

an early Gothic cathedral, which was built in the most realistic fashion. Seats for 10,000 spectators were placed on each side of the cathedral, which was really in the middle of a great amphitheatre. At the west end of the cathedral there were massive iron gates, which opened upon a picturesque view of the Rhine Valley. Some of the episodes of the play are described as eerie and fantastic. One of the scenes shows a band of huntsmen, with their horses and dogs, traversing a lofty mountain. Professor Reinhardt realised that the mountain must be placed "in the middle of the picture," and he built up a huge mountain capable of supporting hundreds of people, and larger in circumference than any stage in London. The mountain was equipped with motor power so that it could be moved easily from one end of the building to the other. The magnitude of the production is emphasised by the details of the arrangements "behind the scenes." The performance was controlled by means of almost countless electric bells and telephones. Professor Reinhardt himself used a motor-car in order to move quickly enough from end to end of the great building, and the "call-boys" were mounted on bicycles.

**A Tiny Prima Donna.**

The London press is unanimously of opinion that in Miss Lyne, who was "discovered" by Mr. Hammerstein of the London Opera House, we have the making of a "star" soprano of the magnitude of a Melba or of a Tetravini, says a writer in the "Musical Standard." We advisedly say "the making of," for some reporters, showing no restraint whatever and only wishing to appear "brilliant," actually suggest that Miss Lyne is already a Melba or a Tetravini, although, practically, a mere girl in operatic experience and vocal development. We are pleased to know that Mr. Hammerstein has made a real vocal discovery, and we can only hope he has made and will make some more. There is nothing like encouraging real talent. The fees of the old "stars" are becoming impossible! Unfortunately, there is no Hammerstein to encourage the unknown composer. Oscar Hammerstein risks nothing in that respect! But he is performing opera adequately for the great London public, and it appears that that great public is giving him very satisfactory support. That is as it should be. If a more ambitious kind of opera season is to pay its way the public must support it. It is no good blaming the ambitious work of impresarios—and stopping away. The whole matter—for improvement or decay—is really, let it be understood—in the hands of the British public; unless—and this, reader, is an important point—it may be true that the desires of the public are developed according to the fare provided. One's impression on seeing Miss Lyne is surprise that such wonderful singing can come from so young, so fragile a girl, for she is only twenty years of age, stands but five feet high, and weighs scarcely more than seven stone. A few moments of conversation and the secret of her success becomes at once apparent. American vivaciousness of manner, a quick, clever conversationalist, bright brown eyes lighting up a small face tinged a soft velvet brown colour thoroughly in harmony with her opulent brown hair, a merry, flexible voice, a will of her own, and an artistic temperament—that is the picture she conveys to one's mind. "I was born in Kansas City, Missouri, and for three years studied singing in Paris under Mr. L. d'Aubigne," she says. "I returned to New York, and after singing for a time on the concert platform joined Mr. Hammerstein there and sang for him in opera comique. The piece was 'Hans the Mute Player,' and I took the part of Lisbeth. Mr. Hammerstein then offered me the part in 'Rigoletto' in London, and I sang it there for the first time. It was also my first appearance in grand opera. It was just lovely," was Miss Lyne's description of her success. Miss Lyne speaks fluently Italian, French and German, and is one of the very few operatic singers who find it easy to sing in English. She is an accomplished pianist. The compass of her voice is three octaves, and she easily sings F in alt.

**"The Speckled Band."**

The wriggling snake in "The Speckled Band," the new Sherlock Holmes play, has been fascinating quite a lot of people during the week at His Majesty's, Auckland. With William Desmond, Gaston Mervale, and Miss Dorothy Dix (making her first appearance) in the cast anything would be sure to go, so

the business has been good. While nothing like the play that Cuyler Hastings introduced to us some years ago, "The Speckled Band" is full of interest, and Sherlock, Watson, and Billy, not to mention the pipes in the coalscuttle, the tobacco in the slipper, and that confounded cocaine bottle still have a fascination for audiences. The play is clumsily put together and Sherlock Holmes does not appear till quite late in the action, but good as Conn Doyle is to read, he is an almost impossible person to dramatise. Gaston Mervale was distinctly good as the mad step-father, who uses a snake to get rid of people who annoy him, and won't give him money, and he would have been better if he had dropped that most irritating habit of snapping his fingers every few minutes. Mr. Desmond, as Sherlock Holmes, suffered by comparison with the imperturbable Cuyler Hastings, but he quite gripped the audience. An American accent for an English role is somewhat of a handicap, but Mr. Desmond is an excellent actor, and always gives a finished study of his parts. Miss Dix looked the part quite successfully, but at times when not stimulating a stress of feeling she was inclined to "slack off," which rather spoiled the illusion of the piece occasionally. Billy was an interesting little figure. "Alias Jimmy Valentine," which replaces "The Speckled Band" to-morrow night (February 1st) was in the South liked better than the Conan Doyle play, and is said to be a merry piece, in which the Williamson Company is very much at home.

**A Contralto Season.**

Mlle. Eva Gauthier, a Franco-Canadian mezzo, is arranging for a brief starring tour of Australia this winter, which is likely to be remembered as a contralto season (says "Sydney Herald"), not a single soprano having yet been announced. The new artist has been making great successes in the Straits Settlements, India, China, and the East, and is now in Java, where she was giving concerts in November, 1910, and then returned for a further season in 1911. Mlle. Gauthier, who was trained in Paris by M. Bouhy, through the assistance of Lord Straticona, supported Mme. Albani throughout Great Britain, the United States, and Canada, as a contralto, but made her operatic debut in Italy at the Theatre Guelfi, Parma, as a lyric soprano in the role of Micaela. At The Hague and Rotterdam the press notices allude to her as "a warm, full mezzo, of beautiful quality" and very extended range." Mlle. Gauthier, who has been decorated by the Queen of Denmark, is very pretty and petite. It is probable that she will reach Australia in April or May. After those months three more famous contraltos are due here—Mmes. De Cisneros, Kirkby Lunn, and Eva Mylott.

**Miss Ethel Irving.**

Playgoers have every reason to be gratified at the way this year has begun with theatrical attractions of a high order. Starting with such a celebrity as Mr. H. B. Irving, we now have Mr. Williamson's exceedingly well-balanced dramatic company, and following this, we have the welcome announcement that the great English actress, Miss Ethel Irving, with her complete London comedy company, will play a short season at His Majesty's, Auckland, commencing on Thursday, February 8th. Miss Irving, who, by the way, is no relation of "H.B.," is looked upon as undeniably one of the finest artists in her line on the English stage. Her forte is high-class comedy, and she will have a splendid vehicle for the display of her abilities in Mr. Somerset Maugham's comedy, "Lady Frederick," with which the season opens. This play has proved an enormous success throughout the Australian tour, the crowded audiences expressing delight with what is described as one of the best modern comedies extant, whilst lavish praise was bestowed upon the portrayal of the name part by Miss Irving. Its success in London, where it was first presented by this lady, was most pronounced, a programme we have before us referring to "the four hundred and fifteenth, and anniversary performance." Unfortunately, through stress of time, the season is limited to seven nights, but with the two pieces to be presented: "Lady Frederick" and "The Witness for the Defence," the public may confidently look forward to a quite exceptional treat. The plans for the first nights will be opened at Wildman and Arey's on Monday morning next.

**"Alias Jimmy Valentine."**

"The Evening Post," Wellington, in its review of "Alias Jimmy Valentine," Paul Armstrong's most successful comedy drama, which is to be produced by Mr. J. C. Williamson for the last five nights of the present season at His Majesty's, Auckland, commencing on Friday next, February 2nd, says: "If the ways of theatrical management are not past finding out surely 'Alias Jimmy Valentine' produced on the eve of the end of their Wellington season should have been chosen as the very piece with which to open it. No sooner had the first dozen lines been uttered than a spirit of glad surprise seemed to pervade the audience. Here, it almost said aloud is something out of the common, something refreshingly original (and yet not adapted from the French), something pregnant with probability, and the might have been something (at last!) free from that infusion of the stale old tea leaves of conventional drama sugared with sentiment and tinted with the milk of human kindness. This is a fresh hot fragrant brew made in a hot pot. Here there is life and truth and feeling; here is a human play. The actors seemed to feel the spirit of the play, too, and the result? One of the most artistic productions from a purely histrionic point of view that Mr. J. C. Williamson's management has given. When a play grips as this one did, when a play holds up the mirror to human nature and gives a true reflection as this one did, and when all taking part—large part or small—felt that part and made those who looked on feel it too, then it is fair to describe one such play as a farcical comedy drama. 'Alias Jimmy Valentine,' as a story owes its origin to O. Henry—the writer upon whom the mantle of de Maupassant rested but for so short a while. As a play it is a masterpiece. Mr. William Desmond, Miss Dorothy Dix, and Mr. Gaston Mervale, supported by the full strength of this exceptionally strong company, will participate in the presentation, and two clever children maintain the child interest which is introduced into Act III. The box plan is now open for the full season at Wildman and Arey's.

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