

THE SUNDERLAND EMPIRE.

On Saturday afternoon last a large and fashionable company numbering some 1000 persons, accepted the invitation of Mr. Richard Thornton and his co-partners to a private view of their latest venture, a full description of which we gave last week.

The visitors were received by Mr. and Mrs. Rich. Thornton, Mr. Sydney Stone, and Mr. Frank Allen, &c., in the circle saloon. Amongst those present we noticed Mr. Walter de Freece and Miss Vesta Tilley, Mr. and Mrs. T. R. Milburn, Mr. and Mrs. Wm. Milburn, Ald. Potts, T. Johnson, J.P., J. W. Smith, Annisson, J.P., R. Readhead, Rutland, J.P., J. Reay, Wm. Carter (Chief Constable), Councillors Huntley, D. Bell, G. Mew, J.P., Wm. Blanchard, Hastings, Swan, Armstrong, Johnson, Geo. Bartram, G. Swan, Hutton, Pratt, J.P., J. R. Hall, and Scott; the Mayor of Jarrow (Mr. W. J. Ramsay), Foster, J.P., Col. and Mrs. Evans, Dr. and Mrs. Markin, Messrs. R. H. Nicholson, Wm. Milburn, jun., C. W. Laing, S. W. Milburn, D. Wilson, J.P., and Mrs. Wilson, R. Murray, P. Thornton, W. B. Bartram, Geo. Thompson (South Shields Empire), R. H. Mushena (Manager Sunderland Theatre), Fred and Mrs. Emley (Newcastle), Jos. Hemingway (Royal Theatre), Mr. Pellow (Sir Ed. Moss's General-Manager), Mr. Gething (Empire District Manager), and Messrs. J. and R. Coulson (Royal Theatre, South Shields), and others. In the course of the afternoon, Mr. Frank Allen, on behalf of Mr. Thornton and his co-partners, appeared on the stage and addressed the audience as follows:—

"Ladies and Gentlemen.—By Mr. Thornton's request, I beg to thank you for the honour you have done him by your presence here to-day, and to express a hope that this new Empire Palace, which he has had pluck enough to erect, comes quite up to your expectations. Speaking for myself, I am filled with admiration and astonishment at the beauties of the decorations, the perfect acoustic properties, the clear and unobstructed lines of sight, the cleverly arranged entrances and exits as necessary for the safety of the public; in fact, taking the theatre as a whole, I can with confidence say that it will bear fair comparison with the most pretentious in the country, and I am sure reflects the greatest credit upon the architects, our own townsmen, the Brothers Milburn, who have designed and carried out the work in a manner worthy of their reputation, giving, I assure them, the greatest satisfaction to the Managing-Director, Mr. Richard Thornton, and those who are associated with him. It is twenty

one years since he (Mr. Thornton) commenced his first venture as a music-hall proprietor in South Shields, with your humble servant as his General-Manager, and I well remember how careful he was during our first interview to impress upon me his great desire that the entertainment which was about to be presented to his patrons should be clean and wholesome; nothing must be allowed either in word or gesture on the stage that could possibly offend the most fastidious; the entertainment must be of such a character that any man can with safety bring his wife and family to witness it—said Mr. Thornton. These were the principles laid down by him at the beginning of his career, and these are the principles to-day. From the ashes of an old workshop in Union-alley, South Shields, nearly twenty-two years ago, arose, phoenix-like, the pretty little theatre known as Thornton's Varieties, and which unquestionably has proved itself the jumping-off board to all his future successful undertakings in the business, resulting in his name being prominently associated with the greatest entertainment enterprise the world has ever seen, with a capital of over two millions of money. A few years after the commencement of his South Shields venture, Mr. Thornton, who by this time had added the Theatre Royal, Sunderland, the Alhambra, West Hartlepool, and the Empire Newcastle, the latter being only partly completed when he joined partnership with that great showman, Mr. H. E. Moss, now Sir Edward Moss, appointing me their first General-Manager, with a seat on the board, a position I have had the honour of holding for nearly twenty years. Then additions were made with startling rapidity, and a few years later, just to put the finishing touches upon this wonderful combination, Mr. Oswald Stoll joined forces with them, adding his beautiful variety theatres to the already long list. And now, here we have the veteran Mr. Thornton, coming up smiling with a final effort to try and eclipse the lot by adding this palatial structure, making a grand total of thirty-nine, comprising some of the finest appointed theatres in the world. A record that will take a lot of beating by those who try to follow us. In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen, allow me to express a hope, in which I hope you will all join, that the new Sunderland Empire Palace, which I am sure is a credit to the architects, a credit to Mr. Thornton, and a credit to the town, will be worthy of the best traditions of our numerous and successful undertakings, and that the people of Sunderland will not be slow in showing their appreciation of what the worthy promoter has done for them, by giving him their most generous and hearty support. I thank you once more for the honour you have done us by your attendance here to-day."

Music was rendered at intervals, and a series of "back-cloth" were unfurled and duly admired by those present.

Mr. Thornton has appointed as his Resident Acting-Manager Mr. Harry Esden, a gentleman of wide experience and great ability, lately manager of the Newcastle house.

A large audience assembled at the opening on Monday, when Miss Vesta Tilley headed the bill. The orchestra, under the baton of Mr. Chas. P. Loller, struck up the first strains of the National Anthem. The audience rose to their feet, the curtains opened, and Miss Lillian Lea advanced and sang "God Save the King," the audience lustily joining in the chorus. The fair singer was backed by Mr. Richard Thornton, Sir Ed. Moss, Mr. Oswald Stoll, Mr. Frank Allen, Mr. Sydney Stone, Mr. Wm. Milburn, Mr. T. R. Milburn, Mr. J. W. White, — Martin (Leeds), Mr. W. de Freece, Mr. Gething (Glasgow), and Mr. H. Esden, Acting-Manager. On Miss Lea concluding her solo, a huge "horse shoe" bouquet, symbolical of good luck to the venture, was brought to Mr. Thornton amidst cheers. The programme was commenced by the orchestra playing the overture to *William Tell*. Mr. Fullbrook and company were the first to appear, and the sketch, *Astronomy*, soon had the audience in excellent humour. Then came Thorpe and Coe in a most amusing comedy sketch, entitled *My Burglar*, that fairly kept the house in roars. Miss Maudie Francis was delightful in a smart sand dance. The Sousloffs proved themselves smart and nimble cyclonic dancers, and Will Van-Allen, the musical tramp, was very diverting. Miss Vesta Tilley was received with uproarious applause. Her first song, "When the right girl comes along," was given in fine style, and was heartily greeted. Her next, "The soldier," was very enjoyable. She responded with "Following in father's footsteps"; and Mr. Thornton appeared on the scene and presented the artist with a lovely bouquet of white flowers amidst applause. She soon re-appears and gave "The seaside sultan" capitally. The Biograph showed an interesting series of living pictures of Miss Vesta Tilley laying the foundation stone of the present palatial building some twelve months since. Charles Kay rendered an amusing medley on songs past and present, and Miss Lillian Lea brought the programme to a close with a pretty scena, entitled "Dear Little Primrose." She sang "Banish sorrow" in a manner that was keenly appreciated.