ward, etc.

Well, folks, I reckon it's time I rang down. All the Original Leopolds are also Kellys, Northern Irish with a splash of Italian. So if any of my relations read this I should be pleased to hear from them. Please forgive me if I've made a few errors; it's been a long time, over 70 years.

Kindest regards to all old friends.
Sincerely,

MARIOUS LEOPOLD