

My Christchurch correspondent writes: "Theatre-going on a nor-wester night in Christchurch is far from being an un-mixed joy. Too Turkish bathy. But, like 'Frederick,' in 'The Pirates,' I am the slave of duty, consequently I hied me to the Royal the other evening to witness the performance by the Caste Comedy Company, which is composed of the very best amateur talent in our midst. It was a plucky venture for amateurs to hire the Theatre Royal for a whole week, and follow the Williamson crowd at that. But they provided a capital bill-of-fare, which was duly appreciated. The curtain rose on 'A Bed of Roses' (no goak intended). This is a really good playlet. Mr. Wood Jones was excellent in this in the character part of the old chicory merchant, and the favourable impression he made was confirmed in the well-known farcical comedy, 'Jane,' that followed. A better 'Mr Kershaw' it would be hard to find in amateur ranks anywhere. And pretty little Miss May Wells, too, was first-rate. Indeed, her acting is almost up to professional form, and it would not surprise me to hear she had an offer to go on the regular boards. Mr Winter Hall scored heavily as 'Charley Shackleton,' and everybody in the cast did well. On Thursday there was a change of bill, when Pinero's 'The Magistrate' was presented, and Mr Wood Jones again distinguished himself as 'Mr Posket'; Mr Winter Hall was admirable as 'Colonel Lukin,' and Miss May Wells gathered more laurels as 'Beattie Tomlinson.' Mr C. H. Hobbs was the 'Cis. Farrington' (good), and Mr W. A. Bowring (who hails from Auckland) fully sustained his reputation on the amateur boards as 'Capt. Vale.' On Saturday afternoon there was a matinee performance of 'Jane.' I hope the financial success of the venture may equal its artistic success. In that case the Caste Comedy Co. will come out alright. . . . Maggie Moore's season began last Monday at the Royal with 'the picturesque Irish drama of Killarney' (vide bills). Maggie is a favourite here—where isn't she a favourite?—and we are all glad to see her once again. . . . The Marionettes at the Oddfellows' Hall continue to rope in the shekels. These mechanical 'entertainers' are livelier than some flesh and blood artists I have seen in this dusty town. . . . Fuller's Opera House show has been doing a roaring trade all this week. Ted Herbert is an immense favourite. Will Stevens' popularity waneeth not, and the other turns are all good. . . . Heaps more shows due here between this and Christmas. More anon."

The Sydney "Daily Telegraph" thus refers to the play of "Madame Sans Gene," which the Frawley Company will produce here during their forthcoming season:—"It is a cento of brilliant and charming episodes. But, besides being bright and clever, interesting personages are drawn with such distinct individual strokes that his or her peculiar eccentricity is revealed with uncommon intensity. There is also, from a theatrical point of view, dramatic fabric in its framework, which perhaps makes it realistic and picturesque rather than strong. The story is not obvious from the outset, as in many comedies, but its easy and natural development, coupled with the striking individuality of Miss Mary van Buren as Madame Sans Gene, not only charms the eye but pleases the ear. The prologue contrasts somewhat unfavourably with the play itself; but its vital importance is subsequently made apparent, for we are introduced there to Catherine, a humble laundress, pretty in appearance, plebeian in expression, busy with her daily work. There is her soldier lover Lefebre, and there the workings of a happy love story are set in motion. Nearly half a century elapses, and when we make her acquaintance again she is now married to Lefebre and elevated with him to the Court of Napoleon. [The expressions learnt in humble years still cling to her, and there are many light scenes invested with vigorous diverting qualities, in which cutting defiance and smart repartee deeply overshadow the sneers of the court ladies."

At last (says Melbourne "Punch") the truth about poor Dan Leno has crept out, and the London public has been informed that their idol has become mentally incapacitated, and quite irresponsible for his actions. This is the second time the famous comedian has broken down, it will be remembered, the other attack occurring some little time back. A few people in the know understood what was the matter then, though facts were kept dark, and it was with feelings of delight that those who hoped for the best, and looked forward to seeing the comedian quite himself in all respects again, saw their hopes realised and Mr Leno back at his work. And now the second collapse has come, and very serious it is. Leno's hallucinations chiefly centre round his visit to Court, and his reception by the King and Queen. He is first one personage, then another. Those who have access to him are solemnly received, ordered to bow the knee, and gravely knighted by the poor humorist. Hard

work and neglect of himself are the causes of Leno's breakdown, which has been regarded as a personal sorrow by members of all classes in England, from the King downward, who knew the comedian as a great artist, a good fellow, and a fine husband and father.

Mr Frank Hawthorne writes from Perth to say that the Thornton Company have been doing excellent business in the most western State of the Commonwealth. Mr Thornton leaves Perth by the mail steamer Victoria, on the 31st inst. Mr Hawthorne mentions that, whereas Mr Thornton only had one Australian in his company when he opened about fourteen months ago, he wound up with six colonials and one American, all playing important parts.

In Paris and London the open-air theatre has become a fashionable institution. In the former city last month an attempt was made to revive the sylvan pleasures of the lofty theatre at Versailles, whilst in London the Mermaid Society has produced with great success the "Comus," of Milton, as that celebrated masque was intended to be given, in the open air. All the original music by Henry Lawes was rendered by an efficient orchestra; the critics are unanimous in their praise of the whole production. It is interesting to note that Australia was represented in this artistic performance, for Mr Roland Cunningham played the role of Thyrsis. Of his performance, the "Daily News" says:—"Mr Cunningham gave a most beautiful rendering of Thyrsis's several songs, particularly that in which he appeals for help to the nymph Sabrina."

For completeness of mounting Mr Bland Holt's production of the latest sensation drama, "Going the Pace," could hardly be excelled (says "Peter Quince," in Melbourne "Punch"). Mr Holt is a strong believer in the truth of the proverb, that "what is worth doing is worth doing well." As a manager he seems to disregard the question of expense altogether, and considers only whether the introduction of a feature will enhance the completeness of effect. A marked illustration is to be found in the present play. There is a hunting scene, in which the characters ride over a rustic bridge before they take a fence. The old style of representation would have given us a set of cardboard horses and riders moving stiffly against the backcloth. At the Royal we see real men and horses going at the jumps in true professional style. The bridge over which they rush spans a millstream, and over this bridge comes a cart with an old country woman carrying her geese to market. She has nothing to do with the plot of the piece, and her absence "would never have been missed." But she makes an amusing incident, and realism would be helped by the rush of the hunt toppling the old woman and her feathered property into the millstream.

Nelstone and Forrest, the clever entertainers who appeared here with the World's Entertainers, have dissolved partnership. Mr Nelstone recently started from Capetown with a company of eight (including Miss Elsie Forrest) on a tour from Cape to Cairo, but before proceeding far there was a break-up. Miss Forrest married Mr Stillwill, a conjurer belonging to the same company, and both were to leave for London soon after.



Dance from the "Fortune Teller."

Dan Berry threatens Adelaide shortly with a dramatic season.

It is somewhat remarkable that the great Napoleon has never been adequately treated on the stage. That the life and character of the French Caesar lend themselves to dramatic treatment is obvious, yet the theme has never been treated adequately, if we except "A Royal Divorce," by Willis, by any English dramatist of note.

Poor Johnny Collins, the Irish comedian, who first appeared here with the Permians about fifteen years ago, died at the Auckland Hospital last week, after a lingering illness. Johnny was not a great artist, but he was a very fair imitation of the Widow O'Brien, etc.



MISS MARY VAN BUREN, leading lady of the Neill-Frawley Company.

Billy Speed, the negro comedian who was reported eaten by sharks at Western Australia, has turned up in Singapore.

Rose Hamilton has left Sydney for England, where she dons the tights as principal boy at Liverpool Court for the Christmas panto.

J. C. Bain's vaudeville show still flourishes in Hobart. The latest additions to the company are the Misses Neva Carr-Glynn, Dora Taylor, and the Gonzales Sisters.

The veteran Mrs G. B. Lewis appeared this week at the Melbourne Princess as the Marchioness in "The Daughter of the Regiment." She makes it a live "character" part.

Majorie, the six-year-old child of Mr Williamson, made a very successful first appearance as Meenie in Act I. of "Rip Van Winkle," at Sydney. The little lady was overwhelmed with a veritable horticultural sflow at the end of the act, and Miss Susie Vaughan had a brisk five minutes in handling the floral tributes.

Maoriland contralto, Princess Te Rangipai (in private life Mrs John Howie) and Maori tenor chieftain Ranginia are concert touring in England with great success (says the "Newsletter"). The New Zealand brass band form part of the combination.

Sherlock Holmes dramatic company did good biz. in Brisbane.

Mr Wm. Anderson intends paying New Zealand a visit in September.

Hill and Silvainy, the trick cyclists, will be seen again shortly at the Tivoli, Sydney.

Olive Lenton has been playing Rose Musgrove's parts in the Musical comedy company, Sydney.

The Daniel Frawley Dramatic Company open their New Zealand tour at Auckland on October 12.

Charlie Faning, one of our best "corner men," has evidently caught on in London. "The Era" says some nice things about Charlie's operatic burlesque.

Nellie Stewart talks of impersonating Kate Hardcastle ("She Stoops to Conquer") and Lady Teazle ("The School for Scandal") in the near future.

George Darrell's surname before he took to the stage was Price. He was in his early days an assistant in a bookseller's shop in Dunedin. My paragraph about his age has gone round. I saw him first in 1877 or 1878—the latter year, I think—in "East Lynne," in Dunedin. His first wife (Mrs Robert Heir) was Lady Isabel, H. H. Vincent (now Mr Williamson's boss stage manager) was Archibald Carlisle, George was Sir Francis Levison, and poor Solange Novaro was Barbara Hare. This, I believe, was the last appearance of Mrs Robert Heir, for she died shortly afterwards.

My Wellington correspondent writes, under date August 20:—"The Sheridan Comedy Co. are producing "Cinderella" at the Opera House to good attendances, though the weather has kept many people away, it having rained right through the season. "When the Lamps are Lighted" is underlined for Saturday next. . . . The company at the Theatre Royal under the Dix banner are doing very fair business, and have been augmented by the assistance of some of the touring company. The Flying Moultons, who do a clever act, are the big draw, and are ably assisted by Tod Calloway (who can sing comic songs), the Williams quartette, Sherwin, Concertina King, Johnny (scarecrow), Coleman, and several others. . . . Fuller's Entertainers are doing A1 at the Choral Hall, and are opening with Joe Watts, comedian and dancer, and Miss Madge Lucas, serio, on Saturday night, and the evergreen Bob Bell on Monday next. With the performers at the Choral Hall just now, this inclusion should give about the best programme ever submitted. . . . Cooper and McDermott's biography has taken a lot of money out of the town this last week or so, it being the only picture show seen here for a long time. . . . D'Aro's Royal Marionettes are to open a season at the Exchange Hall on Saturday next. J. C. Bryant, ventriloquist, supplies the management, and good houses should be the rule."

Within a fortnight of the Servian tragedy a play was being written dealing with the subject. It will be produced in America at the end of this year.

Rumoured that Rose Musgrove and Fred Leslie will be shortly with the Royal Comies.

It is said that Mr J. M. Barrie has earned £60,000 by the dramatisation of "The Little Minister."

Ted Holland's Comedy and Vaudeville Company are touring North Queensland. The show includes Tom Edwards, Bert Roche, Eva Wilson, Lingwood and Wray, W. Cottier, Will Rollett, Lilian Knight, and the inevitable biographe.