

STOCK COMPANIES v. STARS.

The decay of taste in matters musical and dramatic among audiences not merely colonial, but even European, is growing more lamentable every day. Grand and comic opera are being frozen out by musical comedy, and musical comedy by musical farce. The "*bello Canto*," of which Du Maurier makes Svengali say, "It was lost, but I have found it!" is in truth dying. In place of teachers like Nicholas Porporo, Ronconi, Garcia, etc., etc., who exacted from their pupils a course extending over, sometimes, seven years before allowing them to sing a song, much less to appear in public, the present voice-trainers hurry their victims through perhaps, a two years course, thrust them straight upon boards or platform, with the idea of advertising teachers, rather than making an instrument of a voice which would last nearly the singer's life time. There are, perhaps, one or two exceptions, but that is undoubtedly the general rule. In drama the same fallacious method prevails. Brilliant stars suddenly blaze out in the theatrical firmament without a perfect knowledge of that stage technique which is only acquired by working patiently from the foot to the top of the ladder. In the colonies especially, the good old stock companies are missed. Many of us can remember how well and evenly Shakspeare and other classics were played years ago in New Zealand, when experienced, if not brilliant, artists supported the principals. Nowadays, the general complaint is "One or two stars with very inadequate support." Herein lies in great part the reason why "Shakspeare spells ruin." Rather than see important rôles played by people who sound no aspirates and murder blank verse, audiences prefer to patronise the farcical rubbish which (they say) at least makes them laugh. Therefore, the younger generations receive no education in, and are losing all taste for classical and legitimate drama, a very deplorable consummation. Mr. George Rignold's Shakspearean productions are some comfort, but even he has to rely upon Melodrama in his repertoire to replenish the treasury.

MISS JANET ACHURCH.—Among the few really high-class actresses who have visited New Zealand, this lady is prominent. In the year 1891, supported by an excellent all-round company, she made a triumphant tour of the colony. The repertoire included "Forget-Me-Not," "The New Magdalen," "In His Power," "Masks and Faces," "Fedora," "Camille," "Frou-Frou," and Ibsen's much-vexed "The Doll's House." Perhaps the greatest compliment ever paid to an actress in New Zealand, was accorded at this lady's benefit. On the fall of the curtain at the end of the third act of "Masks and Faces," an original idea was effectively carried out by friends and admirers entirely unconnected with the management. As the curtain was raised in response to deafening applause, a perfect tornado of bouquets, fired in a volley, rained upon the stage. The curtain was dropped and again raised, revealing Miss Achurch with streaming eyes surrounded by a rampart of over three hundred bouquets. Among the capable artists in this excellent company were the Misses Kinnaird, Alice Norton, Messrs Herbert Fleming, C. Charrington, Power, R. Watson, and Barry England, the able stage manager.

A delightful supper to the company and Press was held on the stage half an hour after the performance. Everything was truly bohemian. Miss Achurch made cigarettes for all. Songs and speeches, and chaff, made the fun fast and furious. Mr. Charrington tried to sing "The Cork Leg," and, forgetting the words, was vainly prompted (while the rest sang "Rule Britannia,") by a veteran of the Press on each side of him, who jointly knew less about the words than the singer. Mr. R. Watson, a staunch Good Templar, was led to believe that milk-punch was strictly a temperance beverage, and when daylight did appear, and the guests separated, was found sitting in the gutter opposite the stage door complacently munching an apple. But he was still in good order and condition, for, to this day, he remembers and laughs over that, and many other incidents of the jolliest hours of fun with the best entertainers and the liveliest company of guests who ever enjoyed an innocent orgie.