TRIALS OF A THEATRICAL MANAGER

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he meant me; so I went over, offered my hand, and asked him what all the excitement was about.

"This is a fine trick you've played on me!" he shouted. "Do you think I'm going to let you play in my theayter with a cheap second company, after you promised me I'd get the original production?"

I tried to calm him; but he would not listen to me.

"When I book a New York company, I want a New York company, and not a second rate road company!" he yelled.

And—would you believe it?—it took me two hours and three cigars to convince that manager that, as my play had not yet played either in New York or in any other city, he was getting the only "original company" that ever existed. Some one-night-stand managers remind me of nothing so much as peacocks with dynamite bombs and arguments strapped to their tails.

I REMEMBER a case in point that occurred a number of years ago when I was taking the original tank melodrama, "The Dark Secret," through the one-night stands of the South. When we got to a small town in Alabama we discovered that the theater was over a big drygoods store. We got to town early in the morning and, going directly to the theater, had the big water tank placed in position on the stage. Our advent had been heralded for weeks in advance by the manager of the theater, who had plastered the town with bills reading, "Four thousand tons of real water on the stage at one time." Of course, as this was the first time real water had been used in a play, and as one of the actors, it was advertised, had to dive into the tank to effect a rescue during the progress of the drama, the town flocked to the boxoffice and bought all the tickets in the rack in less than no time.

Four hours before the performance was scheduled to begin the manager of the theater came dashing into my room at the hotel, crying out that the dam had burst. It was true. The tank had broken, and the drygoods store below had been flooded.

"It ain't the drygoods store I'm thinking about, though," sobbed the manager.

"Then what is it?" I begged.

"Why, it's my reputation! If I get all the townspeople into the theater to see the show after I've advertised four thousand tons of real water on the stage, and then don't show 'em any real water, they'll never come to my theater again. I'm ruined, I tell you, I'm ruined!"

After I had dried his tears for him, I suggested that in such a case the only thing to be done was to cancel the performance and refund the money. He broke out crying afresh at the very idea of giving back all the money that was already reposing snugly in the boxoffice safe.

"Well, then, if you don't want to fool the villagers, and still want to keep their money, what on earth do you want to do?" I asked him.

He stifled his sobs and looked at me. "I want you to help me out by diving into the empty tank," he replied, just as placidly and offhandedly as if asking me what time it was.

"You want me to dive into the empty tank?" I exclaimed. "Don't you like me?"

"You can do it," he said. "Any other actor would be afraid; but I think you've got nerve."

It was a beautiful compliment; but somehow I was of the opinion that it was he who had the nerve. He went on to explain that if I dived into the tank the people would be fooled into believing there was real water in it, and that, even if they did not believe it, they would feel that they had got their money's worth if they saw someone dive into the tank.

Now, of course I was not hugely pleased at the idea of returning all the money either, and I tried to get at a compromise. But he would not listen to any other proposition than my diving into the waterless tank. And finally, to settle the matter, I had to agree to play the part of Old Tom in the play, fill the bottom of the tank with canvas, and take a headlong plunge into it when the climax of the play arrived. What is more, I did do the diving act, and the manager was so overjoyed subsequently that his reputation and virtue had not been impaired, that he presented me, as a token of his esteem and gratitude, with a pair of twenty-five-cent blue cotton socks.

EVERY once in awhile one of the office boys brings a card to your desk—if you are a theatrical manager—and on the card you see inscribed the name of a man or woman utterly unknown to you. You ask the boy to find out the visitor's business, and he returns with word that the stranger is "the head of a committee" who has been implored by "a great body of citizens" (it is always a "great body") to get into immediate communication with you. You have the stranger shown in, and he invariably seeks to inaugurate a spirit of camaraderie between himself and the manager by entering into a discussion of the weather, how you slept last night, what you think of Roosevelt, or how you liked Mrs. So and So's latest novel, which, he confidentially assures you, would make a mighty fine play.

After you have politely suggested to him that just because you are a theatrical manager he must not think you have nothing to do but deposit money in the bank, he consents to tell you his business. His business is a flexible affair.

I'll give you a partial list of these "businesses" as I tabulated them during one single week's time not long ago in my office. Here it is: To get me to prepare data on the American drama to be used by the caller in a lecture he was to deliver before a private dramatic club; to get my help in advising his society how to go about instituting a dramatic censorship; to pay a caller's relative two hundred dollars in advance royalties on a play I had never seen or heard of; to make a round of the theaters with some college student investigators and determine to what extent the speculator nuisance existed; to join a society for the advancement of "billboard art"; to subscribe one hundred dollars to a newly formed "organization for the reading of plays of unknown American dramatists"; to write a five-thousand-word article to be read at a church sociable the next evening on "the defects in our national dramatic tendencies"; and to subscribe money to help out a dramatic club in a high school in a small town in Connecticut. There were many other applicants during this same week; but I have told you enough to allow you to guess the nature of the rest.

It is a curious fact that so many persons believe a theatrical manager is a cross between an information bureau and a public bank. I have never been able to account for it. And yet it remains that a person who pays two dollars to see one of your plays somehow or other imagines he has done you a personal favor and that you owe him some of your time and money in return. The better the play is and the more he has enjoyed it, the more he thinks you ought to take him round the corner and buy him a meal. It is less a question of psychology than of Dementia Audiencia.

BEFORE concluding my scenario of a manager's trials, tribulations, and contribute-relations, let me add a few words about another element that goes to make a theatrical producer's life something less carefree and easy than that of a professional cotillion leader. I refer to the actor job hunters. Tammany Hall the morning after election looks like a deserted island compared to a theatrical manager's office any day in the week. For every position in a manager's companies there are something like one hundred applicants, and the ninety-nine who do not get the job hurry out on Broadway and begin calling you names at the top of their voices.

The job hunters try every conceivable way to get a personal hearing with a manager. I have known one of them, a young woman, to pretend she had sprained her ankle in tripping over one of the outer office rugs, in order that she might thus win a little sympathy—and mayhap a little job along with it—from me. I have known actors to lie in wait for a manager for days at a time, in hotels, theaters, offices, on the L stations, and elsewhere in order to get his ear on the subject of a position. Some actors have waited out in front of my house the whole night long in order to be able to catch me as I was coming out early in the morning.

Inside my breakfast table newspaper, next to the theatrical news, I once discovered a note from a job hunter. I found out later that he had paid the delivery boy a dime to fasten the letter inside the paper with a bit of mucilage. On another occasion, three months ago, I was awakened in the middle of the night by a ring on the telephone. The voice at the other end said its owner had just arrived in town from the West and wanted to know whether any positions in my companies were open. I get applications by telegraph, telephone, mail, hand, heliograph, and every other way under the sun. It has got so now that I fear my bootblack