

THE STAGE

(By "Footlight.")

THE OPERA HOUSE.

"LEAH KLESCHNA."

After drawing packed houses all through the week, "Dorothy Vernon" was withdrawn on Monday in favour of C. M. S. McLellan's drama "Leah Kleschna." It is a play of intense dramatic interest worked out on somewhat original lines, and contains some fine writing, although a few passages in the first act put in the mouth of Raoul Berton might well be omitted, without in the least spoiling the effect. Briefly, the story tells of one Kleschna, a brave man, but a thief who has brought up his daughter Leah to follow the nefarious calling. A year before the story opens, she, among some forty others, has been rescued from a sinking steamer by Paul Sylvaine, and him she has unconsciously learned to love. This gradually brings about a great dislike for her method of living. The crisis comes when Leah is ordered by her father to rob a house of some valuable jewels, but is caught in the very act by the owner, who turns out to be no other than Paul, her rescuer. Instead of handing Leah over to the police he reasons with her, persuading her to give up being a thief. Paul is betrothed to Claire Berton, whose brother Raoul turns up in a semi-drunken state, and first accuses Paul of making an assignation with Leah, and ultimately when their backs are turned, steals the jewels himself. Leah returns to her father, and in an intensely dramatic scene, bids him farewell for ever, after which she returns to her dead mother's people, and labours in the fields. Kleschna and his accomplice Schram volunteer with the Boers, and are killed by a shedd, while Leah is ultimately found by Paul, who has been jilted by his fiancée, and persuades the repentant girl to become his wife. Miss Tittell Brune is given a fine chance as Leah, and she makes the most of her opportunities. She was perhaps, at her very best in the housebreaking scene, when the terror at being discovered by Paul Sylvaine, and the horror when she discovers that he is no other than her preserver, were very cleverly brought out. The final farewell to her father was another example of fine dramatic work. It is not often that we have Mr Gaston Mervale as the hero. In the role of Paul Sylvaine he is excellent throughout, and the portrayal of the large hearted senator is one of the very best things this talented actor has yet given us. Mr Mervale was particularly strong in the burglary scene, coming in for no small meed of applause. Mr Thomas Kingston was seen to more advantage than in the preceding piece, giving a consistent representation of the part of Kleschna, a man with two sides to his character, one the thief, the other the brave man and loving father. Mr J. B. Atholwood did all that was possible with the comparatively small part of Schram, which by the way might almost have been founded on that of Jacky in "Sunday." Mr John Beauchamp adequately filled the requirements of General Berton, while Mr Harry Sweeney well contrived to make of Raoul Berton the detestable character the author so clearly intended. All the other characters were well cast, while the scenery was entirely adequate. The setting for the final act—a vegetable garden in Austria—was a capital piece of stage work, and was warmly applauded. "Leah Kleschna" will be repeated for the last time this evening.

"MERELY MARY ANN."

To-morrow, Friday, there will be a change, when Israel Zangwill's famous comedy "Merely Mary Ann," will be staged. This piece, which was adapted by the author from the story of the same name, was originally produced at the Duke of York's Theatre, London, in 1904, when it ran to enormous business for an entire season. In the production to-morrow, Miss Tittell Brune will take the role of Mary Ann, in which she is said to be simply immense. Mr Kingston will be Lancelot, and Mr J. B. Atholwood the Rev. Samuel Smedge, while the rest of the cast is a very long one. A contemporary in Wellington, where the play was enthusiastically received, writes:—Zangwill cleverly worked out a happy notion in his book "Merely Mary

Ann." His hero is Lancelot, son of a baronet, reduced to a bed-sittingroom in a lodging-house, under a landlady of unlovely mien. Pride and devotion to art have laid him low, from the view-point of material wealth, but he is high in ideals. He is a musician, a composer whose brain throbs with melodies—classical. He commits them to paper, sends them to publishers, and has them returned regularly. An old chum, Peter, who surreptitiously made a hit with a popular "sentimental" ditty, urges Lancelot to similarly stoop to conquer, but the proud patrician snorts with disgust. He takes another hitch in his belt, and resolves to have some more meals of vain dreams. In the meantime his hours of dreariness are partially cheered by a pretty general servant, Mary Ann, a guileless girl from the country, who secretly worships him. In a plebeian moment of weakness he kissed her, but afterwards had a fit of repugnance, and washed his lips in horror. Gradually Mary Ann grows upon the moody musician till one day when his star of fortune is peeping from its cloud, and he is revolving to seek a fresh place

entitled "Merely Mary Ann" will be presented, and will run for four nights. On Wednesday, the 24th, a special production will be given of Sardou's great work "La Tosca," with Miss Brune in the tremendously exacting part of Floria Tosca. This night will be set apart as a "grand souvenir night," when each lady visiting the theatre will be presented with a handsome coloured photograph of the distinguished young actress. On Thursday, the 25th, and for the remaining two nights of the season, the play of "Sunday," which is probably the most successful in her repertoire, will be presented. Altogether playgoers have no reason to complain of the diversity and general excellence of this programme, and the season will be remembered as one of the most attractive Auckland had for a long time.

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE.

THE RICKARDS COMPANY.

Mr Harry Rickards, after doing very good business, finished up a comparative-

Nita Leete, Miss Nellie Kilburn, and the Biograph helped to make up a programme which it must be admitted was in some need of strengthening. The Company have gone South.

WEST'S PICTURES AND THE BRESCIANIANS.

We are to have a return visit of this very popular and successful company to His Majesty's Theatre, Auckland, on Saturday next, the 20th inst. The portraits of some of the well-known members of The Brescians, namely, Miss Antonia Martinengo, the comedy soprano, and Miss Adelina Martinengo the brilliant violinist, which we publish in this issue, will be readily recognised, and remind us of the happy hours they have afforded us in the past. Mr T. J. West intimates that every picture shown will be entirely new to Auckland, and avers that the whole world has been put under contribution to supply a series of interesting pictorial novelties. The concert part of the programme too, will be entirely new,



MISS TITTELL BRUNE as Mary Ann, in Zangwill's Comedy, "Merely Mary Ann."

of residence, he consents to take Mary Ann with him. Then the providence that has seen the servant suffer from poverty, showers half a million pounds, a legacy from a long-lost brother, on her auburn head. That accident makes the aristocrat decide to go alone. Mary Ann weeps, and her idol tells her that only as man and wife could they travel forth together, and he cannot marry her. So they drift apart. In the play Mr Zangwill has added sufficient to bring in the altar and the joy-bells without which no play is complete if it desires to please the multitude.

The following programme has been outlined for the remainder of the enormously successful season now being played by Miss Brune. "Leah Kleschna" will be performed for the last time on Thursday evening, and on Friday the 19th, Zangwill's much heard of comedy

ly short season at His Majesty's Theatre on Tuesday night. The programme of novelties proved a draw right up to the end. Brinn's marvellous feats of strength and daring jugglery continued nightly to inspire his audience with wonder, and his hair-raising proclivities as a cannon manipulator hold the big crowds in a tense state of awe and expectancy. Little Cliff—who, by the way, has just about outgrown the name—never failed to please in his versatility as a comedian, expert dancer, and in his clever character sketches. Baby Watson has won a place in the hearts of Auckland theatregoers, and the tiny comedienne is assured of a warm reception when next she makes an appearance here. Seymour and Dupre's turn always proved acceptable, the wonderful vaulting feats of the former, and clever dancing of the latter receiving a full meed of applause. Miss

and there can be little doubt but that the company will receive an enthusiastic welcome, for beyond question their popularity is very great.

THE OLYMPIA RINK.

Of the numerous places of amusement in Auckland by no means the least popular is the Olympia Rink. With the advent of the warm weather one might reasonably have anticipated that all thoughts of skating would disappear, but this is by no means the case, and the sound of the smooth running wheels can still be heard as of yore. Mr Woodley and his staff see to it that the management permits no loophole for complaint, and to this fact is to a large extent the continued popularity of the rink