

An Animal Actor.

(AN INTERVIEWETTE.)—BY HARRY HOW.

“**C**OME in!”

This short but suggestive invitation was in response to my knock at the door of a dressing-room of one of London's great variety theatres some time ago. The door was of iron, and my knuckles were only of the ordinary kind. I was somewhat surprised that the gentle tapping produced by a very average pair of knuckles upon an exceptional specimen of the door known as strong should have reached the occupant within. I responded to the “Come in.”

The occupant of the arm-chair was Mr. Charles Lauri, a man upon whom may be justly conferred the title of the King of Animal Impersonators. He is decidedly muscular looking, though somewhat short, with a face full of character, and capable of unlimited expression. He invited me to enjoy a big cigar. During the moment that the afore-mentioned weed was passing from his case to my fingers, a rapid vision of cats and dogs, parrots and poodles, frogs and wolves, to say nothing of all sorts and conditions of monkeys—indeed, a positive little Zoo—seemed to have their being in the dressing-room.

Mr. Lauri has impersonated them all, and his realizations of many of the animals he may be said to have created are not likely to be forgotten. In that moment I saw him as the celebrated dog, “Tatters,” at the last Lyceum pantomime, scampering after the two little children, romping with them, and having no end of fun with the bed-clothes when it was time for his tiny charges to drop into the arms of the soothing Morpheus. In an instant, one could distinguish him as a poodle, running round the crimson plush of the Drury Lane dress-

circle; and the dressing-room, at any rate in my imagination, resounded with the shouts and laughter of the youngsters as they watched the irrepressible antics of the curly, white-coated dog; some of them wondering if it was real, and the more venturesome pleading with their fathers and mothers to buy the pet for them, and let them take it home. But the poodle was only Mr. Lauri after all!

However much I should have liked to have chatted with the famous artist regarding his poodles and parrots, his cockatoos and cats, the object of my visit to-night was to be a definite one. It was to be a little study of Mr. Lauri as a monkey.

One of the most picturesque and artistic ballets which he has produced, and one which is calculated to show his mimicry as a monkey to the greatest advantage, is entitled “The Sioux,” and in a very short time he would have cast off his mufti and put on the monkey. Such was the programme for this evening.

“There you are,” said Mr. Lauri, merrily, “there is the monkey, hanging on

the wall; just take an inventory of him!”

I did.

Peg No. 1. Wig and whiskers.

Peg No. 2. A mask which covers the lower part of the face, in order that the protruding jaw of the animal may be faithfully realized. It is a capital mask and well worth its money, being made of substantial leather of a brownish colour, and liberally supplied with thin straps in order to securely fasten it on. The teeth, which glisten in two great rows along the still greater jaws, are warranted ivory, and the eyebrows may be lifted and lowered at pleasure by a small string, which is cleverly carried down into the hairy coat.

Peg No. 3. A remarkable-looking shaggy



MR. CHARLES LAURI.
From a Photo. by E. Lacour, Marseilles.

dress of long hair, which is combed out and brushed most carefully in order to obtain a more realistic appearance.

Peg. No. 4. Socks, a good-looking pair of dark brown socks, made with an entrance for every toe, on the same principle as a pair of gloves.

The various colours used in the making up of the face, a process, by-the-bye, which I described in the last Christmas Number of this Magazine—are all arranged in little tin pans on a table.

Mr. Lauri chats away very genially whilst donning the shaggy coat and transforming his face into as perfect a specimen of a monkey as one could possibly wish for.

He has been playing animals ever since he was eight years old. As a lad he studied their merry little ways, and every moment that he could afford after school lessons were done was given up to carefully attending to the needs of the members of a miniature menagerie in the back garden.

As he grew up his admiration for animals increased, and he soon found opportunities of turning this love to a very profitable account. He soon learnt to positively worship the Zoo and all that it contained; he swears by the Zoo, and no one regretted more than he when dear old "Sally" was forced to say "good-bye" to its keepers and its uncountable friends, and go the way of all monkeys.

Charles Lauri is never without his camera, and, when walking, is always on the look-out for a suitable subject. Nothing in the way of animal life in the streets escapes his eye, and he frankly confesses that he has been taught many an excellent lesson by those little imps of mischief which perch themselves on the common or garden barrel-organ, and go the whole length of a very short chain, and help themselves to the flowers which bloom in the gardens of highly respectable suburban villas.

"You are quite right," said Mr. Lauri, as he proceeded to paint his forehead, neck, nose, ears, hands, and arms, with a mixture of lard and burnt umber; "you are quite right, the monkey is my favourite study. There is always something fresh about him; to tell you the truth, they are positively inimitable, and experience has taught me that they do so many remarkable things, that, were I to endeavour to reproduce them all, I should be stigmatized as unnatural. A monkey, so to speak, is always thinking what he can do next. He is seldom still, he must be on the move. He may possibly sit down for a moment to have a quiet think, but the

young rascal is only plotting mischief all the time, and his pulse is beating high in anticipation of doing something which he knows he ought not to do."

There was a tap at the door. It was the warning voice of the call-boy.

"Ten minutes, sir!"

"All right!" replied Mr. Lauri.

The monkey mimic now worked very rapidly. First of all a bit of colour out of this pan; then a bit out of another. The crows' feet and wrinkles are cleverly put on with a camel's hair brush; the mask is adjusted, and it is noticeable that the brown of the mask and the burnt umber on the face are a perfect match; even at close quarters it is difficult to see where the join comes in. Now the wig and whiskers are adjusted. A final glance in the glass. All well! and, hastening from the dressing-room, we hurry along a narrow passage, and in another moment are in the vicinity of the wings on the stage.

The last bars of the overture are being played; the stage manager has rung the warning bell which communicates with the



A MARVELLOUS CLIMBER.

From a Photo. by Alfred Ellis, 29, Upper Baker Street, London, N.W.

men in the flies to tell them to get ready to lift the curtain. Charles Lauri takes a rapid view of the stage to see that all is right. He tries the rope up which he will shortly climb—and what a marvellous climber he is! How quickly he runs up the hempen cord, using his toes with the greatest dexterity in order to get a firmer grip.

"Just a little idea borrowed from the Japanese," he says, referring to his method of conquering a rope.

Now the overture is finished.

"All right! Up she goes!" And the heavily-weighted canvas slowly ascends. It reveals a strikingly pretty scene. The situation is in North America. Here, in a spot where the giants of the forest stretch out their great leafy boughs, as though about to pounce down upon the palms which grow luxuriantly below, and root them out of the earth—here an old settler, with long-grown hair and beard, has pitched his tent. He has two daughters, one a fine grown girl, the other a little one, who may possibly have passed through four summers in this delightful corner of the earth. One feels that much of the interest is to be centred round this maid, whose days are passed in chasing butterflies and gathering flowers. Her life is so perfectly happy and free that she never

seems to pause for a moment to remember that there are such wicked individuals within an easy walking distance as wild and wary American Indians, who would think nothing of cutting off every curly lock of her head, to say the least of it. Tomahawks! This jolly little four-year-old never troubles about such primitive weapons of warfare. But the audience do. They are on the tip-toe of expectation—they know exactly what is going to happen, and the people in front immediately fall in love with this tiny maid, and whispers of affection seem to sweep over the footlights.

Then to a bar of stirring music the settler's son returns. He is a fine, handsome, stalwart-looking middy. The old man and the two daughters receive him back with great rejoicing, I may say unspeakable rejoicing, for everything is done in dumb show. Indeed, so enthusiastic are they in their greetings that one wonders what they would really have said if the stage manager would only have allowed them to let loose their tongues.

But our friend who roamed the ocean o'er is not alone! Oh, dear, no! He has returned with a monkey!

A shout of approval goes up from the audience. They remain in their seats quite



From a Photo. by]

A FAMILY GATHERING.

[Alfred Ellis.



CHADI'S PLAYMATE.
From a Photo. by Alfred Ellis.

comfortably, for they know that the body that breathes within that shaggy coat, and the eyes that twinkle behind that brown mask, belong to Charles Lauri. And what a monkey! In the words of a celebrated comic song, he is "All over the shop," climbing trees, perching on chairs and tables, turning the most marvellous somersaults, till finally the little four-year-old in the white pinafore begins to regard Chadi, for so this monkey was christened, as a very welcome playmate. And Chadi returns the compliment, for he plays at ball with the little four-year-old; and, again, one cannot help complaining that it seems a pity that the stage manager would not permit the youngster to scream with delight. He will only allow her to clap her hands. But she is bursting to shout, she is so happy!

Such is the opening of this very charming ballet.

The settler and his son determine to go in pursuit of some Sioux Indians, who, they have every reason

to believe, are in the neighbourhood. Chadi, in dumb show, is given to understand that he is to be left in charge. He realizes his position, and by a wonderful piece of by-play and expression, looks at the little girl and turns to his master with a glance which unmistakably says, "Never you fear for her!"

So father and son depart, and Chadi and the child exchange confidences until bed-time comes, and the little one hurries away into the hut, and the soft music from the orchestra in front tells that she is fast asleep and dreaming the brightest of pictures.

Chadi, evidently with the idea in his mind that his master, the middy, shall not have it all his own way as representing the Navy, determines that Tommy Atkins shall have a chance as well as Jack. Hence he discovers a soldier's coat and cap, and shouldering a gun, keeps sentry beneath the window of the room where the little girl is sleeping.

Suddenly an Indian scout appears,



From a Photo. by

"ON GUARD."

[Alfred Ellis.

creeping along amongst the palms and the bushes. He is quickly followed by many of his dusky relations. They attack the hut, which Chadi most valiantly defends. But what is one among so many? Chadi may jump on the roof, he may rush to the window, and always with some substantial missile which he hurls at the heads of his friend the enemy. He hurls and, what is more, he hits. Indeed, such feats of valour does he perform that the cool and calculating Indians determine to make a bonfire of the house. A huge quantity of red fire in a pan, hidden away from the sight of the audience, is lit. It smells strongly, particularly where I am standing. But what matter? The effect, like the effect of all fires, is grand, but terrible. The audience hold their breath—I was forced to hold my nose, for the pungency of the theatrical concoction which realizes "fire" became keener. But why think of personal feelings at such a time as this? The hut is in flames—the child is sleeping in the front room! What of her?—what of the little one? They need not tremble about the child. Chadi is thinking of the little four-year-old; and as the stalls set up a huge shout, and the gallery boys, in their wild excitement, nearly tumble over into the depths of the pit below, Chadi appears bearing his little mistress in his arms. But, however the audience may have admired the bravery of this marvellous monkey, the Indians are still indignant, and their wrath still waxeth great. To have been

cheated out of their designs by a monkey whose name was Chadi! That was the thought which annoyed them. Would any man, let alone an Indian, like to be done out of anything, and by a mysterious personage, whom some people endeavour to make us believe was really one of our progenitors? Perish the thought! It is certainly very rough on the monkey, but, nevertheless, just as father and son return, and the Indians are making their escape, one redskin, more daring than his fellows, plunges his long knife deep into the breast of poor Mr. Lauri—I mean poor Chadi!—who falls in a heap on the stage.

Chadi is dying. His last thoughts seem to be centred round the little girl. It is as much as he can do to drag himself along the ground, but he nerves himself for a final effort, and once more he takes the child in his arms with all the love and tenderness of a human being. Everybody on the stage, every-

body in the audience, is silent as they watch this marvellous monkey breathing his last moments! And the faithful Chadi dies, and the curtain is slowly rung down on his life! The old settler and the middy begin to chat away, unconcerned, as though nothing had happened; the rescued little one seemed happier than she was before the piece began; and this marvellous monkey leaves the stage and comes up to my side with the pleasant and suggestive remark of, "What do you say to a bit of supper, eh?"



From a Photo. by

"SAVED."

[A]fred Ellis.