

A BIT OF REMINISCENCE OF OLD
LIMERICK.

The Limerick correspondent of the *Cork Herald* writes:—A few days ago I picked up in a City bookshop a copy of the "Picture Magazine," containing a photograph and portion of an autograph of the distinguished actor, Edmund Kean. The discovery is very much prized, because one of the most unique incidents in theatrical life in Limerick is associated with the visit to the city of the great Shakspearian impersonator. 69 years have fled since the occasion, and it is interesting to re-write the circumstances of the visit. Time and the devastating flight has changed many things since. Kean was amongst Limerick folk, and with these must be counted the celebrated Assembly House in Charlotte's Quay, where he so prominently displayed his talent. On the 13th of September, 1824, the Assembly House having been again fitted up as a theatre was re-opened with Shakspeare's tragedy of Richard III, the celebrated Kean playing Richard. He left Limerick on the morning of the 15th, very much displeased with his reception. He returned, however, and completed his engagement, which was for twelve nights, and played alternately tragedy and comedy to the delight (it may be presumed) of many country families who patronised the assembly rooms. This famous rendezvous was founded in 1761, the want of a large public room for assemblies being very much felt by the gentry of Limerick and the surrounding counties. So much was this want experienced that it was suggested to build an assembly house of large dimensions. At a meeting of those interested it was resolved that a society consisting of twenty gentlemen be formed, for the purpose of erecting the building. At a subsequent meeting held in the City Grand Jury Room on the 30th September, 1768, Mr John Prendergast in the chair, it was proposed and adopted that the following gentlemen be formed into a society for building and maintaining a public Assembly House in the city on a capital stock of £2,000, and that each member bear an equal proportion of the expense. These were Thomas Vereker, Mayor; Charles Smith, Esq; George Smith, Recorder; Thomas Smith, Alderman; David Roche, do; Robert Hallan, do; Wm Mansell Burgess; John Prendergast, Burgess; John Tunneidine, Alexander Franklin, Sir Henry Hartstonge, Silver Oliver, John Bateman, Rev Dean Hoare, Rev Jacques Ingram, Alexander Sheares, Wmham Blood, John Munchin, Norcot D'Evereux, and Patrick Mahony.

An interesting gentleman, Charles Smyth, Esq, having proposed to accommodate the society with a convenient plot for building, it was resolved to take a lease of the ground as described in a plan presented by Rev Dean Hoare (clergymen were rather theatre lovers in those days) and which was approved of for a term of 999 years at the yearly rent of five shillings. The ground was on what afterwards went by the name of the Assembly Mall in a line with Charlotte's Quay. A sub committee of five was appointed to carry on the work forthwith, and on the 24th of October steps were taken to commence the foundation. The house was completed in August, 1770, and by the following extract from the minute book of the society it was resolved—"That the house be opened for the reception of company on Tuesday, 11th Sept, and shall be opened every night during the Assizes at an English half crown each ticket, the English half crown then bearing value 2s 6d. The arrangements of the assemblies and "drums" were carried out by the members, and the gentlemen in their turn took the tickets at the door and acted as stewards in the room. The building cost the proprietors £3,208 2s 11d (an accurate calculation), and the house was well supported by the public for many years. In 1772 it was let to a Mr Bowen for the purpose of assemblies carried on by him under the control of the company, and he agreed to pay £300 per year for the purpose on a lease of 31 years. Before the expiration of Mr Bowen's lease balls and suppers became less frequent, and in the year 1790 the principal room was converted into a theatre by Sir Vere Hunt, Bart, Mr Clinch being principal, and on the 31st January was opened with Shakspeare's comedy, "As You Like It." The place continued a theatre for several years, but in 1818 the Christian Brothers then for the first time in Limerick opened a school in the upper rooms of the house, for which they paid £75 a year, and where they remained until more convenient schools were opened in 1824. A mechanics' institute was opened in the house in 1825, and subsequently the ball and supper rooms became the theatre of Limerick, and some of the best actors of the day performed there. It was in this house Edmund Kean made his appearance in Limerick, and here, too, all the celebrated singers who came to the city appeared before crowded audiences. It continued a theatre until 1836, and on being out of repair and dangerous to the public safety, it was tumbled by order of the Sheriff in 1838. Pleasant evenings were spent in the beautiful building, and no wonder when such choice spirits as Kean and others sauntered amongst Shannon folk.