

"PLAYBOY OF THE WEST."

MORE DISTURBANCES AT THE ABBEY THEATRE.

POLICE CALLED IN.

RIVAL FACTIONS IN THE AUDIENCE.

There were renewed disturbances last night at the Abbey Theatre during the performance of Mr. Synge's comedy, "The Playboy of the Western World." In view of the disorderly scenes that were witnessed on the previous night unusual interest was manifested in the performance, and in the pit especially the attendance was very large. The stalls were also fairly well filled, and at the outset it was clearly evident that the house partly consisted of two rival factions.

There were, of course, a great many present who desired to hear and judge the play on its merits, but this section of the audience suffered to a large extent through the noisy demonstrations of the hostile parties.

Some of those in the stalls were evidently determined to tolerate no interference with the progress of the play, and to their rather ill-judged interference the commencement of the disturbance was undoubtedly due. Their hot resentment of anything in the shape of disorder gave rise to a succession of turbulent scenes which, for a time at any rate, equalled, if they did not eclipse, the demonstrations of the previous night, with the result that not a syllable of the first act was heard, while of the other two acts only an occasional phrase could be heard.

Mr. Synge's one act play, "Riders to the Sea," was given without a word of dissent being uttered, and at the fall of the curtain there was general applause in all parts of the house. Before "The Playboy," the principal piece of the evening, was proceeded with,

Mr. W. B. Yeats came before the curtain and said:—A difference of opinion has arisen between the management of this theatre and some of our audience as to the character of the play which we are now about to produce, and as to the policy of producing it. If any of you wish to discuss with us the merit of that play or our correctness in producing it, I shall be delighted to discuss it with you, and do my best to answer your arguments. On Monday evening next I will come here to debate it with any of our audience, and I will ask you who object to it to come up on this platform and address the audience. We will do the best on our side to see that those who object will receive fair play. (A Voice—"That's freedom.") I hope that the speakers on our side will receive equally fair play from those who disagree with them. We have put this play before you to be heard and judged by you. Every man has a right to express his dissent if he disagrees with the play, but I ask you first to hear it before you pass an opinion on it. Even if a certain section disagree with the play, as long as there is one man in the audience who wishes to hear it we will go on producing it, and our patience will last longer than your patience. (Cheers.)

For a few minutes the play was listened to with comparative tranquility, but it was clearly apparent that the interrupters were merely biding their time. A reference of one of the characters in the piece to the ministrations of "Father O'Reilly" provoked a remark from the pit, "What a priest-ridden fellow you are." Hereupon some of the occupants of the stalls jumped to their feet, and hotly demanded the ejection of the interrupter. A perfect storm of groans and cheers followed, and the disorder was, if possible, accentuated by a person in the stalls issuing a challenge to the house generally.

Derisive cheers greeted this outburst, and both the rival factions rose and fairly glared defiance at each other. Groans, hisses, and cheers were given with lusty vigour, and the din was increased by the valiant efforts of a performer on a penny trumpet, but the "music" he produced was almost completely drowned by the angry interchanges which passed between the stalls and the back portion of the pit.

The occupants of the gallery looked down on the scene with philosophic calm, though at times from this and other quarters of the house there were loud and insistent demands for the play to be proceeded with. The players, indeed, were performing their parts all the time, but not a word could be heard, and no attention was paid to their efforts.

Order, having been somewhat restored, Mr. Yeats, who was received with cheers and groans, said—I ask you to listen quietly to a play of a man who is, at any rate, a most distinguished fellow-countryman of yours. (Cheers and groans.) If this play is bad it will die without your help. (Cheers.) If this play is good your hindrance cannot mar it either. (Cheers.) But you can mar the reputation of this country for courtesy and intelligence. (Loud cries of "Fair play.")

The moment Mr. Yeats retired there was another outbreak of cheers and groans, and the penny trumpet, which had already done pretty effective service in the interests of the interrupters at the back of the theatre, was again put into vigorous use.

The man who had previously risen in the front portion of the house was here, after some difficulty, summarily ejected from the building, and, in the meantime, the disorder was continued with unabated vigour.

Mr. Yeats again came before the curtain, and was again received with cheers and groans.

In a lull he said—"We have persuaded one man, who is intoxicated, to leave. I appeal to you who are sober to listen to the play." (Cheers and laughter.)

The play, which had been temporarily stopped, was then resumed, but it was all dumb show so far as the audience was concerned, for not a single word travelled beyond the footlights. Cheers, groans, and stamping of feet were continued in a most persistent manner, and at times it seemed that the hostile elements would come to fisticuffs.

Eventually Mr. V. D. Kenny, who occupied a seat in one of the stalls, rose, and said—As a member of the public I ask just for one moment. (A Voice—"Hold your tongue.") "The management of this theatre is responsible for having brought us all here this evening, and it is responsible for giving us something, but it is not allowed to do so. We are all in the same position. (Several Voices—"Sit down," "Let him go on.") You want something in return for your money. (A Voice—"We didn't come here to listen to you")—but you have not received that something. Have you seen this play or heard it? (Cheers and groans, and cries of "No" and "Yes.") I will ask you not to pass judgment upon it until you have heard it. (Cheers, and a Voice—"There are no murderers in the West.")

There was still no sign of the restoration of order, and ultimately the police were sent for. The appearance of the constables was received with cries of "Coercion," "This is a National theatre," "Bring in Long," "Bring in the High Sheriff," and "This is Dublin Castle."

The police to the number of about sixteen ranged themselves around the rear portion of the pit, and for a moment or two the interrupters kept quiet. But the lull was of short duration, for a remark in the play again aroused their ire, and there was another tremendous outburst of groaning, cheering, whistling, and stamping of feet.

All attention was now directed to the rear of the building, and the extraordinary spectacle witnessed of almost an entire audience with their back turned to the stage, while the play they had presumably come to see was in full progress. The police removed one particularly aggressive interrupter, and shortly afterwards the curtain fell at the end of the first act. The second act opened to the accompaniment of hisses from the pit, and the lights, which had previously been turned out, were now turned on. Another interrupter was quickly ejected, and the disturbers adopted new tactics. They began to hammer the floor with their boots, but they did it in such a subdued manner that they could not be detected, even by those close at hand. The noise which resulted was sufficiently great to render the players inaudible beyond the stalls. A piece of the dialogue, however, travelled to the pit, and again provoked an uproar. "Are you the man that murdered your father," asks one of the female characters. "Yes," replies the Play Boy. "Then a thousand welcomes to you," says the girl. This sentiment was the signal for a tremendous and long-sustained demonstration. Voices yelled—"That's not the West," and after the disturbers had cheered themselves hoarse they proceeded to stamp the floor with renewed vigour. A further remark in reference to a certain inside female garment led to renewed scenes of disorder, and the cross-fire between the audience was intensely funny. One man yelled out, "That's worthy of the slums of London." "Shut up your mug," cried another; a third man chimed in with, "Go to h—." "That's your country,"

was the retort; but the rejoinder was absolutely crushing, "Go home and kill your father." A hearty laugh followed the remark. "This travesty should be beaten off the stage," was a pious expression that evoked cheers. "There's a picture of the West," met with the retort, "They are more modest there than the girls of Dublin," and then somebody asked, "Where is Cardinal Logue now?" The stamping of feet continued, but the interrupters still succeeded in eluding the vigilance of the police. The close of the second act was received with tremendous cheering and groaning, and these demonstrations were renewed as the third and last act was entered upon. All through it there were continual interruptions, but the disorder was not so pronounced as in the preceding acts. When the curtain fell the rival sections cheered and groaned each other for a time. Then some of the occupants of the stalls started to sing "God Save the King," but the strains were completely drowned in the groans of the pitties, who next started to sing "A Nation Once Again." Both parties kept up the vociferous with lusty vigour, and, on the whole, fairly good humour prevailed. A force of police entered the stalls and promptly cleared out the singers, who were apparently students. For a time matters assumed an ugly appearance, and some blows were interchanged, but eventually the students were induced to leave. They assembled in a group outside, and again began to sing "God Save the King," and the other side again responded with "A Nation Once Again." The police moved on the crowd, and for a considerable distance both sections assumed a defiant attitude, but the police prevented them from coming into collision. However, in Westmoreland street two members of the rival parties got into fisticuffs, and one student was arrested.