

SERIOUS BUSINESS OF PROFESSIONAL HUMORISTS

Weber and Fields Tell of Their Bright Lines.

Weber and Fields are recommended as a tonic for whatever ails you. Interviewed in their private office, a business-looking suit room above the theatre, they admitted their privilege and duty in this

a remark. Making people laugh is not, according to them, any easier than making them cry. "There is always the struggle between the footlights and the audience," said Mr.



FIELDS, THE LAUGHMAKER.

direction. Mr. Weber stopped talking through the receiver of a telephone—he says it is just as good a way as any other and you don't have to bother to change your position—and Mr. Fields uncoiled his long legs while they talked, sometimes together and sometimes separately, about their adventures and misadventures. They are serious looking men off the stage, as all professional humorists seem to be, but occasionally a flash of fun emphasizes

Fields. "Sometimes as soon as the curtain goes up, before a word is said, the people will begin to laugh and we know then we have what we call a laughing audience. Sometimes it is a long time before we can get them started and we work hard to do it, I can tell you." "Sometimes," Mr. Weber interposes, "we can't even make the people in the first row laugh." "Why is that?" "I don't know, unless it's because they're

too close." That sounded very much like one of his stage jokes. "Do you know," continued the elder man—there is only one year's difference—that we never have jokes about politics or religion? Not even during election time. "It is simply a matter of tact. Our audiences are so mixed that it would not do to run the risk of offending them, and so we simply cut that out. There are plenty of other subjects to joke about.

"We have here what is called the exchange joke. If we try a joke and it does not raise a laugh we don't stop that joke out of the cast. No, indeed. We simply put it in another place. "Now, if I say something funny and apparently nobody but myself thinks it is funny, why perhaps the next time Pete Dalley will say it or Mr. Weber here. We trot the line all about the place until it finally lands where it will raise a smile."

"I had a line in one of the pieces last year," said Mr. Weber. "It was of only three words, 'Oh, joy, joy.' It didn't create any joy so far as I could see, and we boarded it around until one night the dead silence with which it had been greeted before was understudied by a shriek of applause. "There it stayed. It was the hardest joke to place I have ever met. You don't know what a sensation of relief I had when that poor jockey got its reward.

"Speaking of jokes, I don't think we have in our burlesques what you can really call jokes. We make a distinction. We never speak of them as jokes, but as bright lines. "You see the difference? A joke is independent of the context and can be repeated by itself and is funny alone. But the words with us that really make a hit depend so much on the situations and the actions, on what has gone before, that you couldn't take the meaning of it all away with you. We prefer that sort of laugh raiser, if for no other reason than on account of the theatrical plates."

"What are they?" "Trouble raisers for us. We have to be on the lookout for them, particularly first

specialties. No one has any idea what some one else in the cast may say. We talk right off the bat, and it is quite hard on a newcomer. "I know when Bigelow came to us the first night he had to go right off the stage, he was so rattled. He didn't know what to make of it, we put in such a lot of new stuff.

"As a general thing, however, our com-



FIELDS GIVES ADVICE ABOUT TAILORS.

pany is used to that and know just where they are at. They expect something weird all the time and as soon as we get back to the lines it is all right. "Do we think that a burlesque of a play helps it? In most instances there is no doubt that it does. That is proved by the fact that often when a new play is put on we are asked to burlesque it as a help in advertising.

"Once in a while, however, a manager takes his play very seriously and he doesn't care to have it made fun of. Last winter there was a play on that we wanted to burlesque and the management knew it. "Of course, the only opportunity we have to see a play is at the Wednesday matinee, as the rest of the week we are busy ourselves. When a new play is staged we send our author, Mr. Smith, to see it, and if he thinks it worth while from the comedy point of view then Mr. Fields and myself attend some matinee. We don't need to go but once."

"This particular company did not give Wednesday matinee simply to prevent our seeing the play. We were up a tree for a while, for it was absolutely necessary that we find out what was done." "As good luck would have it, the star was a particular friend of ours, and one day, without the knowledge of the management, the whole company came down here secretly. We locked the doors and they went through the entire performance for us while we sat in a box and took notes.

"To this day I doubt if the management know how we got what we wanted. It was a sure enough star chamber session. "A play may be successful from the theatrical standpoint, but it will be use-



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"When the curtain goes up you can see people sitting there with an expression on their faces that says, 'Well, here I am. Now just make me laugh if you can.' That's a nice spirit, isn't it, for an over-worked comedian to face?" "Well, we face it all right, and hand out bright lines over the footlights until we see that expression chase itself away and we know we've made a hit.

"Now, the second night, the regular theatregoers, are entirely different. They come to be amused." "I don't suppose," was asked by the interviewer, "that you have as much trouble with your costumes as some stars—Maxine Elliott and Lillian Russell, for instance?" "We've had our troubles, all right. But experience has taught us what to do. Unlike most stars we don't want our clothes to fit, so we go to a bad tailor and tell him to make us a fine suit, and he hits it all right every time. They never touch us anywhere.

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"Yes, we do get tired of our make-up. I believe," said Mr. Fields solemnly, "that I could put that make-up on in the dark if I was fast asleep." "And my stomach-pad," continued Mr. Weber. "People say to me, 'Why don't you wear one of those rubber bags that you inflate.' It's the latest thing, I know, in swell fronts, but I simply can't. I've seen that old wooden thing for fifteen years, and I am helpless without it.

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