

Hot Times Behind the Scenes

The Crucial Moment Comes When Manager Sammis Appears with 86 Mysterious Envelopes.

THOSE who have seen "The Girl Behind the Counter" on a Tuesday evening at the Herald Square Theatre may or may not have noticed any extra enthusiasm among the performers on the stage as the curtain goes up on the second act, but it's there just the same. While the opening chorus is singing the orthodox we're-here-because-we're-here - because - we're - here-because-we're deeply interested in something or other, presumably broiled lobster, every single girl from Verna to Stella to the one who has the nerve, mind you, to call herself Jane, knows full well that Manager Sammis has fetched from the box office eighty-six mysterious envelopes and has set up a little table in the wings, just outside of Lew Fields's dressing room, and has announced that he is ready to meet all comers from Connie Ediss, the heavyweight champion of the world of song, to little May Naudain, who gets thrown violently into the air whenever she tries to tip the scale. Somewhere among those eighty-six envelopes is the salary of everybody in the show—that of Lew Fields, even, which is popularly supposed to be rolled to him in a barrel, actually fits into one of those momentous pieces of stationery.

As the great bells in the various church towers solemnly toll the hour of ten minutes past 10, Manager Sammis takes his place behind his improvised treasury, becomes for the nonce The Man Behind the Counter, and with the dignified diction befitting the solemn occasion, bawls out: "Come on, girls!"

"Original Pony Ballet."

But the greater part of the company is delayed on the stage by glow worms. In other words, they have to buzz gracefully while May Naudain gives her personal opinion, set to music, of the aforementioned bright bugs. Hence they envy the pony ballet, who aren't working just then, but are walking about airily in the wings with one eye fixed on Manager Sammis and the other likewise.

As soon as he cries "Come on, girls!" one of the six ponies, or balletesses, or ballettes, or whatever they call themselves, rushes over to the treasury with a full power of attorney for the bunch, affixes her signature and the words "Original Pony Ballet" to a document by the side of Mr. Sammis, grabs one bulging envelope, and, her fingers twitching with the curse of Mammon, goes away from there. For the pony ballet is a company within a company, incorporated under the laws of Piccadilly or the Strand, or Drury Lane, or some equally important part of the British Empire, and it is paid each Tuesday as an individual, although it is composed of six girls. Miss Elizabeth Hawman, who is the fourth one from the right—or is it the second one from the left?—usually dismembers the pay envelope Tuesdays and serves it up piecemeal in the dressing room. Anyhow, she did last Tuesday, saying "Thank you!" in French with a charming London accent.

Whereupon it was Connie Ediss's turn to take a fall out of the treasury, which she did. And then, with a fine swishing of skirts, came Louise Dresser. Louise, as all who have seen the show are aware, wears a priceless cloth-of-gold confection by Worth, Paris, freely adapted and reconstructed for the American stage by the Décolleté Company, Unlimited, of New York and the Garden of Eden, and it is so very, very priceless that Louise can't swish about in it behind the scenes in the careless way affected by the little

girls who seldom get knee deep in skirts. So, when she sweeps up majestically to the treasury to pocket her weekly Yellow Peril she has a colored lady's maid swish out behind her, to hold the train of cloth of gold far from the madding crowd of microbes and dust particles and unprincipled whatnots which, were it not thus, would simply love to board the said train for a free ride.

Having looked contemptuously at her salary, just as if it were a mere speck on the horizon, Louise veers suddenly, so suddenly that the colored engineer at the throttle of the train is almost ditched, and returns to the roundhouse.

An Onset of Indians

Then May Naudain ends up her disquisition on glow worms as near to the keynote as she can get on such an agitating day as Tuesday, and the chorus, with a shout as of Comanches on the warpath, only higher, dashes headlong at the treasury, almost overturning it and Manager Sammis and whatever else happens to be in the vicinity. In vain the Treasurer calls for near order and threatens everything from a one-dollar fine to the sack direct if the rough house does not stop at once. All he achieves is an Indian-file formation of the ex-glow worms, but that doesn't do much good, for the ones in the rear of the line, overcome by greed, push the front of the line violently, causing it to topple over into the treasury and muss things. But eventually the manager gets really serious, so the girls say "Shush!" to each other and come up one by one like well-behaved children to sign the great document and get their eighteen per, or somewhat more if they are statuesque and have been intrusted with vitally important lines in the show, such as "Oh!" and "I'll tell you."

Elsa Reinhardt, for instance. She is so statuesque that whatever she walks on immediately forgets its regular job and resolves itself, for the time being, into Elsa's pedestal. So she gets forty per, or says she does. Yet, statuesqueness or no statuesqueness, Elsa is not allowed to take liberties, as she learned to her sorrow last Tuesday, when she glided up to the treasury and found within her envelope \$1 less than her salary.

"Oh, Mr. Sammis," she said petulantly, "why have I been fined a dollar?"

"Because last Friday, instead of being on the stage, you slipped away to drink a glass of lemonade."

"But I was simply fainting from thirst, Mr. Sammis."

"Can't help it."

At this juncture Lew Fields, who has been changing from a glorious red sult by Worth, Paris, into a waiter's costume by Moe Levy, Manhattan and Brooklyn, emerges from his dressing room. Elsa immediately tells her grievance to him.

"I can give you girls salary, but not sympathy," says the comedian, escaping hastily in the direction of the stage.

So Elsa Reinhardt, itinerant statue, resigns herself to the inevitable.

As she flounces away toward the dressing room, a demure little Pierrette is mean enough to ask: "Elsa, won't you have another lemonade?"

Each girl fined was, of course, entirely innocent, but Manager Sammis, for all his facetiousness, is shockingly hard-hearted, so every delinquent climbs upstairs to the dressing room \$1 minus, making way for another incidental divertissement, namely, Marion Whitney, statuesque lady, snowy neck, and piles of hair, who insists that Mr. Fields promised her a raise of \$10 for

shapeliness while declaiming the line, "Yes, yes." But Mr. Sammis has absolutely no record of the promise in question, so the incident is closed with a bang.

George Beban, the funny Frenchman, then elbows his way up to the treasury and tears open his envelope with Gallic frenzy.

"Sammis," he sputters, "I wish you wouldn't pay me my salary in one-hundred-dollar bills. Eet ees so difficult to make change. I cannot pay my creditors. I cannot eat. Do not do it! Oh, sacré bleu! Zis foolishness! Stop eet, stop eet!"

Light talk of this kind about one-hundred-dollar bills so unnerves the reporter from the Sunday TIMES, who once dreamt of one and woke up half mad, that he forgets to ensnare local color for fully five minutes, during which all sorts of delightfully racy things probably happened, including whatever the remark was that made Lotta Faust murmur "Oh, indeed!" so haughtily as she came up to get her money. But she isn't haughty at all with the Treasurer. In fact, one almost expects her to sing:

"Sammis, oh, oh, oh, Sammis!"

as she gracefully picks out her envelope; but Lotta is not such a brazen punster, not she. She wears, by the way, a spangled affair, which follows her very closely wherever it catches her, and makes her look like the Mary Garden scene from Lotta Faust, being especially simple about the neck and back.

Prize Package of the Evening.

May Naudain makes no fuss about getting her envelope; just trips in, turns around, and trips right out again, as pretty as you please. But when Topsy Slegrist, alias Susie Scragga, gets hers, she looks so happy that Charles Fields, the official buffer between Lew Fields and the cold, cold world, is moved to exclaim, mournfully:

"Oh, give me a present, Topsy."

"Sure," she says, kissing him, and that incident is closed, too.

Then comes a real, bona fide rumpus.

"I won't pay for that pair of shoes!" declares a young person in the garb of a devilish man-about-town, whose real name is Helen.

"Why not?" inquires the suave Sammis.

"Because they weren't good shoes, so there!"

"Oh, yes, they were."

"No they weren't!" with a stamp of the foot.

"Oh, yes, they were."

"Well, I won't pay for them. I won't, I won't, I won't!"

"Ah, indeed. Well, why don't you speak to Mr. Lee Shubert about it?" says the cruel Mr. Sammis.

The young-man-about-town scuttles upstairs in a perfect fury of tears to tell her woes to the other young-men-about-town, who are hastily metamorphosing themselves into cherry girls.

And thus it goes on through alternate snatches of tragedy and comedy, just as everything in life does, heigho, until there is only one envelope left on the table; a bulky envelope, an imposing envelope, a portentous envelope, bearing on the outside this inscription:

"Mr. Fields!"

But remembering the effect on his heart when Mr. Beban talked one hundred-dollar bills, the reporter decides to take no more risks, so he makes an obeisance to all present and vanishes without waiting to see Mr. Fields unseal the prize package of the evening.