

MADAME PATTI'S THEATRE AT CRAIG-Y-NOS.

OPENING CEREMONY

AN OPERA WRITTEN, COMPOSED, AND ACTED BY SWANSEAITES.

[FROM OUR SWANSEA REPORTER.]

I scarcely know what the status of Swansea may be in the musical and artistic world. Anyone attempting to treat of the musical taste and powers of the people of Swansea would quickly find himself involved in a mass of contradictions. It is certain that musical caterers do not find Swansea to be a first-class concert town, and the assertion that "nothing better than a nigger minstrel performance will draw good houses" does sometimes find exemplification there. Yet there is any amount of musical life in the town, and it would really seem difficult to anyone who knows Swansea to put one's finger upon any town in the kingdom of its size which contains within itself more material for musical and operatic combination. At any rate, I know of no town which has at the present moment a well-trained, well-dressed, and fairly efficient amateur opera company performing (not once, but often) operas written and composed in the town, and performing them in such a manner as to win the hearty approval and sympathy of the public.

Swansea amateur talent scored decisively at Madame Patti's new theatre at Craig-y-Nos Castle on Thursday night. It is a thing requiring no slight degree of courage to trust one's musical works to amateurs, but that a man of the well-known musical acumen of Mr. W. F. Hulley should present his work through such means before the Queen of Song and her attendant satellites, and that amateurs should be found to face such critics they did on Thursday, are facts sufficiently indicative of the efficiency with which the training has been done beforehand. To say literally that the performance passed off "without a hitch" is not to use a convenient and hackneyed phrase, but to describe accurately the course of events on the occasion of the opening of the theatre.

THE JOURNEY TO CRAIG-Y NOS.

I formed one of the party of 70 persons which travelled via the Midland Railway to Craig-y-Nos, by the invitation of Madame Patti-Nicolini, on Thursday evening, and I wish to describe exactly the occurrences of the eventful evening. The members of the opera company, consisting of middle-class young men and women evidently on the very best of terms with one another, were entering upon a big task with evident lightness of heart. Either they were conscious of the efficacy of the last rehearsal, or they knew by experience the kindness of the Lady Bountiful at the "Rock of the Night." The latter they certainly did, for they wore as conspicuously as they possibly could do the very tasteful jewellery presented to each of them by Madame Patti-Nicolini when they performed Mr. Hulley's other opera, "The Rustic," at Craig-y-Nos not very long since. This time, however, they were bent on eclipsing their previous effort, for were they not assigned the important task of formally "opening" the new theatre which Madame Patti, at a cost of some £5,000, has attached to her mansion with the view of giving charity concerts at various times in the future? The feeling of curiosity with regard to the new theatre was intense. Arrived at Penwyllt, the party found all the available carriages belonging to the castle waiting to convey them down the couple of miles of road, which Madame Patti has made at her own expense, to Craig-y-Nos. About half the party travelled on foot, but all arrived at the castle about six o'clock, and had the opportunity of inspecting the additions to the castle before "the dressing-bell rang." The chief recent additions are the new winter garden and the theatre, but the mansion has been nearly doubled in size since the old tenancy. The application of the electric light by the Wenham Lamp Company was, perhaps, the most interesting feature, and how beautiful and convenient this light can become was sufficiently illustrated by the manipulations of Mr. Berghiel and Mr. Lowrie, who evidently had the installation under splendid control.

THE THEATRE.

The theatre was, of course, the principal object of admiration. Madame Patti has spent some £5,000 on this structure, which probably would not have cost more than half the amount in a more accessible region. The theatre is not a particularly handsome building, and in its undecorated state looked almost plain. Its appearance depended almost entirely upon Corinthian columns and pilasters set into the walls, the lower portion being Renaissance work in mezzo-relievo. Round the frieze are placed the names of great literary and musical celebrities, Rossini's name occupying the centre of the proscenium. There is a small, plain gallery at the opposite end. The stage is the feature of the building. For the size of the place it is a magnificent structure, and a peep at the mechanism below showed that no expense had been spared in obtaining the latest improvements. The curtain contains a magnificent painting of Madame Patti-Nicolini as Semiramide driving a chariot and pair. The side curtains are of peacock blue plush. The stage is lighted by about 240 incandescent electric lamps, the footlights being of variously coloured glass, by which effects can be instantaneously produced by switching in or out of circuit. The orchestra is sunk below the ordinary level, and the floor is made to lift level with the stage, converting the theatre immediately into a fine ballroom. The theatre is unseated, except by ordinary movable American chairs, velvet covered.

THE AUDIENCE.

Naturally, having viewed the theatre, the next thing about which the company were solicitous was who were to compose the audience. From Mr. Heck, the indefatigable and courteous steward, I discovered that Madame Patti and Signor Nicolini are entertaining a large party at the castle, including Mr. R. Nicolini, Miss Nicolini, Signor Arditi the well-known composer; Signor Arditi, junior Miss Harvey, the celebrated American actress; Mr. and Mrs. Kingston, of London; Her and Fraulein Kuhe, Signor Bonetti, Miss Cohen, San Francisco; Mr. and Mrs. Augustus Spalding, Mr. and Mrs. Knighton, Mr. Bari, and Miss Eisler. Among the company invited from the district were the Players of Clydach and Ysalyfera, Mr. and Mrs. J. B. Moore, Mr. and Mrs. H. N. Myers, Dr. Thomas, the Goughs, of Ynyscedwyn; Mr. Flower, Neath; and Mr. Bartlett, Neath.

THE PERFORMANCE.

Madame Patti-Nicolini, superbly dressed, entered the room, carefully escorting a delicate lady friend and took her seat in the front row of chairs. At the other seats were quickly occupied by the long train of guests which followed, and shortly after eight o'clock Mr. Hulley waved his baton, and the first bars of the opera were produced. "The Coastguard" was the first of Mr. Hulley's ambitious operatic attempts. The words being written by an acknowledged poet like Mr. J. C. Manning, will stand the test of reading, but it is, I fancy, the music alone which has won the opera its local popularity. The central figures are *Leonie* (the gipsy queen), *Clarina* her daughter, and the *Smuggler King*. The plot is somewhat slight and by no means novel. It is unravelled in two scenes, one being the haunt of the coastguards and the gypsies and the other that of the smugglers. The coastguard sets out to capture the smugglers at the instance of the *Gipsy Queen*, who desires in this way to wreak a love vengeance on the king of the gang. As a reward, the captain is to receive the hand of the gipsy *Clarina*, whose identity is a mystery, known only to the *Queen*, her "kidnapper." This identity is cleared up in the course of the evening's adventures by means of a lost locket, and the *King*, who proves to be Earl of Templedale, receives a daughter and an old sweetheart at the same time. The smuggler band capitulate without a blow, and all ends happily. Upon this hangs a two-hour entertainment, and if the critical guests found the second act at times incongruous, if not bordering on the tedious, they also observed that the vivacity of the actors and chorus and the brightness of the music seemed to make up for the defect. Almost at the opening of the act the climax is reached by the identification by the *King* of his daughter. But, to enable the opera to proceed to respectable length, the principal characters mysteriously disappear till a later stage, and all the farce of ghostly appearances, conflicts between smugglers and coastguards, and so on proceeds without any reason which is apparent to the audience. This might be easily obviated by a re-arrangement, and nothing would be lost by a further effort to maintain clearness and continuity in the story. The following was the cast:—

Captain Percival (H.M. Coastguard).....	Mr. George Crews
Smuggler King (Skipper of the "Vampire")	Mr. Edwin Jones.
Cox'n Jack (in charge of the Blue Jackets)	Mr. Gilbert Davies.
Parish Beadle.....	Mr. Fred. Downman.
Johnny Pigtail (Cook and Steward to the Smugglers)	Mr. Fred. Tunbridge.
Jasper (Chief Officer of the "Vampire")	Mr. Stuart Thompson.
Algie } (Tourists)	Mr. Campbell Thomas.
Gussy }	Mr. Ben Howells.
First Coastguardman	Mr. R. Brophy.
First Smuggler	Mr. E. J. Jones.
Leonie (the Gipsy Queen).....	Madame Pollie Jenkins.
Clarina (the Gipsy Queen's adopted daughter)	Miss Ellen Flynn.
Sybil }	Miss Bella Francis.
Marie } (Gipsy Maidens).....	Miss Lydia Bailey.
Bettina }	Miss Maggie Lake.
Chorus of Gipsy Maidens, Coastguardman, and Smugglers.	

After the opening chorus and song the company gradually got accustomed to their surroundings and sang with confidence. Miss Flynn first, however, aroused sympathy by her careful and confident rendering of "Why is my heart so lonely." She and Mr. Crews made an excellent impression later on in the evening in the song and duet "Life's Guiding Star." Miss Pollie Jenkins was an excellent voice and was greatly complimented by Madame at the close for her rendering of the contralto songs in the opera. The tambourine dance enabled the ladies to show off their beautiful costumes to advantage in the changing colours of the electric light, and, as the dance was well done, they were greeted with hearty applause. The three choruses by Jack (Mr. Gilbert Davies) and the coastguard in the first act are amongst the most lively measures, and they all went swingingly. The acting of Mr. Fred Downman as the *Parish Beadle* was really excellent. The second act introduces the smugglers as a third chorus, with at least two new characters, the *King* and *Johnny Pigtail*. The *King* was impersonated by Mr. Edwin Jones, who has, perhaps, the two best songs in the opera in his part. His sonorous voice was heard to advantage. The part of *Johnny* was taken by a lively young gentleman, Mr. F. Tunbridge, who did everything—including his comic song, "Coolie Foo"—to the evident satisfaction of the audience. The "tourists," who completed the quartette of funny men in the cast also made the most of their parts. Taking it altogether, the choruses were, perhaps, the best rendered portions of the opera, but the performance was remarkable for the verve and vigour with which everything was done, and which lifted it far above ordinary amateur productions. Amongst the orchestra was Mr. John Squire, who acted as leader.

PRESENTATION TO MADAME PATTI.

At the fall of the curtain Mr. W. F. HULLEY rose, and said that since their last performance at Craig-y-Nos the company had concocted a little plot to surprise Madame Patti-Nicolini on her return from America. He then produced a framed and illuminated address, which thanked the *diva* for her kindness to the operatic troupe, congratulated her on her continued successes in America, and offered her the best wishes for the future.

Mr. AUGUSTUS SPALDING, who responded, said he was sure he could not express half as gracefully as Madame Patti-Nicolini could have done her thanks for the honour they had done her. He could not fail to observe by her countenance, however, that evening how pleased she had been at the very satisfactory performance they had witnessed, and how she appreciated the great compliment they had subsequently conveyed to her that evening.

The company were subsequently photographed on the stage. They then partook of a substantial supper in the conservatory before leaving to join the special train which Madame Patti had arranged for their convenience to start at 12.30. During the meal Madame Patti entered the room, looking her best, and was received with rounds of applause. She singled out Miss Flynn and Madame Pollie Jenkins for special notice, and praised their voices in highly encouraging terms. The party then broke up and departed, by special train for Swansea, expressing the greatest satisfaction and pleasure at the evening's experiences.

THE BUILDING OF THE THEATRE.

Mention of those who were concerned in the erection and fitting of the theatre should be made before I close. The architects were Messrs. Bucknall and Jennings, of Swansea and London, who have arranged also the stage fittings and scenery. The builder was Mr. H. Smith, of Kidderminster. The scenery was painted by Mr. W. Hain, of London; the electric lighting supplied by the Wenham Light Company; the curtains were supplied by Mr. D. C. Jones, of Swansea; the furniture by Messrs. B. Evans and Co., of Swansea; the decorations by Messrs. Jackson and Sons, of London; and the heating apparatus by Mr. Legg, of Swansea.