

WHY 'YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU'

WHEN the ubiquitous George S. Kaufman took train for Hollywood last Spring to keep a date with Moss Hart, he was planning to write a play with that gentleman which was not in the least like the somewhat fantastic harlequinade which was unveiled last Monday at the Booth under the title of "You Can't Take It With You." He had his mind set on collaborating on the dramatization of something or other called "Washington Jitters," a then unpublished novel by Dalton Trumbo.

Mr. Hart had the galley proofs of this story submitted to him by the author's agent as a possible basis for a play, had liked it and had obtained Mr. Kaufman's consent to work on it with him. The story, which was published during the Summer, was a satire on Washington politics and the dramatization was to be done in broad strokes somewhat in the manner of the immortal "Of Thee I Sing."

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Mr. Hart met Mr. Kaufman at the station, and when the latter had been installed at his hotel he drove him out to the Hollywood estate which he (Hart) had rented for the Summer. It was and is the home of Frances Marion, one of the ace script writers, who was temporarily sojourning in England. It is a bit on the spectacular side and Mr. Kaufman was properly awed by the sight of the gardeners at work and the seven dogs which came bounding out to greet their new master. The dogs, it may be recorded parenthetically, went with the lease.

At dinner they discussed "Washington Jitters." Somehow or other they were not as enthusiastic about it as they had been shortly before.

"What about your other idea?" inquired Mr. Kaufman.

"You mean the one about the mad family?" countered Mr. Hart.

Mr. Kaufman nodded and Mr. Hart beamed. He had always had a fondness for that idea, which he had discussed with his collaborator last Winter here in New York. It was then only the merest germ, simply the notion of building a comedy around a group of utterly mad but lovable people, each of whom did the thing nearest to his or her heart's desire and the hell with what other folks thought.

Before dinner was over "Washington Jitters" had slipped into the discard and the authors were letting their fancies run riot in the creation of their characters. In this particular play the characters came first. The actual plot was not worked out until all the members of the Sycamore household had taken life in the minds of their creators, until all the last details of their eccentricities and peculiar hobbies had been decided upon.

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This took about three days, and by the end of the week the two were ready to begin work. They agreed upon a schedule and kept pretty close to it—ten days for each act. So definitely were the characters established before the actual writing was begun that the casting was under way the night before the first piece of paper was slipped into

Mr. Hart's typewriter. Sam Harris, their producer, was somewhat startled to receive this night letter the next morning:

DEAR SAM WE START WORK ON NEW PLAY TOMORROW MORNING STOP CAN YOU TIE UP AM ONCE JOSEPHINE HULL GEORGE TOBIAS FRANK CONLAN OSCAR POLK STOP WE ARE ENGAGING HENRY TRAVERS HERE STOP MOSS AND GEORGE.

Before noon contact had been made with all of these actors and tentative arrangements had been made with them to accept no other engagements until the play was finished.

"Nothing like this ever happened to me before," remarked Mr. Harris. "Engaging a cast before a play is written is something new."

At 4 o'clock that afternoon another wire arrived.

DEAR SAM PLAY UNDER WAY STOP PLEASE BOOK PHILADELPHIA TWO WEEKS BEGINNING MONDAY NOVEMBER NINTH STOP WOULD LIKE INTIMATE THEATRE NEW YORK STOP TRY AND GET BOOTH FOR THANKSGIVING WEEK.

All of these things were attended to before Mr. Harris went home to dinner that night, and out in the West the authors went right on

with their work according to schedule.

Finally, feeling a bit whimsical one night, the authors agreed between themselves that the perfect title would be "Grandpa's Other Snake." The central figure in the play is an elderly philosopher who collects snakes as a hobby, and the suggested title was thought to fit in with the mad mood of the play. They were a little uncertain, though, and wired the title to Mrs. Kaufman for an opinion. Back came a wire from that lady who definitely was not amused.

And thus it came to pass that "You Can't Take It With You" was selected as a tentative title. The authors didn't like it very well at first, but Sam Harris did. Finally, as they lived with it and talked about it, it seemed to grow on them and now they think it is a sort of imperative and inevitable name for the play.