SPIRIT OF THE STAGE.

Managers and Members of the Dramatic and Musical Professions are notified that we have furnished to our representatives throughout the country an illuminated card, bearing the signature of the Editor, and specifying the holder's tenure of office.

Correspondents must forward their reports so as to reach us by Wednesday morning. All letters must be addressed to E. A. Buck, Editor.

Wednesday, Dec. 1.

The firstnighters were in a quandary, on Monday. The only novelties were Mr. Jefferson, at the Star, in Rip Van Winkle, which they had seen too often, and Miss Fortescue, whom they had seen often enough, in a double bill, at the Lyceum. Thus they had to take their choice between the two extremes of the profession—and the most of them decided in favor of the Wild West show. Mr. Jefferson, the greatest American comedian, follows Mr. Booth, the greatest American tragedian, and plays old pieces with the same technical perfection. Both of these actors are wealthy. They appear when they like; are sure of good terms; make plenty of money easily, and rank as the Bourbons of the professsion, learning nothing and forgetting nothing. There are no two English actors who can be precisely compared with Messrs. Booth and Jefferson; but Messrs. Irving and Toole hold corresponding positions upon the English stage. Mr. Irving is, beyond all question, at the head of the English tragedians, and Mr. Toole is the oldest, best and most popular of English comedians. Both of them are as rich, probably, as Messrs. Booth and Jefferson, and could take the world as easily if they pleased. But mark the wonderful contrast. Mr. Irving has a theatre in London and so has Mr. Toole. They purchase and produce new plays; they study hard and spend money liberally to revive old plays with historical accuracy and scenic splendor, at the Lyceum, and with all the modern improvement upon old-fashioned fun, at Toole's. They take an active interest in art, in literature and in the drama at home and abroad. They give not only their names and their purses, but their personal attention and services to any organization designed to benefit the actors and improve their position. They go into society and are honored guests in many noble houses, especially at the town and country palaces of the Prince of Wales. They are live men, hard at work on and off the stage, doing good in a thousand ways, elevating the profession artistically and socially and encouraging all other artists, from the painter who provides the scenery to the dramatist who originates or revises the plays, from the musicians in the orchestra to the critics in the stalls, from the designer of the costumes to the inventor of mechanical effects. Compared with Irving and Toole, it is not too much to say that Mr. Jefferson and Mr. Booth are mere puppets, wound up to say certain words and make certain gestures so many nights in a season. They come to New York, year after year, and expect people to go to see them without ever presenting anything to attract the public. No dramatist writes new plays for Edwin Booth. He sticks to Shakespeare, not only because it is great, but because it is cheap. The theatre, the company and the accessories are furnished for him, and he never seems to care whether they are good, bad or indifferent. He goes through his part, well or ill, according to the whim of the night or the state of his health, pockets his cheque and disappears until the stage is ready for the next performance. No playwright devises new comedies for Mr. Jefferson. He bought up Boucicault's dramatizations of Rip Van Winkle and The Cricket on the Hearth, years ago, and for such old farces as Lend Me Five Shillings he pays no royalties, although the author is in poverty. He takes some pains with his company, and is particular that the scenery and properties shall be exact reproductions of the models that he carries about with him and that are quite as ancient as the plays. Clever puppets could do almost as much for art and for the profession, if puppets were able to recite the words of Shakespeare and of Boucicault. Hon. Perry Belmont, himself a man of wealth, argues that rich men owe a duty to the age in which they live and to the age that follows them, and so do the talent of Mr. Jefferson and the genius of Mr. Booth. We have compared them with Messrs. Irving and Toole, but we might also contrast their artistic indifference with the intellectual and business activity of Edwin Forrest, the tragedian, and W. E. Burton, the comedian, who preceded them and prepared the way which is now so easy for them. Mr. Forrest loved Shakespeare; but he did his utmost to develop the American drama; offering prizes, writing suggestions and taking a live interest in the subject. Mr. Burton revelled in the old comedies; but he had new comedies written for him; he created new parts; he edited an encyclopedia of American humor; he entertained royally. We feel, season after season, when Mr. Booth and Mr. Jefferson return to us, as if we were writing obituary notices of their acting, and long for some miracle that will rouse them from their lethargy and inspire them with the spirit of the times.

Miss Fortescue finishes her engagement, at the lovely Lyceum, this week. We probably owe her appearence here as a star to the settled conviction of W. S. Gilbert that the American people are all fools. Miss Fortescue is one of his practical jokes. We found this out when she made her debut, as Gretchen. Very elegant modern costumes carried her nicely through Frou Frou, which she could not be expected to act. In Sweethearts and King Rene's Daughter, the double bill for this week, she is as amateurish as ever, but not quite as pleasing. It takes one's breath away to think of such an inexperienced actress, endowed with no remarkable beauty, endorsed by no society reputation, presenting herself as a star in the metropolis of this country. Her courage must be admired, but her acting is another thing entirely. The only thoroughly acceptable member of her company is Charles Sugden, and we hear that he is going to leave her at the close of her Lyceum season. Of course, Miss Fortescue has not made her fortune in New York; but that she should be able to play here at all, except in small parts and a stock company, is marvelous. Americans like audacity; but Miss Fortescue in Sweetheats is too much for good-nat re, and we respectfully protest. No matter; she is going away, and, next Tuesday evening, Helen Dauvray and her comedians, including Mr. Sothern and Mr. Pigott, will revive One of Our Girls, as a preface to the production of Bronson Howard's new play, now in rehearsal.

The Wild West Show, at the Madison Square Garden, is no longer wild. Steele Mackaye has tamed it and transformed it into a series of living pictures. He has not changed it into a drama, because there is no actor in the company, except Buffalo Bill, who says nothing, shoots badly and is kept pretty much in the background. Those who have seen the Wild West Show in an open field, or at Erastina Wood, will not care for it at the Garden. Those who have never seen it before will not appreciate it thoroughly. The wildness, which was its greatest charm, its distinctive peculiarity, has been taken out of it. Instead of being really savage, [illegible] theatrical. We hope that the Show will not b[illegible] its present form. The Londoners would thi[illegible] better stage-pictures at Drury Lane; the [illegible] as below the standard of the spectac[illegible] Undoubtedly, Steele Mackaye has ac[illegible] raw materials on hand; but the raw m[illegible] alone and not worked up into a [illegible] ther flesh, fowl, nor good red he[illegible] Madison Square Garden is now a s[illegible] of the immense stage upon which [illegible] are presented. A rough, wide p[illegible] the Fourth Avenue end of the Garden, and behind this Matt Morgan's mammoth but artistic scenery is displayed. First, we have the Primeval Forest, with wild animals, Indians, and Indian sports and battles. Then the Prairie, with the arrival of an emigrant train, a fire and a stampede. Next, a Cattle Ranch, with the games of the rude settlers, an attack by Indians and the Cowboy rescue. Finally, a Mining Camp, with the arrival of the pony express, and the departure of the stagecoach, a robbery by road-agents, and a cyclone which blows down the camp and sweeps the passengers from the top of the coach. In preparation is a picture of the battle of Little Big Horn and the death of General Custer; but at present the Show concludes with the cyclone, which is as real as Nelse Waldron's ingenuity and a 200-horse power engine can manufacture. There is some attempt at dialogue during the scenes; but the Garden is too large for the words to be heard distinctly. Frank Richmond, the orator who introduces the pictures, makes himself heard; but the other performers have not his elocutionary powers. Matt Morgan's scenery is beautifully painted and, here and there, Steele Mackaye has managed to get in a true dramatic touch—such as the little child who runs to meet his father in the Ranche picture—but now, as formerly, the parts of the Show which are most popular are those which are all nature and owe nothing whatever to art. The rough riding of the Cowboys, the lassoing, the Indian sports, the old Deadwood stage and the rifle shooting are the features that most please the public. Without any proscenium, any scenery, any orderly arrangement, any attempt at dramatic effects, the Show would have drawn as largely and been much more unique. Buffalo Bill had the right idea, seasons ago. During the summer he exhibited his Show, rain or shine, in the open fields, and during the winter he starred at the cheap-priced theatres in border dramas, his Indians acting as supers and the cracking of rifles exciting the gallery-boys to frenzy. This new scheme to combine the Show and the theatre and give the Wild West on a tanbark stage and the border dramas without actors is not a success. Hundreds of people go to see it; but thousands went to the original Show. Adam Forepaugh, who has invested a great deal of money in the enterprise, advertises it like a circus. It used to be better than a circus, because the horses were supposed to run wild and the riders had to risk their limbs in mounting them; but now the animals are cribbed, confined and have to be whipped into the display of a little animation. We should not be surprised to see a bareback star in silk tights or a Queen of the Arena in ballet skirts added to the programme before long. Neither would be less appropriate than Matt Morgan's scenery and Steele Mackaye's stage directions. We enjoyed the Drama of Civilization; we hope that many people will enjoy it. But it is no longer the Wild West Show. The great art of letting well enough alone has been neglected by the management. After the Drama has worried through the winter months, we hope that Buffalo Bill, the Indians, the Cowboys and the bisons will be let loose in the open again and that, when they go to Europe, all of Matt Morgan's scenery will be carefully left behind.

Next Monday, at the Union Square, Modjeska will revive Twelfth Night, the production of her new play, Daniela, having been postponed for a fortnight. My Aunt Bridget, a comicality that has not yet been seen in New York, will be produced at Poole's theatre. Louis Aldrich will transfer My Partner to the Third Avenue. Kate Claxton will bring back The Two Orphans to the Grand Opera-house. But the event of the evening will be the r'entree of Mrs. Langtry, at Niblo's Garden, and the first performance in this country of the new play, called Enemies, adapted from the French by Charles Coghlan. On Tuesday night, Helen Dauvray will reappear at the Lyceum, and Rosina Vokes, if her physicians are not too sanguine, will rejoin her company, at the Standard, and produce Pinero's farcical comedy, The Schoolmistress. Both Enemies and The Schoolmistress have had long runs in London. Nat Goodwin has at last concluded to change his bad bill, Little Jack Sheppard, at the Bijou, and, a week from Saturday, will appear in a new farce, called Turned Up, and in the burlesque, Those Bells, which is the best travestie of Irving, although Dixey and Hudson, the Tetrach, have pretty well exhausted the subject. A change of bill is also due at Wallack's, because Sophia is advertised as "a brilliant success," and the Wallack advertisements have always to be read backward. The really brilliant successes are Jim the Penman, at the Madison Square; Erminie, which is more popular than ever, at the Casino, and Harrigan's vaudeville, The O'Reagan's, at the Park. The performance of The Princess Ida, at the Fifth Avenue, is the finest ever given in this country; but we doubt whether that opera will hold the stage much longer. The more reason to go and hear it at once.

Munkacsy's picture, Christ before Pilate, is attracting the best people of the city to the Tabernacle, on Twenty-third street. The exterior of the building has been neatly redecorated and the interior rearranged. Every possible comfort and convenience has been provided for the spectators, who can view the picture from their seats, or from the gallery, or can inspect it closely, and it will bear the closest inspection. It is indubitably a very great painting, a veritable masterpiece. The only fault we find with the grouping is that the figure to the left, elevated against the wall, is superfluous, and detracts from the figure of the priest who is denouncing Christ. Pilate's attitude is admirable. One can read the perplexity of the burly Roman in his thoughtful face and the extended hand in which he seems to weigh the case before deciding it. The strongest figure in the picture, however, is not Pilate, but the priest or elder who sits looking malignantly askance at Jesus. The weakest is Christ himself, who is represented as a thin, pale, careworn man, with no sign of dignity in his features or in his manner. His face is not only meek, but weak; his mouth especially feeble. He does not appear to be either a King of the Jews or the King of Heaven. He is gentle and patient; but he is painted as a persecuted Polish Jew, not as a God incarnate working out His own plan of salvation through suffering. Perhaps it is impossible to depict Christ satisfactorily; but certainly in the scene in which He claimed to be a King and was condemned for this assumption, He should not be represented as so entirely destitute of nobility. Going back to the artist's conception of the picture, we may challenge his composition on the ground that he has not selected the most characteristic incident in the trial of Christ before Pilate. The most detailed account of the interview is given by St. Matthew. For a picture we should have chosen the time when the wife of Pilate whispered in his ear: "Have thou nothing to do with that just man," or when Pilate, seeing that a tumult was made, took water—the Scriptural phrase has now become slang—and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just man; see ye to it!" Munkacsy has overlooked these two dramatic incidents and painted one not so picturesque. We hold that he has not given us enough chief priests and elders to realize the trial as the Scriptures describe it. All the chief priests and elders went before Pilate—"the whole council," says St. Mark; "the chief priests and the rulers and the people," says St. Luke. Singularly, however, St. John, who was probably the only eye-witness among the disciples, writes a very different account of the trial, and is more likely to be accurate. According to St. John, no such scene as that painted by Munkacsy could have occurred. He says that the Jews would not go into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled and so prevented from eating the passover. Pilate went out to them; heard their accusation; reëntered the hall, called Jesus in and questioned him alone. Here was Munkacsy's subject: Christ standing before the Roman governor in the otherwise empty hall, and the angry priests and people glaring in at the wide entrance, eager to hear what was said, anxious lest their victim should escape through Pilate's indifference or conversion. St. John emphasizes the fact that the Jews did not enter the judgment hall by saying that, after Pilate's interview with Christ, "he went out again unto the Jews." An artist should be historically correct when he has so plain a history before him. We do not think that Munkacsy is correct in his conception, in the architecture of the judgment hall, in the costumes of the priests and elders and particularly in the face and figure of the Christ. But, aside from this criticism, and considered simply as a painting, we repeat that the work is very great. It will amply repay careful study and one finds new beauties at every visit. To consider it as a religious painting is a mistake, as we have demonstrated. It does not depict the Christ of the Bible, nor the incident which the Bible describes. It is, in fact, rather a picture of the modern, sceptical school, representing Christ as a harmless, innocent fanatic, howled at by Jewish bigots and condemned by a big, blundering, well-meaning heathen, who wanted to let Him go free, but feared the people. As a painting it is none the worse because no clergyman of any denomination would care to have it hung in his church. It is a good, sound, faithful work technically; it is at once impressive and suggestive, and, if it represents only the humanity of Christ without a touch of His Divinity, the fault redeems itself by the dissatisfaction which it excites in every spectator who has formed from the Bible his own ideal of the Savior of the world.

To-night, at the Metropolitan Opera-house, Wagner's grand opera, Tristan and Ysolde, will be presented for the first time in America. At the Academy of Music, Patti will give her last operatic concert for the present—which means that she is going into the provinces, and will return to bid us a final farewell. 'Tis bold on Manager Abbey's part to thus pit Patti against Wagner and the Metropolitan forces; but seats for both houses were at a premium, this morning. There was only one Wagner; but there is only one Patti.

Henry M. Stanley, the African explorer, was banquetted at the Lotos Club, last Saturday; has attended several fashionable receptions; has lectured at Chickering Hall and at Brooklyn, and will lecture here again, on Saturday afternoon. Time has improved Mr. Stanley in every way. He looks much younger than on his previous visit, and he has acquired the arts of the accomplished orator, and delights his audience with the manner, as well as the matter, of his discourses. He has a most interesting story to tell, and he tells it admirably. His lectures are not dry compilations from his books, but are full of humor, of romance, of thrilling experiences, of quaint anecdotes and of suggestions for the poets, the novelists and the business men of New York. Africa is unquestionably the country of the future, and it could have no more eloquent prophet than Mr. Stanley has become.

The tenth games of the Athletic Association of the Seventh Regiment will be held at the Armory, on Saturday evening. The games are always good; but the feature of the evening will be the mothers, sisters, wives, daughters, sweethearts and friends of the Seventh Regiment, who include most of the fashionables of New York and who will assemble, to the number of two or three thousand, to hold a delightful reception and applaud the sports.

On Monday night the Eden Musee will be closed to the public and an invitation reception will be tendered to Munczi Lajos, who is to be the next star of that institution, which needs no stars. Munczi Lajos as a Hungarian musician, who leads a famous orchestra. This is the last week of the Mexican Village, at the Cosmopolitan. The exhibition will repay a visit. It is to be taken to Brooklyn, next week. Be sure to see it.

Boston is making elaborate preparations for the Dixey ball, to-morrow week. It is expected to eclipse the New York affair. Several hundred guests from New York are going by special train. We beg to acknowledge the compliment of an invitation, but regret that a previous engagement will prevent our acceptance. The *Advertiser* states that, at the first Patti concert, "a large proportion of the floor seats and of those in the front balcony were unoccupied." This is bad for Boston. The high prices are complained of; but Patti's singing is cheap at any price, and this is her final farewell. Edwin Booth begins an engagement, next Monday, at the Boston. The other new announcements are: A Celebrated Case, at the Bijou; Theodora, at the Globe; John T. Raymond, at the Park, in A Woman Hater, and The Shadow Detective, at the Windsor. Harbor Lights is playing to standing-room only, at the Museum. Austin's Sunday night concerts are crowded.

Cincinnati regrets that the season of the American Opera was a disappointment. The great financial success predicted did not materialize. The advance sale was large; but the sales at the doors were insignificant. The scenery was magnificent; the chorus excellent; the orchestra unsurpassed; the ballet a revelation to Western critics; but the soloists lacked voices. Spectacularly the operas were successful; but vocally the company was weak. The Carleton company had fair houses for Nanon, at the Grand. Reilly and Woods claim to have played to $5,000, last week, at the People's. As this theatre is low-priced, the story is strange, if true. Manager Miles has furnished the Grand with entirely new orchestra chairs, which are declared to be the most uncomfortable in the city. Probably the seats are all right, but they have been placed too closely together. Give 'em room.

San Francisco reports that Mr. and Mrs. Florence, who are now beyond criticism, have played a fine engagement, at the Baldwin. This week, Mr. Florence revives Dombey and Son. Sol. Smith Russell was heartily welcomed, at the Bush-street theatre. His new play, Pa, amounts to nothing; but he is a host in himself, and large audiences laughed at his specialties. Price, Lamb and Jordan follow him, this week, with On the Rio Grande. The Queen's Lace Handkerchief, this week, at the Alcazar, and The Mascot, at the Tivoli. The California is to reopen, next Monday, with The Ratcatcher, by the Kiralfy troupe.

Washington has W. J. Scanlan, in Shane-na-Lawn, to big houses, at Albaugh's, this week; Atkins Lawrence and Viola Allen, in A Wall Street Bandit, at the National, to fair business; Miner's Silver King company, at Herzog's; Horace Lewis, in Monte Cristo, at the Bijou. Lawrence—not Wilson—Barrett will appear at Albaugh's, next week. D. E. Bandman will oppose him, at the Bijou. The Choral Society will give a concert, at the Congregational Church, next Wednesday, with Charlotte Walker, Whitney Mockridge and George Prelin.

At Frederick Archer's second organ-matinee of the new series, on Monday, at Chickering Hall, Marion Benfield made her first appearance and sang sweetly in a light soprano; Alexander Lambert was the pianist, and William Courtney had an encore for his "Come Into the Garden," in which he is unequalled even by Sims Reeves.

Indianapolis gave Robert Downing small but enthusiastic houses for The Gladiator. This week, at English's, Maud Granger, in The Prima Donna and Lynwood, and Rankin's Minstrels, at the Grand, where Nanon is booked for next week.