

FUN FRESH FROM AFAR



JOHN CUMBERLAND and SYDNEY SHIELDS in "PARLOR, BEDROOM and BATH"

WHENEVER an author grows apologetic he steps confidently forward and says, "This is true to life." In a general way the declaration is true, but the phrase engenders suspicion. Authors are jealous folk—more jealous than courtiers—and when they are certain of their achievement will not share credit even with life.

But the miracle proves the rule. Now and then the modest author appears to confound his brethren, as a flash of lightning rivets the dark. Such a personage is C. W. Bell, co-author with Mark Swan of "Parlor, Bedroom and Bath," the latest A. H. Woods farce, which is now playing to capacity audiences at the Republic Theatre.

Mr. Bell is conscious of having written a "palpable hit," even if he had no other evidence than the royalty statements. At the same time Mr. Bell makes the following confession of fact: "I did not invent the basic idea of Parlor, Bedroom and Bath. Life invented it, and I ran across it at a time when I was looking for something that would make money on the stage. And if the play proves profitable I shall owe a great deal to a certain New York dramatic critic who gave me my cue as to what the public would like and what it wouldn't."

About three years ago Selwyn & Harris produced a farce comedy of the title called "Her First Divorce" at the Comedy Theatre. They gave it a capital production and the critics of New York were unanimous in their approval of it, but the play was an absolute failure. Appreciating that the producers, the cast and the press had done everything in their power to lift the play I realized that its failure was my own fault and I did some hard thinking about it. One critic who had reviewed my play seemed to me to have supplied the answer. He wrote that it seemed like a well bred lady lifting its head among a lot of musty mongrels that yelped their way to success on the New York stage.

"Very well," I said, "if that's the idea I'll write a lusty mongrel. Only what shall I yelp about?" That was the question, and truth to tell the muzzle was on for some time. I am not a yelper by instinct, but always I carried in the back of my head a statement I have seen attributed to the late Charles Frohman: "If our American playwrights want to be successful let them remember to write of the things they see around them." Sir Philip Sydney, of course, said the same thing when he told the aspiring author to "look into his own heart and write."

Well, I slouched for an idea and one day I got it. A lady of my acquaintance, a fine intelligent woman of superior mentality and great common sense, had one peculiar obsession on the notion that every woman who met her handsome husband fell prostrate at his feet and was his lawful prey. There

was a suggestion of a play idea in her attitude, but I didn't feel sure until something occurred that clinched it. "The lady in question was given to attending many social functions with the irresistible one, but always preferred to remain in the background, leaning on the young girls who danced and flirted with him. She actually glowered on those who passed him by. It is a not unfamiliar trait of feminine psychology. On one occasion she overheard her husband remarking to a sweet young thing that he was feeling particularly frisky that evening, to which the sweet young thing replied, 'Second childhood, eh?' That remark ended the friendship be-

tween the wife and the young lady, but it gave me the idea for "Parlor, Bedroom and Bath." I know that these two women do not speak to each other to this day. "Of course the idea needed exaggeration to be effective on the stage, and the husband of the stage isn't anything like the original model, but the important thing—the psychology of women—remains precisely the same. I thought, what if I showed a yelping mongrel, and so I set to work to make the idea yelp. After much work I made the animal sit up and yelp some, but spasmodically in places—I took him to William Harris, Jr., who had often encouraged me in my playwrighting efforts and who had an optimistic faith in me. Mr. Harris couldn't see the play at all. He declared it was a self-conceit farce, and when I asked him what that was explained that he didn't quite know, but it was that anyway. So the play went to several other managers, who admitted that it was a dog, and that he yelped, but who sent it back. Among the managers to whom I sent it at that time, and who returned it to me was A. H. Woods, the present producer.

"I should admit every new playwright should play his comedy to this point in its career, to do just what did—call in an experienced play doctor. No play looks good to the author after it has been rewritten and rejected half a dozen times. So I got in touch with Mark Swan and arranged to have Sunday shows with me. From the title for me the doctor found the patient lusty and well worth saving. I think we set a precedent in collaboration, because we never had one disagreement.

When the play was finished we sent it to Mr. Broadhurst, who accepted it overnight, but a change in his plans caused him to abandon its production. Then it went one Saturday to Mr. Woods, and the following Monday saw our contracts signed. From that moment things moved fast. I was then that I discovered that Mr. Woods's talent ran to hits. We had originally called the play "The Private Suite" and then changed it to "Licentious Reginald," but Mr. Woods was satisfied with neither. One night we were standing in front of the theatre discussing the play when Mr. Woods suddenly shouted with me, "For the title is 'Parlor, Bedroom and Bath.'" We tried it out almost immediately in Atlantic City, and then went to Chicago for an engagement of two weeks. We stayed fourteen. They say Chicago success isn't good for a play in New York—but the mongrel is yelping lustily.

The result of this amiable collaboration may be gathered from the following scenes illustrative of the qualities that keep audiences from brooding about the war. Reginald, the poor husband, is compelled to pretend to a life of devilish intrigue in order to fascinate his romantic wife. His friend Jeff arranges with the irresistible Polly, played by Florence Moore, to add to the deception.

Jeff—Now be serious, Polly. At 7 o'clock to-night you have a nice lit-

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