

in Old-time Shows

Then again there was "The Toreador," composed by that prolific writer, Lionel Monckton. It's an opera that we don't often hear nowadays, and it contains several pretty little songs, one of which is "Keep Off the Grass." "The Belle of New York" had a great run in London, and George Edwardes, the famous producer, must have made a small fortune from this opera alone, as he had half a dozen touring companies in the provinces all playing to capacity houses. It was in this show that Edna May achieved her triumph, while Frank Lawton (father of the successful young English actor) played the part of Blinky Bill—a wonderful characterisation.

Both the Wellington and Dunedin amateurs have recently enjoyed successful seasons with their productions of "Miss Hook of Holland," an opera which was a huge success at Home 25 years ago. And now an excursion into the realm of military musical comedy—"The Chocolate Soldier." When Strauss gave us this opera he paved the way for the Viennese type of musical comedy which came along renewed after the break caused by the war. "The Chocolate Soldier" gave this country a chance of hearing one of New Zealand's own daughters in the title role, Amy Murphy, who toured with J. C. Williamson's. Miss Murphy was certainly a success in the part, but she faded from view and has never been heard of again. The soprano song, "My Hero," in this opera is a great favourite with budding sopranos on account, no doubt of its great range.

Now we come down the years to "The Maid of the Mountains," which was one of the biggest successes that Daly's had ever known. Josie Collins packed the house night after night, and was as warm a favourite with her public as was her clever mother, Lottie Collins, of music-hall fame. This is the opera that had a whole team of composers behind it, and it was produced by Oscar Asche of "Chu Chin Chow." This last-named show could almost have been called a musical comedy, although the title of extravaganza seemed to describe it better. Nevertheless it was the outstanding success in London in those far-off war days.

"Lilac Time," a story based on Schubert's life, was a charming opera, and the Australian cast had as one of its most outstanding members, John Ralston, who died in Sydney the other day. I suppose one of the greatest successes seen at Drury Lane (with the possible exception of "Rosie Marie") was Romberg's "Desert Song," the musical comedy which served to introduce to New Zealanders that clever Wellington actor, Lance Fairfax, who has since made a successful English talkie, "The Beggar Student."

It is a greatly that lovers of really good music do not get more opportunity of hearing and seeing some of the old favourites I have just described. Take, for instance, "Dorothy"—where could you find prettier music or a better libretto than that provided by Collier's tuneful opera? This production, by the way, is the only one, I think, which calls for a pack of

hounds on the stage—and what a beautiful scene that is—the huntsman in his pink coat and the chorus of followers. That prince of matinee idols, Hadyn Coffin, played the leading role in this opera, and his great singing role was the beautiful "Queen of My Heart" song with which he nightly brought down the house. Lurcher, the comedy role, was played by Edmund Payne. "The Little Michus" was a musical comedy I remember seeing in the English provinces many years

ago, but I do not remember even hearing of its production in either Australia or New Zealand. "San Toy" had a great run at Home, and is after the style of "The Geisha"—it has some pretty numbers, including "Rhoda and her Pagoda. . . . With his one little, two little, three little, four little wives."

"A Chinese Honeymoon" was a riot when taken through the provinces, and was a surefire drawing card

for any suburban theatre, but I don't think it was much of a success in London. I wonder if any reader can recall a musical comedy which was a huge success in the 'nineties—George Grossmith's great show, "Gentleman Joe"? That was a show, if you like,

and how the audience would roar every night at the quips and songs of Gentleman Joe.

A later show and a warm favourite of mine was "The Waltz Dream," a musical comedy which showed what a really fine actor Leslie Holland was. His duet with another character in the show—"Pic-pic-piccolo" was one of its brightest gems. "Veronique" is a lively little work, after the dainty French pattern, and when it was first produced in London 30 years ago Ruth Vincent played the title role. It was revived recently when Derek Oldham and Winnie Melville played the leading roles and made the most of that famous duet, "Trot Here and There."

Well, I could go on reminiscing for ever (and if I started on Gilbert and Sullivan I'd be filling the whole paper), but I will conclude by expressing the hope that the time is not far distant when the Dominion will again be having regular visits from musical comedy companies.



—MEMORIES OF THE MERRY WIDOW—
—MARIE TEMPEST IN THE GEISHA—"I
FEEL SO SILLY WHEN THE MOON COMES
OUT"—THE BELLE OF NEW YORK WITH
EDNA MAY — THE MAID OF THE MOUN-
TAINS.