

THE VARIETY STAGE.

BY W. H. CLEMART.

PARADOXICAL as it may seem, the most important event of the year in variety-land never happened. When, at the end of the month of March, it was publicly announced that the King had graciously indicated his intention of commanding a music hall performance to be given at the Empire Theatre, Edinburgh, in July, during his visit to that city to attend the Coronation festivities, the delight of the music hall profession knew no bounds, for never before in the history of the music hall had such a mark of Royal recognition been recorded. A committee, for the purpose of drawing up the suggested programme to be submitted for approval by His Majesty, was formed, and consisted of Sir Edward Moss (chairman), Messrs. Frank Allen, Alfred Butt, W. H. Clemart, Walter de Frece, Walter Dickson, J. L. Graydon, Walter Gibbons, Alfred Moul, Oswald Stoll, Henry Tozer, and Mr. C. Douglas Stuart (hon. secretary). Several meetings were held, and speculation was rife as to who were to be the lucky mortals selected to entertain their Majesties. Many forecasts appeared, both in the public and professional Press, and, although it was ordained that the official programme was never to see the light of day, it can be stated that not one of the forecasts published was correct. The air was full of jubilation, when, on Wednesday morning, May 10, everything was changed to gloom by the receipt of the terrible news that on the previous evening a most disastrous fire had taken place at the Empire Theatre, Edinburgh, entirely destroying the stage and some of the dressing-rooms, and that the Great Lafayette and seven others, including two children, had perished in the flames. It did not come as a surprise when, on May 15, Sir Edward Moss received a letter from Sir William Carrington stating that His Majesty had decided that the command performance should not take place. Nothing else could possibly have been expected in the circumstances. However, it is a pleasure to record that Sir William Carrington added "that His Majesty had in no way abandoned his intention of attending a music hall entertainment, and that such a performance might be given later on, probably in London, at a suitable occasion." That His Majesty will keep his promise goes without saying, so perhaps 1912 may be looked to to compensate for the disappointment of 1911. Putting on one side its regret, the music hall profession immediately set about doing its duty to those who had suffered loss in that terrible catastrophe. Messrs. Howard and Wyndham very kindly placed the Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh, at the disposal of Sir Edward Moss and the Variety Artists' Federation, who, without delay, proceeded to arrange a matinée in aid of the sufferers. The matinée was given on Saturday, May 20, under the patronage of their Majesties the King and Queen, and, together with a "relief fund" opened in the columns of "The Performer," realised £299 11s. This sum was dealt with by a small Federation committee, with Mr. Frank Allen, deputising for Sir Edward Moss, in the chair; and on June 20 cheques to the number of forty-one were sent out to the various applicants, not one penny being deducted for expenses. And so the "great event" never happened, but when their Majesties return from India—well, as Mr. Asquith puts it, "wait and see."