

THE STAGE

(By "Footlight.")

THE OPERA HOUSE.

"DOROTHY VERNON."

Most people have read Charles Major's fascinating romance of "Dorothy Vernon of Haddon Hall," and while some have objected that the author is guilty of juggling with history all are agreed as to the absorbing interest of the story. Paul Kester's stirring stage version does not greatly depart from the book, and therefore it goes without saying that there is enough of interest running through the play to rivet attention throughout. For those who have not read the novel it may be well to tell the story in brief. Dorothy Vernon, a great heiress, is betrothed in infancy to Sir John Manners, son of the Earl of Rutland. The Earl and Sir George Vernon (Dorothy's father) subsequently have a bitter feud, and Dorothy is promised to Sir Malcolm Vernon, a cousin whom she has never seen. When Dorothy has reached the age of eighteen, Sir John comes to Haddon Hall, despite the danger of such a proceeding, to claim his bride. It is intended for a jest, but seeing Dorothy he falls desperately in love with her. To prosper his suit he announces that he is Sir Malcolm, who is expected, and Dorothy, charmed with her lover, is only too ready to meet her father's wishes and marry the man they all think to be Sir Malcolm. At the most inopportune moment the real Sir Malcolm arrives to claim his intended bride, and Sir John just escapes in time to avoid death. Dorothy refuses to wed with Sir Malcolm, whereupon her father endeavours to starve her into submission. Thanks to the aid of Perkin, a faithful jester, Sir John is able to meet Dorothy at Haddon Hall, where he is discovered by Sir Malcolm, and is only just saved from an ignominious death by the arrival of Queen Elizabeth, who has come to stay the night at the Hall. To save her lover Dorothy betrays the hiding place of Mary Stuart of Scotland, but to make amends hurriedly changes dresses with her waiting maid and rides at break-neck speed to Rutland Castle to warn Mary of her peril. Here she again changes dresses, this time with the Queen, who escapes for the time being, and Sir George Vernon, sent to arrest Mary, is instead confronted by his own daughter. Back again at Haddon Hall the anger of Elizabeth is appeased by the artful flattery of Dorothy, while the double-dealing of Sir Malcolm, who has plotted with Mary, is revealed. The latter is arrested, while Sir John is sentenced to a year's exile in Wales, a lot which Dorothy willingly shares, and for these two at least all ends happy.

As Dorothy Vernon, Miss Tittell Brune is given a magnificent chance. It is a long and very trying role, entailing an immense amount of work. Miss Brune however rises to the occasion, and in her the Dorothy of the Middle Ages may be said to live again. No matter whether it was the wilful and headstrong beauty, the happy girl being wooed for the first time, or the passionate woman striving by every artifice to save her lover, Miss Brune was always in drawing, and if in the lighter scenes she appeared to excel in those requiring greater dramatic force she was hardly less great. The talented young actress has given evidence before that in roles which suit her (and not all that she has been seen in, do so), she has but few rivals, and of Dorothy Vernon it may be said that the part fits her like a glove, and is one of her very best. After reading all that has been written of him one is perhaps vaguely disappointed with the Sir John Manners, of Mr Thomas Kingston, although like the curate's egg, it was good in parts. A more debonaire lover might be wished for, one who is prepared to lightly face death for the sake of his lady love. The author was rather over-serious, although many fine touches were introduced, and possibly a little more breeziness might have been an improvement. Mr Mervale has a thankless role as Sir Malcolm Vernon, but did all that was possible with it. The Sir George Vernon of Mr J. B. Atholwood may be in accordance with the author's conception, but surely it was

unnecessary to make this fine old English gentleman so much of a buffoon. The character was too much lacking in dignity, and, although as Sir John Falstaff it would have been a success, yet the Master of Haddon Hall can hardly have been of such a type. Mr Maurice Dudley gave a particularly good sketch of the part of Perkin, the jester to the Earl of Rutland, being consistent throughout. Mr Vivian Edwards efficiently met the requirements of the part of Lord Burleigh. Miss Susie Vaughan essayed the role of Queen Elizabeth, giving a dignified reading of the part, while the quick changes of expression when Dorothy is playing upon her inordinate vanity, were cleverly brought out. Miss Helen Ferguson made the most of the comparatively small part of Mary of Scotland, while Miss Clara Stephenson's Lady Vernon left no cause for complaint. Miss Nellie Calvin was a very winsome Jenny Foxton, while Miss Irby Marshall made the most of the small role of Bess. All the others in a long cast helped to complete a very excellent picture. The scenery, although not elaborate, was adequate, and the costuming of the play beyond reproach. There was a very large

"Battleship" include possibly the most wonderful feats of balancing and endurance ever presented on the vaudeville stage, in more senses than one the strong man of the company. His feats seem almost incredible, and suggest superhuman powers of endurance and daring. Such nerve breaking exploits as those he performs with seeming indifference and perfect ease, can hardly be appreciated unless they are seen. The possibility of any man balancing a field gun, carriage and all, upon his chin, would scarcely be dreamt, much less thought of, as within the range of human accomplishment. Yet Brinn not only attempts, but achieves this seemingly impossible task, the feat being made the more wonderful by his method of doing it. Four men with block and tackle, another assisting with the ropes, laboriously elevate the gun in a position, and when, suspended in mid air, half way up the stage, Brinn receives and balances it, suspended upon his chin, the ropes are loosened, a lanyard is pulled, and the gun is fired, the man beneath remaining seemingly immovable. But this comes as the climax of a series of feats more or less phenomenal in char-

"Brown," a man about town. His shadow dancing was particularly good, and unstinted applause greeted his every effort. "Baby Watson" is another juvenile prodigy—a dainty, little, old-world maiden, who sings and dances with wonderful self-possession, and with a skill far beyond her years. She quickly establishes herself as a favourite with her audience, and wins general approval. She was thrice recalled on Monday evening. Seymour and Dupre, two clever speciality artistes, put in a very interesting and novel turn, the former as a Chinaman, uniting great acrobatic skill with unwonted musical ability, and the latter as a singer and dancer. Miss Nita Leete has a rich contralto voice, and is heard to advantage in such ballads as the "Convent Bells" and "Listening." Her illustrated songs are also good. Miss Nellie Kilburn, as a serio-comic artist, sings with a vivacity which appeals particularly to the gallery and the pit. She made her greatest hit with "The Irish Girl From Home," and was also remarkably good in the song of the coster's wife, stranded twenty miles from home and deserted by her husband, with nothing but "the baby and the pram." Mr Fred Bluett comes to New Zealand with a great reputation as a clever English comedian, and is very successful as the funny man of the company, his patter singing and dancing, etc., being evidently appreciated. A number of animated pictures shown at the close of each portion of the programme add greatly to the enjoyment of the evening's entertainment.

THE OLYMPIA RINK.

Rinking continues to be a favourite amusement, and accordingly the Olympia Rink is never without patrons. Indeed, there are many worse ways of spending an evening than by taking a turn on the modern equivalent of the winged sandals of Mercury. Mr Woodley and his staff Kester's stirring stage version does not order, and the result is that visitors are always thoroughly well satisfied. Last night there was a capital attendance, the ladies being invited free. By the way a capital rule obtains at the rink, and that is that the management reserve the right to refuse admission to any person without stating the reason. By this means the rink is kept entirely free from any disturbing element.

"THE LITTLE STRANGER."

This entirely new and original farcical comedy, written by Michael Morton, and produced with the greatest success at the Criterion Theatre, London, has been secured for the Australasian colonies by Messrs Meynell, Gunn, and Varna, in conjunction with Mr Allan Hamilton. A special company has been engaged in London, the principal members being Mr James Lindsay, Mr J. W. Deverill, Mr Harry Haller, Miss Violet Dene, Miss Helen Russell, Miss Winifred Gunn, who will be supplemented on arrival by the popular Australian favourites, Miss Florence Seymour, Miss E. Guildford Quin, Mr Frank Hawthorne, and Mr Harry Hill, while for the part of "The Little Stranger," the management have secured from London, Master Willie Parke, a little fellow barely nine years old, but who has had considerable experience on the English stage. Master Willie Parke was specially selected for the character by the author himself, by whom he is described as an "infant phenomenon." The initial performance will take place at the Princess Theatre, Melbourne, on October 20, after which Sydney will be visited. The New Zealand tour commencing at the Opera House, Wellington, Thursday, 12th December. "The Little Stranger" will be presented under the stage direction of Mr H. W. Varna, so long associated with the late Knight-Jeffries combination, while all business arrangements will be in the hands of Mr Allan Hamilton.

According to a London paper, Mr Harry Rickards has entered his appeal against the recent decision binding him to accept variety troupes for which he has contracted, but in which important alterations have been made in the personnel.



MISS TITTELL BRUNE as Dorothy, and MISS SUSIE VAUGHAN as Queen Elizabeth in "Dorothy Vernon."

audience on the opening night, and that the members thereof were thoroughly pleased was evidenced by the hearty applause at the close of both acts.

"Dorothy Vernon" will hold the boards throughout the week, and on Monday next it will be replaced by "Leah Kleschna," a play in five acts by C. M. S. McLellan, which is said to be of absorbing interest throughout, and in which Miss Tittell Brune is reported to be given a great chance in the title role.

HIS MAJESTY'S

RICKARDS' VAUDEVILLE CO.

A crowded house greeted the Rickards' Vaudeville Company which opened a short season of nine nights at His Majesty's Theatre on Monday evening. The programme provided is both varied, entertaining, and sensational. Brinn, an Italian artist, whose "Pastimes on a

acter, such as the tossing of 175lb projectiles in the air and catching them on the shoulders; the balancing of two ship's steering wheels and an anchor on the chin, the wheels revolving quickly while; the firing of a cannon suspended on a pole, while the latter is balanced on the chin, and the adroit tossing up of the former and catching it on the shoulders—all this and a good deal more seems to interest and thrill the crowd. Brinn is certainly a wonderful artist and must be possessed of an iron nerve to undertake the thrilling turn he presents. Another of the stars of the company is undoubtedly "Little Cliff," the English juvenile comedian and dancer. He is still a boy, perhaps fifteen years of age at most, but has all the manners, poses, and actions of a comedian of mature years, and evidently unites exceptional experience with great natural ability; he appears in character—first as a school-boy, then as a drummer, and again as