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# HOW TO STAGE A PLAY

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# HOW TO STAGE A PLAY

A MANUAL

For the Amateur Stage Director

*Illustrated*

BY  
HARRY OSBORNE

AUTHOR OF

*"When Smith Stepped Out," "The Deacon Entangled,"  
"A Home Run" and "After the Play"*



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## FOREWORD

The production of plays by amateurs is not and should not be confined to Dramatic Clubs alone. Societies of a social or fraternal nature, in fact organizations of almost every description, find the productions of plays to be not only beneficial and broadening in self culture but a pleasure to their friends and the community in which they live as well as to themselves. It also affords a pleasant and effective means of raising money for charity, for depleted treasuries or any other worthy cause.

In every social organization there will be found unsuspected histrionic ability as well as many who have a distinct talent for the stage. Acting or impersonation is a most natural impulse, inherent in greater or less degree, in all of us, even at a very early age. Who has not seen the child who "dresses up" and pretends to be somebody else? A considerable number of prominent actors and actresses of to-day, received their first training in amateur productions and can look back upon that Home Talent Entertainment as their first stepping-stone to a successful and artistic career. Then too, amateurs have always been pioneers in the development of the drama. Not only in the Greek theatre, where the drama had its birth, but also in England and other European countries, new movements in the theatre have always been fostered by non-professionals. In America to-day there are a number of amateur organizations which are pointing the way to better plays, better acting and better theatres. The reason for this is evident. The professional stage is steeped in tradition and controlled by commercialism. The professional

## FOREWORD—*Continued*

manager with his reputation and capital at stake and striving to please a rather fickle public, is naturally slow to break away from what is considered the tried and true; while the amateur with but little or nothing to lose and everything to gain can experiment with and test out all manner of untried theories. Many decided innovations in play-writing, acting, stage lighting, costuming and scenery now used in the professional theatres can be traced directly back to amateur productions. Since no art has a more potent influence in our national life than the art of the theatre, the production of plays by amateurs is a thing to be respected and encouraged.

The question of doing a play comes up before many organizations and is voted down for fear it will not be a success. "What do we know about producing a play and who is going to coach us?" is asked. There may be no one available in the community who is capable of coaching a performance and the expense and trouble of employing a professional stage director from some other town is often out of the question.

Now staging a play, while not an easy thing to do by any means, is not as difficult as may be supposed. As in every other undertaking which is worth while, *knowing how to go about a thing* is really half the battle. The rest consists in hard work.

To assist the amateur who has had no experience as well as the one who has had some experience but is not sure of his ground, is the purpose for which this manual is written.

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# HOW TO STAGE A PLAY

## CHAPTER I

### A SUCCESSFUL AMATEUR PRODUCTION

There are four things that go to make up a successful amateur theatrical performance: the play, the company of actors, publicity and the stage director. George Bernard Shaw mentions a fifth ingredient when he refers to the audience as being "successful" or otherwise, and there is no doubt that the audience plays a big part in the success or failure of a play; but as we cannot select our audiences very well, we must merely do our best to please them.

*The Play*                      In order to please a mixed audience, the play should have as nearly as possible a universal appeal. That is, it should, in its various scenes, appeal to young and old, to both men and women, to those who go to laugh and those who go to weep. But in selecting the proper play, the company of players must also be kept in mind. It is not a good plan to have many of the company "double," that is, play more than one part. If there is a difficult role, be sure that you have a player who is capable of playing it satisfactorily. One part badly played will distract the attention of the audience and ruin the performance. Select a play that can be properly cast, that is worth doing and doing well. Avoid the so-called "problem plays" and those containing long, emotional roles.

*The Company*                In making up your company favor those who have had some experience. Choose those who will attend rehearsals regularly and are willing to work for the success of the play as a

whole. Beware of those who always find an excuse to drop out just before the opening night.

*Publicity*                      The importance of publicity, or the work of the press agent, is often overlooked in amateur theatricals. Too much dependence is placed upon the members of the company in interesting their friends and relatives. Now no one would deny the amateur actor the pleasure of having his friends and relatives see him perform, but to bring out the best histrionic ability that is in him, he must play before a packed house, before strangers as well as friends, and to this end the press agent works. He gets the people into the theatre. No matter how good a thing may be, people must be told about it. There is a book published called *The Press-Agent's Handbook*, by Frederick G. Johnson, which is invaluable in amateur theatricals.

In passing let us remark that there are two kinds of success for which to strive. Artistic success, which depends largely upon what the stage director is able to produce from the play and the players, and commercial success, which depends largely upon the press agent. If the performance is an artistic success and few people attend, it is a failure and the company and promoters are dissatisfied. If it is a commercial success and a poor, uneven performance is given, it is again a failure because the audience feels it has been cheated.

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## CHAPTER II

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### THE STAGE DIRECTOR

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The professional stage director occupies a most important position in the theatrical world. He receives but little publicity and is almost unknown outside of his own profession. As a rule you will find his name in small type in the program, for the glory goes to the

actor and few people realize how important a part he has played in the production. Many times, by arduous and painstaking labor, he has snatched success from failure and made a seemingly impossible play into a huge success. Oftentimes he practically re-writes a play at rehearsals. Many managers consult with their stage directors before deciding to produce a play at all, relying upon their judgment. The average salary of a first-class professional stage director is five hundred dollars a week. If he has six or eight weeks in which to make a production, well and good. If in an emergency he has but two weeks, he works night and day almost without sleep and forces the company to work up to their limit. How important this branch of the theatrical business is may be realized from the fact that David Belasco, manager and playwright, stages his own plays. Of course he has a number of capable assistants, but every detail of the production passes under his discriminating eye and the final rehearsals are under his personal direction. Richard Mansfield, a great actor, never intrusted the production of his plays to any one else. After rehearsals had passed a preliminary stage, he always took active charge himself. Frequently he was known to try out a dozen or more actors in a seemingly unimportant role, until he found one who could play the part just the way he knew it should be done. But the faculty for business management or acting is seldom combined with the ability to stage a production, and this has made a place for the professional stage director who does nothing else. In the theatre his authority is supreme, his word is law.

There are no hard and fast rules to follow in producing a play. Each play presents an individual problem. The successful stage director is one who uses his head at all times, is original, resourceful, creative, keenly observant and knows enough of human nature so that he can direct the people under him in a way to bring out the best that is in them.

*How Selected.  
Should He Play  
a Part?*

Other things being equal, it is well to select as stage director some one of your company who has had some experience in directing a performance. But experience alone should not outweigh certain other qualifications which we have enumerated below:

He should be a good disciplinarian.

He should have the courage of his convictions, so that when he knows he is right he goes ahead in spite of opposition.

He should be a close student, never satisfied until he is at the bottom of a thing.

He should never be satisfied with "good enough" but always strive for perfection.

He must be an indefatigable worker and possess unlimited patience, for his patience will be sorely tried.

He must be a diplomatist and also understand human nature well enough to know when to criticize, when to encourage and when merely to suggest. He must be resourceful. During rehearsals he will run into many seemingly blind alleys and must know when to back out gracefully and when to find or make a way out.

The stage director, in an amateur production, should not be burdened with a long or important role. If he plays at all, it should be a short, unimportant part, but it is better to free him from this responsibility entirely.

*His Staff  
and Their Duties*

The manuscript or printed play is to the stage director much the same as the plans and specifications are to the builder of a house. It is a foundation upon which he builds a finished performance that reflects life as the author sees it.

*The Stage  
Manager*

At once or very soon after rehearsals are started the stage director should select an assistant or stage manager. He is the stage director's mouthpiece as it were and sees that his ideas are carried out. He acts as prompter during rehearsals and at performances and as we go

along we will mention many ways in which he may be used.

*The Property Man* A property man must be appointed to supply and look after all articles or "props" as they are called which are used in the play. He is given a list of the properties needed for each act and must supply them. He distributes them before and during a performance and collects them afterwards. Properties must always be in the proper place at the proper time. A missing "prop" can easily ruin an otherwise flawless performance. In an exciting scene a character opens a drawer where a revolver is supposed to be and there is no revolver, or the revolver has not been loaded with a blank cartridge and the villain does not know whether to drop dead or not. A servant enters the scene to deliver an important letter and has to go back after it. These and other disasters will be avoided by having a reliable property man who understands and takes his work seriously. He also attends to mechanical and off stage effects, as for example the galloping horseman, the more modern horn of the automobile, the slamming of a door, the ringing of a bell, etc.

*The Stage  
Carpenter*

The stage carpenter should be endowed with some mechanical ingenuity. He is furnished with a scene plot showing just how each act or scene is to be set. He sets the stage, sees that things fit, and when the scene is "struck" or taken down has it laid away in order for resetting, keeping each act in separate "packs" as they are called. A place for everything and everything in its place is his motto.

*Stage Hands*

It may also be necessary to select one or more persons, depending of course upon how elaborate the production is to be, to act as stage hands. They will work under the direction of the stage carpenter and help him shift the scenery, furniture, etc. A man should be appointed to raise and lower

the curtain and unless the lighting effects are too intricate, can also handle the switchboard. He is furnished with a list of cues for curtain and lights. He raises the curtain on signal from the stage manager and lowers it slowly or quickly (as the case may be) promptly on getting his cue. The stage manager should signal the raising and lowering of the curtain with two bells, the first bell one minute in advance as a warning and the second bell to go. He lowers the house lights and throws in the stage lights and foots before the curtain is raised. When the curtain is lowered and curtain calls have been taken, he raises the house lights and lowers the foots, giving the audience to understand that the act is over.

*The Wardrobe  
Mistress*

Unless the play is a musical comedy or a romantic drama with frequent changes of costume, it will not be necessary to appoint a wardrobe mistress. Each performer will be able to take care of his own wardrobe. If, however, costumes are rented or borrowed, they should be placed in charge of one person who will see that they are properly distributed, taken care of and returned in the same order in which they were received.

The stage director should clearly define the duties of each of his assistants and thereby avoid any misunderstandings. If the duties of each one is written out, no one can offer the excuse that he thought some one else was expected to do what he forgot. Excuses do not excuse in a theatrical performance. Every contingency must be provided for in advance. Things must be done right, not once, but over and over again with clock-like precision, in order to insure a finished performance.

*Responsibility  
and Authority*

The stage director assumes entire responsibility for a finished performance and therefore he must be given complete authority. Emerson has said something to the effect that there can be no responsibility without authority, and this applies with full force to the stage

director. In all matters pertaining to the performance, his authority must be supreme. If given full sway he cannot offer excuses. He must not, however, allow this temporary authority to turn his head, for it is only during rehearsals and at actual performances that this authority is his. No one person can think of everything, and if he is tactful he will receive and graciously acknowledge suggestions from any member of the company when he sees that they are to benefit the performance.

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### CHAPTER III

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#### PREPARATION FOR REHEARSALS

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The stage director will make it easier for his company, and also lighten his own work considerably, if he will study carefully the printed play before calling rehearsals. Let him, as soon as the play has been selected, get off by himself and go over the play carefully, trying in his imagination to visualize each scene. Undoubtedly he has already had something to say in the choice of the play, but this is not enough. He cannot indulge in too much preliminary study in order to familiarize himself with the characters and situations. In the modern printed play, complete stage directions and business are usually given and these should be closely followed. In many so-called "Reading Plays" the stage directions are incomplete or inaccurate, which necessitates much extra work before and during rehearsals.

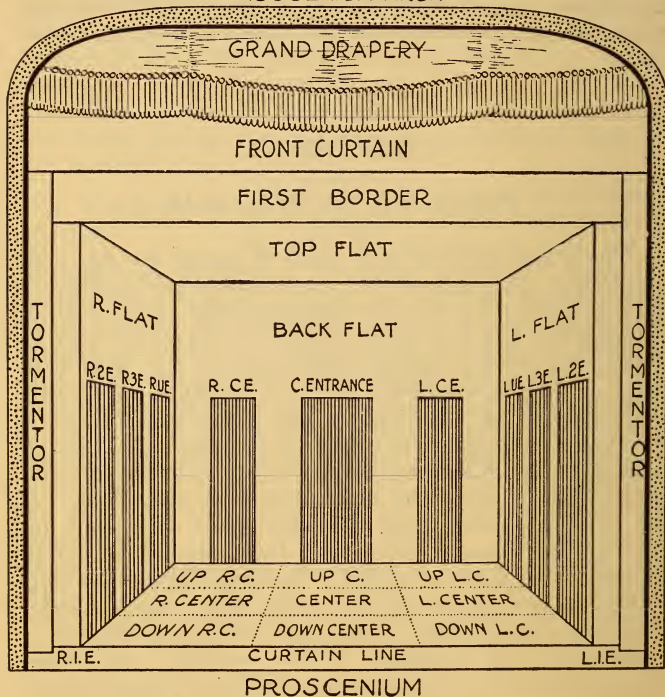
Knowing the members of his company and something of their histrionic ability, the stage director should go over the cast of his play, weighing carefully the abilities and personalities of the different members and assign the parts tentatively. But let him keep this flexible as changes will undoubtedly have to be made after rehearsals have started.

## CHAPTER IV

## THE PHYSICAL STAGE

Let us now assume that the stage director has been chosen and address our subsequent remarks directly to him.

## PROSCENIUM ARCH



Stage settings are roughly divided into two classes, interior and exterior. Today, interior settings are always boxed, that is, enclosed on three sides, as though one wall of a room had been removed. In the accom-



panying sketch or diagram, an interior setting is shown with the proper names for the different entrances and stage positions. You must learn these names and what they mean at once, for when you start rehearsals you are to tell each player just where to enter and exit and just where to stand and move during the time he is on the scene. These are the professional stage terms. They are simple and when once understood will save time and needless explanations.

Up stage means away from the audience and down stage means towards the audience. The terms right and left are always used as the player faces the audience. Center is abbreviated C. Right is abbreviated R. Left is abbreviated L. Up is abbreviated U. Down is abbreviated D. Right First Entrance is abbreviated R.1.E. Right Second Entrance is abbreviated R.2.E. Right Third Entrance is abbreviated R.3.E. Right Upper Entrance is abbreviated R.U.E. The same terms for stage positions and entrances also apply to an exterior setting.

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## CHAPTER V

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### REHEARSALS

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The length of time required for rehearsals depends somewhat upon the nature of the play. Rehearsals for a Musical Comedy should be called eight weeks in advance of the opening performance. For a three or four act play consuming two, or two and one-half hours playing time, five or six weeks should be ample. A one act play will require two or three weeks preparation. There is but little danger of amateur players going "stale" before performance. If you should find this to be the case, however, you have simply to omit a few rehearsals before the final week, or have them practice on make-up. In calling your first rehearsal, impress upon the members of your company the importance of their being

on hand promptly. One person who is late or who has forgotten his part holds all the others back. Each member of your company should have a copy of the printed play.

*The First  
Rehearsal*

When your company has assembled, tell them that you feel deeply the responsibility you have been asked to assume and ask them to be patient with you as you are going to be with them. You are confident that with everyone working in harmony and doing their best, they are going to give the finest amateur performance ever presented in the community. Assign the different parts as best you can, explaining that you may make changes later. Then have the company read the play aloud, each one reading the part you have assigned him. Do not excuse anyone from this reading, no matter how small a role they have, as it will give them an idea of the play as a whole. When the reading of the play is finished explain to them the meaning of the word "cue." Now a cue is not merely the three or four last words in a line or speech; it may be a noise on the stage or off, or it may be a piece of business, but there is a cue before every line the actor speaks. The three important things to impress upon your company regarding cues are, that they must be *learned as thoroughly as they learn the lines of their part*, they must be *given distinctly* so that the actor who follows can make no mistake, they must be *taken up promptly* or the performance will drag and lack verisimilitude.

As your company reads the play, note carefully how all the words are pronounced. If you have the slightest doubt as to the correct pronunciation of a word, make a note of it and look it up before the next rehearsal. Have no argument about pronunciation. Look them up and be positive. Your company will respect you for it. You may find when the first reading of the play is finished that you can make advantageous changes in your cast already, and if so, notify the players affected

so that they may begin to study their new part at once. Before dismissing the rehearsal, tell the company when the next rehearsal is to be. Tell them to read over their parts, trying to get into the spirit of the character and underline their cues. Instruct each one to come to the second rehearsal provided with a pencil. Borrowing or passing around a pencil wastes time and each one must have a pencil to jot down business, emphasis, and so forth in his copy of the play as you point it out. Arrange your subsequent rehearsals so that all can be present. About four rehearsals a week from eight to ten-thirty o'clock in the evening should be sufficient.

### *The Second Rehearsal*

If possible, conduct your rehearsals in the theatre or hall where the play is to be given. If you have a choice of stages, select a large one, a small cramped stage is more difficult to manage. This is not necessary, but is a help to people unaccustomed to the stage. Before starting your second rehearsal, make up your stage as best you can with chairs, boxes or other movable articles to represent entrances, tables, davenports, chairs or whatever the scene you are doing may call for. If in the first act there is a door at Center and another at R. 3 E., place two articles at each entrance, explaining what they represent, and have the players enter and exit between them. Let two or three chairs in a row represent a davenport, and so forth. This gives your players some idea of the relative positions and distances. You are now ready to have your company "walk through" their parts, that is, they will read their parts from the printed play, but enter the scene and exit, sit down, rise or cross stage as you indicate. When you tell them to do something not shown in the printed play, have them write it in their copy with a pencil and make a corresponding notation in your own copy. Take them up on mispronounced words—they cannot get them right too soon. All these things take time and you

may not get very far into the play during this rehearsal. You may not be able to do more than the first act at the second rehearsal.

*The Third  
Rehearsal*

Begin your third rehearsal where you finished before. Always set your stage as you did at the second rehearsal, or better, let your stage manager see to it. Conduct the third rehearsal about as you did the second, keeping away from detail, but watching for mispronounced words. After your company has "walked through" the entire play once, you should be able to determine upon the ultimate casting. Keep this constantly in mind during the first rehearsals, for the sooner your cast is fixed the better.

*Rehearsal  
Without Parts*

After five or six rehearsals, depending naturally on how well you are getting along, inform your company that there are only so many more weeks for rehearsals and that they must begin to learn their parts. Instruct them to come to the next rehearsal prepared to go through the first act without parts. Some of them will immediately protest that this cannot be done and you will have to insist upon it.

You are now in the fifth or sixth rehearsal and doing at least one act without parts. All of your attention must now be directed to the players, so turn your marked copy of the play over to your stage manager and let him act as prompter. He must follow the dialogue carefully to see that nothing is left out and nothing is put in or changed except as you direct. If you are using a regular stage for rehearsals, leave the stage to the players and direct operations from a place two or three rows back of the orchestra pit. Here you can obtain a better perspective of the stage picture you are trying to paint, and as you move about in the auditorium you can criticize it from every angle and also judge how well your company is going to be heard on

the opening night. As soon as your company can do an act without parts, begin to teach the business of that act. Have them go through all motions and handle all articles in pantomime as though they were actually using them.

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## CHAPTER VI

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### SUBSEQUENT REHEARSALS

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When your company is letter perfect in one act, start them in learning the next. As soon as they can go through the entire play without parts, and you find that you can run through the entire play at one rehearsal, you can begin to pay some attention to the tempo of the piece.

#### *Tempo*

A farce or musical comedy should be played about as fast as you can drive them through it. It must be done so fast that the audience, on the opening night, will not have time to think how ridiculous it all is and instead merely enjoy it. Bear in mind that a farce to be successful must be played seriously, the more seriously the better. To the characters in a farce nothing is funny, to the audience everything is or should be. A comedy must be done briskly without a single let down except in sentimental scenes which must be taken a little slower. A serious drama or tragedy must be played not slowly but impressively. It sets people to thinking and wondering what they would do in like circumstances and the points must get home. Form the habit of holding your watch on each act so that you can judge how long each act should take.

#### *Interruptions*

No longer stop the rehearsal to let any player go back to repeat a speech or a piece of business. Correct them, if wrong, but let them remember to do it right the next time. Do not

allow anyone in the company or outside to interrupt your rehearsal. Keep each member of your cast *in the character he is playing*. Suggestions and remarks from them must be reserved until after rehearsal.

*Dialect Parts* It is difficult for some people to memorize a dialect part. If you should find that any of your company are confronted with this difficulty, have them resort to the method used by professional actors and re-write the part in good English, learn it and then gradually transform it into dialect.

*Love Scenes* It is only natural that amateurs should be embarrassed in doing love scenes. It is up to you to overcome this feeling at the start by making them go about it in a business-like manner without any foolishness or tittering. No rules should be laid down regarding the position, standing, sitting or embracing of the loving couple. Have them try different positions until you feel sure it will convey to the audience the feeling to be expressed and also makes a pleasing picture. Thus studying the matter out with them will, in itself, go far in dissipating any embarrassment they may feel. Remember that while in real life people usually make love awkwardly, on the stage it should be idealized and done above all things gracefully. The exception to this, of course, is the love scenes between comic characters. The more awkward and ludicrous they are, the better.

*Doing Things Right* Have things done right at rehearsals. If they are not done right at rehearsals, they will never be done right on the opening night. Have them done right each time, over and over again. This is *the only method* to insure a smooth, even performance. Never permit any player to tell you that they "know just how" to say or do a thing and they will "do it right at performance." They won't. Make them show you. If a character enters the scene after what is supposed to be a

hard climb or a long run, do not let him stroll in. See that he is out of breath and shows every evidence of what he has been doing.

*Reading Lines* Do not let your players recite their lines or give them in a sing-song manner. See that they bring out in their reading the *exact* and *entire meaning*. Hold up as a criterion before each spoken line the way that line would be spoken in real life, allowing of course for the limitations of the stage. Some exaggeration is, of course, necessary. Misplaced emphasis on a single word will twist all the meaning out of a line. Have them underline the word to be emphasized.

*Stage Business* The action of a play is just the opposite of a three-ring circus, in that only one principal scene or situation occupies the attention of the audience at one time. Have your important scenes acted somewhere across the center of the stage where everyone in the house may easily see and hear what is going on. When a character is no longer active in the scene but is still on the stage, have him move up stage and do nothing to distract attention from the scene being played. If a number of characters are inactive, get them up stage and have them converse in dumb show. There used to be an old rule that an actor should never turn his back to his audience, but the modern stage strives for naturalness, and there is no reason why an actor should not turn his back to his audience when occasion requires.

Do not allow your players to stare at or ogle each other unless it *means something*. We stare at a person in surprise or when we are trying to read their thoughts, we ogle a person when we are trying to draw them out or when we want to note the effect upon them of what we are saying, but in casual conversation we look at them and away from them. You must make the eyes of your players behave. If they look at some-

thing they should not look at, the eyes of the audience will follow theirs and the effect of the scene will be spoiled.

Strive to have your players talk and act as naturally as the limitations of the stage will permit. Here is an example of poor stage management. In a recent metropolitan production, an actress playing a minor part was seated up stage conversing in dumb show with her partner after a dance in the adjoining ballroom. She was fanning herself languidly in a most natural manner when suddenly an exciting scene began to take place down stage between the principal characters. It was the climax of the third act—the situation was tense—people in the audience were holding on to their chairs. But our lady with the fan did not allow it to interrupt her conversation nor disturb the rhythmical sweep of her fan. She might as well have been a thousand miles away so far as any effect upon her was concerned. The writer was upon the stage at the time, and after the curtain came down the things the stage manager said to her would not be allowed in print. Anyone in the audience observing her would realize at once that he was not seeing a slice of real life but was merely sitting at a play.

If there is a long stretch of dialogue between two or more characters, you may find it expedient to have the characters change position or cross stage in order to relieve any monotony. But be careful about this and do not let them move about aimlessly. Give them something to do in order to make their movements appear natural. Remember every movement on the stage *means something*.

Rehearse "stage falls" carefully so that they will look effective but not injure your players. The knees give way first and the body falls forward. Either at the beginning or when part way down the arms go up and the impact of the fall must be taken on the palms of



the hands. Practice this yourself so you can show them.

Amateurs are prone to make a complete turn instead of a half turn. You must guard against this. For example: a character is facing the audience at R. C. and gets his cue to exit at Center Door. Instead of letting him make a full turn to his right and going up to Center Door, be sure that he makes a half turn to his left. Or again, a character is standing at R. C. with back to audience when another character standing at Center speaks to him. The character at R. C. should face the speaker by making a half turn to his right instead of a full turn to his left. In passing a table, piano, chair or other article of furniture do not let your players grasp for support or put out their hand and pivot around it. Do not let them do anything with their hands unless the gesture has some significance which you wish conveyed to the audience. Economy of motion and gesture must be your watchword.

Another common failing of amateurs when they have a line to speak with an accompanying piece of business, is to perform the business and then speak the line, which, of course, breaks the continuity and is unnatural. The business and line should be given together simultaneously. Watch out for this for it will surely occur.

When a character sits facing the audience, never allow him to cross his limbs so that the sole of his shoe is visible to the audience. This is one of the limitations of the stage. True it is that people cross their limbs often with entire propriety in actual life, but the audience is below the level of the stage and the soles of people's shoes are not pleasant to look at.

*In General* In working out your stage pictures, business, etc., do not allow yourself to be hampered by tradition or the way you have seen things done on the professional stage. They may often have been done badly. Be creative and resourceful and bear in mind that amateurs have always been pioneers

in the dramatic field. The drama is growing every day in simplicity and naturalness and you have a wonderful opportunity to experiment with different ways of doing things until you feel that you have found what is most effective. For example: we have all seen professional performances in which every character just before the exit, breaks his closing speech, reserving the last few words until he has reached his point of exit and then turns, delivers his closing words and walks off. Now in certain situations this is, of course, effective and of value, but resorted to at every exit, it becomes valueless and terribly hackneyed. Conduct your rehearsals in an authoritative, decisive manner. When ready to begin exclaim "first act" or whatever act it is. "Places," the players who are to be discovered on the scene take their positions and those who are shortly to enter stand ready at their respective entrances "Go" and the rehearsal starts.

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## CHAPTER VII

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### DRESS REHEARSALS

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The final or dress rehearsals should be conducted the same as a regular performance. That is, the company wear complete make-up and costumes, the scenes are set correctly and in detail, all properties are on hand and used, the lighting is done as carefully as at performance, nothing is left over for the opening night.

The number of dress rehearsals necessary varies according to the nature of the piece you are producing. One or two dress rehearsals just before the opening night should be sufficient for a modern three or four act play. A costume play or musical comedy will probably require three or four dress rehearsals.

To accustom your players to the ordeal of the opening night, conduct your dress rehearsals with the pre-

cision of a regular performance. Have the stage set for the first act in advance. Instruct your players to be in the theatre at seven o'clock, in time to make up, dress and be ready to go on at eight-fifteen. At seven-forty send the stage manager to the different dressing rooms. He is to knock on each door and call "half hour." By this your players know that they have a half hour to get ready before the overture. At five minutes of eight he again makes the rounds of the dressing rooms, calling "fifteen minutes." At eight-ten he makes a final trip to the dressing rooms, calling "overture." This means that everybody who is to appear early in the act is to be on the stage at once. The overture begins. You stand down Center with your back to the curtain and inspect the scene carefully to see that everything is set properly and that the lighting is correct. Just before the overture is finished you cry "clear" and everyone not concerned in the opening scene hurries off into the wings. "Places" the players stand ready at their appointed places. On the last note of the overture the electrician throws in the footlights. the house lights go down. As you walk off the stage the curtain rises and the act is on. When the last line of the act has been spoken, the stage manager rings down the curtain. "Strike," he exclaims, the actors go to their dressing rooms to change and the carpenter with his assistants takes down the scene, if it is to be changed for the next act, and proceeds to set the new scene. There will probably be curtain calls after the second act and they should be rehearsed two or three times.

Avoid long waits between the acts at the dress rehearsals as you will have to during actual performances. Nothing will chill an audience into indifference quicker than long waits. They are the death knell of any performance. Go through each act in the same manner as the first, on schedule and when it is over, go over your notes and have corrections made.

## CHAPTER VIII

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### MUSICAL COMEDY

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The first step in producing a musical comedy is to teach your company the songs. Have them gather around the piano and learn the songs by heart. Rehearse the chorus separately and after they have learned the songs, teach them the steps, evolutions, groupings and so forth. Rehearse separately the principals in their solos and duets. Alternate these rehearsals so that you can utilize their time and your own to the best advantage. As soon as the musical part of your play is well under way, begin on the dialogue or dramatic portion of the piece. Not until these three parts of your play have progressed sufficiently so that they can go through without halting, can you begin to weld them together. Here is an important thing. When your chorus is in the background during a scene between the principals, do not let them stand stock still as though they were painted on the back drop. Keep them in the scene, have them show surprise, delight, horror and make comment among themselves at what is transpiring in the scene before them. This welding process will be something of a grind for all concerned, musical numbers, dialogue and business must all be deftly joined without a perceptible break, but at last you and the company can begin to see what the finished piece is going to look like and you will find it to be interesting and enthusiastic work. When the time for dress rehearsal arrives, conduct them in the same manner as described in previous chapter.

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## CHAPTER IX

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### THE OPENING NIGHT

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If you have never experienced the ordeal of an Opening Night, you have a distinct thrill in store for you.

You have followed the advice given in the foregoing pages and your work is now done. If it is not done it is now too late to "fix" anything. What remains for you now, is to keep cool, be watchful and preserve the same attitude you have maintained at rehearsals. Inwardly, you are of course excited and over anxious but do not let your company or stage crew see it.

You have entered the theatre probably slightly in advance of the company. The stage is being set for the first act. Everything is as it was during your dress rehearsals, except that presently those empty rows of seats are going to be filled with an eager throng of people who have paid money to see what kind of a piece of work you can turn out. Speak an encouraging word to every one concerned in the production—they are nervous too and need it. Let them see that you are smiling and confident and your attitude will go far in steadying them. Go about your work in the most methodical manner. Have the electrician or man who works the lights, try them out for you, see that your stage manager calls half hour, fifteen minutes and overture on time. Shatter the precedent if you can that amateur performances are always late in starting. See that your stage manager has your marked copy of the play to use in prompting. Inspect carefully the make-up and dressing of each member of your company as they appear upon the stage. A compliment here and there may not be amiss.

The overture is being played. A buzz of conversation amounting almost to a roar comes to your ears. You look out through the curtain and find (let us hope) that empty, dark and silent house which for weeks has been your workshop, brilliantly lighted and filled with people rustling programs, and all talking at once. In a moment they will be plunged in darkness and your stage bathed in light. It was Richard Mansfield who said that the dark, silent, expectant house at the rise of the curtain always seemed to him like a great black

bear ready to spring upon and devour him if he did not please.

The orchestra has about done its duty to the overture. You inspect the scene, it is complete. "Clear," those not concerned in the scene hurry off; "places," your company stand in readiness; "go," as you walk to the wings. The footlights go up and the house lights down, the curtain rises, disclosing your work for the first time to public approval.

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## CHAPTER X

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### THINGS TO REMEMBER

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Leave nothing for the opening night—prepare for and rehearse everything in advance.

Avoid long waits between the acts—nothing will so dampen the ardor of an audience.

Cues must always be given distinctly and taken up quickly.

Always be courteous but firm. No matter what your position in life outside the theatre is, your authority is supreme in preparing a production.

Always be prompt yourself at rehearsals, set a good example.

*Don'ts*                      Never lose your temper.  
                                     Never argue with members of your company or stage crew. Be sure you are right and then have your own way.

Never accept the excuse that such and such a thing will be ready or done right on the opening night.

Do not try to see how sarcastic you can be at rehearsals.

Do not work your players too hard by prolonging rehearsals, rather provide for a sufficient number.

Do not try to do everything yourself—throw everything you consistently can upon your assistants.

If there is a mirror used on the stage, place it at an angle where it will not reflect anyone in the audience.

## CHAPTER XI

## STAGE LIGHTING

In addition to directing and coaching the players you will also have to give considerable attention to the important matter of lighting. If you are working on a stage fully equipped with electric lights, in charge of a capable electrician, you have open to you a most interesting and fascinating field of endeavor. If your stage is not adequately equipped, you should not attempt any intricate lighting effects but be content to do the best you can with the means and funds at your disposal, keeping in mind that your stage is a picture you have painted. You naturally want it shown to your audience in a favorable light, so you must stand off and study it under different effects of lighting. David Belasco once said: "Lights are to the drama what music is to the lyrics of a song. The greatest part of my success in the theatre, I attribute to my feeling for colors, translated into effects of light." You may have noticed that the eye of a person sitting in the dark is instinctively drawn to a bright light. This is the fundamental secret of stage lighting—of compelling the eyes of your audience to unconsciously focus when and where you wish them under your skillful manipulation of lights.

How important this branch of stage-craft is, may be realized by going back briefly over the history of the stage from the time that plays were first given indoors and noting the effect which improved methods of lighting have had not only upon the physical stage but also upon the drama and the art of acting. In the eighteenth century it was a difficult matter, using flickering candles and smoking oil lamps, to adequately light the stage. For this reason the stage was built to curve out into the audience, eighteen or twenty feet beyond the curtain. This projecting portion of the stage was called the "apron" and circled with footlights on three

sides was illumined much better than that portion of the stage back of the curtain line. Naturally the actors in order to show to the audience their play of feature and change of expression, chose to act all their important scenes out upon this apron. It is for this reason that the stage of those days is now referred to as the "platform stage." Naturally the plays written for this stage were more oratorical, more bombastic and abounded in long soliloquies of self-revelation and many passages of rhetorical phrasing. It followed that the acting was done along broad, heroic lines, ranting we would call it to-day. When gas lighting was introduced into the theatres in the nineteenth century, followed by the lime light, the projecting apron began to shrink, and finally when the Edison electric light was born the apron receded until it coincided with the proscenium arch. It was no longer necessary or desirable that the play should be acted in the midst of the audience. Every corner of the stage could be perfectly illumined and all the action of the play could take place back of the curtain line. This created a greater sense of illusion and made possible more subtlety in play construction and acting. So we have to-day what is called the "picture-frame stage" with every detail of the picture perfectly lighted. The soliloquy and the aside are no longer necessary and have been largely done away with. The whole art of the theatre has changed and become more true to life.

A description of the mechanics of stage lighting written ten years ago is to-day more or less obsolete and a detailed account of the present methods would undoubtedly be as hopelessly out of date ten years hence, for improvements are being made every day. In general, however, there are four ways of lighting the stage, by the footlights at the bottom or front of the stage, by the borders from above, by the portable strip and bunch lights from the sides and the spotlight from the gallery. Some reformers have of late condemned the foot-



lights and an effort has been made to do away with them altogether. The apparent reason for this is that in times past, the footlights furnished the principal means of illumination, whereas at present they contribute to only a small part of it. Undoubtedly they will remain until something better is devised to take their place.

Border lights consist of a row of incandescent bulbs spaced at regular intervals in an inverted metal trough. These troughs are placed above the stage and parallel to it from side to side. They can be raised or lowered. They are numbered starting from the front, first border, second border, etc., and are from three to eight in number depending upon the depth of the stage.

Strip and Bunch Lights. The strip light varies in length and is placed in many different positions. It is made by inserting a row of bulbs in a long narrow zinc box with hooks on the back by which it may be hung or placed at one side of an entrance, behind a low hedge, back of a fireplace or almost any place where occasion may demand. The bunch light consists of a large reflector head studded with bulbs. The stand or base is portable and the head can be turned in different directions. This makes a highly concentrated light and it has innumerable uses. Other variants of this form of lighting are the flood light or open-faced arc, although in many of the newer theatres this has been supplanted by the thousand watt lamp which gives a powerful and steady radiance.

The spotlight operated from the gallery is used for emphasis. By its use you can compel your audience to concentrate their attention upon an object, a character or an entrance. Different effects of colors are obtained by colored slides. Belasco went even further and invented the baby spotlight, one for each character on the stage and a separate color effect for each one.

The effects of color are obtained by the use of colored bulbs, amber, red, steel blue and dark blue in com-

ination with clear ones. The flood and spotlights change color by the use of mediums or slides and by skillfully using the two forms of lighting in combination almost any color or effect may be produced. Merely throwing a red light upon an object will not necessarily make it appear red. It depends upon the color of the object, the texture of the surface, polished or dull, and the strength of the light. You will have to experiment with the lighting equipment you possess upon the scenes you are using in order to get the proper tone color. Shadows upon the stage are, of course, to be avoided by having your stage well lighted from the front, from above and from the sides. Rehearse your lighting as you do your players, leaving nothing to chance on the opening night and you will be rewarded by the appreciation of your audience.

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## CHAPTER XII

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### SCENERY

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Speaking in general, there are two kinds of scenery, representative and suggestive. By representative is meant, the showing of the thing as it actually is, as far as is practical and expedient; by suggestive, the showing of as little as is possible in actuality, but by stimulating the imagination of the beholder, making him visualize what you want him to see. There can be no doubt that greater illusion can be created in an audience by the suggestive method and as illusion is the very essence of the theatre it would seem that this method was the most effective. But both of these methods can be carried to the extreme and much depends upon the nature of the play. Needless to say the scenery should conform to the mood of the play. No matter how fast and furious a farce might be, it would inevitably suffer by being played against an impressive and majestic scenic background. In the same manner a serious play or tragedy would lose weight if played in a musical comedy setting.

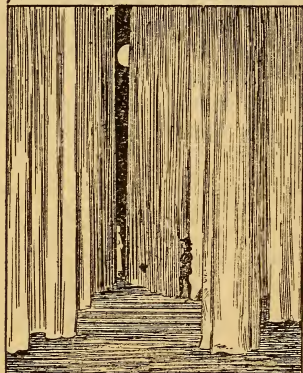
David Belasco might be mentioned as the foremost exponent of the representative method. Anyone who has seen his production of "The Return of Peter Grimm" has probably realized that never before has he beheld quite such a stage setting. There was a door at the right leading to an adjoining room of which the audience could merely catch a glimpse as the door was opened but nevertheless this off stage room was completely furnished. To the audience it gave a sense of reality and it also kept the players "in the atmosphere." The argument advanced by the adherents of the other school is that an intricate and realistic stage setting distracts the attention of the audience from the play itself and the acting.

Gordon Craig has made long strides in the suggestive method of stage scenery and lighting and he has accomplished some wonderful effects which are being used in greater or less degree in many theatres throughout the world. Against a dim, vague and shadowy background free from outline, he has the players move. The audience is conscious that the scene is a hall in a castle, a wide plain, a platform or whatever it may be, but they do not know why. They merely feel it and their attention is concentrated upon the acting. Craig accomplishes his effects in a simple but ingenious manner by the use of folding screens, drapes and concealed lighting.

As stage director, you must take inventory of the scenery your theatre contains and make an early decision as to what can be used in your play. The ordinary theatre contains as a rule three kinds of scenery: drops, borders and flats. A drop is a painted curtain suspended from the flies and lowered not rolled as occasion requires. Borders are nothing but short drops and are used to represent sky, clouds, foliage and ceilings. Flats are light wooden frames with a brace at the back and covered with painted canvas or cloth. These flats are lashed together to form the three walls



*Scene from Old-time MELODRAMA.  
An old-style setting where realism runs riot. The same light for "sky-drops" as for actors, threw ugly shadows. The scenery, of which there was far too much, aimed at realism but ran to extremes.*

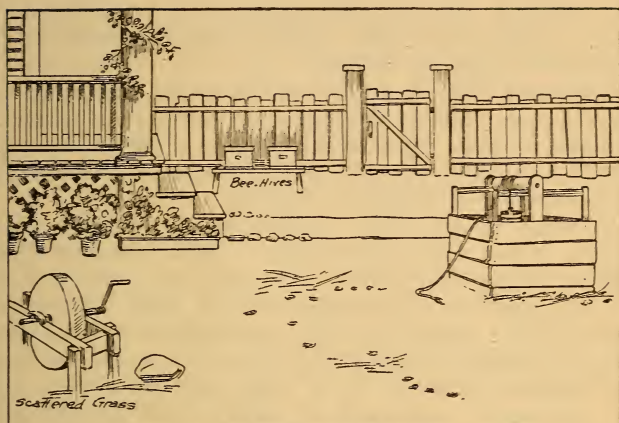


*Scene from "HAMLET." By G. CRAIG.  
A modern setting, simple in details, but typical of new ideas in stage art.*



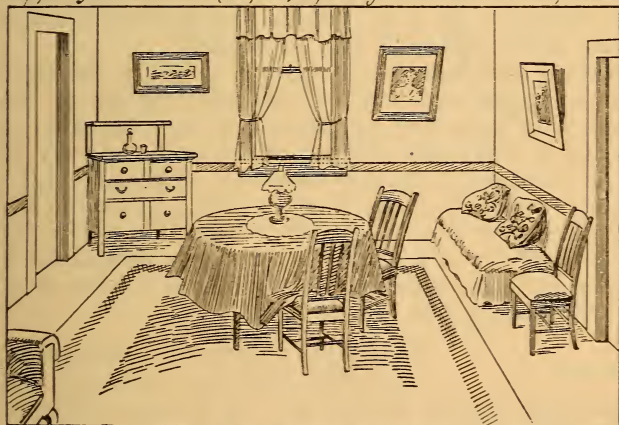
*Scene from "PARSIFAL." By A. APPIA.  
Here the scenic artist used indirect lights to give "depth" to the setting.*

*The extreme in modern STAGE SETTING.*



### A SIMPLE EXTERIOR

*The type of stage-setting easily adapted. No house seen, but steps and rail suggest it. Green burlap on floor with knaki strip for path. Blue back-drop for sky. For rural scene (not farm) replace grindstone and well with plants.*



### A SIMPLE INTERIOR

*With two entrances (drapery or doors as desired). Any furniture suited to the play. Carpet or burlap on floor. Real window in back-drop, or only suggested by draped curtains. A boxed-in setting of this type can be suited to most plays.*

of a room or interior and contain doors, windows and other openings as needed. The top flat is lowered from the flies to form the ceiling.

A ground-cloth is needed to cover the floor, usually green in color for an exterior scene and for an interior, a brown or grey upon which rugs may be spread. It should be tacked securely at the entrances to preclude the possibility of a player tripping.

In many of the older theatres, wings are still used in place of the more modern flats. These consist of from four to six upright pieces of scenery on either side of the stage, set in rows from front to back. They are slid upon the scene in grooves on the floor and in slots above. Instead of doors, the characters enter between the different grooves. It is from this old device that the expression originated of saying that an act was played in one, two, three, or four, meaning the distance back on the stage which marked the boundary of the scene. It is also responsible for the numbering of the entrances, R. 1 E. (Right first entrance) and so forth, which custom is still in vogue.

Should you have no choice but to use a theatre or hall equipped with the old fashioned wings or with scenery so worn and old fashioned as to threaten the success of your play, scenery which perhaps every one in the community has seen hundreds of times, it will be expedient for you to see what you can do with the folding screens or drapes, the "new way" as it is called. In general you will find it easier to use screens for interiors and drapes for exteriors, although no rule should be laid down in this respect.

### *Screens*

Secure the services of a carpenter or someone handy with tools and build some light wooden frames and cover them with dark colored muslin or cotton flannel. You will have to determine their height and width by the size of your stage. They should be high enough to reach up to the borders, if not you will be obliged to place a drop be-

hind them to cut off the vision of your audience. In width they should be about four or five feet. If you make them too wide, you will have to make them heavier or they will be too flimsy. They should be hinged in twos and threes and each one should have a brace hinged onto the back so that they will stand upright when the lower end of the brace is screwed to the floor. In Figure I a screened interior is suggested, consisting of four screens, two screens at the back and extending down the sides made in three pieces and hinged together and a screen on either side made of two pieces hinged together. This combination can be changed about to make a room of many different shapes. Note that a backing is required above the door at centre but that the entrances at the sides are made so that the audience cannot see beyond them.

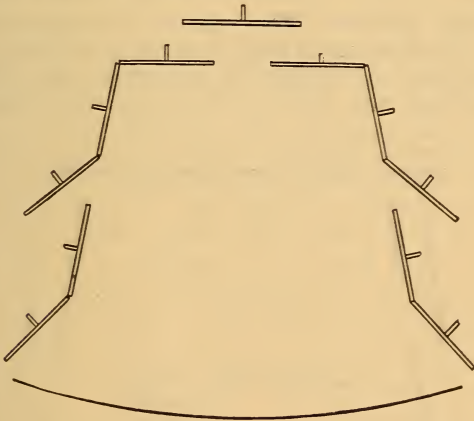


FIGURE I.

*Drapes*

A simple draped interior is shown in Figure II. The drapes should be of plain, dark colored material, brown, grey or green preferred, and should hang in loose folds from wire or

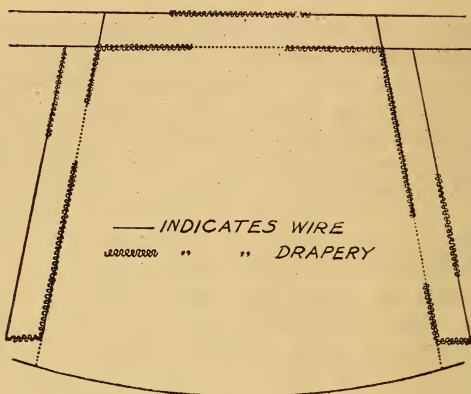


FIGURE 2.

poles from the flies. They should be weighted or fastened at the bottoms to keep them from swaying. Doors and windows are formed by leaving a seam open and drawing back the folds. A backing, of course, is required at all openings.

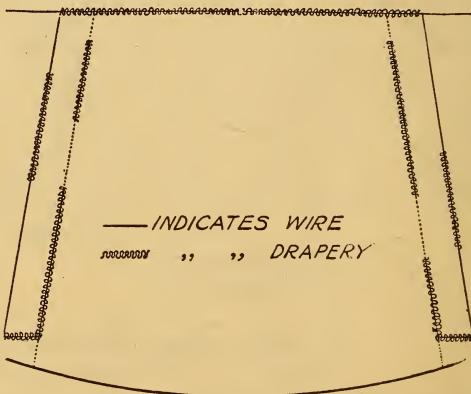


FIGURE 3.



In Figure 3 a draped exterior is suggested which requires no explanation.

In dressing your stage for a screened or draped setting, remember that you are now striving for simplicity and suggestiveness and use only such furniture and properties as are actually required in the action of the scene.

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## CHAPTER XIII

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### MAKE-UP AND COSTUMES

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There are several good hand books published on make-up, telling where the materials can be purchased and how to apply them. Let your company begin to experiment with make-up between rehearsals and see that they make the proper progress long before the opening night. It is suggested that wigs or beards should be bought, not rented. Articles rented from a "sanitary" point of view are not desirable and in the end the saving in expense will be small.

For historical and foreign costumes you can procure a book of plates in almost every public library and you also have recourse to the dictionary and the encyclopedias where much useful information will be found. In ordering of a costumer who keeps them in stock, give him the period and nationality and be sure to order far enough in advance so that mistakes may be corrected in time. Many simple costumes can be made at home by getting the women in your company interested and having plates to work from. If your play is modern, learn in advance something of the wardrobe of each member of your company so that you can make suggestions and know before the dress rehearsal that the correct thing will be worn. Under no circumstances let anyone surprise you on the opening night with some outlandish or anachronistic costume which cannot be replaced in time.

## CHAPTER XIV

## MECHANICAL EFFECTS

Mechanical effects are rather dangerous in an amateur production without a well trained stage crew to produce them. They should be avoided except as they are made essential by the lines and business of the play. Make out a list of the effects required and if possible take it to a stage carpenter for consultation. He will either let you use some of his appliances, make them for you or show you how. If you are obliged to rely upon your own resources entirely, the following suggestions may be of service.

**RAIN.** Knot ten or twelve pieces of cord at the ends and tie the opposite ends to a handle, making a sort of cat-o'-nine-tails. Play the knotted ends of the whip on a piece of heavy paper pasted over a frame and you will get the effect of pattering rain. Or a rain box may be made from an ordinary cheese box by nailing cleats at about six inch intervals around the inside. Then make an axle in the center with a handle attached to turn it with. After putting in a quart of dried peas, seal the ends with heavy paper. When revolved rapidly, a good effect of a rain storm is obtained.

**WIND.** The effect of wind is made by blowing on a shrill whistle and letting the sound die away gradually. Follow this by rubbing together two pieces of very fine sandpaper.

**THUNDER.** Thunder is produced by shaking a piece of heavy tin or thin sheet iron which has been suspended by a cord.

**LIGHTNING.** Prepared "Stage Lightning" may be purchased of a dealer in theatrical supplies. Secure an ample supply and follow directions closely.

**APPROACHING HORSEMAN.** Use a cocoanut shell sawed evenly into two parts or hollow out two wooden blocks and fasten straps onto the backs of them to slip the

hands through. Rap these lightly on the floor in imitation of the rhythmical beat of a horse's hoofs with a crescendo and diminuendo effect to indicate whether he is leaving or approaching.

**SNOW STORM.** Sift a quantity of finely cut white paper through a coarse wire netting. This netting forms the bottom of a long narrow box which should extend from one side of the stage to the other. Suspend this box from the flies with ropes at each end having another rope come down into the wings by which the box may be swayed back and forth. Coarse salt may be sprinkled on the hats and shoulders of characters who enter and this must be brushed off promptly after they are on.

**GLASS CRASH.** Have a basket partly filled with old china which may be dropped or shaken at the proper time.

Water scenes are difficult and should be avoided if possible. A very good effect may be obtained by the use of a moving picture machine played upon a suitable background. The old device of shaking a blue cloth from one side of the stage to the other is so old and obvious that it may cause merriment when it is not wanted. Give your property man a list of cues for each effect to be produced and have your stage manager rehearse him thoroughly.

**DEPARTING TRAIN.** This effect is obtained, first by the tolling of a bell containing a clapper followed by beating a wire switch against a sheet of tin or a tin stove pipe which produces a sound similar to the exhaust or escaping steam of an engine getting under way. This switch is composed of a dozen or more wires a foot and a half to two feet long, bound together at one end and having the other end radiate to a circumference of about one foot in diameter. The ends of the switch striking the tin in succession produce, at a distance, a peculiar hissing sound. Toll the bell slowly four or five times and then beat the tin slowly, increasing the rapidity

of the blows and at the same time diminishing the volume until the sounds die away. For an approaching train use only a whistle but do not use the whistle for a departing train as it is best to let the audience forget about the train after they have heard it leave.

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## CHAPTER XV

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### GLOSSARY OF STAGE TERMS

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Many of the terms used on the stage and found in play manuscripts are more or less technical and peculiar to the theatre and may be puzzling to the amateur. We have, therefore, compiled a list of the more common terms used and arranged them in alphabetical order.

**ASIDES.** Lines or words which only the audience is supposed to hear. They are but little used in the modern plays.

**BOX SCENE OR SET.** A scene where the sides are closed in like the walls of a room.

**BUSINESS.** The things a player does, as distinguished from the lines which he speaks. Business is often done simultaneously with the speaking of a line, or is used as a form of by-play to fill in. Picking up a book, lighting a cigar, arranging flowers, etc., is referred to as business.

**CALL.** An official notice issued by the stage manager or director, notifying the players of rehearsals or any other matter pertaining to the performance.

**CAST.** The members of the company, that is, the players who are taking part in the performance.

**CHARACTER PARTS.** Roles in which a player represents an odd or striking type of character. As distinguished from "straight" parts it means dialect parts, old men or women, eccentric parts, etc.

**CLEAR.** The stage is clear when there is no one on the scene. The stage director or manager uses this expression when he wants the stage free of every one not concerned in the scene.

**CLIMAX.** The strongest scene or turning point in the play. In a four act play it usually comes at the end of the third act. In a three act play some place in the third act. There is no rule.

**CUE.** A signal or warning for a speech or action, or in fact anything that transpires on the stage. The word implies a pre-arrangement as opposed to what is impromptu.

**DOWN.** Toward the footlights.

**DRESSING THE STAGE.** Referring to both the actors and to the furnishings of the stage. The way they are grouped or arranged to make an effective picture.

**FAKE OR FAKING.** An actor fakes when he has forgotten his line and has to improvise.

**FAT.** A part or role is said to be fat when it offers good opportunities for the actor to reveal his ability.

**FEEDER OR FEEDING.** A role which is secondary in importance. When properly played it creates opportunities for the actor playing opposite.

**FLIES.** That part of the theatre above the stage.

**GAG OR GAGGING.** Introducing words or jokes not in the play. Not to be tolerated under any circumstances.

**THE HEAVY.** The actor who plays the part of the villain or any sinister character.

**INGÉNUE.** A style of character portrayed in which artlessness, simplicity and ingenuousness predominate.

**JUVENILES.** Young people in the play, usually the young lovers.

**LEFT.** The actor's left as he *faces* the audience.

**LINES.** The words or speeches of a part.

**MUGGING.** Making faces for the purpose of creating laughter. It is bad acting.

**OFF.** Meaning back or to one side of the scene which is visible to the audience.

**ON.** A person is on the scene when they are visible to the audience.

**PRACTICAL.** In stage directions a window or door or a piece of property used in the play is referred to as practical, meaning that it is to be used as in real life. It must "work."

**PROPERTIES.** All articles used in the play either on or off the scene.

**RANTING.** Speaking too loud or over acting a part.

**RIGHT.** The actor's right as he *faces* the audience.

**RINGING IN.** The signal to the orchestra to begin the overture.

**RINGING UP.** The signal for raising the curtain.

**RUN.** The number of consecutive performances of a play. Also an inclined plane or run-way extending from the wings to the stage.

**SCENE PLOT.** A list of the scenery required in the play.

**SET.** The stage prepared for an act, that is, set with scenery.

**SET PIECE.** A piece of fixed scenery. A house, rock, tree, etc.

**SOLILOQUY.** A speech in which the actor is supposed to think aloud. Little used in modern plays.

**SOUBRETTE.** A lively, frolicsome role for a young woman.

**STRIKE.** To take down and remove the setting of a scene or act.

**STRAIGHT.** A character is played straight when it is done without eccentricity. A straight part is a normal, conventional role.

**SUPERNUMERIES** or **SUPERS.** Extra people used in the play to represent the mob, soldiers, etc.

**TAG.** The last line of the play.

**THINKING PART.** A part without lines to speak.

**THROWING LINES.** Prompting an actor who has forgotten his lines.

**UP.** Away from the footlights. To be up in a part is to know it thoroughly.

**UTILITY.** A small part usually given to beginners.

**WAIT.** A stage wait is a delay in the performance, caused by an actor failing to enter at the right time or when something fails to take place which should take place. It never should be allowed to occur.

**WINGS.** The sides of the stage not visible to the audience. This is the modern meaning. In the old method of stage settings, the wings were upright pieces of scenery.

# An Old Fashioned Mother

By WALTER BEN HARE.

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The dramatic parable of a mother's love, in 3 acts; 6 males, 6 females, also the village choir or quartet and a group of silent villagers. Time, 2¼ hours. One scene: A sitting room. A play of righteousness as pure as a mother's kiss, but with a moral that will be felt by all. Contains plenty of good, wholesome comedy and dramatic scenes that will interest any audience. **Male Characters:** The county sheriff; an old hypocrite; the selfish elder son; the prodigal younger son; a tramp and a comical country boy. **Female Characters:** The mother (one of the greatest sympathetic roles ever written for amateurs); the village belle; the sentimental old maid; the good-hearted hired girl; a village gossip and a little girl of nine. Especially suited for church, Sunday school, lodge or school performance.

## SYNOPSIS.

**Act. I.—The Good Samaritan.** Aunt Debby's farmhouse in late March. The Widder rehearses the village choir. Sukey in trouble with the old gray tabby cat. "She scratched me. I was puttin' flour on her face for powder, jest like you do!" Lowisy Custard reads her original poetry and Jerry Gosling drops in to see if there are to be any refreshments. "That's jest what maw says!" Lowisy and Jonah pass the fainting tramp by the wayside and Deborah rebukes them with the parable of the Good Samaritan. The tramp's story of downfall due to drink. "A poor piece of driftwood blown hither and thither by the rough winds of adversity." John, Deborah's youngest son, profits by the tramp's experience. "From this moment no drop of liquor shall ever pass my lips." John arrested. "I am innocent, and when a man can face his God, he needn't be afraid to face the law!"

**Act II.—A Mother's Love.** Same scene but three years later, a winter afternoon. "Colder'n blue and purple blazes and snowin' like sixty." Jerry's engagement ring. "Is it a di'mond? Ef it ain't I'm skun out of two shillin'." "I been sparkin' her fer nigh onto four years, Huldy Sourapple, big fat gal, lives over at Hookworm Crick." Deborah longs for news from John, the boy who was taken away. The Widder gossips. "I never seen sich a womern!" "You'd think she was a queen livin' in New York at the Walled-off Castoria." Lowisy is disappointed in Brother Guggs and decides to set her cap for Jonah. Deborah mortgages the old home for Charley and Isabel. The sleighing party. "Where is my wandering boy tonight?" The face at the window. Enoch and John. "I've been weak and foolish, a thing of scorn, laughed at, mocked at, an ex-convict with the shadow of the prison ever before me, but all that is passed. From now on, with the help of God, I am going to be a man!"

**Act III.—The Prodigal Son.** Two years later. Deborah bids farewell to the old home before she goes over the hills to the poorhouse. "The little home where I've lived since John brought me home as a bride." The bitterest cup—a pauper. "It ain't right, it ain't fair." Gloriana and the baby. "There ain't nothin' left fer me, nothin' but the poorhouse." The sheriff comes to take Aunt Deb over the hills. "Your boy ain't dead. He's come back to you, rich and respected. He's here!" The return of the prodigal son. Jerry gets excited and yells, "Glory Hallelujah!" The joy and happiness of Deborah. "Honor thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long in the land."

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# Safety First

By SHELDON PARMER

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Farce-comedy, in 3 acts; 5 males, 5 females. Time, 2¼ hours. **Scenes:** A parlor and a garden, easily arranged. A sprightly farce full of action and with a unique plot teeming with unexpected turns and twists that will make the audience wonder "what on earth is coming next." Behind the fun and movement lurks a great moral: Always tell the truth to your wife. The cast includes three young men, a funny policeman, a terrible Turk, two young ladies, a society matron, a Turkish maiden and Mary O'Finnigan, the Irish cook. The antics of the terror-stricken husband, the policeman, the dude and the Irish cook start the audience smiling at 8:15 and send them home with aching sides from the tornado of fun at 10:40. Suitable for performance anywhere, but recommended for lodges, clubs and schools. Not a coarse or suggestive line in the play.

## SYNOPSIS

Act I.—Jack's lil suburban home. A misplaced husband. "He kissed me good-bye at eighteen minutes after seven last night, and I haven't laid eyes on him since." The Irish maid is full of sympathy but she imagines a crime has been committed. Elmer, the college boy, drops in. And the terrible Turk drops out. "Sure the boss has eloped wid a Turkey!" Jerry and Jack come home after a horrible night. Explanations. "We joined the Shriners, I'm the Exalted Imported Woggle and Jack is the Bazook!" A detective on the trail. Warrants for John Doe, Richard Roe and Mary Moe. "We're on our way to Florida!"

Act II.—A month later, Jack and Jerry reported drowned at sea. The Terrible Turk looking for Zuleika. The return of the prodigals. Ghosts! Some tall explanations are in order. "I never was drowned in all my life, was I, Jerry?" "We were lashed to a mast and we floated and floated and floated!" A couple of heroes. The Terrible Turk hunting for Jack and Jerry. "A Turk never injures an insane man." Jack feigns insanity. "We are leaving this roof forever!" The end of a perfect day.

Act III.—Mrs. Bridger's garden. Elmer and Zuleika start on their honeymoon. Mabel forgives Jack, but her mamma does not. They decide to elope. Jerry's scheme works. The two McNutts. "Me middle name is George Washington, and I cannot tell a lie." The detective falls in the well. "It's his ghost!" Jack and Jerry preparing for the elopement. Mary Ann appears at the top of the ladder. A slight mistake. "It's a burglar, mum, I've got him!" The Terrible Turk finds his Zuleika. Happiness at last.

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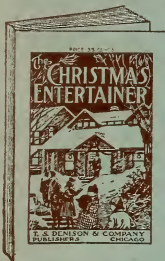
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