

# The Chorus Girls' Rebellion

"I know where the pitfalls lie, for I was a chorus girl. I know what the chorus girl is up against. I want to make the chorus safe for girls."

Marie Dressler, President of the Chorus Equity Association, Tells Why the Fight Began, and Why Making People Laugh Is a Business That Deserves Well of the World.



A chorus queen.

BY MARIE DRESSLER.

I HAVE been an actress for 20 odd years, but the proudest, the most inspired moment of my life was when, as president of the Chorus Equity Association, I attended the State Federation of Labor convention at Syracuse—not as an artist—something particularly precious and removed from the common herd—but as a laborer among laborers.

It is madness to say that acting is not a trade. The production of anything necessary to the world is labor and must be learned. This sad old world needs comedians, people with the secret of joy and of the expression of joy in their being. It is the hardest of tasks to make an audience laugh. Audiences do not laugh because they want to, but because they can't help it. It takes years of study and thought to learn how to demand that laugh. That is why I want my own chorus people to feel the independence, the pride and self-respect which comes only to the true artisan who has begun at the bottom and learned his way step by step to the top. That self-respect is what I know their spiritual and actual affiliation with labor will give them. Those who, for reasons best unmentioned, did not want us to affiliate with the American Federation of Labor, talked of the impossibility of temperamental artists creating while connected with anything so sordid as labor—it must have been the sordidness of sure pay and decent treatment to which they referred. Michael Angelo learned his trade; he was a laborer and he got a laborer's pay. There were labor unions in Rome in those days and I am sure he was a member. I never heard that it left a taint on his art.

**Dreams of a Life Work.**  
All my life it has been my dream to form an association of chorus people which would bring the chorus back to the position it occupied in the old days—as a training school, and apprenticeship for bigger work. When I started in the chorus it was where all young actors learned their trade. Some of the best-known people of the profession of today came from the chorus. Francis Wilson started his career playing the hind legs of a camel or the left wing of a bat or something equally important. You know it takes study, application and real work to keep your name in electric lights for 20 years. I've seen mine there for 21 years. Yet I regarded the chorus as such an excellent training school that I went back to it twice after I had started playing leading business.

**A "Background" for Chorus Girls.**  
None of this is true now. The insults and indignities heaped on the chorus man or chorus girl are such that no sensitive person willingly undertakes that branch of theatrical work. However, necessity forces many

Marie Dressler, president of the Chorus Equity association, and a group of chorus girl strikers in New York.

there who could have profited by the training in the old days. I cannot pay too high a tribute to the men and women of the chorus of today who are fighting against such terrible odds. I have met many, many wonderful people in the chorus and it is for their sakes that I want to rescue it from what it is rapidly becoming—the happy hunting ground of the kind of girl I call a luscious and expensive prop rather than a really hard-working and earnest chorus girl.

My idea, and one that I have had for many, many years, is to have an association for chorus people that will give them a background, a self-respect in their vocation which will make them more responsible, more ambitious and hard working. If you start referring to a puppy as just a cur the chances are that he will grow into a full-fledged yellow dog. When a girl goes into the chorus now the first thing that is said of her is "she is only a chorus girl," and by and by she gets the idea, "I'm only a chorus girl, no one cares, so what does it matter what I do?"

I am not one of those people who start barking like an excited fox terrier and try to climb a tree for sheer joy at a chance to interfere in someone else's morals. It is none of my business whether any particular member of my trade is moral or not. What I am concerned in is that she shall not be obliged to sell herself in sex slavery.

As a member of a strong labor association no chorus girl will have to stand insults and indignities from managers. She knows her association is backing her and she knows she can turn for protection to any stage hand who will big-brother her. As a labor leader I want to make the chorus safe for girls with talent, so that any

girl can come into it with a full feeling of moral independence. I want to make it so that they dare resent indignities. Referring to the work done by the Equity, Chic Sales said to me: "Thank God, now I dare let my children go on the stage."

### The Matter of Pitfalls.

I know where the pitfalls lie, for I was a chorus girl. I am not trying to give the impression that my youthful path was beset with wicked managers and stage-door Johnnies. It wasn't. I was too homely. But my eyesight was good, and I know what a girl in the chorus is up against.

And the Chorus Equity association will protect the manager quite as much as the members of the chorus. It will see that the people of the chorus play fairly and squarely with the management that has played fairly and squarely with them. It will not be necessary for the wary manager to pay the chorus on Tuesday rather than Saturday for fear of the question discussed in the they will jump over the week-end to another show where they hope for better treatment. And the manager who has signed up his chorus for a road tour when the New York season

shall be over can go to the station on the day of departure and know that his entire chorus will be there union to be as a mother, a help and never failing resource to the people



One of the stage groups broken up by New York's extraordinary demonstration.

Edith Hallor, who came close to a choice as leader of the chorus girl strikers.

of the chorus, the one place where they can always be sure of help. One thing I am going to work for as a labor leader—and I shall never cease working for it—is a better understanding between capital and labor—and between actors and managers. I do not want to fight all managers; I want to bring them to a closer understanding of the actor. And I do not want to fight all capital. Not all wealthy people are the criminal blood-suckers some would have us believe. I have found many, so many, who are willing and anxious to work and help, only they do not know how. They have been eager for suggestions, enthusiastic in their offers of support. Mrs. John D. Rockefeller and Mrs. William Fellows Morgan have promised to help in a plan I have had for years, that of establishing, under the auspices now of the Chorus Equity association, in New York and in every large city of the country, a chain of players' houses for the people of the theater. This would form a chain of real homes where theatrical people could live in congenial and comfortable surroundings at moderate prices. It wouldn't be an institution or a home in the sense that the word is coming to be used. It would be designed especially for their needs. There would be suppers served after the theater, a time when every one who has been brought up in the smell of grease paint gets hungry. And there would be little sitting rooms where the girls could receive and entertain the men they know—and be courted and maybe get married like any other working girl.

All these things—the strength which the Chorus Equity association has gained from its affiliation with the American Federation of Labor—will help win for us. But there is a bigger, a much bigger thing that we will get. I felt it in Syracuse—I have never ceased feeling it and I want my people to feel it, too—a sense of oneness, of closeness to one's own people—the workers of the world.

## RIP VAN WINKLE OF PACIFIC RIVALS MR. IRVING'S CLASSIC

Old Indian Tale Is Every Whit as Interesting as Catskill Mountain Yarn and Has a Much More Pleasing Finale.

RIP VAN WINKLE is popularly associated with the Catskill mountains through Washington Irving's classic bit of fiction that for long has been a fixture of English literature in our schools, yet there is another Rip Van Winkle of whom the world has little heard. It is the Rip Van Winkle of the Pacific coast—every whit as interesting as the poor old Rip of New York state—and the story has a much more pleasing finale, since the westerner

partment of the interior, in his latest volume on the great national parks of America. The story runs in this fashion:

According to Theodore Winthrop, who visited the northwest in 1833 and published a book entitled "The Canoe and the Saddle," which had wide vogue at the time and is consulted today, Mount Rainier had its Indian Rip Van Winkle. The story was told to him in great detail by Hamitcheou, "a frowsy ancient of the Squiamish."

The hero was a wise and wily fisherman and hunter. Also, as his passion was gain, he became an excellent business man. He always had salmon and berries when food became scarce and prices high. Gradually he amassed large savings in hiaqua, the little perforated shell which was the most valued form of wampum, the Indian's money. The richer he got the stronger his passion grew for hiaqua and when a spirit told him

In a dream of vast boards at the summit of Rainier he determined to climb the mountain. The spirit was Tamanous, which, Winthrop explains, is the vague Indian personification of the supernatural.

So he threaded the forest and climbed the mountain's glistening side. At the summit he looked over the rim into a large basin, in the bottom of which was a black lake surrounded by purple rock. At the lake's eastern end stood three monuments. The first was as tall as a man and had a head carved like a salmon; the second was the image of a camas bulb; the two represented the great necessities of Indian life. The third was a stone elf's head with the antlers in velvet. At the foot of this monument he dug a hole.

Suddenly a noise behind him caused him to turn. An otter clambered over the edge of the lake and struck the snow with its tail. Eleven others followed. Each was twice as big as

any other he had ever seen; their chief was four times as big. Their eleven sat themselves in a circle around him; the leader climbed upon the stone elk head.

At first the treasure seeker was abashed, but he had come to find a man and had a head carved like a salmon; the second was the image of a camas bulb; the two represented the great necessities of Indian life. The third was a stone elf's head with the antlers in velvet. At the foot of this monument he dug a hole.

Suddenly a noise behind him caused him to turn. An otter clambered over the edge of the lake and struck the snow with its tail. Eleven others followed. Each was twice as big as

hlaqua, every shell unbroken and beautiful. Never was treasure-quest so successful! The otters, recognizing him as the favorite of Tamanous, retired to distance and gazed upon him respectfully.

"But the miser," writes the narrator, "never thought of gratitude, never thought to hang a string from the buried treasure about the salmon and camas Tamanous stones, and two strings around the elk's head; no, all must be his own, all he could carry now and the rest for t's future."

Greedy he loaded himself with the booty and laboriously climbed to the rim of the bowl prepared for the descent of the mountain. The otters, puffing in concert, plunged again into the lake, which at once disappeared under a black cloud.

Straightway a terrible storm arose through which the voice of Tamanous

screamed tauntingly. Blackness closed around him. When he awoke he lay under an arbutus tree in a meadow of camas. He was shockingly stiff and every movement pained him. But he managed to gather and smoke some dry arbutus leaves and eat a few camas bulbs. He was astonished to find his hair very long and matted and himself bones and feeble. "Tamanous," he muttered. Nevertheless, he was calm and happy. Strangely he did not regret his lost savings of hiaqua. Fear was gone and his heart was filled with love.

Slowly and painfully he made his way home. Everything was strangely altered. Ancient trees grew where shrubs had grown four days before. Cedars under whose shade he used to sleep, lay rotting on the ground.

Airplane motor revolution meters have been invented by an Englishman to enable an aviator to estimate his speed and distance traveled.