

The Era

24th December 1910 Page 10

DRURY LANE'S CLOWN

A CHAT WITH BOB PENDER



BOB PENDER.
The Drury Lane Clown.

For the fourth consecutive season Mr. Bob Pender will again be the Clown over whose antics the youngsters will soon be laughing so heartily in the Drury Lane annual, and with his clever company of comedians and pantomimists, may be relied upon to supply an harlequinade that is not only brisk, but really humorous, and is sure to contain many surprises.

In a brief chat with an *Era* representative, Mr. Pender – whose real name is Lomas – told how his stage career started when he was quite young – as a pantomime monkey, allowing himself to be swung round by his own father, who was a clown before him. When about sixteen years of age he started with the Lomas Brothers in a monkey act called *Travels in Monkeyland*, in the performance of which he used to climb a rope with bare feet. The act was popular throughout England and the brothers also visited France, Germany, Austria, Holland and many other countries.

A natural desire to rise in the world brought him to stilt-walking, and he formed a troupe, and presented a novel big Giant act - a row of ten ranging from a little man of 3ft. high to a Goliath rising some 118ft. towards the painted clouds. The giants were, of course, all on stilts, which were hidden in skirts or trousers. Mr. Pender himself was the 18-footer, and he recalls how one night at Hanley one of his stilts skidded on a slippery board, and down he came, Fortunately he fell on the stage; another foot or two and he would have been pitched across the footlights, and probably killed. For five years the troupe were with Messrs. Howard and Wyndham in pantomime in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Newcastle, Leeds and Liverpool. It was the Giant act that brought them to Drury Lane. Mr. Arthur Collins saw it in Liverpool, and engaged it for the next pantomime, where it was a decided hit.

The early years of his career, Mr. Pender assures us, were not “all beer and skittles”. “I remember a provincial touring company which I and my troupe of five joined, which was to run for twelve weeks. At the end of the first week there was no salary to come to us,

because we had borrowed it all in advance during the three weeks of rehearsal. At the end of the second there was a little money – but only a little, because it was a bad pantomime, and people wouldn't flock, One night there was 5s. 6d. in the house! At the end of the third week we told the manager that if we didn't get our salaries we wouldn't act; and as a result some £3 was scraped together for the six of us. At the end of the fourth week the management couldn't pay for any of the printing. All the salaries were going on railway fares, and the chorus were looking half-starved. On the fifth Saturday the managers had words, but again a part of what was due to us was got together somehow or other. Hitherto we had hoped the tour would go on but on the sixth Saturday we hoped it wouldn't. We had had enough. And on the seventh Saturday the scene painters, who had never been paid, seized the scenery. And that finished it!"

As a youngster "Bob" travelled the country with his parents and a portable theatre, and well remembers his father playing Hamlet one night and giving a turn on stilts the next. A good and versatile actor, who could make you cry one moment and laugh the next, he often played Clown and played it uncommonly well. And the Grimaldi tradition was early followed by young Pender, who has appeared as Clown in all sorts of places, and at the Grand, Fulham, previous to his first Drury Lane engagement.

The Pender Troupe has recently concluded a three months' most successful engagement at the Olympia, Paris, Mr. Willie Pender making a decided hit as a substitute for Mr. Max Lindor, the French comedian, who was suddenly taken ill. The combination is booked for a big engagement in a new theatre in New York, and have other offers under consideration. The juvenile troupe, Bob Pender's Little Dandies, including his little daughter Doris, a graceful dancer and pantomimist, have also been making a big hit at the Olympia, Paris, in their speciality entitled "Dances à la Russe". Doris had the advantage of a splendid training, having been taught by her mother, the accomplished Mrs. Pender, who was for six years under Mme. Katti Lanner. It will be remembered that Mrs. Pender is the Columbine in the Drury Lane harlequinade, and brothers and cousins undertake most of the other parts.

Besides being responsible for the harlequinade, the Penders will impersonate for giant storks, some 11ft. high, in one of their scenes of *Jack and the Beanstalk*. Mr. Pender has many novel ideas and funny scenes for the kiddies. Much of the old business will, of course, be retained – the red hot poker must be suddenly applied to "Father", but Mr. Pender promises in an original manner; the little boy who swallows a sovereign and disgorges 12s. 6d. in coppers is sure to compel laughter. And there is much other fresh and ingeniously contrived business which we must not reveal. At the conclusion of the pantomime the Pender Troupe go on the Stoll and Gibbons tours.