

BEHIND THE SCENES

Recent Improvements in Kilkenny Theatre

Kilkenny is more fortunate than the majority of Irish centres, inasmuch as, thanks to the late Captain Otway Cuffe, it possesses a theatre not adapted, as is usually the case, from a derelict warehouse, but specially designed and built to fulfil the exacting requirements of stage production. The theatrical history of Kilkenny is unique. Play bills are still in possession of old families which mention in the caste of the performances names which are illustrious in history. Tom Moore and Miss Bessie Dyke, who afterwards became the poet's wife, entertained the Kilkenny public as amateur actors in their day, and amongst other noted persons who took part in theatricals in Kilkenny, may be mentioned Henry Grattan, Henry Flood, and Sir John Stephenson, the Composer.

The histrionic interest thus fostered seems never to have been lost in Kilkenny. Every club of a social character has always had its own dramatic class, and the wonder is that such an encouraging environment did not produce a crop of playwrights. It was, one would like to believe, some such idea as this which actuated Captain Cuffe when, through his instrumentality, the present commodious and well-equipped Theatre was erected in 1902. Perhaps the Theatre has not fulfilled the destiny he had mapped out for it, but in a short space of years it has become an institution, and is part, so to speak, of the social fabric of the city. Kilkenny, minus the Theatre, would be rather a dull place.

Changes in the theatrical world are, rapid—just as swift as the evolution of the magic lantern into the cinematograph, or that of the telephone into wireless telegraphy. Keeping in touch with the spirit of the age, the Dowager Countess of Desart, with that sense of completion which characterises her every action has directed the installation of a new electric plant in the Theatre, which is also capable of supplying neighbouring premises, and has been eagerly availed of for this purpose. A few days ago a representative of the "Journal" was shown over the new building, which houses the installation, by the courteous and popular manager, Mr. T.J. Brown.

The main building is constructed of concrete, and it contains a, thirty-five horse power gas engine, a generator and what is technically known as a battery room. The latter is the apartment in which all the wizardry is bottled up. Technical terms tell nothing to the uninitiated, and the best way to describe this innocent looking room, is that it contains in its accumulators sufficient electric energy to illuminate the theatre for fifty-four hours, or, to put it in a more homely way, for the working week of a local tradesman.

Those who have experience of a gas engine know that it is almost as irresponsible as a human being, and suffers from somewhat similar ailments. When its lungs are affected it coughs, not as human beings do, but with all the vehemence of a gunpowder explosion. In connection with the suction plant which feeds the new gas engine in the Theatre, an ingenious device has been conceived. A cylindrical tank, formerly used in connection with an obsolete suction plant, has been converted in its old age, when naturally it might be presumed to become garrulous, into a "silencer." A pipe, which is really a sound-transmitter, runs from the lungs of the gas engine into this water tank, and so the sound of the periodical explosions is stilled, while the other working parts of the engine pursue their silent course.

In no department of the Theatre will the recent improvements be more manifest than on the stage. Two powerful electric arc lamps have been erected on the wings. The lamps have a swivel arrangement and are fed by portable wires, in this case protected by asbestos. What are technically known as the "limes," can be turned on at will by the operator, and "Tottie Footlights," or "Marmaduke Montmorency," no matter where their stage eccentricities of movement may lead them to, can always be certain of an illuminated performance.

The new plant has been installed by Messrs Edmundson, of Dublin, who have performed their contract in a thoroughly workmanlike manner.

The Theatre has got two important engagements within the next few weeks and patrons of the plays to be produced, may judge for themselves the worth of the improvements which have been recently effected.

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