

# The Whole Show

By Hugh Leamy

Joe Cook himself—and he is the best one-man vaudeville show on earth

*As the One-Man Vaudeville, Joe Cook used to do everything from playing his own overtures to taking his bows*

IT USED to be Four Hawaiians. Now it's a feed bill. "And do you want to know why we didn't pay that feed bill over at Springdale?" asks the warrant-dodging Joe Cook—for the moment a circus executive—of the constable.

"No."

"All right then, I'll tell you. Things weren't always so bright as they are now. Back in the days of the telephone when the radio was the *only means* of transportation a person couldn't walk into a restaurant and *pick out a roll of wall paper* which *while* it might not have been gaudy was *at least reasonable* and in the tone of voice that one would use in speaking to dumb animals, especially the automobile, *providing—always* providing that you season it well and shake before using especially if you compute the compound interest without taking any chances of the stock depreciating. *Of course*, I can get it for you wholesale and naturally if we moved into larger quarters we might have a *bigger* overhead but a greater volume of business anyhow I'll *certainly* look you up some time and you ought to understand *why* we are doing it and just what for and that's why we didn't pay that feed bill!"

So plausibly does the engaging young man present this jumbled explanation that he leaves the constable quite convinced that it would be unreasonable to press the matter any further.

He used to convince vaudeville audiences, by a similar device, that, while he was prepared to imitate two Hawaiians playing the Hawaiian guitar or even three Hawaiians ("one of them beating time with his feet"), it would be both ungracious and unfair to expect him to imitate *four* Hawaiians—even though he could do so if he chose.

## That Back-Yard Début

Joe Cook is, without a doubt, one of the most versatile comedians on the stage today. He can juggle, he can do acrobatics, he can dance, he can clown, and he can play about a dozen different instruments. And he can do them all well. Also, he can sing—after a fashion.

And, despite the fact that he reached stardom over a road that led from a medicine show, through amateur nights, small-time vaudeville, burlesque and "The Vanities," he's quite unspoiled. He couldn't have been much more ingenuous than he is today—not even when he was doing three different acts a week for Dr. Buckner's Corak Wonder Company back in Indiana. Even being taken up and raved over by the highest-browed

critics didn't do anything to him. It was Gilbert Seldes who was quoted once as saying (this was before Cook had emerged from vaudeville) that he couldn't imagine enjoying anything more than John Barrymore's "Hamlet"—except Joe Cook's imitation of the Hawaiians.

Joe Cook's name originally was Lopez. His father was Spanish, his mother Irish, and he was born in Chicago. The parents were professionals, but they retired from the stage before Joe was born. His father went in for portrait painting on a chain-store scale, with studios in Grand Rapids, Chicago and Pierceton, Ind. His parents died when he was four years old; and he and his brother, Leo, were adopted by a family named Cook.

Mr. Lopez was drowned. Joe Cook remembers the time vividly. (Any time you talk with an accomplished clown you'll find that he can reach back into the past to at least one spot that doesn't fit in at all with grease-paint and laughter and

applause from his admirers.)

"It stands out so clearly," Joe Cook said to me. "I think of it now when I think of my own kids. You know how it is. My father had been drowned, and of course there was a lot of confusion around the house. I was only four years old, but somehow or other I learned about the train they were bringing the body home on. Long before train time I slipped out of the house and trotted down to the station, and stood alone on the platform waiting and waiting for the train to arrive. When I look back now, it's just as if it were some other person entirely; but I can't help feeling so darned sorry for that forlorn, dazed kid on the station platform."

It was while living with his foster parents in Evansville, Ind., that Cook first went into the show business on an ambitious scale.

"We had the best back-yard show in town," he said. "Why, we were charging them a nickel admission at a time when the other kids in town were afraid to charge more than twelve pins!" Another showman had been born.

"I learned to juggle and do stunts on a wooden ball—the forerunner of the stunt where I roll up the incline and down again on a ball. Only the ball I used then was an egg-shaped one that I got for \$2 from the Evansville Planning Company.

"My mother—my foster mother—made me a pair of tights which were originally intended for the back-yard

show. However, I used to wear them under my street clothes; and whenever the gang needed some money for anything, I'd duck under the swinging doors of a saloon and peel off my clothes—down to the tights; and then do a few handsprings and other acrobatics. Sometimes we'd get as much as a dollar in one place.

"The shows we'd put on in the back yard were so good that the chief of police sometimes used to pull up his horse and buggy and sit outside the fence watching us. He was a swell chief, too. Once we needed some piping to build a trapeze frame and we couldn't afford to get it. There was a lot of pipe in the rear of the gas plant that didn't seem to be doing anybody any good. So we sneaked down one evening and were getting away with some pieces of it when a cop caught us.

"Just as he was hauling us off the chief drove up. 'Leave them kids alone!' he hollered. 'It's only Joe Cook and his gang. I'm one of their best customers.'"

## The \$1 Miracle

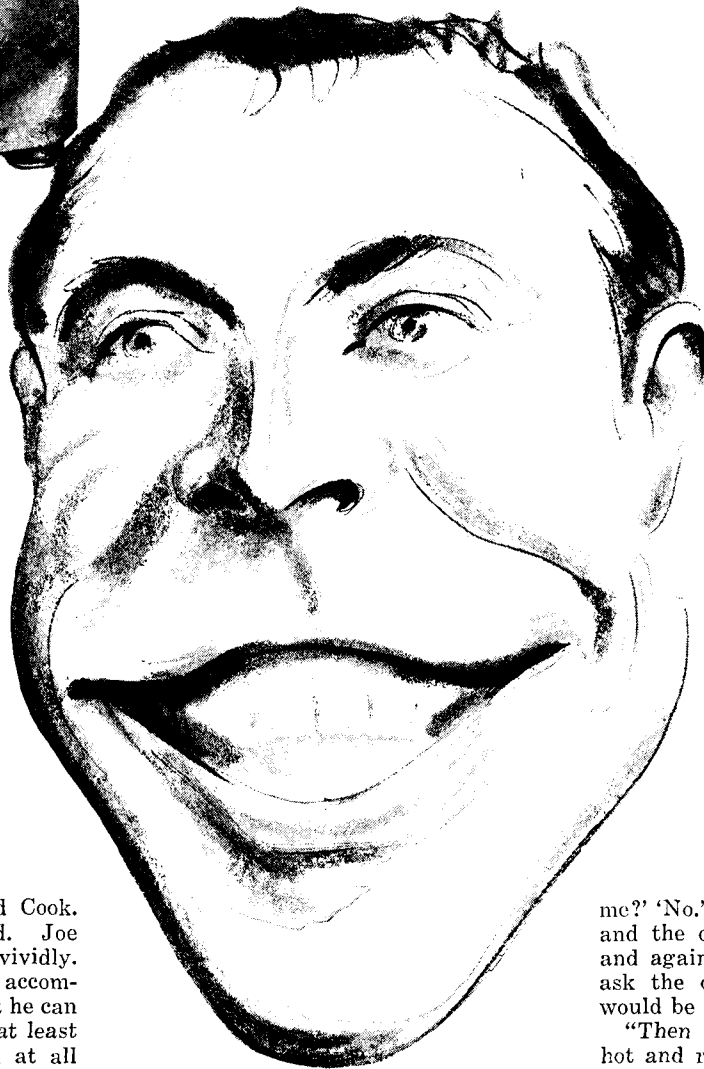
Cook's first professional engagement came during the summer that he was twelve years old. He and another lad were engaged, at \$1 a night each, to appear for Dr. Buckner's Corak Wonder Company's show in Evansville. The show played one week in each town; but Cook's dream of collecting \$7 faded when it was discovered that he and his partner could do only three acts—an acrobatic, a juggling and a "trick-house" act. As the good doctor played to the same audience every night it was necessary to vary the routine. So the boys collected only \$3 a week each.

"The Doc didn't limit himself to selling Corak Wonder. He had several lines, including an oil that would cure deafness. I didn't realize what a fake it was then, and he impressed me a lot. One of his prime stunts was to get some old guy on the platform—some townsman who had been deaf for maybe twenty-two years.

"You are all acquainted with your fellow-citizen, Mr. So-and-So of Clearpoint Street," he would say. "And you all know that he has been hard of hearing for twenty-two years. Now, by the aid of my magic herb-oil, I propose to cure him right before your eyes!" Then the Doc would begin rubbing the old guy behind the ears with some warm oil. Now, you know most deaf people, particularly if they've been deaf for years, get so they can read simple words by lip-reading, especially if the words are pronounced carefully.

"The Doc, after rubbing a while, would look at the man and say, without moving his lips: 'Can you hear me?' 'No.' Then he'd rub a while longer and the oil would be getting warmer, and again but a bit more plainly, he'd ask the question. The 'No' this time would be a bit more hesitating.

"Then he'd let the oil get scorching hot and rub some vigorously on a sensitive spot (Continued on page 42)





# Marriage for Two

By Arthur Somers Roche



"It was my fault," said Joyce easily. "I could have made Larry stay in New York, but—he wants one, so to speak, all to himself"

## The Story Thus Far:

SHORTLY after an interview in which Helen Wilson tells Larry Tracy that she wishes to break their engagement so that she can marry the rich, middle-aged Frank Burton, Larry rescues from a park bench a poverty-stricken and starved though beautiful girl, Joyce Carroll.

Thinking of Helen and of revenge, Larry asks Joyce to marry him. Believing that this might repay him for his kindness, she finally consents.

To escape publicity they go to Biarritz, where they take a villa. Shortly after their arrival Larry, suddenly overcome with emotion, draws Joyce to him and kisses her. She threatens to leave him if such a thing should ever occur again.

Twice Larry has evidence of the strangeness of Joyce's past. A man named Ratty Rogan, in New York, unsuccessfully attempts to tell Larry something of his wife. Another time at Biarritz Joyce gave 40,000 francs to a woman of the demimonde in the Casino and tells Larry she lost it at the tables. Larry later starts to question this woman but is overcome with disgust at himself and leaves her.

Joyce is overwhelmingly popular at Biarritz; especially with Billy Valdemagala, a Spaniard, and Jeanne Mazell, a lovely American blonde; also with Mr. Paul Weedon, whom she instinctively dislikes.

One night, at a fashionable restaurant, Joyce, because of an entirely unconscious, but nevertheless too warm, admiration on Larry's part, quite ignores him. Hurt, he goes outside. Suddenly he sees a figure coming toward him. It is Helen Wilson.

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IT WAS more than her old charm that was revived. Or, if not more, it was something different, this effect that her nearness, her surrendering forward step created within him.

She had been upon a pedestal, that pedestal upon which romantic mankind places realistic womankind, and from which woman too readily steps. For man is the romanticist. To him love is not a business, a career, a race-preserving urge. Rather, it is the culmination of youthful dreams, it is an end in itself,

not a stepping-stone to something else. Home, children, family ties—these may be vaguely encompassed in thoughts of a man when he falls in love, but they are mere incidents in the great bewilderment that is masculine love.

Larry, adoring Helen Wilson, had not thought of her as the mistress of his home, as the mother of his children, nor as anything but an almost disembodied spirit. Of course, he knew that she had beauty of face and grace of figure, but he was aware of these only cloudily. That these were the attributes that had first attracted him to her he knew; he had never been insensible to a pretty face or form; but he would have indignantly denied that part of his anguish at her faithlessness had been due to the knowledge that he would never kiss those lips again, would never hold that graceful body in warm embrace. She was the fulfillment of a dream, that was all.

But now, for the first time, this was no dream woman who stood so near that he could hear her gentle breathing. This was a woman of flesh and blood, a woman of vitality unsuspected heretofore by him. He was not enough of a self-analyst to know that Helen had become clothed with flesh simply because another woman had awakened desire in him. He thought that this was love, a reawakened love, that made his hands reach gropingly for the girl before him. She stepped back, in a simulation of alarm that was convincing.

"Larry," she reproached him.

He dropped his hands beside him. "Why did you come?" he asked tonelessly.

"Why did you do—what you did?" she demanded.

"Marry? Why shouldn't I?" He glared angrily at her. "I told you I would. What difference did that make? To you, I mean. What do you care?"

"Why shouldn't I care?" she countered.

He was in better command of himself now.

"You exchanged five millions for fifty," he jeered. "Wasn't the trade a good one?"

She half turned. "If that is what you have to say—"

"What did you expect to hear?" he asked.

HER lips pouted faintly, as though she were about to weep. It was an old trick of hers, but he had never known that it was a trick. In those lovers' quarrels in which they had occasionally indulged, she had always come out quick victor by this pretense at incipient tears.

"W-e-l-l, we had been friends—hadn't we, Larry?"

Even to him, beset by emotions really incomprehensible to him, this did not ring true.

"Friends? God Almighty, Helen, we were lovers. At least I loved you. And we were engaged to be married. Friends!"

"I loved you, too," she said.

"But how much?" he sneered.

"That isn't fair," she told him.

"Fair? What do you know about fairness? Was it fair to throw me over for an old man—"

"You aren't a girl, Larry. You aren't a girl with a mother who—" She paused.

"With a mother who what?" he insisted.

"Who loves me," she finished.

Even he, none too acute at the moment, disdained this.

"Loves you? What do you mean—loves you?"

"Mothers are ambitious," she explained.

"Well—she couldn't make you marry Burton," he accused.

"That's what I have found out," she said.

And now, instead of stepping away, she swayed toward him.

"What do you mean by that?" he asked. The hoarseness of his voice surprised him. It was as though someone else were speaking, and as though he were looking on, listening.

"Do I need to make it clearer?" she retorted.

"Are you telling me that you have decided not to marry him?" he asked.

"I don't know what I'm telling you—except that I—can't stand it if you—are cross with me."

Some day he would analyze these words of hers, would reduce them to their ultimate absurdity. But not now. She was young, she was beautiful. Another woman, equally as young and infinitely more beautiful, had denied him herself, had made it clear that she would always deny herself to him. But here was a woman, with whom he had been genuinely in love, in love with the spirit and not with the senses, who was intimating promise to him.

"Cross with you? I could never be angry," he heard himself saying.

"But look at what you did," she reproached him.

"Look at what you did," he rejoined with equal childishness.