

San Francisco some time ago Mr. Ashton went to see "The Merry Widow," which was being presented in one of the leading theatres there. The performance on the whole he did not consider as good as the Australasian production, but the people were quite willing to pay from 2s up to 10s for their seats. The piece ran for a season of six weeks, and in the first half of that time the receipts totalled over £3000 per week, and at each performance, including matinees, the opera played to capacity limit. Further, as instancing the scale of pieces, the tariff for each seat actually averaged 5s 9d, or more than is paid for the dearest seat in an Australasian theatre.

MELBA'S PROTEGES.

Madame Melba has now taken up her residence at Macedon, where she will remain until her departure for Europe. She has completed the hearing of the various young singers, to whom she promised auditions. Many of these students showed considerable vocal promise, but the one that most appealed to Madame Melba on the general ground of voice, technique, intelligence, temperament, and industry, is a young Tasmanian soprano, Miss Lucy Atkins, who will accompany the diva to Europe.

"ALADDIN" "BEAUTIES."

Miss Lily Iris, who has arrived in Melbourne to take up her engagement with J. C. Williamson as principal boy in "Aladdin," is a tall, statuesque beauty of the real fair English type, writes my Melbourne correspondent. Her photographs—even in "The Sketch," which makes a specialty of beauty studies—hardly do her justice, for her colouring and her animation alike refuse to be included in the limitations of a sensitised plate. She has an abundant supply of that "go" and vivacity which is always such a welcome concomitant to an attractive stage personality, while her keenness and enthusiasm is sufficiently vouched for by the fact that within an hour of landing she was up at the theatre with Mr. Coventry busily going through her songs and talking over her part. She has been on the stage since she was twelve years old, beginning as a dancer, and she was the first—even before Loie Fuller—to introduce the serpentine dance. In her girlhood, the turn that she remembers with most interest is one—of two years' duration—with the late Johnny Sheridan. Miss Iris has travelled far, having visited South Africa, South America, the whole of Europe,

Egypt, and every part of the British Isles. Miss Clara Beck, who arrived with Miss Iris for the principal girl part in "Aladdin," is an excellent contrast to the latter. She is slighter and darker, with a most engaging piquancy of expression, a beautiful svelte figure, and an abundance of dark brown hair. She too, like Miss Iris, was at work an hour or so after landing.

TAKING NO RISKS!

Before he joined J. C. Williamson's new Comic Opera Company, Mr. Victor Prince was a member of a touring company which visited amongst other territory, the back-blocks of Victoria, and of one town in particular he has an amusing story to tell. The company were giving their premiere performance in a new hall of which the proprietor was exceedingly proud. The entertainment progressed amid a silence that was only broken by the applause of one old woman who was conspicuously seated in the front row. Mr. Prince, who naturally liked a little encouragement to greet the efforts of himself and his fellow members, sought the proprietor and pointed out that the only applause came from the old lady aforementioned. "Oh," remarked the owner of the hall, "don't take any notice of her. She's mad. No noise for me. There will be no whistling and stamping of feet in my new hall if I know it." At another hall, just as the conjurer of the company was in the act of balancing a lighted lamp on a billiard cue, the proprietor shouted out excitedly, "Here, none of that; this hall isn't insured."

A WONDERFUL DANCEE.

Mlle. De Dio, whose dancing at the Sydney Tivoli is provoking so much enthusiasm, is a small dark Frenchwoman, with all the vivacity of her race. When, desiring to go on the stage, she realised that she could not sing and did not know whether she could act, a friend suggested that she should dance. Thus she began as a child. Her work is skirt dancing—"the most beautiful of all," she says. "There is step dancing, but that is not so attractive; and shuffling clog dancing, and even fancy stepping cannot bring out the beauty and grace of movement as skirt dancing does." Mlle. De Dio has danced all over Europe, and in America and South Africa. Her ingenious and effective art is of the kind associated with the name of Miss Loie Fuller. According to Mr. Harry Rickards, she is, in her own line, un-

rivalled in the world. She depends for effect largely upon gorgeous combinations in light and colour, which are worked most wonderfully. The result is a bewildering series of illusions. Miss De Dio is first an exquisite butterfly flitting about from flower to flower in a garden of indescribable loveliness. Next we find ourselves gazing upon an ocean bed, whereon lies a glorious pearl; a diver seizes it, and immediately the lady emerges from the shell as the veritable spirit of the waters. In the final scene thunder and lightning play a prominent part, and amidst pillars and sheets of flame De Dio dances until at last she disappears. It is altogether a most remarkable performance.

THE BESSIES O' TH' BARN BAND.

Hardly any band in the world has such a record of triumphs as that possessed by the Besses o' th' Barn Band, which is touring South Africa, with extraordinary success just now. Away back in 1821, it gained its first prize in the shape of a purse of silver for its playing of a test piece "God, Save the King," at a Manchester musical competition. Later on, in 1837, it was presented with an ornamental crown set with stones, etc., for its excellent rendering of "Hail, Smiling Morn," at a competition at Farnsworth, England. But it was not until about 1878 that the combination began to annex prizes in a wholesale way, and gradually established its pre-eminence to such effect that it was a commonplace for it to win prizes aggregating over £200 in value in any one year. In 1884, for example, it won trophies and other prizes to the value of £213; in 1885 its prizes totalled £268; in 1886 £355; and so on, until it won no less than £742 in prizes, including every challenge cup offered for competition in Great Britain during the year—a record of which any band might well be proud, but it forms only a small portion of the full list of honours gained by the "Besses" since their inception as a band. If that full list were printed, with the details, it would occupy a good half-page in a daily newspaper.

MADAME CALVE.

Madame Emma Calve, who is to appear in Australia next year, has ever been in extraordinary request in London, where she is both personally and professionally a warm favourite. Since her first appearance in the world's greatest city on the 16th May, 1892, when she created a furore with her impersonation of Santuzza in "Cavalleria Rusticana," she has been an al-

most annual visitor to London, and seems to gain fresh laurels with each reappearance. As recently as June last, she presented herself once more before the enthusiastic London public at the local Queen's Hall, and such was the character of her rendering of such numbers as David's "Air du Mysolli" and the "Habanera" from "Carmen," that she was recalled again and again. Indeed her reception was so gratifying that it was resolved she should give another concert at the same place, prior to her departure for Australia, and, accordingly, she sang once again with brilliant effect on Friday, 3rd December last. It might be mentioned that Madame Calve received a high fee for each of the above appearances, and, as some indication of what a high fee is, it may be further mentioned that she received £1000 for appearances at two fashionable "At Homes" in London in one week.

MISS AMY CASTLES.

Miss Amy Castles, the brilliant young Australian soprano, is now living the life of a hard-working artiste, and quite recently was giving as many as five concerts a week. And in giving these concerts on her Victorian tour, the songstress frequently involved herself in an expenditure of time in travelling along that would do credit to a particularly strenuous commercial traveller. Generally her daily programme included a train journey of three or four hours, and in most cases, it also included two daily social functions given in her honour by the people of the town where she had chanced to appear. Almost invariably after arriving at the railway station of the town where she was to sing that night, she would be met by a gathering of school children or by some more formal body, and, after participating in their hearty welcome, would just have time to lunch at her hotel before preparing to attend a reception given in the afternoon. Usually a reception of that nature would last until between four and five p.m., so that the singer would only have about a couple of hours' rest before presenting herself on the concert platform in the evening. After the concert would come bed at 11 p.m. or later, but bed was almost always accompanied by the prospect of having to rise early on the following morning in order to travel as before. Still, with all this energetic existence, Miss Castles had no difficulty in maintaining her natural, amiable demeanour, for she understands that she is now suffering the rather pleasurable penalties of being famous.

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