

The village of Glendale is not blessed with an agreeable climate. The midwinter months are almost as offensive as those in summer, such so that a fairly large proportion of its inhabitants desert the village for Florida, Arizona and other points, principally south. The same people desert northward in summer but at that time they do not leave behind an envious minority. You do not have the feeling of being left behind when your own holiday is only a week or two in the future. In a few days your own face will be as tanned as theirs. In winter you are being left in a different climate, while in summer the change is, comparatively, one of environment only.

The winter exodus usually occurs shortly after the Christmas holidays and is the more conspicuous for being so timed. The family reunions, and the round of parties are over for those of us who cannot get away as well as for those who stayed home until the celebrations were over and no longer. If it were not for a village activity which is becoming traditional we should consider ourselves unfortunate victims of a world out of adjustment. As it is, we shout after our departing friends, "Too bad you are going to miss Stunt Night".

Last year it was the Seventh Annual Stunt Night. Some of us are beginning to be a little apologetic about the name "Stunt Night". It sounds abrupt and perlor-tricky. But the majestic Seventh Annual cancels the triviality of the rest of the title. For the attainment of the seventh anniversary for an activity of this kind is impressive, and as the ordinal numeral increases even more significance can be expected. Many communities attempt the production of something which they probably called the "Follies", I am just as suspicious of their "Follies" as they are of our "Stunt Night". I should feel a little better about it if they could say Seventh Annual, but even so I should prefer our name. It not only

recalls the informal origin but indicates that there is still a lack of ostentation in our production in spite of its increasing scope and form.

The lure of the footlights is strong among us all. The opportunities for gratification are quite possible for those still in school or college, but the urge continues and, not improbably, is at its strongest later on in life. The Little Theatres and Dramatic Clubs offer a few boards for some of us to tread, but the opportunity is not a general one and the high purpose of many of these organizations frighten away those of little or no experience. A Church entertainment or sociable might allow this one to speak a piece or that one to perform on the piano. This is all very laudable and, perhaps, satisfying but the glamour of real footlights and a big audience is usually lacking. This is no outlet for the mother of three school children who has always wanted and still wants to be a member of a pony chorus, or for the father who wants to forget the Christmas bills and the approaching income tax day by doing a turn in blackface.

A dozen or so of the residents of the village felt just this way in January 1933. Christmas had come and gone; the winter vacationists had packed their trunks with linen suits and wash dresses and had fled the disgusting weather. Something had to be done to help pass the time until the appearance of spring with its house cleaning, its gardening and Community Chest Drive. The nasty climate indicated an indoor sport of some kind. It must not involve a great outlay of money but it should be heartening and gay, in acknowledgement of the depression and at the same time in defiance of it. The stagnant bridge games and the occasional trips to town to a movie were not muscular enough for this healthy group.

It is entirely probable that nothing would have developed if this desire for diversion had been the only propelling force. It happened that the President and several officers of the Parent-Teachers Association were among

the members of the Boredom Group. It also happened that the P. T. A. was in need of money. One card party had already been given, rummage sales were not highly productive of either rummage or cash during those years, and of course neither of these activities keyed-in with the moderately jazzy mood of the officers. Both might be exhausting enough but neither was valuable for weight reducing. It was decided that a few of these wives and mothers would, after a nice, grueling series of tap dancing lessons, exhibit their prowess before a large audience cheerfully paying admission to support the P. T. A. and to admire the tapping Metrons. The husbands, if they wanted to, could work up a double quartet or maybe somebody could do card tricks, or something. Anything to hold the audience while the metrons were catching their breaths and changing their costumes. There was plenty of time for that. The important thing was to arrange for tap dancing instruction. Four weeks was enough for rehearsing, it was thought.

For a couple of these weeks nothing much was done except dancing and nursing of lame legs. The exercise was proving enjoyable, poplar and absorbing. The tap dancing was expanded to include a routine or two of regular chorus kicking. The husbands meanwhile had done nothing whatever in preparation for the acts which were to interlard the dancing numbers. It was also realized that with the production only a few days off, something should be done about such trifles as an auditorium, orchestra, tickets, posters and other publicity. There was no general meeting with committee appointments and discussion of policy. A few of the original group distributed among themselves these unfamiliar duties. The school plant itself did not at that time include an auditorium but there was a rickety, knock-down platform and some detachable curtain equipment. This could be set up in the gymnasium leaving room for, perhaps, a hundred spectators. It was not likely that more than one hundred spectators would appear and to make sure that we would not have to play to empty seats, it was decided to set the admission price very reasonably at fifty cents for adults and a quarter for children. A few posters

were hurriedly drafted and posted about the village.

The question of an orchestra brought up the whole subject of the song and dance part of the program. The sluggish husbands had not organized the double quartet and there was hardly time for training a singing chorus. Nor was there room on the stage for such. A few citizens were capable of singing solo, and, when approached, were quite willing to take part. They, however, wanted to be told what to sing and what to wear. Also, it appeared there were a number of others who were eager to have a place in the performance. These folks could sing a little and again, wanted to be told what to sing and what to wear. The easiest way out of this problem seemed to be a minstrel show, with the men dressed in overalls and the women in calico with bandanas on their heads. Moreover, they could march into the auditorium singing, and could seat themselves on the floor of the auditorium immediately in front of the stage. They would thus conceal the too rough apron of the stage, and would solve the problem of entrances and exits by remaining "on" throughout each act. An interlocutor would be useful as an announcer and master of ceremonies. End men could tell jokes and the solo singers, seated with the others, would merely rise and sing when so directed by the interlocutor. A full orchestra would not be needed as the pianist engaged by the dancers would do her part and the school musical director, with his skill and versatility could do the rest. Meanwhile, the tiny stage would be reserved and always ready for the dance numbers and the skits.

"Skits! The show only a week off and now somebody says we must have skits. Of course, you have to include skits. Well, what is a skit anyway? Oh, you know, black-outs and burlesque recitations and playlets. Oh, yes, of course. Well, I guess I can work up something, and you and some other fellow might do that one about the telephone."

The present writer was put to work, adapting and expanding jokes into

black-outs and devising parodies of poems for recital. They seemed to work out well enough, but the most successful skit was a burlesque of a schoolroom episode in a progressive school. This was entirely without script. The parents were cast as pupils; one of the teachers was cast as herself. They were told to get together and be funny. The first attempt was distressing but after going over it a few times each actor had decided what he was going to say and when he was going to perpetrate his own little bit of progressive misbehavior.

By the time of the performance the cast numbered nearly fifty gathered from every corner of the village. There were no prerequisites of experience or social standing. The performer merely had to possess the willingness to take part and a dollar or so to pay for his costume. The dancing choruses also assumed the cost of their instruction. It was desirable that each participant be a member of the Parent-Teacher Association, and essential that he be an adult.

The first stunt night was a success. The auditorium was filled to nearly twice its capacity and the treasury benefitted to the extent of twice its expectation. The dancing matrons lost pounds and inches. Everyone enjoyed the debonaire manner of its conception, its preparation and its presentation. Spring was almost here, the winter vacationists were trickling back and the village returned to its normal life.

A year later the same facts and fancies which brought about the first stunt night were again in force. It was again desirable to become slimmer than you were, to feed the gaping maw of the P. T. A. treasury and to vivify that dreadful midwinter sluggishness. The same group of people known by now as the Stunt Night Committee again took charge. This time there was a little preliminary work by one or two of the enthusiasts before Christmas although most of us refused to give it the slightest attention until after the New Year. We considered that the spontaneity of its predecessor was its best quality, and that if this were

lost and the preparation became too irksome, no more stunt nights would appear. However, it was realized that this time it would be necessary to have some conception of the entire program from the beginning of rehearsals. We couldn't repeat the too easy minstrel idea. It was also clear that the makeshift school auditorium was both impractical and dangerous for such crowds on the stage and in the audience. Arrangements were made to borrow the premises of the Club where the dramatic performances were held. There were early efforts to organize a men's double quartette. Neither early nor late efforts were successful in this respect but there was a suitable singing chorus, largely recruited from the Church choirs of the village. There was also, for the first time, original music, composed by the school musical director, and an orchestra of a few instruments in addition to the piano. Another attempt of those in charge was to proportion equally the three elements,--dancing, singing, and specialities. A speciality was anything which, presumably, did not require professional instruction or direction. It might be a solo or duet or a rather populous skit. These were usually entrusted to individuals and were not assembled until one week before the production. Some of these specialities, when they were finally visible, were a surprise not only to the committee but also to their own participants.

Another quality of the second Stunt Night might be called a parochial one. It was predominately of village interest. The scenes(yes, we had scenery) were "A Village Street", "The Village School", and "The Village Drug Store". The jokes were local; the references intimate and slightly disrespectful.

Still another innovation and one that has become traditional was the "pretty" number. This time it was a waltz with half-a-dozen couples, beautifully and rather expensively dressed dancing together very courteously and becomingly.

The second Annual Stunt Night played two nights to a total audience of about five hundred. The programme lists seventy-five different names, representing

a fairly complete cross section of the village population. Most people thought the ultimate had been obtained and, that if another stunt night were attempted it would be a disaster and an anticlimax.

It looked for a while as if the third Annual Stunt Night was going to contain a men's double quartette, but when the date of the performance came, they did not appear. However, ninety three names were listed on its program. It played three nights to an audience of about seven hundred and fifty, and approximately two hundred pounds was the aggregate loss in weight. Three citizens were now providing original music. The debutants and the young bloods were beginning to take part, but the old timers still assumed responsibility and were still prominent in the list of performers.

It was assumed, again, that the interest was principally a local one. The three acts were called, "Glendale,--Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow". The first of these offered opportunities to recall some of the traditional village characters, episodes and costumes. The second was built around the irresistibly funny circumstance that the village was undergoing the installation of a new sewer system. The third gave an opportunity for flights of fancy. It also contained most of the irrelevant and miscellaneous numbers. This division into acts was not then, or has it ever been a rigid one. The attempts for unity and coherence have been approximations only. A place could be found for almost anything. The show was put together in one week's time and was again an assembly of separately rehearsed units.

By this time, other features of the performance had become more or less traditional. The term "Pink Elephants" is used to describe one of these: "The pigs" denotes another. There is no hint in these terms that there is any physical likeness between the animals named and the esteemed citizens so designated. The "Pink Elephants" are three charming housewives who first appeared together, tap-dancing to the tune of that name. They have proved themselves to be the

most intrepid tap artists in the village, and have for years come forth with another routine more intricate than the last. They have been welcomed by the successive audiences, made up, in part by the ten sturdy children of these three. "The Pigs" is also a trio, so called because of their rendition of "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf" with great gusto, appropriately attired as the three little pigs. One of these was at that time the Mayor of the village and his companions were distinguished business men. They have continued to appear together in one guise or another, and they can always be counted on for a successful bit of comedy of their own preparation.

The Fourth Annual is notable in that its presentation was on the new stage in the school building. The fine new gymnasium and auditorium was not designed primarily as a home for stunt night, but it accommodates very nicely the (by now) vast scale of these productions. The Fourth was of the review type with no attempt at locale or coherence, but with some emphasis on St. Valentine as its first performance was on his day. The numbers were merely distributed among the two acts according to type: i. e., dance, comedy, song. The fact that interest in the event was spreading beyond the limits of the village was recognized. Only two items of the programme were of strictly local significance,--the one a burlesque of the sewing society of one of the Churches; another a respody honoring the new village garbage truck. The programme contained an even hundred names.

It looked for a while as if there were not to be a Fifth Annual Stunt Night. The preparation was more elaborate although no less enthusiastic than before. Original music was contributed by six amateurs and rehearsals were proceeding nicely. Two weeks before the performance the Ohio Valley suffered the worst Flood in history. Glendale, itself, was far from the actual flood waters, but most of its citizens were involved in the emergency work occasioned by the disaster. All concern for stunt night was forgotten for a few days until it was decided to go

on with the production and to divert the proceeds to the American Red Cross. A few replacements were made to fill the places of those whose duties in relief work would probably continue. Rehearsals were held by candle light. The performances took place on the scheduled dates attended by many for whom this was the first entertainment in many days. All theatres were still closed and special permission was obtained for the use of the electric current. The Parent Teachers Association turned over to the Red Cross the proceeds of about \$350.00. The stunt night originally designed to relieve the boredom of a few was now performing a great service, supplying a diversion to its cast and audiences and contributing in no small manner to the relief of the unfortunate.

The success of this emergency benefit encouraged the committee to repeat the performance a week later for the deflated P. T. A. treasury. The third presentation drew a new audience of several hundred. The Fifth Annual was a worthy successor of its ancestors. By this time some sort of prosperity had returned and tropical cruises were reaching their peak of popularity. It was decided to use the cruise idea as the framework rather than the theme of the new show. A thin tie-up with village life was retained in that the affair was called the cruise of the Glendalia, the passengers were supposed to be villagers exclusively. Imposing scenery of a ship's deck was used for two acts while the third was a representation of a tropical island. For the first time a thread of a story was introduced, loosely tying together the dances and songs. Hero, heroine, villain, conflict, climax and happy ending were all included casual and unrelated specialties were not excluded. A great deal of thought and time was expended on the costumes. There was a consistent color scheme, and careful design and execution. A double quartet of sailors would have been ideal but, somehow, recruits could not be found.

The theme of the Sixth was Mexican. Not a few village residents had journeyed to Mexico for their wanted escape. The Stunt Night show followed them there and,

incidentally, borrowed sarapes and regalia from those who had brought back trophies from these regions on previous trips. The story was an adaptation of a popular play of a score of years ago. The costumes again were outstanding with a riot of bold colors made possible by this locale. The orchestra had expanded in skill and personnel; the scenery and lighting effects were sumptuous and the audiences large and enthusiastic. It was still an amateur show, a cooperative effort, the only professional assistance being that of the dance instructor and her pianist. The best that could be done about the double quartette was a quartette - three men and one woman disguised as a cowboy tenor.

There was some hesitation about attempting a seventh. The zenith of the sixth, it was felt, could not be even approached. A few were beginning to feel that its original purpose had been lost; that its elaboration and extension had too much increased the responsibility and trouble of those in charge. But it was now almost a habit, a midwinter sport indulged in by a good portion of the village. The seventh was again a musical play of three acts, more or less coherent but still principally a singing and dancing show. The original group seemed to continue as moving spirits, although by now many of their children had left public school for boarding school and college. A new dance instructor brought in a new blood and again records were broken for attendance and receipts. The double quartette, I need hardly say, was no where to be found.

This sequence of triumphs has not been effected by an excess or even a competency of talent among the performers, or by an excellence of material. To the community flavor of the enterprise belongs most of the credit. There is none of the exclusiveness found in similar efforts put forward by private clubs. Even the Churches have abandoned their own performances and are content

to supply personnel and ideas for inclusion in Stunt Night. A male parent and his child's teacher are often teamed together in a vigorous dance, and the name of the "lady of the house" follows that of her maid on the programme. This fraternizing not only has laudable social implications but also makes for miscellaneous and ample audiences.

Another point that has been mentioned before but will stand repeating is the gusto and spirit of the performances. This is, in part, due to the fact that the preparation is a whirlwind, concentrated effort, absorbing and fatiguing while it lasts but a distinct deviation from normal and quickly concluded. There is not time for the proceedings to become irksome. Another factor is the complete absence of intervals between numbers. This timing is insisted upon by the Production Manager, and is no simple accomplishment with a cast of eighty or more. The applause following one episode begins to fade and the next is underway. The second and third to follow are in the wings. Those who have already been "on" and are to make a later appearance are hustled off to the dressing rooms. If scenery changes are necessary, they are accomplished speedily and quietly. Cues are "snapped up". The curtain is always fast and finales brisk.

A good deal of credit must be given to a few of the enthusiasts. They are for the most part members of the original group. They have carried on each year, benefitting from their own mistakes, assuming responsibility and performing devoted and valuable services. Each has developed a specialty, each contributes time and money. The above mentioned Production Manager is the most important of these. His technical experience and generous donation of time and equipment is invaluable. The scenery is constructed by him, the lighting effects are under his charge. But most important is his service in making an almost professional show from the

miscellaneous material thrown at his feet one week before the performance.

The Eight Annual Stunt Night is just around the corner. Perhaps it will be like Mr. Hoover's prosperity and will not appear exactly on schedule. There are opinions that its scope has increased to such an extent that it might be better to make Stunt Night a bi-annual affair. No one wants to present a show definitely inferior to the last. If it does proceed, the village will find that, already a great deal of spade work has been done. There is also, unbelievably, a well rehearsed double quartette ready to take an important part in the Eight Annual Stunt Night.