

Music and Drama.

All the places of amusement in Auckland did splendid business during the holidays, and the four shows which catered for the tastes of the usual influx of visitors for the festive season should remember the New Year with feelings of satisfaction.

Messrs Willoughby and Geach's Comedy Company has been making His Majesty's Theatre resound nightly with boisterous laughter. "Mistakes Will Happen" had not amused half the people its absurdities are capable of doing when the management substituted "A Stranger in a Strange Land," believing in the virtue of quick changes. The "stranger," who made his bow for the first time on Saturday evening, was such an amusing fellow that he quickly made friends, and he bids fair to be as well known as the town-clock before he gets out of Auckland. Mr Willoughby has the star part, as usual, and intensely funny he is, but the merit of the piece does not hang on one string. Every member of the company has a part that contributes to the wild hilarity caused by the fearful and wonderful complications that are so numerous that one scarcely has time to unravel one before the next comes toppling down on one. Air Willoughby, Mr Cannon, and Mr Tom Leonard provide most of the fun among the white men, and Mr Houray and Mr Lester, as improvised Indians, are very droll. Of the ladies of the company, Miss Roxy Barton, as a smart American girl, and Miss Roland Watts - Phillips, as the elderly lady with a penchant for "rumming the show," and everybody else had the best parts, and both—in their widely different styles—were admirable. Messrs Willoughby and Geach always bring us something good, and in their present repertoire they have some pieces that hit the public taste to a nicety.

The second Stapoffski concert held at the Choral Hall on New Year's night attracted a splendid audience. The programme was a distinctly popular one, and each item was enthusiastically received. Madame Stapoffski sang several songs during the evening, and quite charmed her audience. The selections on the Strob violin by Mr E. Stevenson were a feature of the concert, and this clever artist is sure to make his strange instrument popular throughout the colony. The company is an exceedingly good one, and, judging from the Auckland reception, the tour should be a highly satisfactory one.

Mr Horace Stebbing's song, "The Two Veterans," is to be sold at the fair to be held in Dunedin in aid of the funds of the Veterans' Home.

Mr George Barnes, Mr Musgrove's popular advance, sends along a characteristic card with seasonable greetings, which are heartily reciprocated.

"The House that Jack Built" and "Robinson Crusoe," the two pantomimes to which Mr Fuller and Mr Dix treated the Wellingtonians at Christmas are both said to be very fine.

Miss Fitzmaurice Gill gauged the taste of her patrons to a nicety when she submitted "The Serpent's Coil" as a holiday bill. There has nightly been a large gathering at the Opera House to witness this exciting play, and as it is really well mounted and acted it has been a marked success. Miss Gill and Mr Blake are well supported by a capable company, and "The Serpent's Coil" may be sure of a good run.

The arrival in Auckland of Mr G. L. Petersen announces the fact that Wirth's Circus is due again. This well-known combination is booked to open a season in this part of the colony on January 19th. There has been a reorganisation since the circus was last with us, and the management now announces a list of attractions seldom found in one show.

Madame Fanny Moody-Manners writes to the "Era":—"Sir,—I have read many letters lately regarding the wearing of hats in theatres. Will you kindly allow me to suggest the following method? At some theatre in the Western States the following notice was put up—Only old ladies allowed to keep their hats on! What the effect was I am unable to say. I only know this, that if I had been one of the audience I should have promptly taken mine off."

A sensational accident occurred recently at the Palace Theatre, Blackburn, England. The Haulon Troupe of acrobats were performing what is known as the great throwing act, in which a boy is tossed about in the air between two men hanging by the heels to lofty horizontal bars. Just as the lad was being delivered for the final throw the wire supports of the erection snapped, and, amid screams from the audience, the whole apparatus toppled forward. The boy fell safely into the net, but the man dangling head downwards was only saved from serious injury by the rush of attendants from 'the wings.

Sir Henry Irving is an excellent interviewer, and he has given the Americans some interesting information. "It never entered my head," said Sir Henry, "that I had any facial resemblance to Dante when I selected the character. I did not know the resemblance existed. But it was recently brought to my attention by a small child on board the ship when we were crossing that there is some physical resemblance. He was a restless little boy, and persistently got into mischief, for which his mother was continually chiding him. I overheard her rebuke him

one day with these words, which seemed to be more of a threat than anything else, 'If you are not a good boy, and if you bother me any more, you shall go into the Irving troupe.' It is not exactly a pleasant sensation to have a mother hold you up to her offspring as a sort of ope. However, I suppose that I am, perhaps, less sensitive to that stigma than was Dante. He, if the historians are right, was pointed out by mothers to their children as the man who had been through Hades."

Sir Henry Irving, while in New York, received the following letter:—"My Dear Sir,—I am a member of the electrical fraternity, and saw your play of 'Dante' last evening. If I may be allowed to express an opinion I want to tell you that the infernal scene was very bad. The sunset ripple was woefully lacking in effect. It was certainly not true to nature, if it was so intended." Sir Henry has explained that the ripple got turned upside down on the night in question by some mechanical error, and the rain, instead of falling down, fell up.

Mr W. F. Hawtreay does not share in the condemnation of other entrepreneurs of the South Island as "show" towns. To "Call Boy," in the Dunedin "Star," he remarked:—"Dunedin and Christchurch I look on as two safe places to visit. Business has been uniformly good in both, but I don't know whether it was because they were the two towns we first visited when we originally came from Australia, but this much I do know: both have treated us kindly. Possibly, too, cricket may have something to do with it. As you know, we have a cricket team in the company, and cricket has been a great help to us, for we have always met nice people on the field, and they have proved good patrons. Cricket has proved to me one of the most pleasant and efficient methods of advertisement probably anyone ever came across. We shall be in Sydney for the Fourth Test Match, and you may rest assured that one who will witness every ball delivered throughout the four, five, or six days, as the case may be, will be W. F. Hawtreay. Rehearsals, if necessary, will be held at 9 a.m., and my company are all such enthusiasts that they will readily tumble out of bed two or three hours earlier should they be required."

The recent action of the Examiner of Plays in prohibiting the performance of "Smith of the Shamrock Guards," a drama dealing with "ragging" in the Army, has given rise to a good deal of hasty and inconsiderate comment, says the "Era" in a thoughtful leader. After reading the piece and Mr Redford's reasons for objecting to it, we have come to the conclusion that he exercised excellent common sense. The play itself is curious and interesting in parts, some of the dialogue being evidently "taken from life." There is no doubt that the author of the work, who signs himself "Officer," writes from observation. But, apart from the fact that the drama is weak in story and construction and would stand no chance on the stage, its

public performance would be most undesirable.

No intelligent and refined person desires to defend "ragging"; indeed, to the ordinary civilian, it appears to be indefensible. But as Lord Palmerston pointed out, Dirt is only Matter in the wrong place; and the poor man who might be very happy in a line regiment or in the Militia, or the student who would be quite in his element in the Artillery or the Engineers, is a "perfect nuisance" in a smart Cavalry regiment, officered by men of rank and wealth. He is in the mess but not of the mess. He cannot spare time to ride on the regimental drag, and he cannot afford money to join in a game of cards. He cannot hunt, and he cannot keep polo ponies. He is in the same position as a guest at an aristocratic country house who neither shoots nor rides, and spends his time in solitary meditation in the library. If you have a number of men of similar incomes, tastes, and habits living together in intimate community, the addition to their "family circle" of a man of different tastes, no matter what his merits, is disagreeable; and, in the end, the situation becomes impossible. The boyishly brutal means which officers resort to as a remedy and a solution are indefensible; but the question may well be put: "Why do poor and studious men join such regiments?" The scale of expenditure in a regiment can easily be ascertained before joining. And if they find they are unpopular—i.e., out of harmony with their surroundings—why do they not "exchange" into more congenial ones?

What is the result on the mind of the average common soldier or officer when he witnesses a performance of a "ragging" play like "Smith of the Shamrock Guards?" He sees the question put before the audience unfairly, because the "ragged" man is always made a very fine fellow—whereas in real life he often bears the same reference to the other officers as the studious prig who will not play football or cricket does to the boys of an English school—and the physical brutality of the "ragging" is vividly depicted without any of the extenuating circumstances which we have mentioned above being explained. Naturally, he is indignant, and creates a disturbance; and thus the theatre is turned into an arena for the noisy battles of opposite opinions. Mr Cecil Raleigh in "The Flood and Tide" has managed matters with his usual tact and cleverness. There is a raisonneur in the cast, who puts the case from a regimental point of view, and the "ragging" done in the hero's rooms is very harmless horse-play. But fancy the following scene from "Smith of the Shamrock Guards" being performed upon the stage! The court-martial has been held, and Smith is sentenced to receive thirty strokes with a fire-shovel, and to endure other indignities.

The representation of such a scene in a town where the military element was strong might very probably lead to a riot in the theatre, and even to serious damage to the building; from both of which risks Mr Redford, the censor of plays, very properly preserved English playgoers.

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