

LONDON'S NEWEST THEATRE.

A CHAT WITH MR. BEERBOHM TREE.

No, Mr. Tree is not here," said the polite commissionaire, at the temporary stage entrance of Her Majesty's Theatre. "He is rehearsing at the comedy, but I daresay he'll see you if you don't mind stepping over."

So away I went, through the mud and rain, and found the famous actor-manager in the agonies of rehearsing "The Seats of the Mighty." Some unhappy individual was apparently in danger of sudden death at his infuriated hands, and was about to breathe his last, to the distant music of the bagpipes. After a little delay, Mr. Tree descended to more mundane matters and recognized my existence.

"Certainly," he said, in answer to my suggestion, "I will show you what there is to see, if you will come back to the theatre with me."

Back we went accordingly to the new building, which seems to have sprung up in the Haymarket as if by magic, and in another minute we are standing on the stage at Her Majesty's. Mr. Tree stops at the wings for a moment to explain that the electric lighting is to be on a wonderful scale, and that no gas at all will be used, before or behind the curtain.

"Plenty of ventilation will be one of our strong points," says Mr. Tree, pointing with pride to the big windows at the back of the dress circle. "Every few minutes the air will be completely changed, and on cold nights, of course, we shall have the building thoroughly warmed."

"Only six private boxes, three on either side? Surely you will not find them enough?"

"I think we shall. I don't believe in boxes. As a matter of fact, they don't pay."

"That was a bright idea of yours, Mr. Tree, to have two first nights."

"Well, yes; a little Irish of me, though, wasn't it? But there was nothing else to be done. How do you like our scheme of colour? Nothing but white and gold, you see, and red. The reds will vary in tone, however. The curtains and draperies will be a subdued old rose, quite an early Victorian red, in fact, while the red of the seats is very much brighter. You must come round to the front of the house, though, and see the proscenium properly from the dress circle."

We make our way upstairs, in and out among the holland-covered seats, to a place in the centre of the dress circle, and there Mr. Tree sits down, with a sigh of relief, and looks round affectionately upon his new playhouse.

"You see this is practically a two-tier house, and even the people in the three shilling and four shilling places will have no one over their heads. But you haven't noticed my blue carpet. See, under your feet here. It has the monogram 'V.R.' woven in dull red, and the English rose, treated conventionally. Come round to the back now, and see the foyer."

The foyer is spacious and airy, and opens on to a wide balcony overlooking the Haymarket. This balcony will, of course, be largely used as an out-door smoking-room during the summer. Looking back into the theatre from this point of vantage, one realizes at a glance how well-arranged it all is, and how charming is the effect of the tall marble columns, the sun-god in the centre of the proscenium, with the symbolic figures of tragedy and comedy on either side, the delicate paintings in a line with the gallery, and on the lower tiers, the square panels of tapestry in subdued colours set in a background of white and gold. Everywhere there is a pleasant sense of space and loftiness. Throughout the house the seats are arranged to command a good view of the stage. The level of the pit slopes up from the stalls, so that people in the back rows can see well over the heads of those in front.

As we make our way back again to the stage-door, I ask Mr. Tree about the play, but he discreetly parries my inquiries, and tells me only that the costumes are very picturesque, as those of the period of La Pompadour must be.

"But," he says, in parting, "you will come and see us on the first night, won't you?"

"The first first night, or the second first night?" Mr. Tree, however, refuses to be drawn, and, with an enigmatic smile, at last allows himself to be carried off to lunch, and so bids me good-bye.