The Experienced Chorus Girl Discourses Upon the Unwarranted Presumption of the Amateur---Rehearsals, Stage Managers and Impresarii.

WRITTEN FOR THE SUNDAY REPUBLIC.

"The thing which most frustrates one who has been on the operatic stage for some time, and who can look back calmly to the beginning of her own career, is the horrible nerve of the amateur."

Thus does Miss Ada Mansfield, chorus woman of experience, summarize her opinion of at least one phase of life on the boards. Miss Mansfield was not railing against the amateur. She was not saying that she should be barred from the stage. She was telling a Sunday Republic man a few things about the chorus girls of a big opera company. And just now the chorus girl is very much in evidence in St. Louis, for the Castle Square Opera Company is preparing for its second season here. And what would Director Leisegang's "ensemble" and Stage Manager Hagoman's "stage pictures" be without the chorus girl?

"The amateur regards stage work as play, and the stage as a playground," continued Miss Mansfield. "And she has the most superb confidence in her ability to sing and act as well as anybody else ever did—and perhaps a little better. To her, such things as hard work, experience, practice until the throat is dry, and the muscles ache, and study—study—study—are simply warnings against hobgoblins posted by jealous professionals in order to frighten really talented persons and keep them from entering the ranks. The amateur has seen all that is done on the stage; she has heard the principals sing, and seen the chorus people march and dance, and heard the orchestra play; and it all impresses her as very simple. She can do any of it—and is blandly willing to show the stage manager or anybody else that she can do it.

"But the amateur soon begins to evolve into the professional. After a few weeks of rehearsing in the morning, studying in the afternoon, appearing on the stage in the evening and then mending torn dresses, revolving in her mind the pointed criticisms of the stage manager and the director, and sleeping a bit before she goes to rehearsal again, she begins to think that perhaps, after all, the route to success on the stage does not lie over a path of thornless roses. Long, long after this she shudders when she recalls the early days of her career and thinks what a fool she would have made of herself if it had not been that some one with more sense refused to give her the opportunity.

"The horrible nerve of the amateur."

We had to stand, and walk, and turn, and shake our arms, and do all that kind of thing, over and over and over again.

The Terrible Ordeal of Having the Voice Tried.

"I am not a pessimist in my view of stage life, and particularly of life in the chorus. There are many advantages to it even after we leave out of consideration the fascination that shimmers around an existence before the footlights. I have become used to most of the things that go to make up the troubles of the chorus woman, and accept them as a matter of course. But one thing I have not got used to. What is it? Nothing more nor less than having my voice tried. It is a simple thing, seemingly. All there is to it is to get up before the manager and the musical director and sing a song and run the scales. But, oh, the torture of doing that simple thing! I have never got over the feeling that the director and the manager are executioners who are eagerly awaiting a false note or a wrong phrase or any of the other mistakes that all singers make as an excuse to chop my head off. I would rather rehearse all day than have my voice tried for five minutes. There is something uncanny about it—something simply terrorizing.

"But we will suppose that the beginner has passed safely through the ordeal of having her voice tried; that the manager has engaged her for the chorus, and that she has gone through the preliminaries of rehearsing—that is, that she has taken her book and studied it and committed the words and music to memory. The chances are that she will be so completely self-conscious that she will have to do it all over again. That is a great deterrent factor in the success of singers—and, perhaps, of all actors. They are thinking of themselves all the time—they are tied up to a great 'I,' and are stiff and unpliable. When they sing, they do not think of the notes or tones, but of themselves—of how they look, and of how other people regard them. I know one girl who has a really remarkable contralto voice—one that is sweet and strong and well cultivated. She was in the Castle Square chorus last year. But she was so mortally self-conscious that she did not succeed. To sing or to act one must lose herself entirely—forget herself—for it is utterly impossible to remember the lines and the notes and the cues and the movements, and at the same time remember oneself.

"Now, we will suppose that the rehearsal is under way. Perhaps there is a dance in it or a march. The stage manager—or it may be that the musical director has charge of this—has his own ideas about how the thing should be done; it is a moral certainty that the ideas of at least half the people he is trying to drill are radically different. There is nothing to do but keep at it until all these differences are eradicated. Mr. Temple, who had charge of the drills last year, was the most careful man in this work I have ever seen. I remember that on one occasion, while we were rehearsing "A Basso Porto" we spent four hours, from twenty minutes past 10 in the morning to twenty minutes past 3 in the afternoon, on one little dance that was not more than ten bars long. In all that time none of us could sit down; we had to stand, and walk, and turn, and shake our arms, and do all that kind of thing, over and over and over again. When rehearsal was finally dismissed I could scarcely walk; I was stiff and sore all over and so tired that I could hardly climb into a street car. But the dance was learned—every movement, every position at every note—every finger-crook and every eye-lid blink.

A Good Word for the Maestro and Stage Manager.

"Song rehearsals are not so bad. Then the men and women take turns, one class resting while the other works. Of course, a false note will excite the musical director; frequently he becomes downright angry. But who in the world can blame him? I have seen girls go to song rehearsal with gum in their mouths, with veils over their faces, or with almost anything else that they shouldn't have. I have seen them go on stubbornly, time after time, making a flat where a sharp is plainly marked, slurring notes that should not be slurred, cutting rests and putting in rests—oh my, it is terrible! And the director must keep on until this stubbornness is overcome. It is enough to make him angry. Of course the stage manager has the same trials. I must admit that both the directors and the stage managers I have worked under have been remarkably patient with their choruses. You see, it is the chorus that they have to depend upon mostly, and for which they are held directly responsible. If a principal goes wrong, the manager holds the principal responsible; if the chorus is bad, or if a single member of it does the wrong thing, the stage manager and the director are called to account. Of course the chorus people are lectured; but the brunt falls upon the stage manager and maestro.

"Now we will suppose that rehearsals are over, and that the opera is ready to 'go on.' The chorus people go to their dressing-rooms and dress for the first act. As a rule, the women are left to attend to their own make-up to a large extent; for all women are considered quite proficient in the art of applying paint, powder and patches. They also generally take care of their own costumes; for while there is a wardrobe woman, she usually has all she can attend to with the men, and, besides, most girls prefer to keep their own dresses. This is something that takes up considerable time; for while the company furnishes the costumes it doesn't guarantee a fit. I am about the size of Yvonne de Treville, and it is no uncommon thing for me to get a costume that would generously fit Miss Norwood. Needle and thread are the only recourse; one cannot—absolutely cannot—depend upon pins. The make-up must be completed in time, for no stage manager will tolerate tardiness.

"When the call comes, the chorus people rush upstairs and take their positions. They must keep quiet; otherwise, they will start on at the wrong time. At the proper moment they begin to sing or to march on the stage—sometimes both. And then they are before the public.

The Girls Must Talk, But They Also Work.

"Once more off the stage, they rush to their dressing-rooms to prepare for the next act. It is seldom that they have any too much time for this; but now and then there are a few moments of waiting. There is much chattering, of course, during these waits; as a rule, everybody insists upon talking at the same time. I was studying shorthand once, and thought I would practice by taking down the conversation of the girls while they were waiting. But I didn't do it. It was impossible. My notes were about as intelligible as a phonograph record of a universal debate in Chinatown. But while the girls talk, they do not sit idly around. Few are without some bit of needlework, or a book, or paints and brushes. Many a dainty set of table linen—many a clever sketch or water color—has been done by nimble fingers 'between calls' in the dressing-room.

"Chorus people do not get much opportunity to see the opera as a production. They are parts of the picture, and therefore lose the artistic effects that the spectators catch; they are hurrying to get ready for the next scene, while off the stage; and while on the stage are constantly on the watch for the time to begin and the time to quit singing or walking or dancing. Now and then they find time to stop in the wings for a moment and listen to a solo or a duet or a quartet by the principals; but as a rule they are too busy with their own work to watch that of anybody else.

"In such work as that which the Castle Square chorus has, there is plenty of variety, and no necessity for any one becoming ennuied. At least three, and sometimes half a dozen, operas are being 'broken in' all the time—that is, the next opera is being carefully rehearsed, while the following three or four are being gone over in places, and a general acquaintance with them is being acquired. On the road, where one company plays one thing all the season through, the work gets distressingly monotonous—moving, speaking and singing in the same way and by the same notes night after night. In such work one loses ambition and interest, and becomes an automation that is moved mechanically by the wave of the maestro's baton.

"There is every chance for a chorus girl to advance into the ranks of the principals. She is given the opportunity, and all that remains for her to do is to improve it. Managers are constantly on the lookout for good voices and good actors, and when they find them they are only too anxious to bring them out. There is always a chance that a principal may become suddenly ill, or from some cause be unable to go on at the last moment, and there is where the chorus girl's chance of promotion usually comes in. To prepare for such an event, it is necessary for a girl to do much studying on her own account; she must learn the parts of the principals as well as her own; she must study their ways of singing and acting; and at the same time she must do her own work in such a way that it will stand above that of the others.

In the Chorus Last Year—Now Singing a Principal Part.

"An apt illustration of this fact is found in the case of a St. Louis girl, Miss Ida Bruegel. Last fall she was an amateur in the Castle Square chorus. She had a rich, strong mezzo-soprano, and went to work at the start. She not only learned her parts, but also the parts of the principal mezzo. She worked all through the season in the chorus; and then in the summer entered the chorus at Uhrig's Cave. About the middle of the season one of the principals was taken ill, and on four hours' notice Miss Bruegel sang the part, with some crudeness, but general success. After that she resumed her place in the chorus; and early in the fall joined a traveling company. Soon the principal mezzo left the company and Miss Bruegel was engaged to take her place. She is in the West now, and doing remarkably well.

"I have found that there is comparatively little jealousy among chorus people; they are as a rule glad when one of their number secures promotion.

"Chorus people do not wear tights because they want to do so. In fact, tights are about the most uncomfortable things a person can put on. Not one woman in a hundred likes to wear them. Of course, we do not have much of this kind of costuming in grand opera; but now and then there is some of it—like the pages in 'Lohengrin,' for instance. When the opera calls for tights, however, or for short dresses, or for boy's clothes, the chorus people must wear them if they want to retain their places. It is merely a matter of business; the stage manager knows, and the people know, that there are always a dozen people waiting to jump into a vacancy, and the stage manager is not worried. But stage managers are not the hard-hearted lot that they are sometimes made out to be. If a girl does not want to wear tights, and will tell the stage manager so in the proper way, there is a good chance that he will respect her scruples, and either cast her for another part or allow her to lay off for a week without losing her regular place.

"The 'masher' is more a creation of the comic journals than a reality in the green-room or at the stage door. Most companies are very strict in this respect; and besides, few girls who are real chorus girls have the time for attending to 'mashers,' even if they have the inclination.

"The chorus girl is not a butterfly—she can't be and hold her position. She is a hard worker—perhaps not from choice, but because she has to be. She is of various degrees of beauty—which is something that the public knows full well. She is often intelligent, sometimes wise, and frequently foolish—which is human nature. She is not guilty of many of the short-comings that the public charges her with, and she possesses many virtues which the same public does not suspect. Take her altogether, she is something of a mystery to the public, in spite of all that has been written of her. And there is a glamour about a mystery, and there is money—for stage people—in a glamour."

Bryan's Early Lesson in Contentment.

Touching Story of an Old Man's Life-Long Disappointment.

WRITTEN FOR THE SUNDAY REPUBLIC.

I once heard William Jennings Bryan relate a story in the smoking-room of the Paxton Hotel, Omaha, which I will never forget. Although that was before Mr. Bryan aspired to political honors, the moral implied might well be written in the diary of every politician. The story made such an impression on me that I can even yet recall it, word for word, I think.

The conversation had turned upon the annoyance caused by petty, everyday vexations and disappointments. "That reminds me," said Mr. Bryan, referring to a story related by General Agent Ritchie of the Northwestern line, "of a simple old man I once met out in Washington, who lived his simple life through with but one ambition, which was never gratified. And yet, my experience with that old gentleman taught me a lesson in contentment which I will never forget. Whenever I meet with a bitter disappointment nowadays I find myself repeating the words of the venerable pioneer: 'I did not go to Huntingdon; I could not go to Huntingdon,' and reflecting on these and the line of thought they inspire, I am consoled.

"The 'gold-mining fever' comes at least once, I think, to every healthy American. It came to me several years ago, and I shouldered a sixty-five-pound pack sack and headed for the unknown wilderness between Puget Sound and the ocean, in far-off Washington, intent on finding a fortune in gold quartz. I discovered several things up in that rugged country, but no gold. I found multitudes of elk, deer, bear and trout. But what I remember more distinctly than anything else, is the old pioneer. I found him in the heart of the mountains, about twenty-eight miles from where the fussy little steamer lowered a boat and set me ashore, in the shadow of the great, blue firs, which reached in a solid front, right down to the high-tide line.

"I had been prospecting for more than a month, with absolutely no success, and at last gave up and started for the town of Huntingdon, where I expected to begin the trip home by rail. One evening in the latter part of August I arrived at what appeared to be the hut of an ordinary settler, whither I stopped to inquire the way to Huntingdon. A pleasant-faced woman met me at the door and informed me, much to my surprise, that it was still a good day's journey distant. 'An' a mighty bad trail it is,' she added, shaking her head.

"Already the sun's rays were dying and the mountain mists were dimming the peaks and valleys with their purple haze, and I was tired and hungry. I asked permission of the lady to remain over night, and was greeted with the ready hospitality characteristic of the pioneer and informed that their very best was at my disposal.

"The family consisted of a typical pioneer, perhaps 40 years of age, his wife, two children and an old man whose tottering steps and feeble gestures indicated extreme old age. After the evening meal a desultory conversation occurred around the family hearth, during the course of which the fact was disclosed that the old man had never been to his nearest town—Huntingdon.

"'Adverse to cities, I suppose,' suggested, gazing at the old fellow with some curiosity.

"'Waal, no, caint say he is,' replied the son. 'Et ain't thet, you know. Paw allers wanted to see th' place bad 'nough, ever since I kin reckerlect, but it seems as of somethin' has allers happened to prevent his gittin' thar. You see, my gran'father an' gran'mother, thet war his father an' mother, settled here from England 'fore paw war born. When paw grew up he married maw, who war th' darter of a man from Canada, who had settled across th' gorge yonder'—indicating with his long fingers—an' fer th' first few years he war too busy to git off long 'nough to go. In fact, I guess, he hardly hed time to git to th' store, which is only six miles down th' trail.

"'Why,' continued the son, assuming a retrospective air, 'I kin even reckerlect when he first tried to make th' trip to th' town, 'though I warn't more'n 7 years old then. He took old Bess—war ot Bess? Yes, it war, th' one 'at died th' next year—an' started off at daylight, as chipper as a mountain finch. But say, he hadn't hin gone an hour 'fore maw took down with a dre'dful pain in her stummick, an' I hed to saddle th' other pony an' bring him back, double quick.

"'He tried it again about ten years arter, but the brige over th' Calgry hed fallen, an' so he hed to keel a pie an' back trail agin. An' agin, when I was 25, but thet time his horse took lame an' he finully had to come back. At 50, er thereabouts, he took down with a fever, an' war in his bed fer more'n a year. Then he war too old an' too poorly to go alone, an' et seems as ef I never hed time to take him thar.

"An' so," concluded the son, "he jes wanders 'round th' place, day after day, a tellin' his troubines to enny one thet passes while at night he dreams o' seein' th' place. I think, fer he oftn wakes up an' keeps sayin' over an' over agin, in a mournful kind o' way: 'I did not go to Huntingdon, I could not go to Huntingdon.' But, alas! I'm afeard he will never see th' place now,' and the son sighed feelingly. At the repetition of the word 'Huntingdon' the old man gazed at me with pathetic eyes, and with tears running down his furrowed cheeks and a tremor of his palsied hands, his high, cracked voice mourned: 'I did not go to Huntingdon; I could not go to Huntingdon.'

Here Mr. Bryan paused, apparently lost in reflection. After drumming idly with his fingers for a moment he continued:

"Well, to make a long story short, I finally determined to take the pioneer with me to Huntingdon, if the son would lend me an extra horse and agree to come for him in a day or two. The very thought of seeing the old fellow realize the all-absorbing passion of his life seemed sufficient reward for the trouble it would put me to, and, besides, I had tasted of the bitterness of disappointment and 'hope long deferred' myself, and was actuated by sympathy. The matter was finally arranged and the old man retired to his humble couch, filled with joy at the prospect of at last accomplishing his heart's desire.

"But that night he died."

ARTHUR S. JENNINGS.

"I did not go to Huntingdon; I could not go to Huntingdon."

COLLECTING STAGE PROPERTIES THE FAD OF A THEATRICAL MAN.

Stars of the Past and Present Are Represented in Clement's Museum.

Way down East, in the Massachusetts town of Lynn, there is a former showman who is indulging in a unique hobby. The showman is named Ira Clement, and he was stage manager at Niblo's Garden when Jarrett and Palmer were bringing out "The Black Crook." Some time ago this individual bought himself a cottage on the outskirts of Lynn and retired from business. He had been used to employment, however, and the newly found privilege of being idle soon palled upon him. He had become too feeble for real work, and it was not long before the desire to be doing something manifested itself in a mania for collecting. This mania was not strong enough to lift the erstwhile stage manager from the rut of his "profession." From the start his collections were in keeping with his calling. First he tried programmes; next he gathered seat checks; now he is completing a marvelous assemblage of theatrical properties.

Originally these acquisitions found space in Clement's sleeping chamber. The store was added to so rapidly, however, that the entire house came to be occupied. In every room the walls are covered, tables are laden, mantelpieces are hidden, and even chairs and sofas are filled with the curios. Despite the seeming disorder they are carefully arranged, and, upon its arrival, each is conscientiously catalogued. The collection has been made wholly for the pleasure of the collector. Very few of the denizens of Lynn know of the veritable museum so near them.

Sentiment aside, many of the effects which the old man has contrived to secure are far from being valueless. To the visitor who loves the stage and is familiar with histrionic history they are an inspiration. In a cabinet of home manufacture, standing near the front door of the dwelling, are a silken cord and tassel. Clement explains to a guest that the ornament belonged to Edwin Booth. The most casual cannot but remember that the tragedian often was criticised for toying with it while impersonating Hamlet, and a reverie is sure to follow. A neighboring mantel holds a skull which Charles Fechter was wont to handle in the same role. Just above is suspended an iron cross, which Cooper, the first English actor of note to come to this country, wore in "Richelieu," and above that hangs a sword which Edwin Forrest once wielded in "The Gladiator." Hard by are the dagger that wrought mischief nightly when Charlotte Cushman was appearing as Lady Macbeth, the gloves which cased the fingers of E. L. Davenport in "The King of the Commons," the kerchief worn by Rose Eytinge as Nancy Sykes in "Oliver Twist," the bunch strapped to Danny Mann on the occasion of the first production of Boucicault's "The Colleen Bawn," and the belt which girded that great Falstaff—the elder Hackett. Around the top of a battered bed post is clasped the paste necklace that adorned the throat of Agnes Booth on the evening of Lincoln's assassination at Ford's Theater in Washington.

Souvenirs of the past of present-day favorites there are in plenty. Across a collar purchased for "Fritz" Emmett's famous dog the observer is certain to notice a satin slipper. Clement says that this belonged to one of the Irwin sisters, a song and dance team, though whether to Flo or May he has not been able to discover. Neither could wear it now, even though she emulated Cinderella's wicked relative and had her feet sliced down.

The collector is quite happy over a bag of ducats given to him by Sir Henry Irving, who had carried them in "The Merchant of Venice," and over the glass from which Richard Mansfield drank when he played Baron Chevrial in "A Parisian Romance" at the Union Square. Then, too, he has the "Joe Miller's Joke Book," which was prone to set Thomas Q. Seabrooke roaring in "The Isle of Champagne," and the photograph of Svengali which used to hypnotize Edith Crane in "Trilby." The joke book really is a volume of a forgotten novel, "The Charity Waif," and the photograph represents Fanny Ward as Cupid in a Henderson extravaganza. More interesting, if not so amusing, are a fan behind which Viola Allen blushed when she was Lydia Languish in Joseph Jefferson's production of "The Rivals," a pair of slippers affected by Denman Thompson before "The Old Homestead" had quitted the variety houses, a memorandum book utilized by E. S. Willard in "Jim, the Penman," a hat which graded or disgraced Nat Goodwin in "Turned Up," and a cigarette partially smoked by Della Fox during her rendering of her song in "Wang."

Many of these latter trifles were presented to Clement by the celebrities, whose property they were. The old fellow owns three champagne corks sent to him by Anna Held, who, in the accompanying letter, explained that one was drawn by Judic in "La Femme a Papa," one by Lotta in "Ma'm'selle Nitouche," and one by herself in the version of the two pieces made for her and called "Papa's Wife."

Among the other folk represented are Lawrence Barrett, Edward Harrigan, Madge Kendal, Bartley Campbell, Olga Nethersole, John Hare, George Gilbert, Lester Wallack, James O'Neill, Henry E. Dixey, H. Beerbohm Tree, John Toole and Sarah Bernhardt. What will become of the collection when Ira Clement dies it would be difficult to say. His heirs are not likely to care much for it.

IS THIS THE QUAINTEST TOMBSTONE IN MISSOURI?

This tombstone, with the inscription shown, was recently erected in Andrain County, Mo., over the grave of a man who was a life-long Democrat. The lines—

Kind friends I've left behind,
Cast your vote for Jennings Bryan—

were written by Mr. Norris shortly before his death, and it was his request that they take the place of an epitaph upon his tombstone. He was an ardent supporter of Mr. Bryan and the political ideas that he represents, and it was his wish that if death should prevent him from taking part in the 1900 campaign, he might still help in the work by this "voice from the tomb."

Russell's Ruse.

From The Little Chronicle.

On one occasion, after the late Chief Justice Russell rose to the bench, a juryman asked him to be excused from service. "On what ground?" asked his Lordship. The man approached with his hand to his ear, and said, "I'm deaf, my Lord, and cannot hear the evidence." "You can go—" said Lord Russell in a whisper. "Thank you, my Lord," replied the juryman, taken off his guard. But the learned Judge had not finished his sentence, and he sternly added, "into the box and do your duty."

WILLIAM OPPOSED TO WOMEN CYCLERS.

From the Chicago Record.

Emperor William does not favor cycling as a sport among women. At the unveiling of the monument of Queen Louise, which took place at Tilsit not long ago, the inevitable historic procession formed one of the principal features of the day's programme, and a section of feminine cyclists occupied a prominent part in the line. They were young and handsome, full of life, dressed not in bloomers, but in fine costumes, and, in short, there was nothing for the average mortal to object to as these pretty girls passed the grand stand. Yet the Kaiser disliked the spectacle, and, turning to the ladies about him, he remarked: "Ladies, I beg you never to mount a wheel." Just why he takes this stand is not known; nor is it very reasonable, in view of the fact that he greatly favors horseback riding for women. The Empress is passionately fond of the saddle. Nothing delights her more than when as Colonel she can lead her regiment in review before the Kaiser. "The domain of women, however," the Kaiser one remarked, "is indicated by three k's—kirche(church), kinder (children) and kuche (kitchen)."