

fully simple and refreshing, says the London "Era." The victim, in this case, was Miss Millie Legarde, the charming actress, who is about to tour the suburban theatres shortly with Mr Pople (of Ippleton), and we are indebted to her for permission to use the following epistles:—

Dear Miss Legarde,—I beg to enclose herewith half a dozen photos of yourself, and to ask if you will very kindly do me the favour of signing them for me, on the mount below the pictures, whenever you have a minute to spare. I ask you to sign on the mount specially because I am told that the ink is detrimental to the film of the photographic paper, and I do not wish this, and I shall esteem it a further favour if you will do this for me. I send in addition a stamped addressed envelope, in which the photos may be returned, and thanking you in anticipation, believe me to remain, Truly, Mr. H.—H. H.—

"To Miss Millie Legarde, the Princess of Wales's Theatre, W. Mr. H.—H. H.— has received the note containing a request for half a crown. He regrets to state that he does not see his way to contribute to this society in return for the signature of Miss Legarde, which he requested in his letter of yesterday's date. He does not think the same worth it, and will, therefore, be obliged by an immediate return of his pictures, when they will be destroyed, as Mr. H.—H. does not collect unautographed photos."

MISS TITTELL BRUNE IN AUCKLAND.

Miss Tittell Brune will open a short season of 18 nights at the Opera House on Monday, 8th October, supported by Mr. J. C. Williamson's powerful Dramatic Company, which includes the popular young English actor, Mr. Thomas Kingston. Miss Brune will appear as "Dorothy Vernon" in the absorbing stage version of Charles Major's successful romance of that name. In the South and up the coast—as our society theatre testify, Miss Brune has had an amazing success. The opening production, "Dorothy Vernon" is a play of which the most flattering things have been said and written. One critic has even gone so far as to say that "since Victor Hugo evolved the romantic drama, the stage has seen no more stirring tale of chivalry than Dorothy Vernon of Haddon Hall." The play offers rare scope for the exercise of Miss Brune's histrionic talents, and in Dorothy Vernon she is said to have a part which suits her to perfection. By her excellent interpretation of this character, Miss Brune is said to show herself as capable in light comedy as "L'Aiglon showed her to be in tragedy. In support of the star, Mr. Kingston will appear as the dashing cavalier, Sir John Manners, Miss Susie Vaughan, as Queen Elizabeth, Mr. Gaston Mervale as Sir Malcolm Vernon, Mr. J. B. Atholwood as Sir George Vernon, Mr. T. W. Lloyd as Earl Rutland, Mr. Vivian Edwards as Lord Burleigh, Mr. Maurice Dudley as Perkin, Miss Nellie Ferguson as Mary Queen of Scots, Miss Nellie Calverna as Jennie Faxton, Miss Clara Stevenson as Lady Vernon, and Miss Irbly Marshall as Bess.

The second, great production of the season will be "Leah Kleschna," the famous drama by C.M.S. McLenaghan—which shows Miss Brune's genius in a different vein, and which is acclaimed as one of her greatest achievements. Zangwill's successful comedy "Merely Mary Ann," will also be staged during the Auckland season, and it is hoped that time may be found for the revival of some of the old favourites.

AUCKLAND AMATEUR SHAKESPEARE SOCIETY.

ROMEO AND JULIET.

With a carefully and, as it turned out, a felicitously chosen cast, the reading of "Romeo and Juliet" by members of the Auckland Shakespeare Society, proved of somewhat exceptional interest and merit; and is therefore worthy of rather more extended notice than can usually be devoted to amateur recitals within the limited space available for drama.

Juliet, Romeo, Mercutio, and the Nurse, with Capulet and Friar Lawrence, are the characters who sustain (in the order named) the chief responsibilities of the ever famous, ever delightful love tragedy. In Miss Von Meyern Mr. Mon-

tagne secured a Juliet with whom it would have been hard indeed to find any serious fault, and, indeed, little fault whatsoever, it being a singularly able performance for an amateur.

Young, pretty, with a dainty girlish figure, a piquant, provocative face, and a cultivated voice, nature had certainly done much in fitting Miss Von Meyern for the role, and careful study, under obviously capable tuition, enabled her to read audibly, expressively, and sympathetically.

Now this, for an amateur, is rare enough to note with special marks of approbation.

The famous balcony scene received very delicate and girlishly poetic treatment, and, as evidence of versatility, the low comedy of the interlude with the Nurse, where Juliet, almost crazed with love's impatience, has to alternately coax and pacify the tired and ruffled Nurse, showed that Miss Von Meyern possessed a sense of discretion as well as humour, while in the chamber scene with Romeo, in which Juliet gives her passion free rein she was astonishingly convincing for an amateur, though naturally not able to plumb the full depth of passion as an older and therefore more experienced artist might do. But it was well done—amazingly well done, considering the age, training, and slight experience of the reader. But the surprise, and (considered in comparative terms) the triumph of this reading of the play, so far as Juliet was concerned, was the famous and justly dreaded potion scene which makes the extremest call on the nerve, staying power, and ability of the actress or reader. Nine out of ten amateurs come hopelessly to grief over it, and it was with some trepidation critical members of the audience looked forward to the speech. As an amateur effort, so far as present deponent remembers, Miss Von Meyern was almost unique. She did not rant, yet she managed to create some considerable portion of the "thrill" which artists of repute infuse into the part.

We are not of course judging a professional performance, but that of an amateur, and a very young amateur, and in saying therefore that she gave her audience real and often absolutely fine, artistic (not altruistic) pleasure, one is giving this promising young lady high praise indeed.

As Romeo, Mr. Whitmarsh has youth, a pleasant voice, and his share of good looks, and therefore, so far as a man in conventional evening dress can do at a reading, he "looked" the part, and read intelligently and audibly, so assisting the pleasant impression created by Miss Von Meyern. He was not particularly passionate as a lover, but he was earnest, and gave a good deal better account of himself than the majority of amateur Romeos one has heard.

The Mercutio of Mr Singer was a clear, clean cut, finished piece of work of almost professional excellence. One has heard the Queen Mab speech better done—by a professional—but never by a reciter. The dying speech, too, was worthy of all praise for its light and shade, and also very notably for its restraint.

To entrust the nurse to a very young reader was daring, but the choice of Miss Zoe Bartley was justified. She had been (a little obviously) schooled and coached with much care and detail; and though, in the language of what our legislators refer to as "another place" she was perhaps a trifle "overtrained," her reading was one which did herself and her mentor credit.

Mr Montagu's Capulet was notable for the excellence of his fiery outburst against Juliet in her chamber. It was really finely done. The rest of the cast calls for little if any special notice, save Peter, but it is perhaps best to leave him as the school-boy did Caligula. Asked: State what you know of Caligula, and being stumped, the youth replied with wit and truth: "The less said about Caligula the better." So let it be with Peter.

IS MUSICAL COMEDY LEGITIMATE?

CHAT WITH MR. EDWARD LAURI.

(By the "Era" Commissioner.)

"Australia is a splendid country for an actor to go to and learn his business." That is the opinion of Mr. Edward Lauri, the well-known musical comedy

eccentric character comedian who has just returned to this country after a five years' active experience of Australasian theatrical affairs. "In this country," argues Mr. Lauri, "a man plays a certain kind of part—say an Arthur Robert's part. He gets known by playing that part, and is not afforded an opportunity of distinguishing himself in another style of business. Now in Australia, the actor plays everything, and on the ground of acquiring versatility the training there is admirable."

"The Australian women," continues Mr. Lauri, "possess marvellous natural talent."

The writer recollected that several people he had interviewed recently had had something to say about Australia, and that colony had received a wonderful advertisement. So to a different theme.

"May I lead your thoughts into another groove, Mr. Lauri, by inquiring if you consider musical comedy is legitimate comedy?"

"Well," replies the interviewee, "the common talk of the 'legitimate' on our side of art is generally common clap-trap. Drama and comedy are not fixed in style or intention, but change constantly to meet the changing requirements of the new generation that is with us every day. There are not several sorts of comedy. Comedy is one and indivisible. There are, I admit, quite a number of standard forms or manifestations of the comic spirit, but comedy is the thing common to the lot, the vivifying essence of them all. Anything that evolves naturally from antecedent forms is legitimate; and, viewed in the proper light, 'The Skirt Dancer' is no farther as it is good and human, is as legitimate as 'Twelfth Night.'"

This objection to certain things in modern comedy as illegitimate is the commonest cry of every little crowd that pecks at hard-working playwrights, and we agree with much of what Mr. Lauri says in this respect. It is not real reproach to musical comedy to say that at moments it approaches nearly to burlesque. (Can it be said that in the most deliciously comic scene in Shakespeare, Dogberry, and Verges are not burlesque, and in another play is not the admirable Bottom as broad a burlesque of humanity as you shall find in all literature? Possibly it may be argued that the musical comedy of to-day is artistically defective in that it is disproportionately gay, too lavishly compact of laughter. To this we should

be inclined to reply that, in plain fact, we moderns seem to be reverting to the old ideals; and, as pilgrims at the shrine, we kneel with Aristophanes, who has been some long time lonely.

If we were to dissent generally upon comedy, we might say that in the Elizabethan and Restoration comedies the truly comic element was slender. Of course, it has to be admitted that Marlowe's quips at times are artificial and even brutal. Nor, probably, could any man not criminally insane laugh at the bloody jests of Massinger or the fierce humour of Ford. As to Webster and Tourneur—well, imagine any clean human creature laughing at the deliberately comic graveyard scene between Snuffe and Noguetta in "The Atheist's Tragedy!" Then in Jomsonian comedy, most notably in Volpone, the master's laughter rings terribly sardonic. Such plays are not in any sense truly comic, for satire is not always fun, and wit is not of necessity humour. In all our dramatic literature there is nothing else of its kind to equal the scintillating wit of Congreve, but "Love for Love" is scarcely funnier than "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray."

"What do you intend doing over here, Mr. Lauri?"

"I am anxious to get some first class attractions to take to Australia and New Zealand on my own account and on behalf of a syndicate. You see, one must be careful about producing plays in that colony. So far they have had the best of the pieces from Daly's and the Gaiety, and they expect West-end successes. The pieces are staged in quite as good a manner as in London, and they get a much superior and fuller chorus. In my opinion, the Princess Theatre, Melbourne, is the finest in the world, and yet the highest price for stall seats is five shillings. As to the managers, there are Mr. J. C. Williamson and Mr. George Musgrove, who look after the musical comedy and operatic side. I consider Mr. Musgrove the best manager I ever worked under. His productions are most artistic, and equal to anything to be seen in the West-end. People over here would be astonished to witness the magnificent Australian production of "Veronique," in which the chorus, compared with the Apollo company, was of double strength and volume. Messrs. Bland Holt and Anderson attend to the dramatic branch of the profession, and Mr. Harry Rickards to the vaudeville. Mr. Rickards is very plucky indeed. He takes out the finest talent procurable, and pays any amount of money."

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