

THE NEW HER MAJESTY'S.

The following is a complete technical description of Mr Beerbohm Tree's new theatre, an account of the opening of which appears in another column.

The theatre has been constructed from the designs and under the direction of Mr C. J. Phipps, the architect; and for the internal decorations and scheme of colour, which are very effective, Mr R. Walker has been responsible. The new building has a frontage of 86ft. to the Haymarket, 156ft. to Charles-street, and 90ft. to the Royal Opera Arcade, the building standing, therefore, isolated on three sides. It is substantially built of Portland stone. The style is French Renaissance, the centre part of the façade on the first floor being devoted to an open loggia level with the foyer. The building is surmounted by a cupola.

The theatre is arranged for an audience divided into five different classes. On the ground floor, level with the street, are the orchestra stalls, pit stalls, and the pit. The first floor is devoted to the dress-circle and family circle. The second tier consists of the upper circle, amphitheatre, and the gallery behind. The five doorways in the centre of the Haymarket façade underneath the loggia open into a vestibule exclusively for the use of the two classes of the stalls and the dress and family circles, and the stalls have a third way out, level with the pavement in Charles-street. The pit has one entrance in the Haymarket and another in Charles-street. The upper circle and the gallery have the same, that is to say, five classes of the audience have each two distinct ways out, opening into different streets. Every division of the audience has cloak-room accommodation and refreshment saloons.

The staircases to the upper tiers are of the uniform width of 4ft. 6in., those to stalls and dress-circle 6ft., formed of concrete, with a rise of only 6in., no flight having more than twelve steps. The stage is large, having a width of 70ft. by a depth of 50ft., with recesses for scenery in addition. The whole of the block of buildings in Charles-street is devoted to entrances, &c., on the ground level, the offices of the theatre and the dressing-rooms being on the floors above. A central ticket office has been arranged, so that every class of the audience can pay and take tickets at the various entrance doors controlled from one central office or bureau. The dimensions of the theatre are as follows:—

Width of the auditorium, 70ft.; curtain line to back wall of pit, 61ft.; curtain line to back wall of stage, 50ft.; curtain line to front of dress-circle, 34ft.; curtain line to front of upper circle, 39ft. 6in.; proscenium opening, 35ft. wide, 29ft. high; pit floor to centre of auditorium, 45ft. high; stage floor to gridiron over it, 60ft.; stage floor to cellars, 23ft.

The stage and the auditorium are entirely separate, there being two party walls and an open space between them 9ft. wide, above the proscenium arch. There is constructed on the stage side of the proscenium wall, and closing up the whole of the opening, a hydraulic fire-resisting curtain in one piece, which will be taken up without any rolling, and available to be let down at any moment in thirty seconds. This forms a complete severance between stage and auditorium. Water is laid on from high pressure mains, and hydrants are placed on either side of the theatre at every level. The style adopted for the auditorium of the theatre is Louis XIV.

There are private boxes on each of the tiers adjoining the proscenium, and separated from it and other parts of the auditorium by marble columns. The hangings are of cerise-coloured embroidered silk, and the walls generally are covered with a paper of the same tone. The seating for stalls, dress and family circles is in arm-chairs, covered with velvet the same colour as the curtains. The tableau curtains are of velvet of a similar tone, behind which is the act-drop of tapestry copied from one of the Gobelines tapestries now in Paris.

The whole of the theatre and annexes are lighted by the electric light taken from three centres, so that should any one centre fail the other systems are always available.

Hanging from the ceiling is a cut glass and brass electrolier, and brackets of Louis XIV. style are fixed round the box fronts and on the side walls. The foyer, opening from the corridor of the dress-circle, is ornamented and decorated in a style similar to the auditorium, as also are the staircases leading to it from the vestibule. The warming and ventilation have been very specially considered, it being intended that the theatre should be kept at a uniform temperature of 62deg.

In the basement is a large chamber containing a very powerful fan, which pumps air into the theatre after passing round hot-water coils. From this hot chamber pipes and ducts are conveyed to every part of the auditorium, and from openings in the higher portion of the ceiling shafts are taken directly up to the roof, where exhausting fans are placed. It is computed that 10,000 cubic feet of fresh air will pass through the theatre every hour. Radiators warmed by hot water are constructed on every tier and every corridor leading to the auditorium, especially with a view to prevent cold currents of air entering in from the different doorways. The fans are worked by electric motors.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE ERA.

Sir,—In some of the descriptions of the new Her Majesty's Theatre, the idea of the division of the lower floor of the auditorium into three parts—i.e., orchestra stalls, pit stalls, and pit—is stated to be an innovation, and other papers go so far as to call it a novelty. I feel quite sure Mr Tree himself would be the first to disclaim any such statement. Now for the proof. My earliest theatrical recollection is 1854. At that time the old Standard Theatre had three divisions of seats on the lower floor, at prices on a sliding scale—to be correct, 1s., 8d., and 4d.

In 1859, at the Eastern Opera House, now the Pavilion Theatre, orchestra stalls (cushioned chairs), pit stalls (upholstered), and pit (bare boards) were introduced by my late father. In 1867, when I built the new Standard Theatre, I followed in the same direction, and lastly, when the Princess's Theatre, Oxford-street, was opened at cheap prices in August, 1895, I persuaded the manager to divide the lower part of the house into orchestra stalls, pit stalls, and pit. I believe there are still several theatres in London and the provinces with a similar distribution of seats.

Yours truly,
JOHN DOUGLASS.
Green-room Club, April 29th, 1897.