

"THE PLAYBOY OF THE WEST."

DISTURBANCE AT THE ABBEY THEATRE.

Scenes of a most extraordinary character were witnessed at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, last night in connection with the performance of "The Playboy of the Western World." An organised attempt had evidently been made to prevent the performance, and despite the efforts of the management and the presence of a number of police constables the interrupters succeeded in their object of preventing anybody from hearing a single word of the entire performance. The programme opened with a one-act piece by Mr. Synge, entitled "Riders to the Sea," the scene of which was a cottage on an island off the West coast of Ireland. During the course of this performance the audience was in no way turbulent, but when the curtain was raised on "The Playboy" it at once became apparent that a large section of the audience in the gallery and the back portion of the pit was determined to manifest feelings of a most hostile character. The play, which was produced for the first time on Saturday evening, has, it appears, given offence to a very large number of the Dublin community, who maintain that it is utterly untrue to life and a travesty on Irish character. The action takes place on the lonely coast of Mayo. The central incident of the piece is the glorification of a self-confessed parricide, who subsequently becomes unpopular when it is discovered that his crime is of a comparatively trivial character, and has not resulted in the death of his father. A considerable section of the audience strongly resented the notion that such a state of affairs could be taken as a correct reflex on western peasant life, and showed a determined resolve to interrupt the representation. There were, on the other hand, a great many people in the front seats who seemed to be most anxious to hear the play and judge for themselves as to its qualities; but the interrupters at the back of the theatre would hear of no attempt to produce the piece, and kept up a sustained outburst of hissing, booing, and groaning. After the first act had been entered on the disorder broke out in very pronounced form, whereupon Mr. W. G. Fay, who filled the rôle of the parricide, attempted to address the audience, but was obliged to retire before a perfect storm of groans and hisses. The curtain then fell. When the second act was begun Mr. Fay again endeavoured to speak, and succeeded in giving expression to a few words. He said that he was a Mayo man himself, and that he was surprised at the conduct of Dublin men in treating the performance in the way they had done, inasmuch as the entire production was being carried out in accordance with local characteristics of that district of the country. The disorder again broke out, and continued for some time. Mr. Fay once more tried to address the audience. He stated that those who wanted to hear the play could hear it, and those who objected could have their money returned and leave the building. This announcement was received with derisive cheering, as well as groaning and hissing. After a time, as the disorder still continued, it was decided to send for the police. Half a dozen constables were brought into the pit and three into the gallery. But their arrival did not in the least disconcert the interrupters, who vigorously continued groaning and hissing. Apparently it is a well recognised principle at public performances that an audience is entitled to express its opinions in a legitimate manner, and that hooting and hissing are not a contravention of any Act of Parliament, and can only be stopped on a complaint either of the members of the audience who desire to hear the play or of the managers of the theatre. In this instance no complaint was made, and ultimately, on the representations of Lady Gregory and Mr. J. M. Synge, the policemen left the theatre. The audience still kept groaning, hissing, and booing. During all this time the actors kept pluckily at their work, but their performance was entirely dumb show even to those situated in front seats. At intervals the groaning and hissing were varied by the singing of "A Nation Once Again" and "The West's Awake." Vigorous stamping of feet and slashing with sticks of the woodwork created an indescribable din, as the result of which the voices of the actors were completely drowned. At the end of the performance the curtain fell amidst loud cheering on the part of the interrupters and applause on the part of those who, apparently, desired in this way to express their disapproval of the conduct of the hostile section of the audience. The curtain was raised several times, and the demonstration continued with unabated vigour. There were loud calls for the author, but no response was made. Mr. Fay, however, came before the curtain and said—"Those people who have hissed to-night will go outside and say they have heard this play." One of the audience immediately shouted out—"We heard it on Saturday." This retort was greeted with immense cheering. Finally, after a renewal of the demonstration, the lights were turned off, and the audience quietly dispersed.

Despite the hostile reception with which the piece was received we understand that it is the intention of the management of the theatre to carry out the programme, and produce the play nightly during the week.