

MEET HER MAJESTY - Milady of the Chorus

As they dance, the girls are carefully looked over by manager and stage director. One after the other girls are called aside and asked for their names, addresses and telephone numbers. Some are instructed to return to the hall the next day; others are told they will be sent for when needed. In so far as that particular show is concerned, the latter group are done for. They go away knowing that the little fiction about being sent for is but a polite way of

closing out their hopes. In show parlance it is a "polite notice" and is so understood.

Back of this move has been some discerning observations by some persons very wise in the ways of the show shop. Choristers must meet rigid requirements. They must have, to be perfect, beauty of face and body, must have graceful movements, must be able to sing well and be possessed of a personality expressive of vivacity, flippancy, or whatever you have that arrests the attention of the baldheaded "every-niggers" in the front row of almost any musical comedy house. Only youth commands these characteristics, and not all youths have them. The combination is far more rare than one would think.

The writer has seen beautiful girls whose every move was awkwardness personified; bewitching beauties whose voices were as harsh as a old files; and sweet faced little things whose figures would not "behave." One must remember that there is no artificial device of the customer to rescue the whirling dancing mass from the all-seeing eye of the public. The scant wardrobe of the chorus girl permits none of the clever tricks so helpful to the more prosaic of the sex engaged in other professions.

The first weeding over, those left, with the replacements of the next day, set about learning the long routine of songs and dances. Sometimes they sit about the piano running the score listening to technical descriptions of musical effects usually delivered by musical directors who feel it necessary to educate the chorus to the spirit of the number. Musical directors are hired to direct, and direct they do, even if a tired-legged girl is so distraught that her mind is hardly capable of holding another single instruction from the Simon Legree of musical comedy.

A week of this, and those girls who brought a bright mind—usually charged with some musical education—and their virile health into a draughty hall, are ready to begin with the principals, who up to this time have either been sitting about in austere dignity, or not present at all. There the real work begins. The numbers are placed in some relation to the dialogue of the piece, and here is where the real fun commences. Each principal is very zealous in

the guardianship of her own prerogative, and very jealous of any infringement upon her chance at fame in the show. "This big number must not come before my solo," or, "I simply won't follow that bit of talk with my number; why you leave 'em cold and expect me to revive the house. I should say not," or again, "I don't want those steps in that number, if I am to sing. They just don't suit my desires," are typical objections heard.

All of them are finally met as cajolery, or by the candid information that it will remain so, or in some instances, by submitting the chorus to the learning of a new routine. In either event, the ponies pay the price. If the irate principal won her point, the girls learned a new dance. If she lost—well—a performer who has reached the stage of doing a number with choral support knows a lot of ways of venting her spleen upon those whom she judges to be the humble instruments of her undoing. "If the stage manager thinks more of the chorus than he does of me, I'll show them that I don't share his opinion," would be the words of such a principal, if she spoke her mind. And very often she does.

Two, three, perhaps four weeks of this grief passes slowly into memory depending upon the class of the show. For higher priced houses, more time and a greater effort to attain perfection obtains. The profits at stake are greater. Hence the time and care.

Then comes the day of ordering shoes and trying on costumes; these appurtenances have been bought

in dozen lots. Each girl is given a set for each number she is expected to take part in. Once tried on and fitted by a wardrobe mistress who adjusts them to the needs of the individual as occasion requires, the set is bundled up and henceforth goes to and from the wardrobe trunks as the chorister's outfit so long as she remains with the show. These costumes and shoes wear out rapidly under the heavy strain of two hours dancing nightly.

No salaries are paid for these days and nights of rehearsal. Managers, when once certain that one will remain with the show, and rehearsals

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