

PROSECUTIONS IN THE POLICE COURTS

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PROSECUTIONS IN THE POLICE COURTS.

In the Northern Police Court yesterday, before Mr. Mahony, Patrick Columb, 30 Chelmsford road, clerk, was charged by Constables Nixon (47 C), Fox (87 C), and Dunne (113 D) with having between 10 and 11 p.m. on the previous night been guilty of offensive behaviour in the pit of the Abbey Theatre on the occasion of the production of a play styled "The Playboy of the Western World," by shouting, hissing, booing, and stamping his feet, and by using offensive language to the annoyance of others present.

Mr. Tobias and Mr. M'Cune appeared for the prosecution.

Mr. Lidwell defended.

Constable Nixon deposed that on the previous night, between 10 and 11 o'clock, a disturbance took place in the Abbey Theatre. The prisoner was stamping his feet, booing, and hissing. The audience were disturbed and annoyed. The prisoner and a number of others caused the disturbance. He refused to discontinue the disturbance.

In reply to Mr. Lidwell, witness said that the police had been called in to quell the disturbance. Some of the audience wanted to hear the play and some did not. He heard one offensive word used.

Police Constable 87 C said he was called to the Abbey Theatre about twenty minutes to 10 o'clock. He heard defendant hissing and booing, and saw him stamp his feet. Some of the audience asked to have defendant put out. Witness and Constable 47 C cautioned the defendant, and defendant used an offensive expression loudly in the hearing of the audience.

Constable 113 D stated that the majority of the people in the pit were hissing and booing, whistling and stamping the floor. The people in the stalls were calling for order. Defendant was in the pit.

On cross-examination, witness said that there was a general tumult. He could not hear anything that was said on the stage owing to the noise.

Mr. Wm. B. Yeats, examined, said he was the managing director of the Abbey Theatre, and was there on the previous night. From the first rising of the curtain there was an obviously organised attempt to prevent the play being heard. That was from a section of the pit. The stalls and balcony were anxious to hear the play. The noise consisted of shouting, booing, and stamping of feet. He did not hear six consecutive lines of the play owing to the noise. The section that caused the disturbance was not part of their regular audience. The conduct of that section was riotous and offensive, and disturbed and annoyed the audience.

On cross-examination, witness said—We have a patent for this theatre. I read this play and passed it. The play is no more a caricature of the people of Ireland than "Macbeth" is a caricature of the people of Scotland, or "Falstaff" of the gentlemen of England. The play is an example of the exaggeration of art. I have not the slightest doubt but that we shall have more of these disturbances.

Mr. Mahony said he was satisfied that the defendant had been guilty of disorderly behaviour. He imposed a fine of 40s. and costs, or in default a month's imprisonment, and ordered him to find two sureties in £10 for his good behaviour.

ANOTHER CASE.

Piarras Beaslai, aged 24, was charged by Constables 170 C and 121 C and by Mr. Wm. B. Yeats with having on the previous night disturbed the performance in the Abbey Theatre.

Constable 170 C deposed that the noise prevented anyone hearing what went on. The prisoner, who was in the pit, stamped his feet—others stood up and shouted and bood. Another section shouted at defendant "Put him out."

Constable 121 C gave evidence in corroboration.

Mr. Yeats deposed that he saw the defendant at the theatre on the previous night. There had been an organised disturbance by a section of people in the pit to prevent the play being heard. He saw the defendant arrested. Before that the defendant rose up and yelled at the top of his voice.

Mr. Mahony—Did he say anything?

Witness—He addressed some words to me in Irish.

Mr. Mahony—Were they complimentary or the reverse? I am sorry to say that I do not understand Irish.

Mr. Mahony—I know some Irish, and one can say some very scathing things in it.

Defendant—If your worship had been present you would have heard nothing unedifying from me.

Mr. Mahony—What have you to say now?

The defendant said he was not a member of any organised gang. He went with two friends to the theatre. He did not know the other people who objected to the play. His blood boiled at the attempt to coerce public opinion. The men in the stalls stood up and shook their sticks. Mr. Yeats stood over him, and said he would charge the next man who bood. Just then a particularly objectionable expression was used on the stage, and he (defendant), in common with others, bood. Mr. Yeats then pointed him out to the constable, and he was arrested. He (defendant) was satisfied with the result, and neither threats nor penalties would deter him from objecting to what he considered was an outrage on the Irish people. Previous to this he had been an admirer of the Abbey Theatre, and had been a regular supporter of it.

Mr. Mahony said that this was a different case from the last.

Defendant—I have made my protest. I consider that every true Irishman would act in the same way.

Mr. Mahony—You are entitled to indulge in legitimate criticism and in a reasonable form of disapproval, but you are not entitled to act in such a way as might be offensive to persons taking part in the play, and prevent the performance. If the defendant would undertake that he would not again take part in these disturbances he would not be hard on him.

Mr. Yeats said he would be satisfied with such an undertaking.

Defendant said he would make no appeal to Mr. Yeats—he rather wished that Mr. Yeats would push the matter to the utmost extremity. They would then have the spectacle of a man who had been brought into the Police Court for having made a protest against an outrage on Irish nationality.

Mr. Mahony—Surely you can protest in a form without breaking the law.

The defendant said that Mr. Yeats pointed him out to the police, and he was responsible for that prosecution.

Mr. Mahony—You were determined to stop the play.

Defendant—I was not. I objected to a thing that I heard.

Mr. Mahony—I must fine you 40s., or in default you must go to prison for a month, and I will take your own surety for good behaviour.

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