



E. Mason Hopper, the Director

**S**OMEBODY has said, "Any old fool can make people think, but it takes a wise man to make them laugh."

The truth of these words was never better realized than in the making of moving pictures. A play with a pleasing plot, a pretty setting, and a touch of pathos will get by and win the approval and applause of any audience. But to try to make the public laugh is another matter. It is almost a thankless job, especially for the actor.

One of the principal points to bear in mind is that it is still human nature to laugh at others in distress or in physical or mental pain. Although a ban has been put on the "rough-stuff" to which a hospital bed

is more than a possible sequel, still, this is the theory on which E. Mason Hopper, of Essanay, perhaps more than any other comedy director, has adopted with highly successful results.

It is hard to get a peep at proceedings during the making of a comedy, but I was lucky enough to get in. So, if you want to know how it is done, if you are interested in some of the funny incidents

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## Making Slap-stick

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that have escaped being tragedies by a mere hair's breadth, read on.

After "Producer Hop," as they sometimes call him for short, has hopped into the carpenter shop, the scenic artist's corner, the prop room, in and out of the building a few times, and has given out orders in a lightning manner—"Lightning" is his middle name by adoption—he gives the sets the "once over." If things are not exactly to his liking, he juggles them until they are. And then he calls everyone to attention, and the fun begins.

His eyes take on a far-away look, as he stands before the set, his stick tucked under his arm (that's another of Mr. Hopper's pe-

culiarities the little crook-handled cane he always carries), but it doesn't deceive anyone. They all know that his mind is right on the job, no matter how he looks.

By the way, the play that is about to be produced at this point is called "Actor Finney's Finish," with Wallace Beery playing the part of a poor actor who has just been fired from a job in the legitimate and has gone



*Slapstick*

into motion pictures. All sorts of disasters overtake him in "Reginald, the Heart Breaker," where he tries to show them what real acting is, much to the amusement and derision of the rest of the company, which finally decides to get rid of him at any cost.

The scheme they adopt is to chase him so far away from the studio that he will never come back. The unhappy Reginald tumbles over all the props in sight trying to find a way out, with the whole company after him. Through the building he rushes and up a ladder onto the roof, with the whole company after him. Without a moment's hesitation he flees straight to the edge of the roof and jumps off into space—but not with the whole company after him.

As a matter of fact, Reginald, as far as the public is concerned, did jump without a moment's hesi-



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An Incident That Escaped being  
a Tragedy by a Mere Hair's  
Breadth

tation. Wallace Beery, who was playing the part, was obliged to hesitate in order to ascertain whether the life net was properly in place. And just then the sun went under a cloud.

The camera man, the producer and the usual throng of onlookers who gather whenever anything out of the ordinary is going on out in the "yard" were all there to witness the jump.

Producer Hopper had his revolver loaded with blank cartridges ready to fire the signal for Beery to jump—the megaphone used by most producers is far too mild for a man whose productions resemble a hallowe'en party at the madhouse for sound—Mr. Beery surrounded by the other members of the company stood ready to jump into the life net that was held up by eight or ten strong men—and the sun went under a cloud, as I said before.

So Mr. Hopper signaled Mr. Beery to wait. And Mr. Beery stood waiting for the sun to come out and gazing down at the red spot in the center of the net which marked the place where he was to land, and the net began to grow smaller and smaller to Mr. Beery and the red spot became almost invisible, and the sun stayed under.

It might be well to explain that when Mr. Beery heard about this scene of his which was to furnish the climax for Reginald's escapades he had gone out into the backyard, dug a grave for himself, decorated it with empty bottles of dark brown and some paper flowers, and had marked it with a wooden slab on which was painted "B." So it was that while he waited for the sun to come out, Mr. Beery's eyes wandered from the life net to the newly dug grave and back to the life net again, and he grew a bit pale.

Suddenly the sun came out, Hopper fired the pistol and Beery had to jump. His foot slipped on the edge of the roof and threw him out so that he didn't hit the red mark at all. He hit two of the men who were holding the net. Mr. Beery was rushed to the hospital. Come to think of it, so were the two men he hit. But they came out a day or two later, one with his arm in a sling, the other with a stiff knee. You can see that in order to injure two strong men as much as that, Mr. Beery had to come down on them with considerable force. He



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didn't get out until much later than they did.

However, the picture was a success. And in order that such a good scene might not be wasted, Mr. Beery had to be back on the job while he was still pretty pale and shaky. He looked so much like a real live hero, and all were so sorry for him, that it was with great difficulty that they were able to finish in the proper spirit. But finish they did, and in due time the film was released.

Eddie Redway, who played the part of producer in the play—Mr. Redway is four feet, ten inches tall, by the way—didn't know whether to be glad or sorry that he managed to slide off a piece of scenery that was being hauled skyward, when he was put into the next comedy that Mr. Hopper produced. For in the boarding house romance in which he figured as the deadly rival of Harry Dunkinson for their landlady's hand, he had to fight a duel with Mr. Dunkinson, a duel in which he was armed only with a basket of eggs, while Mr. Dunkinson, with exemplary foresight, had armed himself with a stack of plates. The eggs were perfectly real and comparatively harmless—though Mr. Dunkinson claimed that he had on his only good suit—and the plates were supposed to be harmless. Mr. Hopper had had the property man break a stack of plates and glue them together again, very lightly, as he supposed. But something went wrong, so wrong that Mr. Redway had to have four stitches taken in the back of his head when it was all over.

Such incidents as these are really infrequent, however. What is not infrequent, rather it is the accepted and expected thing, is for the whole company to come back dripping wet from having jumped into the lake—just for fun, or from having been thrown in by some one else—for a joke. This is not nearly so pleasant as participating in a free lunch scene, for instance, where real eats are furnished the company and they manage to get a pretty good meal before the "free for all" in which they are entirely covered with jam or pie or Welsh rabbit or some similarly decorative food begins.

At that, since it is all in the day's work, most of the comedy actors find life quite endurable, and most of them stay in this sort of pictures because they prefer it to any other sort. Mr. Beery says that he will



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Everything Ready for the Start. Mr. Hopper is About to Give the Signal

do anything he is cast to do, and not mind it in the least, if it is only not jumping off a roof. Mr. Redway says he will do anything but ride a horse or be ducked. His aversion to being ducked is due to some nervous affliction which he calls "Tick-de-la-rue." Leo White, the juvenile lead, consents to doing anything assigned to him except the part of an old man. He positively draws the line at that. In view of his youth I will be merciful and not tell the reason why. Bobbie Bolder, an exceedingly rotund man, is also exceedingly accommodating, with a preference for the role of banker or some sort of financier with a wad of money.

Ruth Hennesy, the star of the comedy company, likes to be accommodating, but on the other hand, she dislikes getting all mussed up. Further, she is so tiny and so altogether adorable that everyone, including Mr. Hopper, dislikes seeing her mussed up, or looking like anything but the winsome and coquettish young girl she is. Of all of the roles hers is probably the pleasantest. As a rule she simply has to look natural and not get hit.

When everything is over Producer Hopper says, "That is all for this time," and immediately begins thinking about the next comedy. At his signal, "Strike"! the property man ushers in a regular street cleaning brigade armed with shovels, to prepare the way for another set.

Those who not only know Mr. Hopper, but know the game as well, say that there never was and never will be another producer like him. His rules and regulations, his whole manner and method of producing are entirely original. And that's what the public seems to think of his results, too.