

## MUSIC AND ART AND DRAMA

The Brough and Boucicault Company have come, have been seen, and have conquered. From the rise of the curtain on the first night to the time of writing they have been welcomed with crowded and enthusiastic audiences, and there is no reason to believe but that the season will be eminently prosperous to its conclusion. We are pleased to record this phenomenal success, as it reflects credit as much on the critical discrimination of the Wellington theatre-going public as on the excellence of the Company at present visiting our metropolis. As we said in a previous issue everything that Messrs. Brough and Boucicault do, they do well, and we are pleased that the fiat of the public has been in accordance with our remarks. Messrs. Brough and Boucicault's Company is one of the few stock companies still existing in the English speaking world and its existence and success is a protest against the modern custom of picking artists from here and there for a brief season and then letting them go. Each member of the present company is accustomed to playing with his brother or sister member, and the natural consequence is a perfect whole.

One thing in connection with the present season, however, struck us as being somewhat curious, namely, the opening of the season with so a sombre piece as the "Village Priest." The Company has made its great reputation as being *par excellence* the best comedy Company that has been seen south of the Line, and those who had not had the pleasure of witnessing its performances before, naturally looked for something light instead of a production that bordered closely on the tragic and can be best described as a refined high-class drama. It is possible that the management desired to accentuate the marvellous versatility of its artists by making the strong contrast between the "Village Priest" and "Niobe," or it may have been that the former piece was put on first as an experiment, at any rate, whatever the cause was the effect was a brilliant success. The public of Wellington paid Messrs. Brough and Boucicault the compliment of taking them on trust the first night, and the general satisfaction was so great that the doors have been besieged every night since, regularly.

Sydney Grundy's great drama, "The Village Priest," is in reality a variation of the "Priest's Secret," and the "Soggarth," with a bold innovation in the shape of a priest who reasons, and considers the calls of his conscience, if as he believes, they are divinely inspired, superior to the hard and fast rules laid down by his order. The plot of the drama is well known to the public, and any entering into detail would be superfluous. Mr. Titheradge who appears as the Abbe Dubois seems to enter entirely into the part and gives us an interpretation that shows he's made a careful study of the character. The

man, for he is still a man, who has led a life of priestly sanctity for years finds himself confronted with the terrible questions, shall I permit the innocent to suffer and bring disgrace on, and hatred from his offspring? shall I permit misery and suffering to exist generation after generation to preserve the memory of a guilty dead man? the struggle was hard between religious custom and the calls of conscience to spare the sufferers and finally inspired as he believes by the Divinity the priest forgets his vows and determines to right the injured. His struggle between what is right and wrong while waiting in his sanctuary, and his final decision after the fluttering of the leaves of the bible, with his grand climax "The age of miracles is not past, Lord thy servant is here," was in the hands of Mr. Titheradge, a magnificent piece of acting. It is hardly necessary to speak of the minor details in the scene with Madelaine in the garden, and again when the true murderer is named. Every point has been carefully studied, and the "business," if we may use the term, is perfect.



MRS. ROBERT BROUGH.

Mr. Brough's Jean Tourquenie is another bit of excellent acting. For years he suffers all the horrors of imprisonment, knowing himself to be an innocent man and finally on making his escape is met by the daughter whom he loves and has longed to meet, with abhorrence. This gives him more agony than all he has previously suffered and feelings of revenge mixed with hatred of his kind, boil in his heart. At last the grand *denouement* comes, his character is cleared in the sight of those he loves, his daughter begs forgiveness and but one act remains to clear him before the world, but that act necessitates the

undeceiving of a gentle old lady, who has cared for his daughter as her own child during his imprisonment, the shattering of her love and belief in her dead husband's integrity and the breaking of her heart. Then comes his grand opportunity for sacrifice and self abnegation, and the true nobility of the man stands forth as he gives himself up again to captivity, satisfied with the belief of those he loves, and unwilling to inflict the torture that he has unfairly suffered on one who has been so kind to him.

Mr. Brough's Torquenie is a splendid dramatic characterization and was well worthy of the applause with which it was received. Mrs. Brough's Comtesse was also a fine bit of character acting. Her remorse and agony at the consequences which had been brought upon her child by her sin, and her terror and wretchedness when convinced that the only justification that she had cherished for her wrong doing was a mistaken one, were interpreted most forcibly. Mrs. Brough was throughout the grand lady, and the role was enhanced by her graceful tact and thorough appreciation of it.

On Monday night "Niobe" was staged and a greater contrast to the previous production could hardly have been chosen. "Niobe" is provocative of one continuous ripple of merry laughter from start to finish. There is nothing to provoke the vulgar guffaw or the inane cackle, the piece is fresh, wholesome and picturesquely humorous, with a literary excellence running through it that commends it to the public. The play is fitted to the Company and the Company to the play. Niobe can best be described as a classical parody on Pygmalion and Galatea, with a fund of humour added and none of the grace and beauty of the original production lost.

Mrs. Brough's "Niobe" was imbued with all the naive and delicate humour of Galatea, with just a *soupeon* of her own charming individuality and the modern wit of the playwright added. Her question "Why don't some one teach them how to walk?" was accentuated by her own stately stride, and the beauty of her flowing robes was a protest against the grotesqueness of modern fashion. Mr. Brough's "Peter Amos Dunn" was as finished a piece of comedy acting as we have seen for many a year, and we are of opinion that it is one of his best parts. His curiously comical predicaments, his utter hopelessness of ever making his family believe the true state of affairs, and his humorous situations with Niobe are laughable in the extreme. It is a curious mirth-provoking explanation of what might really happen if the antique were brought in contact with our humdrum everyday modern life. Mr. Ward is amusing as Cornelius Griffin, the sceptical man of the world, and Mr. Boucicault although he plays but a comparatively small part, is most excellent. A word of praise is also due to Miss Gibson whose Hattie is certainly to be applauded for its precocious, childish, abandonment; and Miss Romer's Helen Griffin also deserves favourable comment. We are pleased to note that "Niobe" will be re-