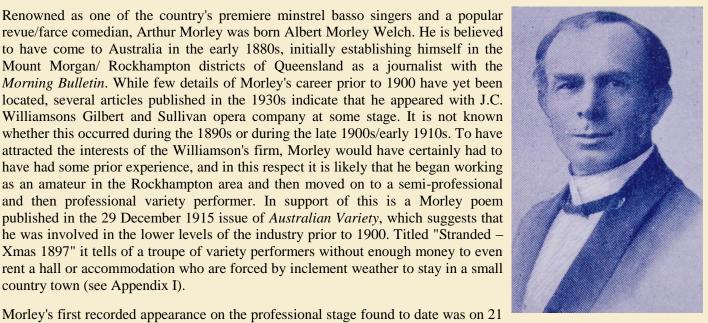
ARTHUR MORLEY

Incl. ELSIE BATES

Arthur Morley came to prominence in 1915 as the originator of several pioneering revusicals. He directed shows for Harry Clay, the Fullers and Harry Sadler but his involvement in the infamous 1918 Sadler/Phyllis Faye incident (and subsequent court case) led to a breakdown. He restarted his career in 1922 and was later associated with Bert Howarde and Gorge Sorlie before carving out a career in radio. Well-known as a songwriter, poet, Morley was married to variety artist Elsie Bates.

Renowned as one of the country's premiere minstrel basso singers and a popular revue/farce comedian, Arthur Morley was born Albert Morley Welch. He is believed to have come to Australia in the early 1880s, initially establishing himself in the Mount Morgan/ Rockhampton districts of Queensland as a journalist with the Morning Bulletin. While few details of Morley's career prior to 1900 have yet been located, several articles published in the 1930s indicate that he appeared with J.C. Williamsons Gilbert and Sullivan opera company at some stage. It is not known whether this occurred during the 1890s or during the late 1900s/early 1910s. To have attracted the interests of the Williamson's firm, Morley would have certainly had to have had some prior experience, and in this respect it is likely that he began working as an amateur in the Rockhampton area and then moved on to a semi-professional and then professional variety performer. In support of this is a Morley poem published in the 29 December 1915 issue of Australian Variety, which suggests that he was involved in the lower levels of the industry prior to 1900. Titled "Stranded – Xmas 1897" it tells of a troupe of variety performers without enough money to even rent a hall or accommodation who are forced by inclement weather to stay in a small country town (see Appendix I).



Australian Variety 23 May (1917), 1.

June 1900, when he was engaged by Percy St John for the Royal Burlesque and Specialty Company's season at the Theatre Royal (Bris). As a member of the troupe he appeared in in minstrel first parts as a basso singer and in both farces and burlesques as a comedian. Such productions included the burlesques The Yellow Dwarf and Blue-Eyed Susan Up-to-Date and farces such as Oysters and The Coming Man. While details of his career over the next decade are yet to be located, Morley is known to have been engaged in 1902 by Williamson, Lee and Rial for their second World's Entertainers, and John Fuller. He also appeared at the Theatre Royal in Brisbane under Harry Rickards' management in 1903. He is also likely to have been associated for much of this time with regional touring operations and city-based firms like Brisbane's Percy St John and Ted Holland.

In early May 1911 Morley was appointed manager of the newly established Olympia Pictures at Mount Morgan, Queensland (operated by the Mount Morgan Amusement Co). He remained in the position only a month or so. In late June he and his wife, Elsie Bates appeared for a one-night season (by special request) in Rockhampton. The Morning Bulletin notes that although Morley had grown up in the area it had been many years since he last appeared on the stage in that city. Morley and Bates were advertised on Harry Clay's program a few weeks later but were unable to appear, forcing Clay to apologise to the audience (11 July 1911). Regarded even in 1913 as "one of the old school," Morley undertook a six month engagement as stage manager for the Dix-Baker organisation (Newcastle) that year. Two years later he and wife Elsie Bates took up an offer from Clay to appear on his suburban circuit where they became firm favourites at the manager's Bridge Theatre headquarters. "Handsome Arthur Morley," wrote one Australian Variety critic in August, "is still a landmark, and judging by his reception nightly likely to be so" (18 Aug. 1915, n. pag.). Morley had by this stage built a reputation for songwriting, scoring hits with original numbers like "The Old Veteran" (AV: 11 Aug. 1915, 6). Later that same year he took up an offer from Clay to write and direct a series of one act musical comedies, which he staged initially under the auspices of the Royal Musical Comedy Company. One of the first Australian-written revusicals presented on the vaudeville stage in Australia was Morley's On the Sands (Oct. 1915). The popularity of these early revusicals led Clay to change the name of the troupe to Clay's No 1 Revue Company so as to highlight the connection with his company. The troupe by then included a number of highly experienced and well-regarded performers, notably Elsie Bates (in the principal lead female role), Amy Rochelle, Doris Baker, Ted Stanley and Ted Tutty. Australian Variety wrote of one of his productions around this time:

The Royal Musical Comedy Co. opened and was responsible for the "House Full" signs being out long before the curtain was raised. The company was brilliant, and surpassed all previous expectations. The whole show was bright and catchy, and did not leave one dull moment. Each item was cleverly and effectively given with excellent business and comedy touches, and the strong talent was particularly good. The musical items are fresh and attractive, and has (sic)] none of the hackneyed quality of many of the recent revues seen at other theatres lately.

This revue was received with most marked manifestations of approval. As for the producing and the staging, it was excellent with original and artistic touches, and too much praise and credit cannot be given to Mr Arthur Morley, as he no doubt must have worked very hard to bring off such success. Arthur in his character, displayed ability and talent that has only been received from such experience that he has had (27 Oct. 1915, n. pag.).

1916 saw Morley establish himself as Harry Clay's leading revue director, with his new productions during the year including *A Kiss in the Dark, On Deck, Not a Word to the Wife* and *In Old Kentucky*. The popularity of these works was such that Morley was forced to warn "pirates," through the trade journals that the above revues and burlesques were his sole property and fully copyrighted. His output during 1917 included the revusicals *Who's the Boss, Run for the Doctor, Six O'clock Closing, Everybody's Doing It* and the pantomime *Aladdin*. During the same year, too, Morley was reportedly "in the course of preparation for a moving picture which will run into five reels, entitled *The Power of Man.*" *Australian Variety* reported that Elsie Bates would similarly play an important part in the production (2 May 1917, 8). Morley's huge workload at this stage was something that the trade magazines also frequently commented upon, noting that his responsibilities put him under great pressure. Not only was he required to create a steady stream of revues, but he also had to rehearse, produce and very often act in them as well. Although Morley ended his fulltime association with Harry Clay in August 1917, it was reported that Clay had engaged him to purchase some revues during his forthcoming trip to America. Whether this eventuated is uncertain.

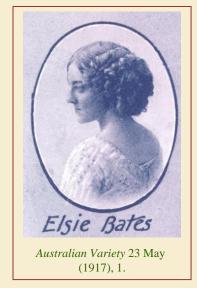


Australian Variety 20 Oct. (1915), n. pag.

Several months after finishing up with Clay Morley took up a role as producer/writer for Harry Sadler at the Princess Theatre (Syd). When Sadler accepted an offer to present vaudeville and revue at the Shaftsbury Theatre in Perth shortly afterwards he engaged a quality troupe from among his Princess Theatre company. Headed by Morley and Bates and including Jack "Porky" Kearns, and Phyllis Faye, the season got off to a particularly successful start but within a few months created national interest not through its on-stage performances but as a result of an off-stage scandal that involved Morley, Sadler, Faye (the company's lead soubrette), and to a lesser extent Kearns. The situation arose after Sadler apparently saw Morley leaving Faye's hotel room and accused the pair of having an affair. Sadler was apparently incensed because Faye's husband Bruce Drysdale, a vaudeville performer himself, was on war duty overseas. A bitter split in the troupe's loyalties ensued, and as a result Morley, Bates and Faye left Sadler's company to join up with rival Perth entrepreneur and bookmaker Percy Dennis. Faye then sued Sadler, and subsequently all four performers became embroiled in one of the most infamous court cases involving the vaudeville industry. A great deal of controversial evidence was presented, including Faye's revelations that Sadler had attempted to seduce her

some years previously, when she was a young girl. The court found in favour of the plaintiff and she was awarded both damages (£25) and costs (said to have been very high).

Following his Western Australian commitments Morley returned to Sydney, taking another engagement with Clay's, where he remained until sometime in 1919. One of his biggest successes during the period was *Dockum Street*, Woolloomooloo (which toured extensively through Queensland at one stage). In 1920 he retired from the entertainment industry, returning to Rockhampton with his wife, who is believed to have had a milliner's establishment there. It is possible that Morley had earlier suffered a breakdown of some kind as several reports in the industry magazines indicate that he had disappeared for a period of time and could not be located by his wife. In 1922, however, he returned once again to the variety stage, appearing with The Arrivals of 1922, a company run by veteran actor/manager, Reg Wykeham, who was producing shows at the Hippodrome, Sydney. Morley was again called on to write and direct his own revues (as well as appear in them as an actor). Two of the Hippodrome shows attributed to Morley were Ship Ahoy and All Ashore, both starring Sadie Gale, George Whitehead, Bert Desmond and Will and Dora Gilbert. It is unclear if Morley had a part in creating any other productions staged by the Arrivals troupe (see 1922 works entry for details). In 1928 Morley toured with a company run by Bert Howarde. Presenting mostly pantomime (including Beauty and the Beast) the troupe included Wal Rockley and Dan Thomas. Three years later he teamed up with George Sorlie to present a series of revusicals in Brisbane with Sorlie's newly formed vaudeville and revue company. Among the works staged during the troupe's season (7 Nov. 1931 - 2 Jan. 1932) were two of his earliest shows, On the Sands and Not a Word to the Wife along with a new pantomime, Mother Grundy. Morley played Demon Despair in the latter production. The costumes for the pantomime were also designed by Mrs Morley.



Although still involved with live performance during the 1930s Morley's professional experience as both a performer and producer saw him become involved in radio during that period, and possibly from as early as the late 1920s. His obituary in the *Courier Mail* records in this respect that he first "came on the air through 4QG, in aid of the Social Service League. About four years [later] he joined the staff of 4BC and gained a reputation as a radio entertainer under the name of Midshipman Bob Breezy. Following that his talks of theatrical identities and events of the past every Saturday under the name of "Old Timer" became a favourite feature" (7 Sept. 1935, 15). Morley apparently finished the "Old Timer" series about six months before his death. By that time he had developed another radio personality, "Constable McGinty" through which "his pleasant brogue and breezy witticisms amused both young and old" (ibid, 15).

Arthur Morley died in Brisbane's General Hospital on 6 September 1935 from complications that arose following an operation the previous week. Buried in Toowong Cemetery, he was survived by his wife Elsie Bates, and children Alice, Nella, Jack and Val. George Matheson, manager of His Majesty's Theatre (Bris), said of Morley:

[His] death removed one of the real old timers. He was one of the most capable and kindly men I ever knew. He was always ready to lend a helping hand to one who needed it. He was also very versatile. He could write a good sketch and produce it, and he was an actor, singer, and everything else needed to make a good showman. The whole of the profession will learn of his death with profound regret (CM: 7 Sept. 1935, 15).

WELCH, Arthur Morley.—In sad and loving memory of my dear Husband and our dear Father, who departed this life September 6th, 1935.

He was only a dad of a brood of four, One of ten million men or more, Plodding along in the daily strife, Bearing the whips and scorns of life. With never a whimper of pain or hate, For the sake of those who at home await. Inserted by his sorrowing Wife & Children—Alice, Nella, Jack, and Val.

Courier Mail 5 Sept. (1936), 1.

SEE ALSO

- Harry Clay
- Jack Kearns
- Harry Clay's No 1 Musical Comedy Co
- George Sorlie Vaudeville and Revue Co
- Harry Sadler
- World's Entertainers [1]

HISTORICAL NOTES AND CORRECTIONS

1. Although associated with a numerous organisations throughout his theatrical career, it was his association with Harry Clay beginning 1915 that saw him reach the pinnacle of his creative and professional career. Indeed, his relationship with Clay over that period was essentially carried out in friendly rivalry, with both men attempting to outdo the other with audiences on occasion. *Australian Variety* records several instances when only Clay's greater experience (and position as boss) was able to overcome Morley's popularity:

Arthur Morley sang "The Singer was Irish" at Harry Clay's last week. This so moved old "Tad" in the front row of the stalls that he sent around "a small gift for the singer. It was a bright sovereign. On being told that the song could not be sung again in the second half, the old fellow signified his intention of being present [the next] week. But here's where Harry Clay gets in his dirty work. He is busy rehearsing all the Irish songs he can think of. "I'll be the first on the programme, too, declares Harry, "and I'll see if I can hit the old fellow for a tenner" (11 Aug. 1915, 17).

The next week the magazine followed with a further report on the competitive repartee between the pair:

Those young fellows - Harry Clay and Arthur Morley - are always having a go at one another. The latter, coming off stage after his turn at the Bridge Theatre the other evening said, "Say Harry, the audience are so used to giving me money for my wonderful efforts that somebody just threw sixpence up on the stage." "That's right old man," was the rejoinder, "They'll throw more than that before the finish." "I can bear that," was Morley's reply. "I'm the best looking singer for my age in Australia." "Well spare me days," said the white-haired one. "You don't half like yourself. Look at me - my beauty is not artificial. I need no grease paint to make me look pretty." The last squib was too much for Arthur, so he discreetly withdrew from the controversy (18 Aug, 1915, 12).

2. In addition to his career as an all-round variety practitioner, Morley also frequently wrote articles and poems which were published in various magazines, notably *Australian Variety*. One of his earliest contributions was for that publication's 1915 Christmas edition. Several of his poems can be accessed via the "Texts: Published and Unpublished" page.

MUSIC THEATRE WORKS

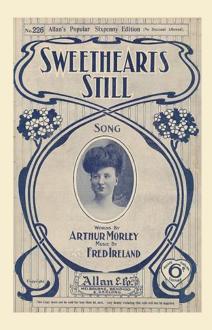
- 1915: On the Sands [revusical] Not a Word to the Wife [revusical] •
- 1916: On Deck [revusical] Who's the Liar [revusical] Saints and Sinners [revusical] A Kiss In the Dark [revusical] On the Land [revusical] Picking 'Em Out [revusical] In the Court of Father Xmas [pantomime] In Old Kentucky [revusical] A Night in Paris [revusical]
- 1917: Aladdin [pantomime] Run For the Doctor [revusical] The Belle of Parsley Bay [revusical] Dockum Street, Woolloomooloo [revusical] Everybody's Doing It [revusical] Six O'clock Closing [revusical] I'll Kill That Kid [revusical] Who's the Boss [revusical] Hopalong Cassidy [revusical] Island of Spice [revusical] Miss \ Chilly from Chile
- 1918: How to Get Rid of a Mother-in-Law [revusical] Yacka Hula Hickey Dula [revusical] Lord for a Night
- **1919:** Arcadia [revusical]
- 1922: Ship Ahoy [revusical] All Ashore
- **1931:** Mother Grundy [pantomime]

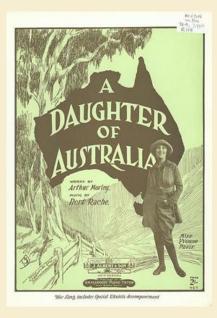
ORIGINAL COMPOSITIONS (Published)

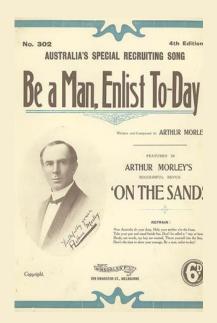
All hyperlinks are to the corresponding AustLit record • \$\mathcal{S}\$ = published score available online via AustLit • All other scores held by the National Library of Australia

All songs by Arthur Morley unless otherwise noted

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1908:
J
                "Sweethearts Still" (Arthur Morley/Fred Ireland)
                "The Sunflower and the Breeze" (Arthur Morley / James E. Dodd)
                "My Old Australian Home" (Arthur Morley/Fred Ireland)
√ ca. 1908-10:
    ca. 1910:
                "Sleep, Sailor, Sleep"
J
                "Goodbye Nellie Darling" (Arthur Morley/G. Martyn- Jones)
J
    ca. 1915:
    ca. 1915:
                "Be a Man, Enlist To-day"
J
                "Rest, Soldier, Rest"
        1916:
J
        1922:
                "A Daughter of Australia" (Arthur Morley/Bert Rache)
                "The Sweetest Bunch of Flowers in the World" (Arthur Morley/T. Edmond Leonard)
         n/e:
         n/e:
                "At St Kilda Beach" (Arthur Morley/Bert Thomas)
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Source: National Library of Australia

ADDITIONAL QUOTATIONS

- One evening last week Mr Arthur Morley (Harry Clay's producer) overheard a discussion outside the Bridge Theatre, Newtown, where it was stated that he (Morley) had very little to attend to. "Oh yes," said deep-voiced Arthur. "Very little to do, have I. Only to keep Mr Clay's companies supplied with a new musical production every week, very often play a part in the said production, work in a trio, play in a farce, do a single, make out a mile or so of publicity material, and conduct rehearsals." We wonder what Arthur does in his spare time (AV: 18 July 1917, n. pag.)
- Mr. Welch came to Australia as a young man and was a well-known identity in Mount Morgan during the early days. There is scarcely a town of any size in Australia that has not known him. He was with Harry Clay's waxworks and vaudeville company, and appeared under J. C. Williamson in Gilbert and Sullivan operas, and with George Sorlie at His Majesty's Theatre. For a time he promoted his own show at the Luxor Theatre, Perth, and he was well known in Brisbane when the Theatre Royal was the only variety house here (MB: 11 Sept. 1935, 4).

PUBLISHED POETRY

1914: "To Variety – **1914**" (AV: 7 Jan. 1914, 4)

1915: "Stranded: Xmas -1897" (AV: 29 Dec. 1915, 17) **1917:** "The City of Make-Believe" (AV: 17 Jan. 1917, 4)

ENGAGEMENTS CHRONOLOGY

* = Details regarding length of engagement are yet to be established

1900: <u>PERCY ST JOHN</u> (Th Royal, Bris; 23 June*) 1901: <u>PERCY ST JOHN</u> (Th Royal, Bris; ca. 10 Apr.*)

1902: JOHN FULLER (Temp Hall, Hobart; ca. 13 Sept. - *)

1903: HARRY RICKARDS (Th Royal, Bris; 6 Mar. > Rickards Variety & Vaudeville Co)

1905: <u>TED HOLLAND</u> (Th Royal, Bris; 15 Apr.* > Lse. Percy St John) • (Qld tour; ca. July/Aug.* > Incl.

Toowoomba TH; 31 July) ► <u>F. M. CLARK</u> (Elsie Bates > Gaiety Th, Melb; 7 Oct.*) ► <u>LEONARD DAVIS</u> (Elsie

Bates > Palace Gardens, Perth; 11 Nov.*)

1906: JOHN FULLER (Elsie Bates - NZ circuit; ca. July * > See TT: Aug. 1906, 22)>

1907: <u>TED HOLLAND</u> (Morley & Bates > Th Royal, Bris; 1 June -*)

1910: GRAND SCOTCH CONCERT (Elsie Bates > Centennial Hall, Bris; 7 Sept.*)

1911: MOUNT MORGAN AMUSEMENT CO (Olympia Hall, Mount Morgan; 11 May-ca. June* > as manager) •

HOLLAND & ST JOHN (Empire Th, Bris; 8 July -*)

- 1913: <u>JAMES BRENNAN</u> (Th Royal, Bris; 22 Mar. *) ► <u>BIRCH & CARROLL</u> (Morley & Bates > Qld circuit; ca. Apr.* > Incl. Charters Towers; 3 May) ► <u>BRENNAN-FULLERS</u> (Morley & Bates > Nat Amph, Syd; 24 May ca. June*) ► <u>J. C. BAIN</u> (Morley & Bates > Princess Th, Syd; 13 Sept.*)
- **1915:** HARRY CLAY (Sydney/NSW circuits ca. June * > See AV: 23 June 1915, 8)
- 1916: JAMES THORNTON (Rosbery Th, Mascot, Syd; ca. Jan.* > See AV: 26 Jan. 1916, n. pag.) ► HARRY CLAY (Sydney/ NSW circuits; ca. Apr.* > see TT: May 1916, 48) ► BIRCH & CARROLL (Qld circuit; ca. June/July* > See Olympia Th, Charters Towers; 23 June) ► HARRY CLAY (Sydney/NSW circuits; ca. Nov-Dec.* > See AV: 27 Dec. 1916, n. pag.)
- **1917:** HARRY CLAY (Sydney/NSW circuits; Jan/Feb. > See TT: Jan. 1917, 52) ► HARRY SADLER (Princess Th, Syd; ca. Dec.* > See AV: 14 Dec. 1917, n. pag.)
- 1918: <u>HARRY SADLER</u> (Princess Th, Syd; 1 Jan.*) ► <u>HARRY CLAY</u> (Princess Th, Syd; 23 Mar.*) ► (Western Australian tour; Shaftesbury Th, Perth; ca. July * > See AV: 19 July 1918, n. pag. / See also Clay Djubal (1998), Appendix F)
- **1922:** REG WYKEHAM (Hippodrome, Syd; 9 Sept.*).
- **1931:** GEORGE SORLIE (His Majesty's, Bris; 7 Nov. 31 Dec. > Sorlie's Vaudeville and Recue Co)
- 1932: GEORGE SORLIE (His Majesty's, Bris; 1 Jan. * > Sorlie's Vaudeville and Recue Co)

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Australian Variety 19 July (1918), n. pag.

FURTHER REFERENCE

All entries are for Arthur Morley and/or Morley and Bates unless otherwise noted

Djubal, Clay. "Morley, Arthur." AustLit (2007).

Howarde, Bert. "The Confessions of The Droll." E: 11 Sept. (1929), 104.

"Late Mr. A. Morley: Stage and Radio Identity." MB: 11 Sept. (1935), 4.

See also:

- **A:** 29 Apr. (1905), 16 [Elsie Bates] 7 Oct. (1905), 16 [Elsie Bates].
- **AV:** 28 July (1915), 8 27 Oct. (1915), n. pag. 24 Nov. (1915), 5 26 Jan. (1916), 16 [*On the Sand's* Rosebery Theatre audience photo] 16 July (1916), n. pag. [Hean's Essence advert] 27 Dec. (1916), n. pag. 17 Jan. (1917), n. pag. 18 July (1917), n. pag. 15 Aug. (1917), n. pag. 14 Dec. (1917), n. pag. 22 Feb. (1918), n. pag.
- **BC:** 23 June (1900), 9, 14 2 July (1900), 6 30 July (1900), 7 25 Aug. (1900), 2 15 Apr. (1905), 2 17 Apr. (1905), 2 29 Apr. (1905), 2 1 May (1905), 3 8 May (1905), 3 22 May (1905), 5 29 May (1905), 5 12 June (1905), 4 26 June (1905), 7 3 July (1905), 3 7 Aug. (1905), 3 14 Aug. (1905), 5 21 Aug. (1905), 4 4 Sept. (1905), 5 11 Sept. (1905), 2 18 Sept. (1905), 2 3 June (1907), 6 1 June (1907), 6 22 June (1907), 2 27 Aug. (1910), 2 15 July (1911), 2 21 Dec. (1931), 3.
- **CM:** 5 Sept. (1935), 1 7 Sept. (1935), 1.

[&]quot;Arthur Morley Passes: Well-known Stage and Radio Identity." CM: 7 Sept. (1935), 15.

[&]quot;Clay's Budget." AV: 4 Oct. (1916), n. pag.

[&]quot;Phyllis Faye-Harry Sadler Slander Action, The." TT: Sept. (1918), 30.

[&]quot;Sculpture – And His Stature, A." TT: May (1916), 48.

[&]quot;Social Service – Reviving Interest: Visit of Mr. Arthur Morley, Well-known in Rockhampton." MB: 4 Mar. (1933), 6.

E: 10 Dec. (1924), 67 [Holland's Entertainers photo, 1905].

NM: 3 May (1913), 1 • 23 June (1916), 2. SMH: 24 May (1913), 2 • 13 Sept. (1913), 2.

27 July (1905), 1, 3. TC:

Aug. (1906), 22 • Sept. (1915), 37 [Elsie Bates] • Jan. (1917), 52 • Mar. (1918), 33 • Oct. (1922), 21. TT:

WA: 11 Nov. (1905), 1[Elsie Bates] • 2 Dec. (1905), 1 [Elsie Bates].



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most insistent and I could not get rid of it, and my opening performance
"Mand on this procusts"

Speaking to a brother performer, he advised me to try Hean's Essence, and I procured a bottle and had it prepared as per directions. A few doses had a most beneficial effect and within three days the catarrh had entirely disappeared. To avoid any recurrence of the malady I take an occasio dose of Hean's Essence, as, besides being pleasant to take, it wards off all colds and kindred ailments.

MR. ARTHUR MORLEY, one of the bestknown men in the Australasian amusement world, writes his appreciation of Hean's Essence :-

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Bridge Theatre, Newtown, April 28th, 1916

Dear Sir, -- Some months ago I contracted severe throat trouble whilst on four with my own company, the result being that I worked under great difficulty for several nights. Your remody being carried by a lady member of my show, she gave me enough of the mixture for several doses, which I used with immediate beneficial results, and, within three days, my voice was thoroughly restored.

Since that experience, I always bring along a stock of Hean's Essence, and have proved its unfailing value amongst members of my company who have from time to time benefited by its use. Personally, I have no besitation in declaring Hean's Essence to be the finest remedy of its kind I have ever used

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Australian Variety 26 July (1916), n. pag.