

THE NEW "HER MAJESTY'S."

A PRIVATE VIEW.

The mystic Corinthian palace in Keats's "Lamia" hardly arose more swiftly from the ground than Mr. Tree's magnificent theatre in the Haymarket which is destined to continue on this classic spot the long-familiar name of "Her Majesty's," if not the lyrical traditions of Sir John Vanbrugh's temple of Italian opera. It was only last July that Mrs. Beerbohm Tree, wielding the silver trowel with a grace and decision which, as somebody observed, "looked like business," was seen laying the first stone of this latest addition to the ever lengthening list of London playhouses; yet on Saturday afternoon Mr. Tree was able to invite a host of friends to look upon the finished—or all but finished—work, preparatory to the opening with Mr. Gilbert Parker's new play on Wednesday evening next. What remains to be done concerns only some few details of decoration, the most important of which are Mr. Arthur Black's busts of great dramatists—English, French, German, and Italian—which are to occupy the temporarily blank medallions in a circle just below the arches supporting the ceiling.

The exterior of the new building with its elegant cupola, its open "loggia" outside the grand foyer, which will afford an agreeably cool retreat between the acts on sultry nights is already familiar to the public. Within, the most striking characteristic to those who survey the house from the stage is the unusual width of the auditorium and the proximity of the fronts of the tiers to the stage. According to the ground plans given in the appendix to the Parliamentary Report on Theatres in 1852 the width of the auditorium of Drury Lane and Covent Garden was fifty feet; of the Haymarket and Lyceum only thirty-five. In the new Her Majesty's, the measurement is just twice that last named—that is, seventy feet. In brief, by a bold and what promises to be a very successful innovation, depth—which means removal of the spectator to inconvenient distances from the scene, is greatly reduced with a corresponding enlargement of the lateral expansion of the building. The apparent nearness of the stage as seen from the pit, the dress circle, and the upper circle—we may here note that there are only two tiers of seats above the floor, instead of the customary three—was not a little striking. That the acoustic properties of the interior, which as Mr. C. J. Phipps, the architect, on Saturday honestly confessed, are, and must of necessity be, in great degree a matter of good luck or otherwise, was clearly shown when Mr. Tree—with one eye on his watch for an engagement to lecture on Hamlet, compelled him soon to relinquish to others the task of "personally conducting" his visitors over the house—called out in no very loud tones to an attendant in the uppermost rows of the gallery to repeat his words, which the attendant had no difficulty in doing. As to the lines of sight everybody could judge for himself. There is certainly no London theatre in which a comfortable view of what is passing on the stage will be more effectually secured to every visitor. Watching a performance from the attendant's exalted position would no doubt

be a little like looking at nearer objects through the wrong end of an opera-glass, but at least the gallery folk will be able both to see and to hear. Thanks to the rapidly progressive rise of the rows of seats even the matinee hat, will, it is said, cease from troubling. Mrs. Tree—probably because she felt unable to promise her guests any leaning towards mercy on the part of her sex in this regard, was very emphatic in directing attention to this fact, which appeared to promise at least a *modus vivendi* between the fashionable lady matineers (the word will, we believe, be admitted in due course into Dr. Murray's great Dictionary) and the grumpy remonstrants who have hitherto remonstrated to so little purpose. While speaking of dimensions we must not forget to mention that the stage is of unusually commodious size. From the back wall of the pit to the back wall of the stage is just 111 feet. As the line of the footlights about divides this distance into two equal parts it will be seen that the performers, as well as the scenic artists and scene shifters, will have "free space to orb about." Altogether the theatre will seat nearly seventeen hundred persons, representing when the house is full a total sum of 360*l.* Mr. Tree, as we have already had occasion to note, is contemplating no revolution in prices. The half-guinea orchestra stall, an institution scarcely known to the last generation of playgoers, remains, but there will be pit stalls at six shillings and in the dress circle there will be five shilling as well as seven and sixpenny seats, while in the second tier the seats will be divided into three classes.

Speaking generally, the new Her Majesty's is built in French Renaissance style of Portland stone, relieved with red granite. The interior decorations are of the period of the Regency and Louis XV. The proscenium, together with the great columns and pilasters supporting the various parts of the house, are in Brèche Violette marble, with ormolu mountings. The ceiling is of the wheel type, with broad bands of trellis, divided by trophies of musical instruments in gilt. The panels are enriched with emblematic paintings, after the manner of Boucher. Over the proscenium are the Royal Arms, and on either side, reclining on the outer angles, are the Muses of Tragedy and Comedy. The curtains are of rich red silk and embroidered velvet. The Act drop is an enlarged production of that sumptuous piece of Gobelins tapestry, "Dido receiving Æneas." Eight panels in the ceiling represent: Dawn, Sunrise, Morning, Noon, Afternoon, Sunset, Twilight, and Night, and the Grand Foyer is decorated in the same style as the interior. Old playgoers will doubtless welcome the return to the old-fashioned central chandelier, and some may regard with satisfaction the frequent little groups of simulated candles which, except the guttering wax, resemble those in Hogarth's "Laughing Audience," but these are of course lighted, like all the rest of the house both before and behind the curtain by electricity, and the chandelier should more properly be called "Electrolier." Such is a rough sketch of the new house in which on Wednesday evening next Mr. Tree will present "The Seats of the Mighty" to an audience eager to welcome him and his company in their magnificent new house.