

RING UP THE CURTAIN

NOTES ON PLAYS AND PLAYERS

It seems to me a great pity that costume comedy companies of the "Dandies" type have outlived their popularity, and are now as extinct as the dodo. This class of entertainment had a big following some years ago, but folks nowadays seem to prefer a spectacle with an elaborate stage setting which pleases the eye to amuse them, rather than an individual artist in a clean linen shirt-front. Who doesn't remember Claude Dampier and other comedians of his class who used to make us cry through laughing at them? And this was done for the main part without resorting to comedy make-up or wardrobe. Not theirs the baggy pantaloons or the incarnadined proboscis; it was their fine artistry in "delivering the goods," as the Americans say, which made them such firm favourites with their audiences. There are three members of the Gerald Revue Company at the Auckland Opera House who were members of the "Dandy" companies under the management of Mr. Edward Branscombe. They are Mona Thomas, the divinely tall and divinely brunette soprano; Howard Hall, the basso of goodly proportions; and Reg. Hawthorne, who aids and abets Mr. Gerald on the comedy side. Mr. Howard Hall was also with the Jack Waller Company, and visited New Zealand with that combination in 1918, afterwards making a tour of India. Miss Thomas and Mr. Hawthorne were both connected with the "Red" Company headed by Claude Dampier.

The Australian papers have lately been making an outcry at the high prices of admission charged to hear the Melba Opera Company, and all sorts of facetious remarks have appeared in the Press about the High Cost of Opera. One of the dailies gives an account of a penniless man (imaginary, of course) being examined in bankruptcy, and tearfully declaring, when asked the reason

of his financial crash: "Able was I ere I saw (M) Elba." At first sight the prices certainly *do* seem rather huge, but the expense of an opera venture of this sort, with its large orchestra of over sixty performers, its well-trained and consequently well-paid chorus, and its immense overhead expenses, generally, cannot be defrayed by ordinary rates of admission. For the opening night in Sydney the dress circle seats were sold at £2 5s. 9d. each, and the gallery—for the Melba season renamed "the upper circle"—seats were rushed by enthusiasts at £1 3s. each. Once the first night is over, however, the management has promised not to be hard, and in future the prices will range from one guinea down to the modest five bob—plus tax.

Bert Harrow, the "Mile-a-minute" comedian, at present delighting audiences on the Fuller Circuit with his quaint witticisms, is a keen fisherman, and declares that one of his greatest ambitions in life is to relieve the congestion amongst the finny denizens of the deep. Recently, while fishing off the wharf at Devonport, his sport was interrupted rudely by a voice behind him saying peremptorily, "Can't fish 'ere!" He turned to behold a diminutive Council employee wearing an out-size in walrus moustaches, the said appendage concealing his mouth entirely. "I beg your pardon," politely murmured Harrow. "Can't fish 'ere!" snapped Walrus with a rising inflection, from somewhere behind that hairy curtain. Bert couldn't resist the opportunity.



Photo. by S. P. Andrew, Auckland and Wellington.

A charming study of Miss Ngaire Phipson, who is very well known in Wellington, and who has recently joined the Humphrey Bishop Company, now touring the South Island.

"I don't know: are they deaf?" he asked innocently. But Walrus refused to be comforted, so the fisherman had to pack his rod and decamp, vowing inwardly that he would lodge a protest with the Harbour Board against such iniquitous regulations.

Before this appears in print, the Vanbrugh-Boucicault combination will have made their first appearance in New Zealand at His Majesty's Theatre, Auckland. There is a treat in store for all lovers of good acting and plays with a decided English atmosphere: and who will not admit that, after such a lot of Yankee "crook" drama or bedroom-and-bath comedy, the *Genius Anglicus* will be very welcome? In "Mr. Pim Passes By," the part of Mr. Pim is taken by Dion Boucicault, and it is a wonderful characterisation worth going miles to see. Irene Vanbrugh is a craftswoman of brilliancy, and her "naturalness" is delicious. I have only mentioned one of the plays in their repertoire, but several others besides "Pim," and all equally delightful, will be done during the company's New Zealand tour.

We will be probably hearing here shortly (watch your step, Mr. Composer!) Mieczyslaw Muenz, a young Polish pianist, whom the Taits are bringing to Australasia. The Sydney *Herald* gravely informs me that "J. and N. Tait have now announced the name in Melbourne." Is it possible that "An-nounced" should read "Pro-nounced"?



Photo. by Bromia Studios.

The Nelson Blue Bird Pierrot Troupe, which originated under the guidance of Mr. and Mrs. John Hopkins, of "Dandies" fame, to assist the Mardi Gras celebrations at the beginning of last year, and since then has brought laughter and merriment to many people, apart from a very practical gift of £300, which has been used for charitable purposes.