

Things Near my Heart.

(By the Manager, LILIAN BAYLIS.)

This is the last number of the Magazine for the season 1920-21; and as I have not addressed you since the birth of the Magazine in October 1919, except in the Editorial Notes and the "Across the Footlights" column, I want to thank most heartily all of you who have not only come each week to the plays and operas, but have regularly taken leaflets and put them on Notice Boards in offices, works, clubs and the like, or have enclosed them in writing personal letters to friends interested in Music and the Drama.

It is in these small intimate ways, I think, that the Vic. has become known and loved all through this dear topsy-turvy England, the Colonies, America and Europe. A friend who was spending Easter in Brussels heard two Australian ladies saying they never let a week go past when in London, without visiting the Old Vic.—"They have 'all star' casts there" they remarked. I am glad to know our Companies are considered by some, "All Stars." We certainly don't want *one* Star. The beauty of the Heavens, in my humble opinion, would lose much of its restful charm if, instead of myriads of Stars, one alone shone brightly.

It is the "ensemble" at the Vic. in which I delight. When great artists speak of the work, their first words invariably are—"The company is so well-balanced," and it is in that team work in which all pull together with such unanimity that the success of the productions very largely consists.

Another matter of great importance is the arrangement of Colour Schemes, an impossible thing to manage satisfactorily unless you have achieved, as we have recently achieved, your own wardrobe. In the long run this is also more economical, but it involved a large outlay, which I am trusting to your generosity to meet. We need some hundreds to pay off that Fund, and now the L.C.C. insists on the alterations suggested in 1918 being completed. We have paid a large sum for lighting the theatre with electricity and though we gain in losing the dirt of gas the heating installation has had to be increased. This has involved two seasons of horrors, although the system was chosen with great care. Occasional visitors to the theatre must have thought a foundry had been started in the immediate vicinity from the queer noises made by the pipes, but gradually this has been overcome. I hope you think that the efficient lighting has added to the beauty of the productions, as it certainly has to the comfort of the men in the flies, who no longer come down gasping with the heat between the falls of the curtain, but if their conditions of work have improved the artistes and managerial staff feel the congestion behind the stage more and more as the work developes. Our regular patrons will realise our difficulties who know that often at the Vic. there are two operas, and two or three different plays each week to say nothing of the monthly lecture, a programme not attempted at any other theatre in the land.

The L.C.C. rightly refuses to close its eyes to our present conditions any longer and insists that more space be provided. This can only be achieved by expansion into Morley College, the child of the Vic., which, like most children, has outgrown its clothes. When the Vic.'s beloved founder realised the great desire of the workers, electricians, telephone wiremen and others, to know something of the things they were daily handling she brought into being Morley College. However, the child could only grow at the expense of the parents, so every available dressing room and paint room was converted into a classroom. That is the story of its birth in 1885; it was the forerunner of all Polytechnics, and the College runs above, below and behind the stage, though it is cut off by fireproof walls and floors from all direct communication with it. The congestion in the College is, equally with our own, a problem to its Management. We quote from the last report—"Hundreds of students have to be turned away, the classrooms are uncomfortably crowded and the social rooms are no longer large enough to provide for the comfort of the students."

Both the theatre and the College are suffering from want of space. If the work-rooms, costume stores, properties and painting apparatus could all be under one roof and not, as they are now, in inadequate quarters away from the theatre it is obvious how great our gain would be. The £353 10s. 7d. given me on my managerial majority, with the money received by the Appeal Committee and private donations, minus the amount paid for lighting and heating, totals about £3,000. This is on deposit. It is impossible to estimate the amount required for the Vic.'s reconstruction and the removal of the College. It must run into many thousands. Our good friends, the Carnegie Trust and the Charity Commissioners will stand by us; but the public must contribute largely and respond even more generously than they did three years ago in 1918 when money for the L.C.C. alterations was first asked for. The accounts are audited by chartered accountants appointed by the Charity Commissioners, and every shilling that is subscribed goes straight to the fund.

Almost every newspaper speaks of the Vic.'s wonderful audience and all who tread our stage are inspired by your confidence. We on our part have a sure trust that you will see us through this financial crisis.

I shall be celebrating my "Silver Wedding" as Manager of the Vic. in two years' time, it would be the greatest joy to me if the alterations could be completed by that date. After a quarter of a century's unceasing toil to know that the Vic. was adequately housed would bring me the harvest of a great content. If all of you who love the theatre will pray for it, talk about its wants and give what you can afford I confidently believe that the money will be gathered in.