

"Pictures" Interviews James Welch

THE GREAT LITTLE COMEDIAN TELLS OF HIS FILM EXPERIENCES.

JUST an actor, that is all he claims for himself. But what an actor and what an artiste. When I last left "Jimmy" (he is known by this title to his friends the world over), after a non-stop run from Leamington to Paddington, he was a smart, dapper little gentleman, with whom Providence had been more than kind; but to-night, as I interviewed him for PICTURES, I beheld a drink-sodden old reprobate, ragged and disreputable, a "make-up" so perfect that he could walk through the streets and not one person in a hundred would guess him to be anything but the character he is playing in *The Man in the Street*.

I found James at the Grand Theatre, Clapham, just after the first house performance. He had been to some charity matinée all the afternoon, where they had relieved him of every penny he possessed, even to the last two postage-stamps, and he looked somewhat tired.

But the extraordinary energy and pluck rolled up in the little comedian is remarkable, and it takes the genial old baby-faced Walter (his *fidus Achates*) all his wonderful power of persuasion to keep him from over-doing things.

"Well, Mr. Welch, to start with, where were you born?"

"I was born in Liverpool, fifty years ago; I'm not a Taffy although I'm Welch; I'm a Toffy because I come from Everton. Get away there, you boys!"

"Oh! you are forgiven. Fire away."

"My father was an accountant, and after leaving school I entered his office. But my joining an amateur dramatic club somewhat upset the idea of business, and in 1887 I finally forsook figures and took to the stage."

"I know of all your great successes, and so do nearly all my readers, but what they are most concerned with now is your experience with film acting."

"Well, the cinema is the gift to see ourselves as others see us, as the poet says, and oh! when I first saw myself on the screen I could see faults that I have tried hard to get rid of since. It is a most peculiar feeling to see oneself on the screen for the first time. Perhaps you may have noticed it yourself?"

I had to admit the crime.

"You must not think that *The New Clown* and *When Knights Were Bold* are my first picture work. Oh, no! I took up the idea nearly seventeen years ago, and produced pictures for the biograph for the Palace Theatre. Our studio was the New Gallery in Regent Street, now known as the New Gallery Kinema.

I shall never forget when we turned on our lights there for the first time. They were about 160 candle-power, and something went wrong. We blew up a considerable portion of Regent Street. I don't think we did any more work that day."

"It requires a good deal of capital to start a studio," I remarked.

"Yes, and we seemed to find a good deal somehow or other. Mostly by dipping our hands into one another's pockets; but, there, our venture seemed to miss the boat," said Jimmy, with a whimsical smile.

"On your return to picture work after your long pause, what was your impression?"

"I noticed a great improvement in every branch of produc-



"JIMMY" WELCH, in his well-known rôle of the "New Clown."

tion. I simply revel in the work now, and every one seems to know exactly what to do at exactly the right moment, with so very little rehearsal too. Then look at the magnificent set scenes that the London Film Company put up, correct in every detail, and the furnishing costing hundreds of pounds—oh, yes, the improvement is marvellous; there is no spoiling the ship for the h'ap'orth of tar now. I'm afraid we err in the opposite direction. But, there, the best is good enough for the British public, and we must beat the American films by doing our best."

"Have a brandy-and-soda?" asked Jimmy, interrupting himself.

"I know what Mr. Judd Green likes," says a quiet voice, and the discreet, kindly, and altogether incomparable Walter produces, apparently from nowhere, a large bottle of Bass. He guesses right every time, does Walter.

"What was that tale about the char-woman, James?" I asked.

"Oh, dear, have you heard something about that then. Well, it happened this way. It was on the first night of a revival of *When Knights Were Bold*, and just at the end of a scene where I go off to sleep and dream, there was a great shout of laughter from the audience. I need hardly say that no shout of laughter ought to be heard at that part of the play, and I could not for the life of me think what had caused it. The curtain came slowly down, and I turned by no means in the best of tempers, you may be sure, to find cause for the merriment. A charwoman, who had been out to purchase a bottle of stout for some one, had quietly walked on to the stage with the bottle in one hand and a glass in the other. She bowed politely to the man in armour at the back of the stage, offered him a drink, then gravely walked off, never thinking for one moment that she was in full view of the audience. I was furious, as it had spoiled the scene, and sent for the woman, who came before me, trembling.

"Madame!" I said, "how dare you commit such a crime? You who have been connected with this and many other theatres long enough to know better. How dare you."

The poor woman said she was very sorry; she had no idea the curtain was up, and she assured me she would never do it again.

"Do it again," I snapped. "I'll take particular care you never do it again. Tell me your name, Madame, tell me you are never employed in."

your name, so that I may know you are never employed in any theatre that I control again. Your name!"

"Mrs. Welch, sir."

"That put the lid on. I stood and looked at her in astonishment. So I kissed the poor old soul, and told her to be more careful."

And that's just Jimmy. He is built that way; a little man with a big heart, chock full of pluck and—an artiste.

As our picture shows, Mr. Welch has also been filmed in *The New Clown*, the "Ideal" picture version of another comedy in which Jimmy is world famous. He played the same rôle in the screen version which will be shown to the public during the autumn. Mr. Welch is not afraid to tell