

AUSTRALIAN HAPPENINGS.

(From Our Melbourne and Sydney Correspondents.)

A member of the cast of the Australian production of Conan Doyle's drama "The Speckled Band," which will be staged next year by J. C. Williamson, Ltd., that is hardly likely to become popular with playgoers, will be "The Speckled Band" itself, which will be nothing more or less than a real live snake. In the London production of the drama a "property" snake was used, but it is proposed to go one better out here and present the real article. To this end Mr. Rocks Phillips, the property master in Sydney, has bought a fine specimen of a reptile from Messrs. Toat and Rohn, and now has it in training in his workshop, where it is installed in a glass house, and has half an hour every day spent on its theatrical education.

Young, bright and attractive and yet with an excellent experience of pantomime work in London and the provinces, Miss Dorothy Firmin, who is to take the part of the principal girl in this year's J. C. Williamson pantomime, should be eminently suited for the character of the Princess Edwidge, the beloved of the redoubtable Jack of "Jack and the Beanstalk" fame. Miss Firmin is the possessor of a fine voice and she is also an excellent dancer. In addition to pantomime roles, which she has appeared in regularly for some years past, she has been successful in musical comedy and comic opera, and has, indeed, had a good all round experience in musical attractions.

William Anderson's new dramatic organisation opens at the King's Theatre, Melbourne, on Saturday evening next in the greatest of all Walter Melville's dramatic successes, "The Worst Woman in London." The new company was specially selected by Mr. Anderson, and includes: Messrs. Conway Wingfield, Frank Gerald, Harry Sweeney, C. R. Stanford, Walter Dalgleish, the Misses Harry Ireland, Florence Richter and Lillian Wiseman. The company has just concluded successful seasons in Sydney, Newcastle and Brisbane. "The Worst Woman in London" has a powerful plot and sensational scenes, one of which represents the heroine sliding along a telephone wire from a burning house.

In its ninth week, during the matinee performance of "Our Miss Gibbs,"

the queue for the evening presentation of the piece was 100 yards long, and the box office plans gave evidence that the house was booked up for a week ahead. These facts speak for themselves.

Mr. Marlow believes in giving his patrons the best money can buy. In addition to new plays Mr. Marlow has just signed contracts with fourteen English artists with great London reputations who will reach Australia at the beginning of next year.

Mr. William Desmond, the young American actor who has made such a hit in "Salvation Nell," at the Theatre Royal, Sydney, is on the look out for a good twenty minutes drama. Indeed, he says that every actor in America is pursuing a similar quest. With such a "playlet" as he has in his mind Mr. Desmond considers that a man might keep going for years at all the leading music halls of America and England. But so far he has not succeeded in getting just what he wants, and when he confesses that such a piece "requires a single continuous effort, that there must be no let down, no detraction from an adventurous development, which is at once exciting and attractive throughout," it will be realised that such productions do not grow on every bush.

The last financial year of the Drury Lane Company has been most successful, and according to the reports of the directors just to hand, this success is in the main owing to the immense popularity of "The Whip," which they reckon as the most successful drama ever staged at the theatre. They were in a position to pay £20,000 into the Reserve Fund, and were also able to carry forward a substantial sum to ensure a satisfactory dividend next year. In addition they declared a 10 per cent. dividend and a bonus dividend at the rate of five per cent. In spite of the fact that it was the thirteenth year of the Company's existence, they consider it the brightest twelve months in the history of Drury Lane.

The revival of "The Dollar Princess" at the Melbourne Princess' Theatre Saturday week, November 26, met with a deservedly warm reception from the large audience which assembled to renew acquaintance with the dainty and melodious musical comedy. In addition to the charm which accrues to the attraction itself, an additional interest was felt in the reproduction on account of the sim-

ultaneous appearance in the piece of two leading Australian artists, who have come to the fore during recent years. For the first time Miss Florence Young made her appearance with this company in the part of Olga Labinska (the part, by the way, in which Miss Olive Godwin appeared to such advantage when the piece was first staged in Melbourne). Miss Godwin herself on this occasion appears as Alice Conder, and there is no doubt that she appears to far better advantage in the part than any of her predecessors. She has a fine voice, a very attractive personality and a fund of comedy, and with all these acquirements combined, makes a really excellent study of the millionaire's sister. Miss Lottie Sargent in her original part of Daisy adds considerably to the success of the piece as far as the ladies of the cast are concerned, while of course with Mr. Bert Gilbert as the multi-millionaire, Mr. Herbert Clayton as Freddy Fairfax, Mr. Frank Green as the Earl of Quorn, Mr. W. S. Percy as Bulger and Mr. Victor Prince as Tartaroff, it may confidently be assumed that the balance of the cast is perfectly adequate.

Mr. Andrew MacCunn's music for this year's pantomime is so excellent that Mr. Gerard Coventry decided, some little time ago during rehearsals of the chorus, to find out what the ballet girls could do in the way of helping to swell the volume of sound and giving fuller expression to the score. So the members of the ballet were called together and asked to prepare themselves for the trial on a certain day. They were naturally anxious to acquit themselves well, though singing was not really in their line. When the time for the trial arrived they stood up manfully (or womanfully) and opened their mouths to such good effect that Mr. Coventry was amazed at the volume of tuneful sound that they produced and when they had finished, congratulated them most heartily on their achievement. They were naturally very pleased with themselves and suggested amongst other things that the real chorus should be dismissed and their services retained at Grand Opera salaries. These two suggestions are "still being considered by the management." But unquestionably the music for the big Xmas attraction this year promises to be something very far above the ordinary, and the specially selected body of choristers should do it full justice and make it one of the features of the production.

THE DETECTIVE IN DRAMA.

Mr. GEORGE MARLOW'S REFLECTIONS.

"Ever since Hawskshaw, the detective, first arose from his trapdoor," stated Mr. George Marlow to a representative of "The Adelaide Daily Herald," the detective in drama has had an unflinching charm for theatregoers. What is surprising, though, is that in view of his immense popularity in book form, the detective has not had a much bigger place in stage fiction. It had to be left to Messrs. Shirley and Landeck, the well-known writers of melodrama, and authors of Nick Carter, Detective, to realise this fact, and the real red hot detective dish as it is found in the shockers is only just being served up in London in the manner in which it was offered in Adelaide in "Nick Carter, the Detective."

"The detective in drama is usually taken too seriously or too flippantly. The dramatic treatment of Sherlock Holmes, artistic as it was, would doubtless have been more popular had it been on more sensational lines, for Conan Doyle in literature is never ashamed to be sensational. On the other hand, we find the detective figuring continually in farces (or also in picture shows) as an absurdly ludicrous figure. The fact did not seem to be realised until Nick Carter was dramatised that the detective, has, by reason of the hazardous nature of his profession, a special license to do daring deeds without being considered an impossible hero. In other words the detective can go to extremes in heroism and be convincing.

"The reason is apparent. No detective ever made a success in his profession without going through adventures which, if enacted on the stage would have half the audience fainting. In drama, therefore, he can depict heroics to a degree that would seem ridiculous if credited to a clerk or a shop walker, simply because his profession is identified with that sort of thing. The soldier of fortune is mediaeval romance stood to his time much in the same relation as our modern day detective does to us. His designation proclaimed him the doer of brave deeds and consequently they were expected of him, and no one was surprised when they happened. Therefore we see him the central figure of romantic drama—posing, boasting and knocking down every one in sight, and we regard it as quite the natural thing for him to do.

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