THE LIMERICK STAGE 1736-1800

In 1774, shortly after the end of the summer playing, two notable events occurred in the Limerick company. On Saturday, 1 October, John O'Keefe, the popular low comedian, married in the Irish Town Mary Heaphy, the manager's daughter. Ten days later the wife of a lesser-known comedian, Richard Sparks, was delivered ... of Two Sons at Silvermines in the County of Tipperary, while on route to Dublin. Mrs. Sparks, like numerous married actresses of the eighteenth century, evidently felt little discomfort or embarrassment in performance during the last month or two of pregnancy. She had been filling prominent roles as recently as 28 September, the day of her benefit. No ill effects seem to have resulted, for on 17 October the Limerick Chronicle reported that Mrs. Sparks and the two boys were 'in a fair way of doing well'.

The second summer after the birth of the twins Mrs. Sparks and her husband chose to play at Kilkenny rather than at Cork and Limerick. Heaphy experienced no loss by their secession, however, because the venerable tragedian Thomas Sheridan returned to Ireland for a farewell tour under Heaphy's management. Sheridan had found his south-of-Ireland visit in 1773 too rewarding in acclaim and money (he had 'picked up' £700, so his Dublin friend George Faulkner informed David Garrick) to resit a second summer invitation. Heaphy's company, with Sheridan as the star attraction performed in Limerick during the first three weeks of September 1776. Once more the citizenry turned out in large numbers to admire Sheridan's art, but the ageing actor had lost his zest for the limelight. Towards the close of his Limerick stay he wrote: 'I have been playing to crowded houses; but my time has not passed so agreeably as formerly.'

The enthusiasm over Sheridan's farewell appearances was as nothing compared with the excitement over the Limerick Jubilee in August of the following year. Planned and directed by the enterprising mayor, Thomas Smyth, the Jubilee took the form of a week of varied entertainments. The magnificent celebration was intended to focus the attention of Britain and the Continent, as well as all Ireland, upon this vigorous city of 40,000 people, and to demonstrate its coming-of-age as an enlightened European metropolis. The Jubilee opened on Tuesday, 12 August, 1777, with the laying of the cornerstone of the impressive Exchange in Rutland Street. At night the Fancy Ball took place at the Assembly House, where the ballroom was 'lighted in the Manner of the Rotunda in Dublin', and the supper room was 'illuminated with Lamps of various Colours, imitative of the Pantheon in London'. Three hundred persons attended, all wearing costumes of Limerick material and manufacture to evidence the beauty of Irish textiles to the world at large. Though no females dressed in native gabe, a few patriotic males impersonated either Irish countrymen or hurlers. Most of the participants decked themselves out as fashionably exotic personages: Greek or Roman deities, harlequins, Indian princes, and Turkish sultans. Because of the pleasant weather the populace crowded the streets near the quays to gape at these bizarrely attired figures of high society riding in carriages or sedan chairs and attended by footmen. Then a developing Irish democratic impulse scotched the onlookers. 'The mob-illty, as usual on such occasions', stated the contemporary reporter, 'forced the nobility and gentry out of their chaises and sedans, and made them walk from some distance to the Assembly-House, to the no small division of the numerous crowd'. This ball, the most elaborate in Limerick's history before 1800, did not break up until four o'clock on Wednesday morning.

On Wednesday evening the theatrical programme commenced. Heaphy and his company interrupted their Cork summer season to travel to Limerick and perform for the Jubilee. One of the better comedians, Thomas Wilks, was thrown from his carriage near Mallow on his way from Cork and suffered a concussion. The injury, though severe, did not result in death as the Dublin report asserted. With the exception of the rollicking O'Keefe, Heaphy's troupe included no actor of repute. Nevertheless it played acceptably a series of old favourites in the four main types of current drama: (1) the comedy of The Provok'd Husband by Colley Cibber on the 13th; (2) the musical farce of Lionel and Clarissa by Isaac Bickerstaph on the 14th; (3) the tragedy of Hame Shore by Nicholas Rowe on the 15th; (4) the comic opera of The Duenna by R.B. Sheridan on the 16th.

The stage productions, however, could scarcely equal in glamour other of the later Jubilee festivities such as the 'Venetian Breakfast in the beautiful and romantic Garden' belonging to Mr. Robert Davis and located along the banks of the Shannon. A river regatta, interspersed with band music on the water, followed this Thursday morning breakfast. The festivities extended over to Monday, 18 August, when the medieval ceremony of 'riding the franchises' of the city was carried out in gorgeous array. The municipal procession led by the 12th Regiment Band, started from King's Island at noon. 'Every one of the corporations took pains to provide fine cattle (i.e. horses), elegant cloaths, furniture, standards, ensigns, etc.' The pageants of the fourteen trade guilds began with the Smith's display of Venus and a child in a phaeton drawn by four beautiful pied horses with a mounted Vulcan alongside. The Tobaccoeons brought up the rear of the parade with a float showing the Black King of Morocco and Grimalkin the Snuff Grinder. Thus the Limerick Jubilee concluded in a truly grand finale which left one of the Week's participants recalling 'such a diversity of splendid objects, that the fancy, in a kind of controversy with itself, knew not which most to admire'.

Two years after his direction of the very successful Jubilee Thomas Smyth headed the organization of the Limerick Volunteers, a militant defence corps which was forming throughout Ireland to secure her economic as well as her political liberties. As colonel of...
Theatre on Friday, 27 August 1779, from the most notable of her father's recent martial exploit on the high seas: the last night of the season as well as Mrs. O'Keefe pool Prize stage. In December 1781, after assuming the management at Smock Alley, Dublin, Daly brought Heaphy's reign as the proprietor of the Limerick Theatre to an end by leasing it 'for a term of years' with the proviso that Heaphy might take possession for up to six months per year and might use any scenery found on the premises. The new proprietor, in contrast to his predecessor, welcomed any chance for added income from rental of the theatre. Very shortly he leased the building to Alexander Macartney for six weeks in July and August of 1782 while the Daly company from Dublin was performing at Cork. Macartney, a staggering manager already well known to Lisburn, presented the conventional repertory done by a group of obscure players. In accordance with the prevailing custom the manager exploited his Masonic connexions for his benefit evening on Friday, 26 July. "He issued a public request that 'every Brother of Town and Neighbourhood be so kind as to attend the Theatre that Night'. The members of Lodge No. 13 were instructed 'to walk in a Procession from their Lodge Room to the Theatre, dressed in the insignia of their Order. The rate of the curtain was 7.30 p.m. found them all accommodated upon an 'amphitheatre' erected on the stage. Macartney sought to make an impression not only upon the Masons but also upon the entire community. Our reporter gave notice that a copy of the local newspaper that he and his troupe would be leaving town in a few days, and he asked that all bills against them be submitted at once for prompt payment.

No sooner had Daly's tenants departed in mid-August than he appeared with his company, featuring the Drury Lane debutante Anna Maria Phillips. For her benefit, Saturday evening, 31 August, she undertook a generous assortment of light musical roles: Laura in the prelude of *The Chaplet*, Polly in *The Beggar's Opera*, and Leonora in *The Padlock*. On this special occasion the manager increased the size of the 'band' as well as engaged a pianoforte companion to heighten the 'airs'. The century's fond for musical interpolations was again exhibited in connexion with West Diggles's benefit on the following Wednesday, 4 September, when he played Macbeth, and Mrs. Melmoth, Lady Macbeth. The bill for this last day of the Limerick season stressed the rendering of Purcell's *Macbeth* music and the fact that 'in this admired old Tragedy will be introduced the celebrated Incantation of the Witches, assembled over their Caldron in the Pit of Acheron, and all their Magical Spells'.

During the summer of 1783 audiences held up so well in Dublin and then in Cork that Daly did not bring his company to Limerick until the assizes at the beginning of October. During Assize Week the local regiment of Irish Volunteers under Colonels Burke and Smyth gained publicity and worked off patriotic energy by taking the guard of the theatre. On Wednesday, 8 October, the two Masonic lodges observed a benefit night for 'Distressed Masons' with a procession starting for the playhouse at six o'clock. Three days later a veteran cast in Othello - Clinch as Othello, Mrs. Sparkes as Desdemona, acted on behalf of Mrs. Heaphy. She made an urgent appeal for patronage, announcing 'with the most sincere Sentiments of Gratitude and the most tender Sensations of unalterable Respect and Esteem' that 'this will be the last Season's Performance in this City'. As was often the case in pleas of this sort, the prophecy turned out quite wrong. The lady continued her appearances for five more years.

In the summer of 1784, as soon as it became known that Daly and his Dublin troupe were not going to visit Limerick at all, William Henry Moss, an English actor of considerable experience in London and Dublin, attempted to turn Daly's by-passing of the Munster capital to his own profit. He drew up in Dublin a proposal 'to establish a theatre in Limerick upon a regular, respectable, and permanent footing for three months', commencing about November 1784. A sufficient number of advance subscriptions for 12 months was obtained to enable him 'to procure performers more suitable to the public taste than the customary and casual mode can possibly induce'. The needed amount of £54.12s. would be raised by subscription - at £1.10s. and 6d. each, and by ten subscriptions for pit seats at 18s. each. These subscription figures represented a 30% reduction from the ordinary prices for single performances. The subscription money would be received on 12 August to the leading theatrical patron in the county, Sir Vere Hunt, grandfather of the poet Anthony de Vere, and owner of Corkagh Castle, a rich and beautiful estate fifteen miles south-west of Limerick. Sir Vere apparently did not respond with the desired encouragement, and Moss pursued his scheme of a winter theatrical season no further.

The complete dearth of professional stage entertainment during 1784 provoked the formation of the Limerick Theatrical Society. On 17 January 1785 this organization of local gentlemen published its intention to perform for charitable purposes under the joint management of Sir Vere Hunt, Major Alock of the 47th Regiment, and Captain Trevor Lloyd Ashe, a skilled instrumentalist, who later appeared at the Fishamble Street Theatre in Dublin, and elsewhere on the Irish stage circuit. The Society leased from Daly the Theatre Royal, but sold no tickets at the door. They had to be purchased in advance from Mr. Watson the printer. Seats in the boxes and lattices (the upper row of boxes on each side of the stage) cost 4s.; in the pit, 3s.; and in the gallery, 2s. The first performance on Tuesday, 25 January, consisted of two outstanding stage favours: *The Poor Soldier* and *Venice Preserved*, to which Mr. Thomas Grady of Limerick wrote a new epilogue delivered by Captain Ashe. On the second bill, a week later, Sir Vere Hunt took the leading part of Octavio in *The Duenna*. For the fourth society production on Tuesday, 1 March, Mrs. O'Keefe came down from Dublin to play the heroine in *Venice Preserved* and Rosina. Anticipating a crowded house, the sponsors railed off the rear of the pit to be sold as box seats and thus swelled their proceeds. The curtain rose at six o'clock, an hour earlier than usual, in order that 'the Ladies might get in time to the Assembly' after the theatricals. The Society had planned to end its season of charitable plays with *The Revenge* and *The Beggar's Opera* and *The Padlock* on 15 March, for 'the Relief of Fellow Creatures in Distress, many of whom are detained in a loathsome Prison for their Fees'. On this lofty humanitarian note Limerick's exciting innovation of amateur public drama closed for the year.

The successful activities of the Theatrical Society perhaps were responsible for Daly's paying the city greater consideration in the summer of 1785. At the end of the Smock Alley season he sent direct to Limerick the better portion of his company, including two star attractions: the noted...
impersonator of native Irish roles, Robert Owenson, and the young Covent Garden tragedian, Joseph Holman, who was visiting Ireland for the first time. He made his county debut on Tuesday, 16 August, as a Romeo in love with a forty-year-old Juliet, Mrs. Egerton from Drury Lane. His performance drew somewhat restrained approbation from the Limerick Chronicle, which termed his person 'elegant', his voice 'manly', and his action 'that of a finished Gentleman'.

For the next three years Limerick enjoyed more extended and unusual entertainment from Proprietor Daly, no doubt because the city's audiences were keeping pace with its rising population, now close to 50,000. Each summer the Dublin players fitted in two visits to the Munster capital between their sojourns at Cork and Waterford, and also introduced an increasing variety of guest actors. The 1786 performances, which occurred in the first two weeks of August and the last two weeks of September, presented Charles Bannister of Drury Lane and John Henry ("Jack") Johnstone of Covent Garden in their first Limerick appearance, plus Mr. and Mrs. Chalmers, and Richard Wilson, all three of whom were from Covent Garden and on their first Irish tour. These five new faces constituted a superlatively cast for Love in a Village on the opening night of 31 July. In 1787 the curtain was up at the Theatre Royal, Limerick, 10-28 July and 13-25 August, with the celebrated Michael Kelly, 'from Venice' via Drury Lane, and the charming Mrs. Crouch, also of Drury Lane, as the chief attractions. They chose to do Lional and Clarissa for their première before an audience overflowing on account of the assizes.

In 1788 Daly opened the theatre very early in order to profit from the crowds attending the Limerick races 7-12 July. For this year Sir Vere Hunt managed the race meeting, much to the displeasure of the Protestant Bishop of Limerick, who deplored the event as 'very injurious to the Lower Class of People, and Gambling (that most destructive Vice) amongst the Higher Class'. Despite the Bishop's opposition, Race Week had already begun. Heaphy's proposal of 1774 that a new playhouse be erected in conjunction with the Assembly House on Charlotte's Quay. The Smyth family, now represented by John Prendergast Smyth, M.P., renewed its offer of ground adjoining the Assembly House, as a site. With this location in view, the promoters commissioned a London architect of some eminence, James Lewis, to draw up in 1788 appropriate building plans. These, the only ones known for an eighteenth-century theatre in Ireland, called for a handsome three-storied structure of Palladian style to be connected with the Assembly House. It was conceived, however, as a structure that, like the existing Theatre Royal in Cornwalls Street, would combine under one roof residential apartments at the front and a theatre at the rear. The living quarters intended for Mr. Smyth's occupancy 'during his stay in the city' would look north upon the quay and river, and would possess an imposing ornamen
ted facade, in brick and cut stone to match the Assembly House, with two large doors on the ground floor. The theatre area was to have entrances wholly unconnected with the house. Admittance to the boxes would be gained through the vestibule and hallways of the Assembly House, thence up the 'Great Stairs' to a landing, and finally through a broad door into the corridor encircling the first tier of boxes. The pit and the gallery were to be approached separately by doors from the back street at the south end of the building. The stage and dressing-rooms would be situated at this end, but the actors' green-room, reached from backstage by a side passage, would be located in an adjacent card or tea-room of the Assembly House.

The main stage was to be 32 feet at its greatest depth with a forestage or apron one-third as deep, in front of a proscenium 34 feet wide by 27 feet high. The auditorium, 50 feet by 50 feet, and therefore larger by a fifth than that in the Cornwalls Street playhouse, was designed unlike any other eighteenth-century public theatre in Ireland or Britain, namely, with a complete upper as well as lower horseshoe-shaped tier of boxes. The upper tier, containing thirteen compartments, would include in the centre a larger box for Mr. Smyth with entry solely from the drawing-room of his house. The lower tier would have two fewer boxes to allow for the door on each side of the forestage under the upper box nearest the proscenium. Another unique feature of Lewis's plans in relation to the box arrangements was the apparent removal of intrusive columns which traditionally supported the front tiers.
This projected Limerick theatre, though not equal in size or in impressiveness of entrance to the contemporary Theatre Royal at Cork, would have surpassed the latter in the elegance and novelty of its interior. Indeed, it would have been an edifice truly befitting the stature of Ireland's third city. A major obstacle to its construction, however, arose. The peculiar and limited 'form of the ground' donated by the Smyth family compelled the architect to design the backstage area in the shape of a right-angled triangle with the rear seat as hypotenuse. The consequent space available for the requirements of production did not prove sufficient to meet professional acceptance. This adverse judgement made clear the unfeasibleness of the site, and with that revelation the community interest in a new playhouse apparently evaporated. Once again the Munster capital, despite its prosperity, showed a lack of strength to establish a worthy structure, however, arose. The peculiar description of the first evening when 'a discordant scraper and a blind fiddler were raging in the gallery; and sold admission tickets for twenty guineas for the Limerick poor.'

Even greater profit was secured by railing in the rear of the pit with the boxes for the acting of Cato and The Brave Irishman on Monday, 21 December. The audiences felt insulted and reacted with severity toward what one indignant observer called 'the remnant of a motley group of ragged strollers.' This same critic wrote to Dublin a satirical description of the first evening when a discordant scraper and a blind fiddler attempted to grind opera tunes and a gentleman of the bar, Mr. Lysaght, called out Deputy Dawson, alias Chief of the Monarch's eunuchs, on the stage, and he was obliged to make the amende honorable'. Saturday night, 22 August, saw the tension on both sides of the footlights at its height. Mrs. O'Reilly, the leading lady, attempted to play Lucy in The Beggar's Opera, then 'changed her mind and quitted the house'. The irate audience shouted for her husband, and at O'Reilly's appearance on the stage, 'treated him so roughly that he set out for Cork that moment'.

When Sir Vere's company returned from Waterford to begin a summer season of five weeks at the Limerick Assembly House on Saturday, 31 July, it had to compete against the Crow Street troupe under Daly till their departure on 13 August. The Dublin players chose to appear just at this time so that they might share in the lucrative business enjoyed by Assize Week, 2-7 August. At their Cornwallis Street theatre they performed for the most part comic operas with a strong quartet of vocalists in Bowden, J. Kelly, Mrs. Mountain, and Miss George. Thus, during this brief midsummer period, the Limerick playgoers could enjoy two competent companies with quite differing repertoires - a situation unparalleled in the city's stage history before 1800.

Many interesting details of Sir Vere Hunt's theatrical enterprise during the summer and the following winter season at Limerick can be gleaned from the surviving accounts of his treasurer, John Booker. Receipts ran large from the opening Saturday night, 31 July, through the ensuing Assize Week when daily performances were given. Income for these seven evenings totalled £130.7s., with a maximum of £37.19s. on Monday, 2 August, and a minimum of £4.6s. for the next Saturday. During this period the doorkeepers unwittingly accepted 13a.6d. of 'bad silver'. for which, according to custom, they had to be reimbursed by the proprietor.

In addition to the manager, a dozen men and a half-dozen women composed the regular acting personnel. Manager Clinic, of course, got the biggest compensation. £3.13s.6d. a week, The leading men - Richard Hurst, Ezra Wells, and J. Brown who had just come from Crow Street - received £2.2s. for a normal week of three nights, but additional and variable amounts for extra performances. The ordinary actors - Adamson, Clare, Kelly, McCulloch, McCrea, Power - £1.11s.6d. per week; and the novices - Beaumont, Dempsey, Goteley - 10s.6d. weekly. The women's salaries were appreciably lower. The top figure of £1.11s.6d. was paid to Mrs. Achmet, a well-known Dublin actress who at the moment was enjoying one of his frequent disagreements with Richard Daly and therefore was not employed at Crow Street for the current winter. Clinic assembled a troupe of experienced strolling actors to open the 'New Theatre' with As You Like It, on Saturday, 30 January 1790. Immediate success induced the aristocratic entrepreneur to expand his activities by taking over from Daly the proprietorship of the Waterford Theatre Royal. Thither he sent his players under Manager Clinic sometime in early summer for a stay that lasted till late July.
Miss Atkin's next benefit, in January 1791, yielded £19.8s., over twice the amount of her previous intake.

Sir Vere Hunt's backstage and house staff numbered between twenty and twenty-five. The scene designer, Samuel (?) Whitmore, an artist of repute, rated with the chief actors in salary at £2.2s. per week. Byrne the assistant scene painter, Hoole the head carpenter, and the two regular musicians had a nightly wage of 3s. per night. Bill posters, charwomen, doorkeepers, playhouse guards, stage boys, and other helpers got 1s. for each performance. The total wages of the New Theatre, Limerick, for the last week of its summer season, a typical week, amounted to approximately £36.

Sir Vere Hunt kept productional expenses at a minimum. Copy-books of individual parts in plays (for example, King Lear and She Stoops to Conquer) were procured at a charge of only 6d. Purchases of such petty materials as chains, cord, glass, ink, nails, painter's size, paper, tar, and wine occurred often. A few unusual items were bought: green baize for the pit seats, 4s.3d.; ‘two Chamber Pots for the Dress Rooms’, 2s.; an inkstand, 6d.; a pitcher and basin, 2s.; a prompter's whistle, 6d.; a dozen tin candlessticks, 2s.3d. Hurst, wardrobe and property keeper as well as actor, made occasional outlays: 'stage properties', £2.10s. on one date and £1.1s. on another; 'dresses', £1.1s. once, and, later, £1.11s. A costume for Touchstone, done by Moore the tailor, cost 7s. The stage carpenter received 3s. for 'turning work' on Juliet's bier. Certainly these were very modest sums for outfitting.

Similar economy characterized the illumination of the theatre and the stage. During the summer season it must have been done entirely by oil lamps, because the sole lighting charge was for oil at 9s. a performance. The expense of oil lighting in the winter increased by 2s. Since the accounts mention 'toe for the lamps', that is, cord-like cloth or fibre for lamp wicks, it is apparent that Sir Vere Hunt had not installed the London 'patent' lamps, an improved type with cylindrical wick, which Daly had introduced to Ireland at the Crow Street Theatre in 1788. Wax tapers lighted the playhouse interior on rare occasions in the winter season. According to one entry, it cost 38s.4d. to buy 'Candles for 4 nights'.
£107.14s., compared with £130.14s.
for the first seven nights of the summer season. With the onset of more inclement weather, playing became more intermittent at the same time that attendance declined. From 10 December to the end of January the company acted only eleven nights and took in at the door £87.7s. On Monday, 7 February 1791, with the benefits completely filled in the thirteen weeks of winter performances at the Assembly House came to a close.

Sir Vere Hunt then prepared for another short season that would include the Spring Assize Week, and to that end installed as manager, at a salary of £4.4s. per week, the veteran William Moss of Dublin. Back in 1784, Moss had vainly aspired to be a Limerick manager but had never appeared on the local stage until his arrival in December 1790, after a long sojourn in Edinburgh. The new manager persuaded Mrs. Castelli and Mr. Brennan, well-known singing streaks of Cork, to lend their talent, and thus he strengthened its musical repertoire. The new season at the Assembly House theatre commenced on 23 February 1791 and continued until 18 March. During these four weeks Moss raised the curtain on nine nights for total receipts of about £72, the same average per night as in midwinter.

After a month of inactivity following the cessation of the Limerick performances Sir Vere sent the company under Moss to play at Cork. In June a disagreement with Moss caused the Limerick baronet to withdraw from any agreement with Moss caused the Limerick baronet to withdraw from any agreement with Moss, who had made a promising début at Cork. In July 1792, he strengthened its musical repertoire.

With Sir Vere's retirement Richard Daly once again exercised sole control of Limerick's professional stage entertainment. His Dublin players, however, no longer liked the venerable Theatre Royal on Cornwallis Street, and called it 'too small' when in September 1791 they arrived with two guest stars from Limerick. The dispirited manager favoured the Assembly House rather than the players aroused public condemnation: 'So large and so improving a City as this should be disgraced by such a Theatre. The Manager ought to pay some attention to the proper accommodation of the Inhabitants. The House is not only considerably out of repair, but many of the Seats in the Boxes are dirty beyond description'. The same critic blamed the manager also for the 'disorderly and insolent behaviour in the gallery' where the spectators 'resemble Savages'. If the manager had shown the proper initiative and called on the 'magistrates', they would surely have assisted in preserving decent manners throughout the house.

Daly may not have heeded the urging of this angry patron to sweep out and repair his building, but at least he appeased the complaints of others by putting the theatre in good shape for its reopening on 23 February 1793. Since the list had been 'mislaid' at the start of the previous season, 'some confusion' had attended the admission of season-ticket holders. No longer, however, would ladies and gentlemen be inconvenienced at the door, for the doorkeepers had in hand a new and complete list of the proprietors announced before the first night. The Crow Street company came direct from Dublin in mid-July to present Limerick's playgoers with their first performances at the Assembly House on 23 July. Miss Frances Abington and Miss W. Brett. The former, famed as Lady Teazle and Maria in Scandal at Home; the latter, as Violante in Much Ado About Nothing, Estefania in Rule A Wife, Lady Bell in Arthur Murphy's Know Your Own Mind, and Violante in Mrs. Centlivre's The Wonder: A Woman Keeps A Secret. To play Lissardo opposite Miss Farren's Violante. Daly chose at short notice the young comedian Charles Mathews. Mr. Brennan, who had made a promising début at Crow Street in June. This assignment led to a situation that developed as much comic melodrama as any scene in the troupe's repertory.

Mathews, despairing of perfecting his role of Lissardo, decided to rehearse during the afternoon in the open air. He crossed the bridge over the Shannon and was strolling along the river bank when he met a fellow actor, Seymour, also rehearsing. After reading lines to each other for a while, they parted. Soon Mathews, on account of the sultry weather, proceeded to strip for 'swimming'. Suddenly he got in over his head and started to sink in panic. Like a man in a dream, he fell for a brief moment into conjecturing who could act Lissardo with Miss Farren that night if he were drowned. Then he rose, saw Seymour reading a little way off in the sun, and was strolling along the river bank when he met a fellow actor, Seymour, who had made a promising début at Crow Street in June. This assignment led to a situation that developed as much comic melodrama as any scene in the troupe's repertory.

Another glamorous actress new to Limerick, Miss Elizabeth Farren from Drury Lane, furnished the main excitement of the 1794 season, which opened with Assize Week, 8-13 September. Miss Farren 'was most rapturously received by a very elegant audience; for besides numerous people of fashion residing near Limerick, the assizes brought together an immense number of people'. Packed houses greeted her on all five nights of her week's engagement. To Proprietor Daly she proved a lucrative investment despite his publicity about the 'very great expense' connected with her visit. Over the years the Theatre Royal had grown notorious because it contained no decent place of reception backstage. The prospect of Miss Farren's vexation at the absence of so important a facility moved Daly at last to remedy the situation. He built for her a fine dressing-room that in the future was to be used for the green-room. In addition, he paid her the highest fee ever offered to an actress in eighteenth-century Limerick, namely, £50 per night. These outlays in conjunction with 'the smallness of the theatre' provided Daly with his excuse for raising the cost of seats to the current Dublin figures: 5s. for the boxes, 3s. for the pit, and 2s. for the gallery. At these new prices a full house totalled about £130. Therefore, with the theatre filled throughout Assize Week, the proprietor earned a large profit.

Miss Farren elected to entertain Limerick with the comic parts in which she shined in Drury Lane in March As You Like It: Know Your Own Mind, and Violante in Mrs. Centlivre's The Wonder: A Woman Keeps A Secret. To play Lissardo opposite Miss Farren's Violante. Daly chose at short notice the young comedian Charles Mathews. Who had made a promising début at Crow Street in June. This assignment led to a situation that developed as much comic melodrama as any scene in the troupe's repertory.

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scholar. What name's upon him?"
'Sure, I heard the Englisher red-coat
say he was one of Daly's divartets'.

The whisky massage restored the
nearly drowned Mathews with such
surprising speed that by evening he
went on stage and carried off his part
to the complete satisfaction of both
Miss Farren and the audience.

Another memorable episode
enlivened Limerick's summer two years
later. The Crow Street company came
to the city direct from Dublin in order
to take advantage of Assize Week. They
opened on Monday, 18 July 1796, in
the comic operas of Robin Hood and
The Farmer, with the two principals,
Joseph Munden and Miss Poole, mak-
ing their first Limerick appearance.

Since Daly's players were staying for
only ten days, he rashly promised that
he would send at least a portion of his
troupe up from Cork to perform during
the Limerick races, 18-20 August.
When the time came, however, he dis-
patched five of his instrumentalists
and singers to give evening concerts in
the Cornwallis Street theatre with but
pit and box seats available. The substitu-
tion of chamber music for plays
irritated fashionable society at the same
time that the closing off of the gallery
vexed the general populace. In retalia-
tion citizens and visitors alike boycot-
ted the concert series. Four persons at-
tended the premiere: one unidentified
man in the pit, and Lord Barrymore
with two guests, all three of whom en-
tered a box late in the programme. This
fiasco concluded both the concerts and
Daly's reign as proprietor of the
Limerick Theatre Royal.

The Rebellion of 1798 caused the
Crow Street organization to delay its
annual visit to Munster's capital until
the first of October, when the violence
and tension had almost subsided in the
south-west of Ireland. Then the Crow
Street deputy manager, Thomas
Bellamy, took on tour one of the
strongest troupes that had ever set
forth from Dublin. Its leading figure
was not, as in recent summer tours, an
actress, a comedian, or a singer, but a
tragedian of repute, George Frederick
Cooke from Covent Garden. He made
his Limerick debut in the role of
Shylock on the season's opening night.
Monday, 1 October. A week later
Manager Bellamy staged his own
benefit with a calculated outburst of
loyalty to the English Ascendancy. For
the evening's climax 'a Grand Em-
blematic Transparency', representing
the Viceroy Marquess Cornwallis sup-
ported by Justice and Mercy, was
gradually disclosed amid the singing of
'See the Conquering Hero', 'Rule Brit-
tannia!', and 'God Save The King'. This
display of allegiance typified the
political bias that had dominated the
entrepreneurs of the Irish theatre
throughout the preceding two critical
decades.

The final summer of the century
found the Crow Street troupe at
Limerick in time for the assizes, 22-26
July, with an even finer aggregation of
talent, including Thomas Huddart of
Covent Garden on his first Irish tour,
young Miss Gough in her local debut.
Cooke, Fulham, and the popular come-
dian James B. Stewart. For the troupe's
last performance Huddart and Stewart
employed the arrangement, rare
among 'name' players, of 'blending
their Nights', that is, combining their
benefits. Huddart proceeded to shine
as Othello, and Stewart as a singer of
comic lyrics, notably one entitled 'In
Poaching All Mankind Delight'.

The truly superior groups of actors
that now were yearly visiting Ireland's
third city deserved there an attractive
and commodious playhouse. Frederick
Edward Jones, who in 1797 had taken
over the Limerick as well as the Dublin
and Cork Theatre Royal patents from
Richard Daly, pronounced the thirty-
year-old structure in Cornwallis Street
to be in 'such a decayed and ruinous
condition that it would be much more
advantageous to build a new Theatre
than repair the old'. Therefore, to stir
up agitation for an appropriate modern
building, he advertised at intervals dur-
ing the winter 1799-1800 for 'Ground
in a central situation 50 feet in
Front, by at least 130 feet in Depth',
whereon to erect a new theatre.

These advertisements, however,
elicted neither offer of land nor any
other material support. For the third
time in the last quarter-century the un-
tertaking to provide Limerick with a
more suitable playhouse had been
called to public attention: for the third
time no effective response was
forthcoming. Without any good excuse
Limerick went forward into the era of
the Union dependent upon a
notoriously outdated theatre.