



10 YEARS IN ENTERTAINMENT



find out what had been done at the first meeting. So many of those present seemed to have their heads in the clouds, and to think that we had only to whisper the magic word "repertory," and that the purses of Wellington would open and the money flow freely into our coffers. I was one of those present who wished to know to what extent I was committing myself, and I'm afraid I wasn't popular. However, we were all enthusiastically in favour of forming a repertory theatre in the capital, and after much discussion, in which one voluble lady swayed those present to her way of thinking, despite the more feeble protests of a few of us, the National Repertory Theatre Society came into being. This high-sounding title was felt always, by many of us, to be a misnomer, and was changed some years later to the Wellington Repertory Theatre (Inc.). Mr. Leo du Chateau was the first director, and during the first year staged four excellent productions which met with immediate favour. The premiere of Shaw's "Pygmalion" was a memorable occasion. By 7 p.m. long queues of people were awaiting admittance to the Concert Chamber. I recall the thrill I got when I reached the Town Hall and saw this unexpected crowd trying to get in. The cast comprised Miss Nan Pike as Eliza Doolittle, Mrs. Coleridge as Mrs. Hill, Miss Hilda Miles as Miss Hill, Miss Louise Hall as the housekeeper, Mrs. John Hannah as Mrs. Higgins, Miss Thyra Baldwin as the maid, Mr. Vivian Rhind as the Cockney dustman, Doolittle, Mr. Fletcher Turner as Colonel Pickering, Mr. Frank Burden as Freddy, Mr. Joseph Hunt as a Cockney, and I played Professor Higgins. Mr. du Chateau's production was brilliant, and we had a most enthusiastic reception. The society was thus launched successfully.

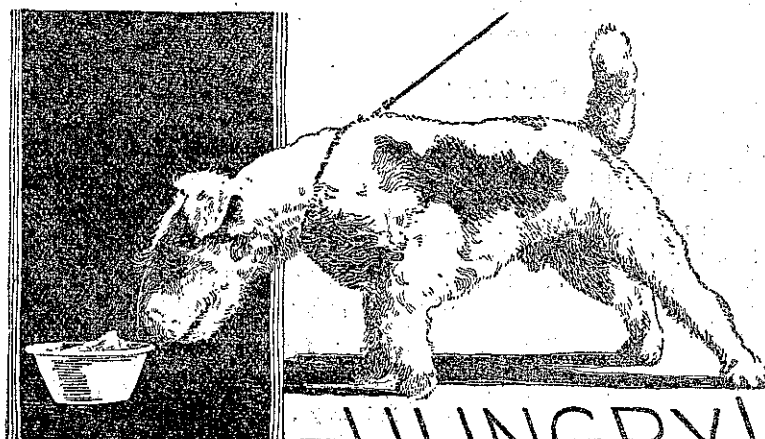
But, despite this big initial success, we were faced with great difficulties for several years. The chief of these was finance. A feeling was abroad that the National Repertory Theatre Society was an exclusive highbrow body. It has taken us years to dispel this illusion; but, thank goodness! it seems to be dissipated at last, for during recent years the membership has increased rapidly and, at present, is going ahead by leaps and bounds. Since the beginning of April of this year, eighty new members have joined up, which shows the continually growing interest in the Repertory Theatre.

The growing interest in repertory work is instanced, too, by the success

achieved by the recently-inaugurated society, the Thespians, under Mr. Victor S. Lloyd's skilful direction.

I have written at length about Wellington; but the repertory movement has spread to all parts of New Zealand. Christchurch soon followed the lead of the northern cities. There had been the elements of a repertory theatre there for some years at Canterbury College, where Professor Shelley was the guiding spirit. He has entered

whole-heartedly into the movement, and has done much toward the great success of the Canterbury Repertory Theatre. Mr. Beresford was the first producer, but he was soon succeeded by Miss Klore King, who did excellent work till ill-health forced her to retire for a time. Invercargill, too, has a most efficient "Play Box Theatre," where scenery and properties are made by the members, and a long list of plays has been produced.



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