

THE STAGE

(By "Conrus.")

OPERA HOUSE.

"HER SECOND TIME ON EARTH."

Mr Anderson has earned his title to contemporary renown, if not to immortality, as a caterer to those strong tastes of the multitude which the critic is sometimes tempted to deride. But the rank and file of the population cannot enjoy exactly what pleases the student and the man of culture. The average man has elemental instincts and tastes. He prefers bread and cheese and beef-steak to truffles and paté de foie gras, and melodrama before dramatic idylls. Very well. One may deplore the existence of this excessively gross taste, but there is no use in quarrelling with it. I have known managers who pander to it, but Mr Anderson's view is that it is worth ministering to. And he does it, and does it well. He takes the plays that have enjoyed a large measure of success in London and presents them through the media of capable artists and fine scenery, and so far he may consider himself to be a public benefactor. Thousands of playgoers in every centre of Australasia say so, at any rate. This, it seems to me, is the standpoint from which the melodrama (so-called) should be judged. All the tests applied to "Her Second Time on Earth" respond unerringly. There is fleetness in vice and corresponding slowness in virtue, with the regulation handicap imposed by Providence; there is the exceedingly bad woman and the excessively funny man, and so on. At the risk of mixing up my metaphors, I would say that melodrama is like a suit of clothes. It may vary a little in colour, cut and material, but there must always be the same number of pockets and buttons. Dora Gray is very much like the Worst Woman in London, and we should probably think less of her if she were not in the hands of a so capable actress as Miss Eugenie Duggan. It is this talented lady's first visit to Auckland, and the impression she has created must be most gratifying to her. For many years she has been known as a popular exponent of some of Shakspeare's tragedy heroines, and her training in the emotional side of her art has proved of the utmost service to her in melodramatic lead. "Her Second Time on Earth" abounds in thrilling situations, and Miss Duggan does not fail to extract the utmost from them. She is ably supported by a well-balanced company of actors and actresses, specially selected to interpret the items in Mr Anderson's repertory, and trained under Mr Anderson's eye. There are one or two exceptions, however. Mr G. P. Carey, who plays elderly parts, is one of the soundest of the good old school, and Miss Clara Stephenson, who makes such an impression in the intensely realistic part of Dora's mother, was an exceptionally brilliant female lead in days gone by. The older generation of Auckland playgoers may remember her as the star of the combination that played "Aurora Floyd," "Green Bushes," etc., away back in the seventies. Associated with her then were poor George W. Collier, Lancelot Booth, George Burford, and several others, whose hour of fretting upon the stage has long since gone. Mr Anderson's company has all the stuff in it that his class of play calls for, and he is likely to do first-class business during the season.

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE.

"THE LIGHT THAT FAILED."

A combination of Kipling and Cuyler Hastings managed by J. C. Williamson ought to draw anywhere, and it filled His Majesty's to overflowing on Monday night. The fine company that came here with Mr Hastings a year ago and stirred our blood with the round of fine plays that included "Sherlock Holmes" and "If I were King," remains virtually intact, and though there seemed at that period to be little room for improvement, the personnel has distinctly improved. It would be difficult to indicate in what particulars it marks an advance, but the impression remains. No doubt the difference is to be found in an increased ripeness, mellowness, the greater

ease that comes from long association, and the longer results of intelligent application to the principles of an art in which no man or woman ever becomes absolutely perfect, though they may attain to relative excellence. Mr Hastings himself exhibits indications that the interval has been profitably employed; his enunciation is clearer, his methods of using his force more definite, and, if it must be said, he has parted with so much of his mother accent that even the most delicately organised British auditor might forget that he is an American. His acting in the part of Dick Heldar can only be described as superb. One might use the Anglo-Saxon equivalent, in its best sense, to express my meaning. For Mr Hastings, as much as any actor I know, is imbued with pride in his work. Whether in the loose life of the camp, in his tender moments with Maisie, in the abandonment of his better nature, or in his passage through the Valley of the Shadow, his conception of the part appeared to me to rise to a higher level than the author's. The vivid realism of it holds the audience spell-bound. The tension is, indeed, at times painful, but Mr Hastings, in his devotion to art, spares his audience no more than himself. Miss Chevalier also brings with her an added charm, as real as it is elusive. Her Maisie is the fitting complement to Mr Hastings' Dick.

rather startles us by her realistic portrayal of the bad girl Pessie Froke. Mr Gwen modestly gives us a delicious character-sketch of old Fenton, and—but there is not room to say all the good things I should like to add about the rest. The play, of course, is splendidly mounted. The Nile Valley scene is a brilliant piece of work; the back cloth in Maisie's Cottage is a most beautiful picture, while the two interiors are perfect in every detail. The orchestra, under Mr Diedrichsen, is a most efficient one. "The Light That Failed" will be produced until Saturday.

"THE ADMIRABLE CRICHTON."

On Saturday evening next, Mr Williamson's Company will present for the first time, J. M. Barrie's play, "The Admirable Crichton." Playgoers are looking forward to another great treat with this "fantasy," as he describes it, of the popular Scotch author's, as it has been remarkably successful elsewhere. It is said to be an entirely original conception, most interestingly and at the same time amusingly worked out. The London "Times" went so far as to describe it as the most delightful play the English stage has produced in our generation.



MR T. MANDENO JACKSON, the popular tenor.

Maisie's broad type is not uncommon. The independant woman has always been with us, and is with us now, in these days of National Councils, more than ever, but it is not always that a Maisie's heart beats under the independant bosom. And no one who followed Miss Chevalier through the first three acts, delightfully as she portrays the heroine's worldly side, would understand what a consummate actress she is if he missed the fourth. It is in the final scene that Miss Chevalier rises to the very summit of dramatic excellence. We have seen her in a similar situation in "The Christian," but Maisie is better than Glory Quayle. Mr Hamilton Stewart gives us a perfectly satisfying presentment of good old Torpenhow. It is what we had a right to expect from this sterling actor. Messrs Atholwood and Lumsden Hare, too, offer admirable studies of Cassavati and "The Nilghai," respectively. Miss Olga Beatty Kingston's Red-Haired Girl is an exquisitely dainty and fresh bit of characterisation, and Miss Florence Gleeson, who so charmed us all in "Secret Service,"

THE HOLLOWAY COMPANY.

The Holloway Company brought the Auckland season to a close on Saturday night with "The Shraugraun." Mr O'Neill, in the name part, was completely successful, and the play was greatly enjoyed by large audiences for the three evenings on which it was staged. The season, on the whole, was a satisfactory one.

MISS FLORENCE MENK-MEYER.

Miss Florence Menk-Meyer, the famous composer and pianiste, will shortly arrive in New Zealand, where she purposes performing in Dunedin, Christchurch, Wellington, and Auckland. Her concerts in Dunedin take place the last week in March. For over ten years Miss Menk-Meyer has been touring throughout the Continent of Europe, received everywhere with enthusiasm. She has performed in Paris, London, Vienna, Berlin, St. Petersburg, Moscow, Rome, Milan, Amsterdam, The Hague, etc. The press

and public were unanimous that Florence Menk-Meyer is to-day the greatest living female pianiste. The Vienna "Journal of German Art and Music," writes as follows:—"In Miss Menk-Meyer, who made her first appearance before the Vienna public at the Bosendorfer Hall on the 30th of January, we became acquainted with a pianiste and an artiste worthy of the highest recognition and acknowledgement. Miss Menk-Meyer, who possesses an exceedingly graceful and charming appearance, in the freshest bloom of her youth, with a beautiful 'spirituel' face, wherein her dark eyes grow luminous with enthusiasm, has command over a grand 'technique,' which she enlists in the service of a rendition, not, however, in the involved style of a mere performer, but one artistically deepened and elaborated and specially to be extolled for warmth of feeling and overpowering emotion. From her slender fingers there literally thrills and sparkles a life-like and brilliant fluid. Her touch in 'piano' and 'pianissimo' is soft, tender and flowing; in the 'forte' passages of elastic power and firm rhythmical articulation. Throughout the entire performance the young artiste was honored by her audience with enthusiastic applause and beautiful floral tributes." The dates of her Auckland concerts will be shortly announced.

FITZGERALD'S CIRCUS.

This mammoth Show closed its all too brief season at the Freeman's Bay reclamation yesterday, after doing remarkably good business. Delighted audiences daily witnessed the performances, and the main attractions, the wire-walking, the clowns, the horsemanship, the tumbling, and the feats of strength more than retained their popularity. To-day Messrs Fitzgerald commence a provincial tour, which will embrace the goldfields and the Waikato.

Mr George Abbott has given the necessary orders for a handsome new drop scene for the Opera House, an improvement that will be greatly appreciated by patrons of that theatre.

My Christchurch correspondent writes: The Theatre Royal re-opened last night, after being in the hands of the painters and decorators for two or three weeks. The old house is quite transformed. The alterations to the staircases, etc., recommended by the inspector are a great improvement, and the badly-needed coat of paint on the exterior has smartened up the appearance of the ancient show place until it is hardly recognisable. The Sanford Company re-opened the house with "The Power of Gold," and created a most favourable impression. However, I will hold over a more extended notice of the show until I have seen it, which I have not, as yet, been able to do. Our old friend, Will Jameson, so long acting for P. R. Dix here, is business managing for Mr Sanford, and I am sure the latter could not have secured a more popular man for the post. The season is to be a four weeks' one, and we are promised a succession of novelties. The fame of the company has preceded it, and I so not doubt it will catch on here. . . . I looked in at the Opera House on Thursday, and greatly enjoyed some of the turns. John Fuller's singing of "Oh, Summer Night" and "My Pretty Jane" delighted a big house. That "silvery tenor" of John's is as melodious as of yore. I never heard him in better voice, and the enthusiastic encores he received testified to his popularity. The Lentons contributed some excellent acrobatic work, infusing a good deal of humour and originality into their performance. Ted Herbert's songs were exceptionally well received. I fancy Mr Herbert would make a capital actor; his songs are rendered with true dramatic force. Miss Olive Fitzsimmons, the pianiste, is really a most accomplished musician; quite an artiste.

Mr Harold Ashton leaves Auckland on Monday for Dunedin, to make arrangements for the appearance of Mr Williamson's Royal Comic Opera Co. in that city, commencing on Easter Monday.