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made the public like them," while Fritz Kreisler "spoke excellent English."

Certain pieces of really interesting information will reward the reader who is still hard to please. "The New Zealand Polka," for instance, was composed by Harriet Barlow in Wellington in 1858, and must have been one of our earliest local compositions. And in 1899 Haydn's *Creation* drew the biggest audience Dunedin had ever seen, all the big "shows" of previous years notwithstanding, a piece of evidence that suggests there really would be a story in the musical ground Mr. Hurst has left unsearched.

But in general, the inside is like the title on the cover — first things come last, last things first. In the title the real clue to the matter in hand is in the afterthought. In the book, the author's picture of his period has a foreground of ephemera, while fascinating speculations hide behind the almost inadvertent references to early silent films and their audiences, the Verbruggen Symphony, the Gonzalez Opera Company ("some performances were very good indeed"), Madame Albani, the Sheffield Choir (200 strong), Mark Twain, General Booth, and others of whom "mention must be made."

Never mind, the book is full of interesting things, and will offend no one, for it has praise for all and not a word of criticism. And when the day comes for someone to write the real story of Music and the Stage in New Zealand, it will be found indispensable. In the meantime, its pages make a good evening's entertainment, at a price, 8/6, that is not unreasonable in 1944 for a book which, in addition to 112 pages of text, has about 30 illustrations.

HOME GUARDS

THE BOOK OF THE GUARD. Text by Ian Mackay. Illustrations by L. C. Mitchell, R. Hipkins, D. B. Mackersey, M. L. G. Leask, C. E. Symes and J. T. Gasson. Coulls, Somerville & Wilkie, Ltd.

IT is perhaps a little dangerous to say that the funniest book the war has so far brought out of New Zealand is this book about the Home Guard. It sounds like saying that the Home Guard itself was the best joke of the war, and that of course must not be said by anyone but an ex-member. In fact nothing like that is intended. But one question obtrudes itself: is age funnier than youth? The Home Guard, with some exceptions, was a collection of has-beens. Most of its members were too old for front-line service, or too encumbered domestically or too economically important. But they were not too old to laugh at one another, and especially at themselves, and the *Book of the Guard* is one loud guffaw. But don't think that you must be a guardsman to join in. Sales and advance bookings have already reached the 25,000 mark—the present is the third printing—and there is no indication yet that the flood is slowing down. At two shillings it is the cheapest book of laughter on the market.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

WELLINGTON SHAKESPEARE SOCIETY: Series of addresses delivered 1943. Issued by the President, E. C. Harvie.

A 28-PAGE booklet containing addresses by Johannes Andersen, Alan Mulgan, D. C. Mazengerb, Marshall Macdonald, and H. F. von Haast.

NEW ZEALAND LISTENER, APRIL 14

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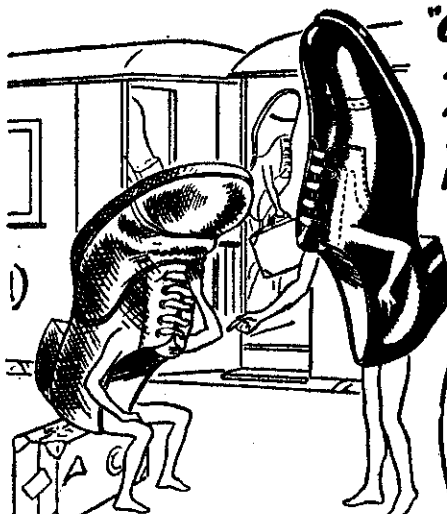


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