

STAGED BY—



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BY PAUL WEST

Drawing by Alonzo Kimball

ON the first day of rehearsals for a new musical comedy, the persons most concerned in its success or failure rank about as follows:

MANAGER

AUTHOR AND COMPOSER

STAGE MANAGER

A week passes, and at its close there is considerable of a shake-up in the batting order, which now reads thus:

STAGE MANAGER

MANAGER

AUTHOR AND COMPOSER

Another week; and then the make-up of the team presents this appearance:

STAGE MANAGER

There is nobody else. The author, heart shattered, manuscript tattered, has gone far, far away. The composer is engaged in telling to a sympathetic company at the Lambs' or some Broadway chop-house what he thinks of Stage Managers in general and this one in particular. The manager of the musical comedy—the man who furnishes the money for its production—is still by force of circumstances permitted about the theater where rehearsals are being held; but he is now a chastened spirit and has learned to speak in whispers.

At the end of the last week of rehearsals, the order of the executive force has not changed, except that the name of the Stage Manager may now be writ in even larger letters. But by this time all signs of war have vanished and the white dove of peace hovers over the proceedings. True, the aforesaid dove may be tethered to the spot; but he is there. By this time the author, if he is sensible,—and there are few authors into whom a modicum of sense cannot be beaten in the course of a month,—has come to the conclusion that the scenes and situations, lines and lyrics, that he wrote for the piece were not much good, after all, and that the Stage Manager knew exactly what he was doing when he cut them out. The composer has reached a stage in which he can listen

to the interpolated numbers without squirming, and when he hears one of his own that has by chance been left in the score, he is inflated with delight and thankfulness for such mercies. The manager is still in the picture, silently, smilingly advancing salaries to such of the company as may be O. K.'d by the Stage Manager.

He Loathes Himself

BUT by this time the Stage Manager has come to shun himself with all the loathing in his being. He despises his profession, and he hates the sound of a piano or the sight of a dancing foot. He has dyspepsia, his eyes are granulated and strabismic, he is footsore, and he scarcely can speak above a whisper.

But he is King! Ah, yes, he reigns supreme! He is the Negus, the Grand Mogul, the Big and Little Panjandrum, the Ahkoond, the Janitor,—everything that suggests unlimited power and despotism rolled into one great, awe inspiring title, STAGE MANAGER!

It has been a bitter fight,—a combat single handed against such adversaries as Inattention, Insubordination, Awkwardness, Stupidity, Favoritism, Insolence, and Mental Deficiency,—yet it was a fight that he must win, or—the title he bears would be an empty honor, a hollow mockery.

The Stage Manager's battle begins the day he is engaged to "put the piece on." He meets the manager, the author, and the composer and goes through the book and music. Of course, if he is an experienced, competent Stage Manager, he finds flaws in the work; but he must not say so. That would precipitate warfare, and it is not yet time for open hostilities.

Probably the writers of the piece have ideas for

"business" for certain of the musical numbers. Their ideas may be excellent; but here begins the trouble.

"This number ought to be immense," says the author. "Eight girls—the Ponies—dressed like poodle dogs, and the eight showgirls leading them. A little dance, with the ponies barking in time to the music, you know."

"All right," says the Stage Manager, making a note of suggestion. "What's next?"

"Then there's a scene between the comedian and the soubrette, and then the soubrette has a song. It's a good little number, and with the eight Ponies made up like country schoolgirls with big sunbonnets, and schoolboys, it ought to go. You—"

"But doesn't it come pretty soon after the poodle dog number?"

"Oh, yes, not more than three minutes between; but they're quite different."

"Maybe. But how do you suppose you can get the Ponies to change from poodle dogs to schoolgirls and boys in three minutes?"

"Why—"

"You'll have either to put more dialogue in there between the numbers, or shift their arrangement in the act, or use different girls in them."

"Impossible! To change the arrangement would spoil the continuity of the act. And we must have the Ponies in both numbers."

"Oh, all right. I'll try to fix it up somehow."

The authors interpret this to mean that the Stage Manager has agreed with their ideas, and are satisfied. That is where they are wrong. The Stage Manager observes that they are a little sensitive about their work,—authors always are, at first!—and that to argue with them would result in nothing but trouble. He knows that sooner or later they will admit that he is right; so he very quietly makes his little notes as they go through the rest of the book and score; but he says nothing, except by way of praise.

Next comes the question of a company. The man-