



In Hollywood You Can Always Get an Ostrich to Send to a Friend's House as a Birthday Greeting

By ALVA JOHNSTON

ILLUSTRATED BY GEORGE SHANKS

MORE than ten years ago Harpo Marx strolled into Tiffany's. A Tiffany detective in a cut-away strolled after him. Harpo had left his champagne-colored wig at the theater and was incognito, but his twitching fingers and guilty eyes attracted attention. Any jury would find him guilty of anything on the testimony of his eyes alone.

"Diamonds," Harpo told a salesman. He waved away gems worth a few hundred dollars, but began to get interested in \$10,000 and \$20,000 ones. As each costly stone was produced, his eyes glittered with grand larceny and his fingers plucked at imaginary harp strings. Tiffany's whole Scotland Yard gathered round.

Harpo appeared frightened at all these elegantly dressed flatfeet. Saying that none of the diamonds came up to his expectations, he started to leave. Halfway to the door he took a paper bag out of his pocket. It had a hole in it. Diamonds, rubies, emeralds and pearls rattled all over the floor. A half score of Tiffany men took one step toward Harpo and then stopped short. At twenty paces their educated eyes appraised the jewels as Woolworth's. The Tiffany men were not amused. They disregarded the matter unanimously.

Nobody even helped Harpo pick up his treasure. The joke was on him. He made a feeble attempt to redeem himself, as he left the store, by handing the bag of gems to the doorman and walking swiftly away.

This classifies Harpo as a Type IV practical joker. Type IV is a deflator of pomposity. The others are practical jokers for fun, practical jokers for a purpose, and practical jokers for self-defense. Harpo was not hunting publicity. The affair did not get into the papers. The comedian had felt that his democracy was challenged by that imposing palace full of tiaras and lavalieres. His gesture was intended to convey that, in his opinion, Tiffany's would show better taste if they sold their jewels from a pushcart.

A Case of the Last Laugh

OTTO SOGLOW, who has spent most of his life humiliating kings, is a pure specimen of Type IV. These crusaders accomplish little. Harpo's visit did not cause Tiffany's to relax. On the contrary, Tiffany's imparted a little of its grandeur to Harpo. Ten years later the comedian was furnishing a house. Instead of going to a pushcart for his silver, he went to Tiffany's. Although he had not been in the place for more than a decade, he had hardly entered when two Tiffany's headquarters men in cutaways joined him.

"No jokes, Mr. Marx," said one of them.

The deep social motive of the Type IV practical joker is to improve the human race by making everybody resemble him. Like all reformers, he means well. The danger is, however, that he will grow too

fond of jokes for their own sake. In the end he is likely to take as much pleasure in deflating a bus boy as an ambassador. Type IV seldom comes to a good end. The classic example is William Sulzer, former governor of New York. He was, in his day, the most promising demagogue in the United States and was considered by many of his friends to be well on his way to the White House. His instinct for deflating pomposity deteriorated, and he began to deflate dignity. His favorite device was that of slipping a chair out from under a man about to sit down. He did this one day to the most dignified of the Albany correspondents. About three months later Governor Sulzer had the governor's chair slipped out from under him by impeachment proceedings. Inside history records that the dignified Albany correspondent was an important factor in playing this little return joke on the governor.

According to foreigners, America leads the world by a wide margin in practical jokes of all types. Hollywood eclipses all other communities in this field. Nothing astonished Charles Laughton so much on his visits to Hollywood as the physical humor. Like other ignorant foreigners, he had no appreciation of this branch of our culture. He passed the word around that if, at any Hollywood party, he were so much as thrown into the swimming pool with his clothes on, he would leave without saying good night to the host.

The hard-working frontier theory has been called on to account for America's world leadership in practical jokes. During three hundred years of settlement, men have moved into new country ahead of women. Under these conditions, the boys have, according to the theory, a tendency to get rough in their amusements. The bodily-harm school of humor becomes predominant.

The gold rush of '49 was the biggest stag party in history, and its effects are still apparent on the Western sense of humor. The Type IV practical jokers of that time deflated the pomposity of a tenderfoot by shooting at his toes to make him dance, or by hanging him enough to discipline him without killing him. The tradition survives, although today a smaller proportion of the victims wind up as surgical cases.

Southern California may be essentially Eastern and Middle Western, but the Far West sense of humor was smuggled into the place and grafted on Hollywood. There are many reasons for its high development in Hollywood. In the first place, there is plenty of pomposity to be deflated. In the second, thousands of picture people earn a living by thinking up gags for the films, and are usually ready to make a contribution to social life by thinking up gags for private use. Buster Keaton, for example, gave away more slapstick than he sold to audiences. He was the inventor of the electrically controlled beach dressing room whose walls and roof fell away at the touch of a button, leaving the occupant in the public eye. After a hard day of studio comedy, he would oblige friends in the evening by waiting on table at private functions, where he was in request because of his adroitness in spilling soup on the guests and because of his knack of dropping a roast turkey, falling on it and riding it across the floor like a surfboard. Until his face was too well known, Keaton was in great demand to be beaten up or killed as the

climax to a social gathering. His usefulness was based on his ability to take any blow or fall without being hurt. Like his father, Buster was a knockout comedian from babyhood. Once, in a New Haven theater, the elder Keaton, annoyed at the jeers of Yale men in the audience, picked up Buster, then twelve years old, and hurled him over the footlights at his critics, hitting three of them and putting one in the hospital.

A third reason for the pre-eminence of Hollywood is that there is always money on hand to finance any expensive and elaborate practical joke. Another reason is the abundance of members of the animal kingdom available for purposes of humor; you can always get an ostrich or a python to send to a friend's house as a birthday greeting; you can always dress up an actor as a maharajah and introduce him around among the celebrity hunters.

The Argument-Settling Joke

THE practical joke with a purpose belongs to another category. An example of this in the high Hollywood style was the pageant which was staged to compel Victor Levy, a wealthy Hollywood man, to open his wine cellar more freely during Prohibition. Levy, a Belgian by birth, was a good fellow, but was considered to be sparing of his finest vintages. During the postwar tour of the King of the Belgians, Levy received a letter one day on the stationery of the Belgian Consulate at Los Angeles. The letter notified him that he, being Belgian born, had been selected to entertain the king during his stay in Hollywood. Levy accepted without hesitation. He did entertain royally a tall Swedish actor made up to resemble King Albert.

"Pardon me, but I am trying to improve my English," said the actor when he was addressed in French. Levy's pals drank the king's health in magnums of Levy's best. Levy did not learn the facts until the authentic Belgian monarch visited Hollywood three days later.

The practical joke with a purpose was used successfully by the Marx brothers when they were appearing on Broadway in *Animal Crackers*. The

Marxes, after their fashion, had added to their lines and gags until they had almost crowded the music out of the musical comedy. The music writers protested. Sam Harris, the producer, and George S. Kaufman agreed with the song writers that the Marxes should be required to cut out some of their comedy and let a little melody filter back into the show. The Marx brothers were summoned to the office one night at eight o'clock. There they found Harris, Kaufman and the music writers looking grim. The Marxes instantly divined the plot. Before a word was spoken, Zeppo leaped on Sam Harris. Groucho, Chico and Harpo followed. They stripped Harris to the skin, taking off shoes and all. Kaufman and the others fled. Nobody had a chance to mention the subject of the meeting. Nobody brought it up later.

The practical joke with a purpose was raised to scientific importance by Harry Houdini, Harry Van Der Weyden, Fulton Oursler and other members of the Society of American Magicians during their controversy with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The British writer had come over to America to prove that the world was densely populated with pixies, elves, fairies, brownies and other little people. Though invisible to the naked eye, they could be photographed with the help of spiritualists, according to Sir Arthur, who had the photographs to prove it. There was a courteous battle of words between him and the magicians. The creator of Sherlock Holmes became very friendly with them. One day they dropped in on him casually at the Hotel McAlpin and resumed the controversy.

Doyle got a little dignified when he was laughingly accused of being the victim of quacks. He denied

that it was possible to fool him. The magicians asserted that anybody could fake the fairy pictures. Doyle challenged them to try it. The magicians accepted. Sir Arthur would not allow them to use their camera. To make the conditions scientific, he went downstairs and bought a camera and plates. The magicians let Doyle take the pictures himself and develop them himself. Every picture swarmed with little supernatural people. The joke partly failed of its purpose because Doyle suspected that the magicians knew of

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Type IV is a Deflator of Pomposity



A Half Score of Tiffany Men Took One Step Toward Harpo, Then Stopped Short. Their Educated Eyes Appraised the Jewels as Woolworth's

WHAT LARKS!

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the existence of the tiny phantoms, but were not men enough to admit it. What had happened was that the magicians had photographed a multitude of little dummies. They had the undeveloped plates rewrapped so that they appeared to be in the original package. Then they had made a fellow conspirator of the clerk in the photographic department of the McAlpin drugstore. Sir Arthur had become so heated by the argument that he rushed downstairs and bought the first camera and plates that were offered him.

The purposeful joke is widely used by Hollywood directors to break the monotony and keep their actors relaxed. When Max Baer reported at Hollywood to make The Prizefighter and the Lady, he was stiff and ill at ease. W. S. Van Dyke, the director, thought something had to be done to make him feel at home. A huge rubber contrivance that looked like a ton or so of iron was suspended from the studio ceiling. Max was maneuvered around until he stood directly under it. A prop man shouted "Look out!" and pointed upward. As Max looked up, the mass of pseudo iron shot down at him. Just before it landed on him, a prop man hit him over the head with a club. Another fired a revolver behind his back. The joke put Max in a cheerful frame of mind and improved his work. It was found necessary later to overcome his social awkwardness by bruising his spine by seating him in a collapsible chair and by pushing him into a swimming pool with his clothes on. In the end Max turned in an exceptionally good job of acting.

When Van Dyke had the Trader Horn company in the crocodile-and-giant-snake section of Africa, he found the boys getting morose and homesick. His scheme for producing a better feeling was to take a rope about the thickness of an anaconda, lay it gently on a man sleeping in his tent, and draw it slowly, with a wriggling motion, across his stomach. When this was stale, he got an enormous stuffed crocodile and, by a system of wires, caused it to chase his actors and technical men in the cool of the evening.

Notables for All Occasions

The casting departments have been partly to blame for the Hollywood situation. They can always furnish on short notice any type of actor needed for any joke. Years ago Tom Geraghty and Douglas Fairbanks sent for a Robert Louis Stevenson. A big producer had heard about Treasure Island and wanted to engage the author to write originals. Geraghty and Fairbanks sent the Robert Louis Stevenson up to Del Monte. They took the producer up to meet him. Geraghty laughed too much and spoiled the negotiations before they had gone very far. Untutored magnates are not so numerous in Hollywood as they used to be, but within the last three years an important producer, after seeing a little of Faust, inquired eagerly as to the possibility of adding the author to his scribbling staff.

Sam Briskin, an RKO producer, sent to the casting department one day for a financier. Briskin was tired of hearing Sam Bischoff, of Warner Brothers, talk about the riches he was going to collect from a new patent electric razor. Briskin hired an imposing suite at the

Beverly-Wilshire Hotel and installed his financier there. Bischoff met him. The big Wall Street man, chief lieutenant of Winthrop W. Aldrich, of the Chase National Bank, went crazy over Bischoff's patent razor. Lawyers were called in and papers signed which gave Bischoff \$200,000 in cash for the invention and a fat slice of all future profits. Next day Bischoff telephoned to the hotel to ask when he would get the \$200,000 check. The financier was gone. He had left no forwarding address. Bischoff made unsuccessful searches and finally traced the whole thing to Briskin.

Bischoff then sent to his casting department for two upright United States senators. They promptly furnished him with Tydings, of Maryland, and King, of Utah. The statesmen paid a visit to the RKO studio and met Briskin. Briskin showed them around the lot and introduced them to everybody who made more than \$5000 a week. Briskin posed with his two senators for pictures that were widely published.

Bill Newbery, the publicity man, was for a long time a busy practical joker, or "ribber," at the M-G-M studio. He became such a menace that a combination had to be formed against him. One day a series of telegrams from the New York office of M-G-M was handed to him. They were all warnings of the impending arrival of Ah Sam and Lee Wong, proprietors of theater chains in China and the most important men in the Orient, as far as M-G-M was concerned. Too much could not be done for them. Newbery was ordered to take care of them and to spread himself.

Ah Sam appeared in a cutaway and striped trousers. Lee Wong wore a double-breasted blue suit. Ah Sam's English was perfect. Lee Wong could not talk English at all. Newbery took them first to a stage being prepared for a Greta Garbo picture. It was to be one of the triumphs of M-G-M's history. Newbery pointed out the sets and described the plot. When he came to the subject of Garbo, he was talking about his idol and he let himself go—Garbo, the greatest of actresses, the tenderest, the most sensitive, the most glamorous, the most intellectual—

"Wait," said Ah Sam. He translated Newbery's eloquence to Lee Wong. They conversed in Chinese. Ah Sam turned to Newbery.

"Garbo stinks," he said.

Newbery was speechless. He would have taken a swing at anybody except M-G-M's two most important men in the Orient. He was not only deeply wounded but deeply puzzled, because he had heard so much about Oriental courtesy. Reflecting that there is no accounting for tastes and that Asiatics might like a different type, he took them to a set where they watched Joan Crawford at work. Newbery raved again. Ah Sam and Lee Wong held a brief conversation in Chinese. Ah Sam turned to Newbery.

"Crawford stinks," he said.

Newbery mopped his brow and led them to the Clark Gable stage. Gable stank. Same verdict for Shearer, Loy, Montgomery and the other M-G-M stars. Sam and Wong chattered angrily. Sam turned to the press agent and demanded to be informed why M-G-M did not have Hepburn, Lombard, Gary Cooper, James Cagney, Claudette Colbert, or at least one star

that did not stink. Newbery's defense of M-G-M stars was received with singsong jeers of derision. Lunch hour came around and Newbery took them into the M-G-M commissary. The place was crowded, Newbery was conscious that everybody was leering in his direction. He thought they were being rude to his guests, but he didn't care much if they were.

"We're lucky," said Newbery. "This is chicken-chow-mein day."

"Ham and eggs," said Ah Sam.

They ate in silence. At the end Newbery reached for the checks.

"I'll pay my own," said Ah Sam.

"And I'll pay my own," said Lee Wong, the non-English-speaking one.

"Yes, we want to cash these," said Ah Sam. Both Chinese produced extras' checks for the seven dollars which they had received for the day's work.

A Case for Charlie Chan

Sid Grauman, the theater owner, stands high in this field. When he lived at the Hollywood Hotel, he grew bored at hearing the enormous lobby rug referred to as the million-dollar rug. He had uniforms made and ELITE RUG CLEANING Co. embroidered on them in gold. In the early hours of the morning, when the lobby was empty, several men in Elite uniforms started to roll up the million-dollar rug. The night clerk made inquiries. One of the Elite men showed an order on the hotel's stationery to take the rug away and clean it.

For weeks after that, the million-dollar-rug case was worked on by the best detectives in Southern California. Federal detectives were called in. The affair was baffling for several reasons. The million-dollar rug was too big for a private house. It could not be used in a public place without being detected. The dimensions and description were sent everywhere.

The search became so fierce that Grauman grew a little nervous. If the police catch you with a million-dollar rug, even if it is worth only \$10,000, it is a little difficult to explain that it is a practical joke. Grauman made restitution in his own way. Tickets to one of his world *premières* were sent to detectives, police officials and plain cops who were working on the million-dollar-rug case. When the curtain went up on his show, the stage was hung with the million-dollar rug. Hundreds of policemen solved the case simultaneously.

The waxworks joke added to Grauman's reputation. In order to oblige an old friend in the show business, Grauman found storage room for Daniel Webster, Abraham Lincoln, Ulysses S. Grant, Theodore Roosevelt and many other wax statesmen and heroes. A little later all the theaters in Los Angeles were closed because of a poliomyelitis epidemic. They were closed for weeks, during which the theater men suffered ruinous losses. The theaters had been reopened about a week when Grauman telephoned to T. V. Talley, another big theater owner:

"Rush over here," said Grauman. "An awful thing has happened. The governor's health committee is here, and they want to close the theaters for two weeks more. I've argued myself blue, and I've got them half convinced. Hurry, because they're leaving soon."

Grauman then telephoned the bad news to William Klune, another theater man. Talley arrived first.

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"They're in there," said Grauman. "Rush in and start talking. They're getting ready to go. You've only got about three minutes."

Talley rushed into a dimly lighted room where the committee was in a circle, some standing, some seated.

"The epidemic's all over, gentlemen," cried Talley. "There hasn't been a new case in five days. It can't get started again. All the doctors say so. And you can't catch it in theaters anyway. You're ruining us for nothing."

Talley was shouting statistics and medical opinion when Klune arrived. Grauman hustled him in to make his plea.

Talley sat down, mopping his brow. He turned to the seated figure next to him to see what impression his speech had made. The seated figure was rigid and had a faraway look in its eyes. Talley examined it more closely and then shrieked: "My God, this man is dead!"

"Get water!" shouted Grauman. When Klune and Talley dashed out of the room, Grauman raised the curtains, flooded the office with sunshine and then fled. Klune and Talley came running in with water and found themselves at the waxworks show.

Small practical jokes sometimes have a way of building themselves up by their own unaided efforts until they have stirring plots and elaborate casts of characters. A little facetiousness involved Hobart Henley, Rupert Julian and Douglas Gerrard in an adventure which became rather nerve-racking before they were through. This was more than twenty years ago, just before America entered the war. The three actors had rich British accents. They were the three ambassadors in a picture called *The Three Ambassadors*, which was being made by Universal.

After making scenes in Hollywood, they were sent to San Francisco to make scenes on location in Marin County, across the bay from San Francisco. In playing the earlier sequences they had acquired the ambassadorial manner and had formed the habit of calling one another "Your Excellency." Their personal luggage was used as stage properties and was decorated with coats-of-arms.

The Mysterious Excellencies

When they arrived at the desk at the St. Francis Hotel, Rupert Julian said, "How shall we register?"

"I'll register for you, Your Excellency," said Douglas Gerrard. He felt a little gay and wrote "Rt. Hon." before the names of the three movie ambassadors. Another bright thought occurred to him and he wrote "Chaplain" after the name of a fourth member of the party. They took moderate-priced rooms. In a few minutes the clerk came upstairs and insisted on moving them into an expensive suite.

"We can't pay that much," said Gerrard.

"We'll make you the same rate as for the other rooms," said the clerk.

The ambassadors expressed their thanks. Gerrard still felt facetious. He exacted a promise that the clerk would inform no one of their presence in the hotel. That brought the press on the run.

"We represent a great enterprise," said Gerrard. He refused to elaborate. An explanation was soon worked out, however. The three Excellencies must be a British mission on the way to Russia.

The British consul called and offered his services. The three Right Honor-

ables were embarrassed and uncomfortable, but made no disclosures. The Russian consul called in their absence and left his card. The French consul called when Gerrard was alone in the apartment. The actor was now worried. The thing had gone too far. He called for champagne in order to disillusion the French official as tactfully as possible.

"This is an unfortunate joke," said Gerrard after the first glass had been emptied. "We are not on any mission. We are three actors from Hollywood."

"Very good," said the consul. "As I said before, we are at your service. You have but to command."

"We are connected with the Universal Company," said Gerrard. "We are making a picture called *The Three Ambassadors* and we are on location across the bay."

"Yes, yes," said the consul. "I appreciate your circumspection. We are at your command."

A Plot That Got Thicker

"But I'm telling you the truth," insisted Gerrard. "We're not officials. We're not on a mission. We're movie actors. Damn it, we're well-known movie actors."

The consul finished the second glass and rose to leave. At the door he tapped Gerrard gently on the arm and said: "You are very clever. You are very discreet. You are very charming."

The next day the ambassadors tried to expose themselves to newspapermen.

"You admitted you were here representing a great enterprise," said one.

"Yes," said Gerrard, "but that great enterprise is the Universal Film Company."

This only added to his reputation for statesmanlike coyness. One obstacle to the exposure was a photographer with the party. He liked to see actors worry. He let the word get out that important developments would take place offshore that night, and that signals would be visible in the neighborhood of the Golden Gate. He made good by climbing a hill near the Golden Gate and exploding several flashlights.

The next day the actors asked the hotel clerk to get them tickets for the Orpheum. At the theater they were ushered to a box. It had been hastily draped with British flags. As they entered the box, the orchestra played *God Save the King*. The audience rose and applauded. Two men with Teutonic countenances were caught eavesdropping on the other side of the box curtain.

The actors were in distress. They now had a notion the Federal agents might seize them if they failed to get exposed before leaving San Francisco. By the help of letters and of photographs of themselves in other roles, the ambassadors at last succeeded in convincing a reporter that they were impostors.

Many old-timers look back on the Hollywood Athletic Club of fifteen years ago as the great college of humor. One of the residents there was Roy Del Ruth, the director, who introduced the padlock gag. He bought them by the gross. Sneaking into clothes closets, he padlocked coats together through the buttonholes. He had numberless imitators, and for a while it was unusual to get dressed without summoning a mechanic.

Another resident of the Hollywood Athletic Club was Darryl F. Zanuck, now master mind of Twentieth Century-Fox. He was then twenty years old

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"Great day, Zeke," he says,
"he's aputtin' ile in her!"

I've read about these mountaineers—but I never saw any till the other day. Four of 'em pulled into my place in the worst old jalopy you ever saw.

They wanted a gallon of gas an' I gave it to 'em. Then I went into my talk about Golden Shell Oil.

All four of 'em just sat there an' looked at me kind of suspicious while I talked. Didn't move a muscle—except when they shifted their chaw.

I explained how Golden Shell Oil was made for stop an' go—how it went to work instantly and prevented engine parts from rubbin' together dry. I told 'em it only cost 25¢ a quart an' was the best oil buy on the market. Then I asked 'em if they'd like to try some.

I thought I saw one of 'em nod so I went around and lifted the hood. Darned if the whole thing didn't come off!

While I'm putting the oil in, one of 'em climbs out an' stands there starin'.

All of a sudden he pipes up. "Great day in the mornin', Zeke," he drawls, "now I remember what Gran'pappy told us. That there hole in the engine is for ile!"

From some of the motors I hear clankin' by this place, ol' Daniel Boone ain't the only one that's forgot what oil is for. Holy Smokes! How many bets for Golden Shell have I been missin'?

Sincerely,

Your Shell Dealer

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and acted younger. He was a movie writer at the Warner Brothers studio, where he was greatly struck by the aristocratic bearing of a young actress. He mentioned her enthusiastically. News came that she had mentioned Zanuck enthusiastically. A meeting was arranged. She did not appear. Word then came to Zanuck to post himself at the door of a Hollywood café and wait. She arrived in an automobile, accompanied by three men, strangers to Zanuck. Shoving him aside as he approached, they hurried off with the lady.

Zanuck heard that a director named Bill was in love with her. Zanuck went to the director and accused him of using unethical tactics.

"I didn't know you felt this way, Darryl," said Bill. "I'm not interested in her. I'm rushing her so as to keep her away from a friend of mine. He's crazy about her. The girl's a hophead, and I'm afraid she'll get him to using dope."

This sounded correct to Zanuck. He was a mystery writer. Scenes of his early fiction were subterranean palaces inhabited by glamorous hopheads. He lived in a world of poisoned orchids, arsenical muffins, cyanided lipstick, evil eyes, death rays, hemp, hashish and heroin. Trap doors were more normal to him than front doors. His baffled romance belonged to his everyday mental life.

He made another date with the aristocratic cokey; again she was abducted by men of mystery as he was on the verge of meeting her.

That was too much. Zanuck is a man of action. He burst in on her at the studio, exclaiming: "They can't do this to you! I don't care if you are a hophead, they can't do this to you!"

The girl screamed. She had no knowledge that she had been used in a Hollywood joke. For a time she wanted to sue. Zanuck's infatuation cooled. He traced the plot to Johnny Gray, another movie writer who lived at the Hollywood Athletic Club. Zanuck was only one of many of Gray's victims.

Revenge took the form of buying a 400-pound gang plow, disassembling it, carrying it into Gray's bedroom piece by piece and reassembling it there.

Ribbing a Ribber

Billy Grady was formerly the manager of W. C. Fields. He became a New York talent scout for M-G-M. About three years ago he went to Hollywood. In New York he was known as a "ribber." His reputation preceded him to Hollywood. Word also arrived that he had one studied eccentricity—a habit of going to bed at ten o'clock on New Year's Eve. On Christmas Eve, however, he held open house.

Shortly before his first Christmas at Hollywood, Grady had just moved into a new house. He asked friends to drop in on him Christmas Eve. They accepted. Grady laid in stocks of liquor and food and hired extra help. Like Chaplin in *The Gold Rush*, he sat there pathetically waiting for his guests. Nobody came.

On New Year's Eve, a week later, Grady followed his custom of coppering the world by going to bed at ten o'clock. At eleven the bell started to ring. Crowds swarmed in. Most of the visitors were strangers, but they had engraved invitations to a New Year's party at Grady's. Friends of Grady pretended to be tighter than they were,

got into fights and rassled around until they had smashed all his lamps and vases. It was not until eight o'clock in the morning that Grady found himself alone amid the ruins of his art objects. If Grady had been an old-timer in Hollywood he would not have worried about his lamps and vases. The oldest custom there is to enter into a conspiracy with a butler or chauffeur, cart off the art, have it copied in plaster of Paris, and substitute breakaways for the originals at a smashing-up party.

Of the practical jokers who make a living at it, Vince Barnett is the best-known. One of Barnett's early visits to Hollywood occurred in 1927, when talkies apparatus was first being installed. He posed as a German sound professor from the Tobis-Klangfilm studio in Berlin. He inspected the apparatus which Eddie Mannix, an M-G-M producer, was installing.

From modest criticism Barnett proceeded to violent denunciation. He found that nothing but sizzling and frying sounds could be registered by such apparatus. They must have cheated their company and taken bribes, he shouted, to buy such laughable machinery. He left the set, howling "swindlers" and "robbers." Mannix finally saw through it and took Barnett around from studio to studio inspecting sound apparatus.

Exposing the G-Men

The occupation of professional ribber is hereditary in the Barnett family. Vince's father was Barnett the Ribber, who was in the commercial-joke business more than a generation ago. He insulted Jim Corbett. Then, with a little change in make-up, he insulted the former heavyweight again. Jim was defenseless. He didn't dare hit a man, for fear of killing him. Jim had a laugh both times after discovering that he was the victim of Barnett the Ribber.

Another new and promising ribber in Hollywood is Albert Morin, who excels at flying into a rage over the ignorance of the man he talks to. On J. Edgar Hoover's visit to Hollywood last year, Morin was introduced to him as second in command of the Paris police. Morin immediately began to denounce the inefficiency of American detectives, especially G-men. He took as examples two big handsome G-men who were accompanying Hoover.

"Look at those flatfeet," he said. "Cop written all over them. A smart rogue can spot them a hundred yards away by their walk. Paris detectives are little men, but they have brains, brains, brains. How many detectives over here understand the Kleegnobs system?"

"What is that?"

"It is the Carridist system."

"What is that?"

Morin was floored by this ignorance and began to shriek.

Hoover and his party moved on to a set where Myrna Loy was making a picture. One of the big handsome G-men had asked the day before if it would be possible for him to meet Myrna Loy. It was arranged. It was, in fact, arranged to the extent that Myrna Loy leaped at him, flung her arms around him and kissed him, while a camera was snapped by a photographer who had been planted for the scene. This was more than the G-man had been pining for. He pleaded, because of the situation in Washington, for the destruction of the plates. He breathed easier when he found that the camera was empty.