

perfection of the dramatist's constructive skill. Aristotle selected it as the most perfect of Greek tragedies, and the language he uses on the subject suggests that this was a recognised opinion in Greece. The hero is one of those characters dear to tragedy, because his many noble characteristics are marred by certain obvious defects of impulsiveness, anger, and so forth; and because, in spite of his failings, he remains throughout a personage appealing to our sympathies. *Edipus* had done great things for Thebes at a time when it was under the cruel domination of the Sphinx, whose riddles no men could guess. Arriving as a young man, a stranger from Corinth, after the death of King Laius, he satisfactorily solved the Sphinx's problem, and was naturally elected as sovereign, with the privilege accorded to him of marrying the widowed Queen Jocasta.

Fate's Ordinance.

A dark fate, however, overhung Thebes, dependent on some gloomy and terrible prophecies, uttered in Apollo's shrine at Delphi. It was said of Laius, the original king, that he should be murdered by his own son, and that that son should further be guilty of the terrible crime of marrying his mother. In order to avoid a destiny like this, the infant son of Laius and Jocasta was sent out in the care of a shepherd, with his feet cruelly mangled by iron bars, to be exposed on the heights of Mount Cithaeron. The pity of the shepherd saved the hapless infant, for, instead of allowing him to die, he gave him into the hands of a Corinthian shepherd, who took him to his own city, where, in due process of time, he became the adopted son of Polybus and Merope, King and Queen of Corinth. Of course, the boy in question was no other than *Edipus* himself, who, on hearing, on one occasion, doubts cast on his paternity, went off in high dudgeon to consult the shrine of Apollo in order to discover what his origin really was. He got no satisfactory answer from the oracle, and his failure only stirred him to still greater wrath. As ill-luck would have it, he met on the road a chariot containing King Laius and a herald. A violent altercation ensued, and *Edipus* accomplished the first part of the oracle in slaying his father. The second part of the oracle was also speedily fulfilled, for, as we have seen, *Edipus* went to Thebes, saved the city from the exactions of the Sphinx, became King of the Thebes, and married his own mother, Jocasta. The whole import of the tragedy is that *Edipus* was an absolutely innocent and unwitting sinner. He had no reason for knowing that the old man in a chariot whom he slew was his father, Laius, for no true story of his birth had ever reached his ears, nor yet could he know that the queen he was invited to marry in Thebes was his mother.

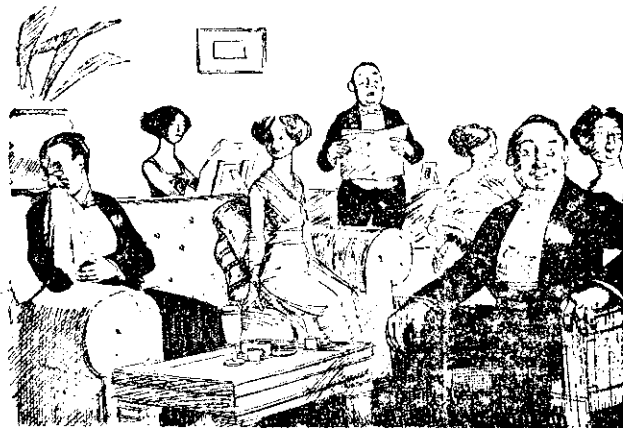
The Final Tragedy.

When the play of "*Edipus the King*" ends, we see the monarch apparently securely enthroned at the highest pinnacle of his power and greatness. But there are signs of trouble ahead. There is pestilence in the city; the flocks are dying; the crops wither in the ground. Thebes seems to be under the spell of some curse from Heaven. And when the oracle is consulted, the dread message is received that Thebes is harbouring a parricide, and that unless she expels the guilty man no further prosperity is in store for her. Then, step by step, we see the predestined doom, closing in narrowing circles round the unhappy hero. Every step he takes brings more surely upon himself the fate originally designed by Heaven. Tiresias, without hesitation, points to the king as the guilty man. But *Edipus*, in order to be better informed, sends for the Theban shepherd. It was his own idea that he was really a son of Polybus, the King of Corinth; but he is speedily disillusioned when a messenger from Corinth informs him that he was merely an adopted son. Then enters the Theban shepherd who had carried the babe out to the heights of Cithaeron. And so, slowly, one by one, the proofs accumulate, until at last the whole hideousness of the position is revealed. *Edipus* is the man accused by Heaven, who, through no guilt of his own, except possibly through a certain rash impulsiveness of nature, killed his own father and married his own mother. Jocasta, on learning the truth, commits suicide. *Edipus*, eternally submitting himself to the decrees of Fate, tears out his eyes with his own hand, and confronts his people, waiting for the inevitable decree of banishment which is to drive him from the State.

Such is the grim tragedy which the genius of Sophocles has presented to us in, perhaps, his greatest play. He makes no comment on the story he has to tell; and, indeed, the story was one of the ancient myths and legends. He is strictly impersonal, both as to the events and the characters of his drama. At most he seems to tell us that men could not in the mythological and classic age escape the lot ordained for them by a Heaven whose decrees were so cloaked in mystery that they seem arbitrary and unjust. Aeschylus, an older dramatist, did his best to console mankind by vindicating the enactments of Heaven on moral and religious grounds. Sophocles is no moralist; he is pure artist, and nothing else. He draws with firm, dramatic touches his characters. He reveals the cloud of Fate under which they have to pass their lives. He shows us their miserable end. But this very impartiality and aloofness make his work all the more impressive. It stands before us like a perfect statue of Phidias, beyond all example, clear, pure, and refined. Subtlety of composition, purity of line, delicacy of modelling—these are the characteristics of his work. And so this tragedy remains unique in character, only to be equalled by masterpieces such as "*Macbeth*," "*Othello*," and "*Lear*," coming from the hand of Shakespeare himself.

Sousa in New Zealand.

After Sousa comes the band. That is typically American, although the excellence and fame of the organisation is



SATIRE IN THE HOME—THE TRAGIC SONG.

due entirely to the combination of both. It is unfortunate that the famous band comes to New Zealand at a time when so much is doing and there are so many things clamouring for support from the pockets of the public. The opportunity is really exceptional, and the public do not seem to have grasped the fact. Sousa has made a speciality of marches and superficial American sketches, it is true, but that cannot hide the fact he and the band are a splendid body of musicians in every way, finer in fact than the much vaunted "Besses." Their programmes are particularly strong in Wagner numbers, and other truly musical works. The opening in Auckland to-night (Wednesday) at the Opera House will see the performance of the famous overture to "*Tannhauser*" and the still more famous "*Ride of the Valkyries*." Included in the season's programmes also will be such things as the gorgeous introduction to Act III of "*Lohengrin*"—a reigning masterpiece in the concert halls of Britain to-day, and the wonderful funeral march and death scene from "*The Dusk of the Gods*"—the last of the four grand operas which compose the famous cycle known as "*The Ring*." Other Wagnerian numbers on the programmes are prominent, but in addition the band, with all its superb accompaniment of reed instruments, plays such masterpieces as Humperdinck's prelude to the opera "*Hansel and Gretel*," the overture to "*Oberon*" (Weber), Sibelius' "*Tone Poem*," "*Finlandia*" familiar to the members of the Auckland Orchestral Society; overture to "*Poet and Peasant*" (Suppe); Tchaikowsky's famous overture "*Solenne*" 1812; "*Invitation a La Valse*" (Weber); Edward German's "*Welsh Rhapsody*"; and the lovely prelude by Rachmaninoff entitled "*The Bells of Moscow*." It will be seen that altogether apart from the exceptional interest the visitors hold for local bandmen, Sousa and his men have

programmes of extraordinary value to musical people. Through them, though the public do not seem to have realised yet, they have a splendid opportunity of hearing an adequate interpretation of what are the fine things so often spoken of, and so little played in this country. The Wagner selections are very comprehensive, and it will be a loss to the music lovers of this country if they are allowed to pass unheard.

After "The Arcadians."

"*The Arcadians*" has been having a "boom" in Auckland, as was to be expected from the excellent impression the piece produced on the first night of production. On Monday next "*The Belle of Brittany*" is to be put on to conclude the last six nights of the season. Hubert of the Lyttelton "*Times*," who is a well tried and sincere critic, writes of it as follows:—

"The programme very judiciously neglects to take the responsibility of classifying '*The Belle of Brittany*,' the second production of the Clarke and Meynell opera season, and it is left for a discriminating audience to decide for itself whether it is comic opera, musical comedy, pantomime or vaudeville. It is none of them and all of them, for it is a delicious mixture of a frankly irresponsible nature, of almost everything that has been done along these lines. It would probably have been more subtle had it been christened '*Reminiscences*,' for there were continual suggestions of old favourites right through the two acts, more in the

Stray Notes.

The principals of the Clarke and Meynell new light opera company, which are to appear in "*The Chocolate Soldier*," have arrived in Melbourne from London. Miss Clara Butt and Mr Kemmerley Rufford commence their South African tour in September. They also contemplate a visit to America, and after that will pay a second visit to Australia. After much delay and disappointment, Mascagni's latest opera, "*Isabeau*," was produced under the composer's direction at Buenos Ayres recently.

Performances of Sir Edward Elgar's new Symphony in E flat are to be given in Berlin and Hamburg under the direction of Herr Nikisch. The work is also to be produced at Vienna and Munich.

A German paper has recently given particulars concerning a new work on which Dr. Richard Strauss is at present engaged. It is a "*Nature Symphony*," and it is to be in two movements. The first describes a lonely wanderer who with difficulty gains the summit of some lofty peak, and there Nature appears to him alone worthy of adoration. In the second he is descending to earth, and there is a struggle going on in his mind against unbelief, but the Symphony ends with a stately hymn, so that faith seems to have conquered.

Mr H. C. Colles has been appointed musical critic of the London "*Times*," in succession to Mr J. A. Fuller Maitland, lately resigned.

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"The Gay Gordons."

The next company to visit New Zealand under the Clarke and Meynell management will be "*The Gay Gordons*," who open in Wellington on September 15th, subsequently visiting Christchurch, Dunedin, Invercargill, Oamaru, Palmerston North, Wanganui, and Auckland. The firm's "*Woman in the Case*" company, which will open its New Zealand tour early in October has been highly successful in Australia. The piece is now being staged in the principal centres in the West, where crowded and enthusiastic audiences are being met with.