

Music and Drama.

By BAYREUTH.

BOOKINGS.

(Dates subject to alteration.)

H.M. THEATRE, AUCKLAND.
 February 14—Rickards' Vaudeville Co.
 February 17 to 22—Richard Vaudeville Co.
 February 24 to March 8—J. C. Williamson, Ltd.
 March 10 to 22—Alisa Doone.
 March 24 to April 12—J. C. Williamson, Ltd.
 May 9 to 21—Branscombe Co.
 May 22 to June 7—J. C. Williamson, Ltd.
 June 9 to June 25—Geo. Marlow, Ltd.
 June 26 to July 5—J. C. Williamson, Ltd.
 July 7 to 10—Alisa Doone.
 August 4 to 10—J. C. Williamson, Ltd.
 August 28 to September 27—Branscombe Co.
 October 1 to 11—J. C. Williamson, Ltd.

AUCKLAND PICTURE SHOWS.
 Globe Theatre, Queen Street—Continuous.
 The Lyric Theatre, Symonds Street—Nightly.
 Royal Albert Hall, Albert Street—Nightly.

WELLINGTON OPERA HOUSE.
 February 27-March 6—Rickards' Vaudeville
 February 28-March 10—J. C. Williamson.

Producing a Play. What it Really Means.

IQUESTION whether the general run of playgoers, no matter how loyal they may be to the theatre, or how many times they may go to the play in the course of a year, quite grasp the real meaning of the simple line of the programme, which runs, "The piece produced by Mr.—" And yet what a great factor in their enjoyment, how all-important, how vital, is the producer of the play! We of the theatre know it, but do the people in front of the curtain? Or, knowing it, do they appreciate the fact at its full value!

Thinking it to be as well that they should be enlightened in some measure, I have penned this article. The producer then, ladies and gentlemen, is "Everybody" in a theatre—the stage portion of it. His word is, or should be, law. Actors, stage-staff, scene-painters, orchestra, etc., are all at his command when a play is in rehearsal; and to him be the honours when the piece is lauded as a success. He it is, to put it briefly, who takes the written word and evolves from it, after weeks of labour, the acted play—the performance as you witness it.

No Easy Task.

The difficulties in the path of the producer in Australasia are very great: He has, in the first place, to deal, in the majority of cases, with the manuscript of a piece *solus*. That is to say, the play is written in, and comes from a far country (England, or America, as a rule), and therefore the author is never available, with his invaluable assistance, for no matter how clear and explicit a written stage-direction, a word from the play-creator's own mouth is ten times more illuminating. The producer has to work out the values, and every technical detail in regard to the piece he is to stage, with his own brain, unaided. No easy task, I can assure you. How much more difficult, though, when the author of the play is not living; when the classical or semi-classical drama has to be taken in hand! Expert advice is in the latter case, most desirable, nay, essential, and it is just here that the difficulties of production increase enormously.

For instance, it is fairly easy to obtain proper technical details, and to enlist the services of competent authorities, with regard to a modern military or naval play. The pattern of the buttons on a tunic; the tunic itself; the make and shape of a big gun, or a sword; the drilling of a squad of soldiers; or the behaviour of a ship's company—all these things may be realistically and correctly reproduced behind the footlights with comparative ease, for there is no lack of knowledge and help obtainable from trustworthy sources near at hand. But the classic play is altogether another matter. Unless he be an absolute all-round genius, a rare avis, the producer must seek the assistance of the best literary and artistic authorities learned in the period in which the action of the piece is supposed to be cast, and they must possess a knowledge of architecture, costume, music, and the language of the times. With the help of these

expert advisers, the experienced stage-director should give a production that would satisfy the most fastidious playgoer.

No Detail Too Minute.

But here the question obtrudes—is such a course always possible in Australasia, and if not, why? In London, the heads of the theatrical profession—all actor-managers—are in every race their own producers. They devote an immense amount of time and trouble to the correct staging of their plays. From the first rehearsal to the last they are aided by expert opinion. Hence the perfection, or nearness to perfection, of the ensemble.

Take, for instance, Sir Herbert Tree, a master-producer, whose work of late years has lain almost entirely with plays classic or semi-classic, in form. Sir Herbert sees to it that nothing is scamped; no detail is too minute for his acute investigation and analysis. To that end he surrounds himself with the highest of authorities. If one were permitted to be present at a Tree rehearsal of a Shakespearean play (it has been my privilege to appear in a number under this particular manager's direction), one would find that, first of all, Sir Sydney Lee, or some equally renowned Shakespeare scholar, would be in evidence to detect and correct any anachronism in speech or deportment, or any unjustifiable alterations in the text.

Next, one would notice the presence of a famous Royal Academician, steeped in knowledge of the time of the action of the drama. He would be at hand to whisper guidance into the producer's ear regarding scenic effects, the proper lighting of stage pictures, the designing of the costumes, the necessary "properties," and so on. Then one would note that the music, that most important adjunct to the drama, would be specially written by one of the foremost composers chosen by the manager for the particular subject, one whose colour (to take the modern word) would most nearly combine with the atmosphere of the piece. An instance of Sir Herbert's thoroughness in this direction may be remembered out here. The incidental music to "The Eternal City" was written, commissioned by the London manager, by Mascagni.

With all these experts to guide him, and with his own unique grasp of every detail of stage technique, it would be strange indeed if London's leading actor-manager did not cause even blasé playgoers to marvel at each new Tree production.

That here, in Australasia and New Zealand, audiences have been provided with many notable stage productions is a fact that cannot be disputed. Each season undoubtedly sees some advance in the staging in local theatres. But it also finds playgoers more critical, more anxious for the higher standard and the newer modes they have been apprised of through the Press and by the lips of travelled theatre-loving friends. For, as "Man never is, but always to be, blest," so the earnest playgoer is ever wishing for something even better than the best that is put before him. He has heard reports of Granville Parker, Max Reinhardt, and Gordon Craig—to name a few of the most famous play producers of the present time—and he vaguely wonders why he is debarred from a taste of their quality.

Little to Complain of.

In short, the Australasian theatre-goer—so, at least, it seems to me—becomes more exigent with every new production. How is he to be satisfied? Are there, for instance, the necessary specialists to give advice in every department of, say, the classic drama in this country?

Failing such assistance from educated experts, the producer out here has to rely on the available literature of the period he is working in, the traditional "business" of various scenes handed down from former producers, and the general stage directions marked in the prompt copy of the play. Aided by his own inventiveness—for no producer nowadays can afford to be hide-bound with "tradition"—he, as a general rule, acquits himself splendidly of his task.

So I venture to think. His own inventiveness, of course, counts for a very great deal. For, although it may be true that "in a multitude of counsellors there is wisdom," in matters connected with stage performance the best producer is the one who, assimilating all the advice tendered him, uses his own discretion afterwards. For, after all, many things that are absolutely technically correct, may be quite non-effective, and therefore valueless from the theatrical point of view. So, the proper stage effect being the thing to be aimed at, if the production prove acceptable to the great majority of the audience, the producer is justified by results.

I think that, taking everything in consideration, Australasian playgoers have little to complain of—not that my good friends in front are given to complaining. Anyhow, if I, within the limits of this short article, have been able to bring them to a nearer realisation of the art of the unseen producer of their stage entertainments, I shall not have written in vain.—Eardley Turner.

Dramatic Hints.

A playwright sat hidden in a box, watching the first performance of his comedy. It was fairly amusing, but the audience did not seem to be amused. An indolent ripple of laughter greeted the bolder jests; delicate witticisms were received in silence. At last, when the third act was drawing to a close, the hero, rushing out of the heroine's house, bowed over the funny old gentleman who had said most of the clever things in the play. On this occasion he said nothing, he merely fell down; but the audience awakened suddenly to the consciousness that he was a humorous character. His nimble wit had elicited no response; but, as his nimble heels flew over his head, the house laughed loud and long. "Ah," sighed the playwright, "personal contact! That's what does it. If I could knock down somebody in every scene, I should achieve success."

A Good, Plain Joke.

Last winter the Irish actors were presenting a play which, to their partial

fancy, sparkled with wit and humour. It dealt with the religious prejudices of Catholics and Protestants in Belfast, and an audience of New Yorkers listened in a state of coma. In the third act an angry son, provoked beyond the limits of endurance, said to his father, "What you are is a damn fool!" wereupon the slumbering house woke up and roared with joy. Irish quips and cranks were all very well in a way for those who strained their minds to grasp them; but to call a man (especially one's own father) a damn fool was a good, plain, American joke, which anybody could understand and relish.

Something Simple and Robust.

These are instructive incidents, and the young dramatist would do well to carefully consider them. If he wants his audience to laugh, he must give it something to laugh at; something simple and robust. He might study the artless methods of Wagner in the "Meister-singer." To pull a chair from under a man who hopes to sit down on it is true humour; it has been so regarded since chairs were made—and before. When the first merry cave man bethought himself to kick away a stone upon which a fellow cave man was about to squat, what Homeric laughter must have hailed the joke. "We laugh at that in others which would be a serious matter to ourselves," says the wise Hazlitt, who knew whereof he spoke. Somebody should suffer for the fun.

Now why, when it is so easy to L. amusing, should the comedian strive so hard? Why, when an audience likes its wit in words of one syllable, should he seek to be subtle and ironic? Let his watchword be simplicity and his lodestar be the obvious. Let his jests be of the order which unhumorous men understand and repeat. Above all, let him observe the kind of things at which a house laughs, and then repeat it over and over again. "Age cannot wither nor custom stale" its infinite monotony.

—Agnes Repplier, in "Life."

Twenty-six Pantomimes in London

During the Xmas season in London this year, no fewer than 26 pantomimes were running, in addition to several special

Xmas and New Year Gifts

The Greatest Gift of all.

At Christmas time, the time of gifts and merry-making, 'His Master's Voice' forces itself upon your attention and interests you in a new way. It solves the whole Christmas Gift problem, for it is the gift for the whole family.

The Gift of Music.

Meiba, Caruso, Paderewski, Tetravzini, Kubelik, Clara Butt, Kirkby Lunn, Pamparico, John McCormack, Battiellini, Destinn, Mische Kimm, Backhaus are but a few of the great artists who make records only for 'His Master's Voice'. A Great host of artists, amongst whom are the principal ballad singers, such as John Harrison, Harry Dearth, and Agnes Nicholls. The music hall stars, such as John Lauder, and George Robey. The dance orchestras, such as Herr Hoff, and Herr Gottlieb. The vaudeville stars, such as Gerlie Miller, Phyllis Dare, George Grossmith, Jr., and Teddy Payne, are ready to entertain you this Christmas, and to bring pleasure and mirth to those who receive this greatest of all gifts.

Call and let us entertain you for a few moments, or send for Catalogue.

Instruments from 44 to 250. Be sure you ask to hear 'His Master's Voice' Cabinet Gram, and listen on seeing the Trade Mark in colours inside the lid.

'His Master's Voice' GRAMOPHONE



E. & F. Piano Agency

Limited.

S. Goldicutt, Manager.

Temporary Gramophone Department.
 Palmerston Buildings, Customs St. West.
 (Opposite Waiatema Hotel)