

THE THEATRES.

OPENING OF THE NEW THEATRE-ROYAL.

Our new Theatre-Royal was opened last night with gratifying *éclat*. Indeed, the inaugural performance was attended with an amount of success which may be assumed by the lady lessee, Miss Litton, to augur favourably for the fortunes of her managerial *régime*. By local playgoers the opening of the theatre had evidently been looked upon as an event of interest, and at which it was imperative they should "assist." It was therefore not to be wondered at that the seats in the better portions of the house were all taken some days ago, and that there was very considerable bustle and stir in the neighbourhood of the building last night. While at one end there was a large crowd eager to obtain admittance, a regular stream of carriages flowed past the doors on the other side, and this, too, we will weigh an hour before we begin up of the curtain. From this one could readily conjecture what would be the condition of matters so far as the attendance was concerned. Spacious as the house is it was crowded to excess; not a seat was vacant, nor was a bit of standing room unoccupied; and the magnificent audience, many of the number in evening dress, were as enthusiastic as the most hopeful management could have wished.

Before the curtain rose one had time, under the full and favouring glare of the gas-light, to mark the general appearance and note the effect of the decorations of the house. Without a doubt Mr Phipps, the architect, has given us a most admirable theatre—admirable alike in the lines on which it has been constructed, the mode of its arrangement, and the manner of its embellishment. On looking about from the stalls what most particularly strikes us is the marked difference between the general appearance of the old and the new theatres. Somehow when seated in the former house one had always a feeling of gloom as the result of impenetrable vastness, but now all is light and cheery, bright and airy. The cunning of the hand of the designer and the decorator is indeed most strikingly shown. From floor to ceiling there is delectable harmony in ornamentation, and certainly nothing of that "loud" coloring which not infrequently offends the eye in places of entertainment. The sweep of the three tiers of galleries is exceedingly graceful, there is chasteness in the elaboration of the ceiling and in the decoration of the walls, while the rich cream colour and gold, in which the prominent

features of the house are treated, blend very effectively with the crimson hangings and cushions. Looking stagewards, the picture is no less attractive. If there is anything which more than another should satisfy the eye in a theatre it is the act-drop so frequently thrust before us. In the present case there is certainly no room for complaint—the curtain which Mr Mann has hung is a very artistic bit of designing and colouring. The seating, too, is very comfortable. Indeed, if Miss Litton could just manage to exclude the cold draught which plays—at least it played last night—about the occupants of the stalls, one would be inclined to say her house is all that could be desired.

We certain rising discovered the managers on the stage, surrounded by the members of her company. The greeting accorded them was most enthusiastic, and on the orchestra giving out the first bars of "God Save the Queen," the audience rose *en masse*. The strains of the National Anthem had scarcely died away, when Miss Litton stepped to the front, and having been cheered again and again, spoke with admirable point the following address, written by Mr G. W. Baynham:—

When, on the eve of strife, the soldier hears
The Bugle call resounding in his ears;
When the stern cry is heard, "To arms, to arms,"
No fear unites his mind and no fear alarms;
In Honour's cause he boldly braves the fray,
And goes—wherever Fate may lead the way!

Such are my thoughts when standing here to-night.

May courage help to make our future bright;
I strive—and well we have others done their part—
To raise the standard of Dramatic art;
To bid for victory in Shakespeare's name,
And trust to you for Fortune and for Fame.

(Applause.)

Do you think this portion of the House will do?
I hope the other side will please you too!
In moving here we've had a busy week of it,
But "As You Like It," so we hope you'll speak of it.

"Union is strength"—an axiom long accepted—
Our present company is not excepted.

With Hermann Veris, and with Lionel Brough,
Baamister, Edgar, and—but "Hold your tongue,
You have the play-bill in your hands at last."
And know "I have set my life upon a cast."
Two hundred nights that closed at Drury Lane
Tell best of talents not employed in vain.

Never will playgoers of the present day,
Stand far afoot when High art leads the way;
Glasgow itself, with Time's moving hand,
Points to the Past and bids us take our stand,
In Edmund Kean's reign to Treasury told
That welcome to the Past *eye* was cold;
A "loyal" Stage has through its glorious past
Shewn how the Scotch to talent will hold fast.
The living race a standing trophy too,
To prove how Glasgow to True Art is true.

(Applause.)

Such memories bid the phantom Fear depart,
They nerve the purpose while they warm the heart;
To-night, while Shakespeare charms your ears and eyes,
Art lends its aid to bid his thoughts arise.
The Rosalind is one not quite unknown,
Some time at Court, then on "The Imperial"
throne;

Last at Drury, now at Glasgow "Royal,"
All know that Schachan to a Queen are loyal.
If but to me you'll only prove as true,
We'll—well, let Time show what we reign shall do.

(Applause.)

During the brief interval which followed some "discontented" gods succeeded in creating considerable disturbance, continued even for a short time after the play began. The tendency to murmur thus indicated might have seriously interfered with our enjoyment of "As You Like It," the charming Shakesperian pastoral with which Miss Litton inaugurates her management in Glasgow, if it had not been repressed, silently, yet most effectively, by the good force of art on the stage. First nights are always a terror to theatrical managers, especially when to the ordinary hazards of production are added the mechanical and other difficulties inseparable from a brand new theatre. Audiences, especially those of their number who get nearest the ceiling, do not sufficiently appreciate these difficulties. On the contrary, they are rather disposed to regard the occasion as one on which more license than usual may be taken in the way of amusing themselves in a manner that is not provided for in the programme, and if there be any want of smoothness on the stage, it is generally emphasized in the gallery. In the present instance, however, there was not a single hitch to mar the even tenor of the play, and the upper as well as the lower parts of the house settled down, after the opening scene, to the enjoyment of an incomparable, exceptionally well-acted comedy. One of the disadvantages of the modern theatrical system is that too frequently we have one big actor so indifferently supported that all the balance and music of the beauty of Shakespeare are destroyed. Miss Litton brings with her at this time a company of actors all of whom are thoroughly competent for their work, while some of them at least have a reputation scarcely inferior to her own. They have a further advantage, of some importance too, in the interests of art. "As You Like It" has been performed by them for ever so many consecutive nights in London and the English provinces, and the consequence is that each plays to the other with perfect ease as well as loyalty, and with a measure of perfection, when taken as a whole, that reduces criticism to the dull level of general approval. Rosalind, it need hardly be said, finds in Miss Litton a singularly graceful and felicitous exponent. She has studied the character so

carefully that all traces of study have disappeared, and her finest points are made with such delicacy that they are in danger of being lost to the careless eye. When, for example, she tells *Oriano* in the first act that "You have overcome more than your enemy," the haughty avowal of her tender interest in the young wrestler is followed by a glance of maternal confusion, eloquent indeed as to the state of his heart, but so transient, that without giving the actress any of her attention the whole significance of the situation is missed. So also in the later love scene between *Garynede* and *Oriano* in the Forest of Arden. If we give heed only to what the actress says, we shall lose much of the charm of her impersonation. This is, of course, true of all acting; it is especially true of Miss Litton's interpretation of *Rosalind*. The audience gave her a kindly reception on her first appearance in the comedy, and as the night advanced she was more than once called to the front, along with the leading performers. *Rosalind's* cousin, the gentle *Celia*, was well bestowed in the hands of Miss Helen Crosswell. The part of the melancholy *Jacques* was assumed by Mr Hermann Veris, of whom we could have wished to see more during the evening. His acting was marked by great intelligence and force, and studied moderation. His latter quality was strikingly displayed in "The Seven Ages," which was spoken in carefully modulated tones, and as if *Jacques* were thinking aloud, all unconscious of his surroundings.

revelled in the wit and humour of the part. His *Touchstone* is not so truly Shakesperian in spirit as that of the late Mr Compton, with whom one can hardly help comparing all other actors in this rôle, but it had the breadth and vigour and inimitable drollery of the rough, and the by-play was all his. *Oriano's* was taken by Mr Jackson, a young actor of good parts, while old *Adam*, one of the most difficult as it is also one of the most beautiful characters in "As You Like It," was given to Mr Everill, a member of the old Haymarket Company, and an actor who knows his work and likes it. The subordinate characters were all well filled.

It only remains to be said that the comedy was put on the stage very beautifully, and with the greatest attention to details, even the most insignificant, if it may be said that in art anything is insignificant. All the scenery was in admirable taste, the forest scene being especially pretty and realistic in the best sense, while the dresses and appointments were at once rich and appropriate. The whole performance enables us to say, as we do with the greatest pleasure, that Miss Litton has made a grand production of "As You Like It" must be recorded as a notable event in the theatricals of the city.