

and poetry have been at least equally zealous in proclaiming the witchery of its daughters. But in whatever degree persons of different parties, tastes, or habits, may differ respecting the importance of these, on one subject we will be agreed,—that the unknown minstrels who have handed down to us such a glowing and minute account of these events, deserved a much more enduring record than either history or tradition has preserved with the public in general.

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### III.—DRAMATIC PLACES OF AMUSEMENT IN LIVERPOOL A CENTURY AGO.

*By James Stonehouse.*

The earliest notice we have of public amusements in Liverpool in the shape of the drama, we find occurring about the year 1571, in the time of Queen Elizabeth, when Shakspeare, Ben Jonson, and other great dramatists produced their time-enduring works; but, whether any of their plays were represented in so remote a place as Liverpool, and at that period so insignificant a town, we have no accurate data to refer to, by which we can arrive at a satisfactory conclusion.

That dramatic representations, as well as performances in the shape of mysteries, were common long before this period, there is, of course, no doubt; that they were brought forward occasionally in the town is clear by the manifesto issued by the authorities at this date (1571):—"That no jugglers, strollers, visions voyde and wayne, shall exhibit without an order or permission from the maior." This order shows that the graceless varlets whom the Roman poet calls "The tribe of minstrels, strollers, quacks, and mummers" had been in the habit of frequenting the town, and perhaps not conducting themselves in so seemly and becoming a way as they ought to have done.

Doubtless the great families of Molineux and Stanley, at their houses, the Tower in Water Street, and the Castle, gave occasionally those pageants, in which the people of the time so much delighted, not only from the pleasure they produced of themselves, but because they could be enjoyed at the expense of other persons.

In an old chronicle there is some allusion made to the Stanleys having players at the Castle, on which occasion the principal gentry of the town were invited to witness the performances.

The first theatre, however, or building devoted exclusively to dramatic performances, of which there is any positive mention made, was erected about 1641 (*temp.* Charles I), on the ground now occupied by a portion of the Coalbrookdale Company's premises, at the back. It stood, therefore, between the present James Street and Redcross Street, or Tarleton's New Street, as it was formerly called. This building, of which, however, we have but very imperfect notice, was constructed of frail materials, and was only used occasionally by strolling companies, who came to Liverpool from the north in their route to Chester and other places. The interior of this theatre would present to view the same aspect as do the old prints of the Globe at Bankside, where we find the most distinguished of the audience seated in a sort of boxes at the sides, or on chairs on the stage, while the pit is unboarded, and the audience there, are standing on the bare ground. Shakspeare alludes to the people in the pit in his advice to the players in *Hamlet*, where he speaks of a roaring actor "splitting the very ears of the groundlings," that is, the people standing on the ground or unboarded floor of the theatre. When this theatre was taken down, a company of strolling players opened a barn in Moor Street for dramatic representations. This barn adjoined a place used as a cockpit, a favourite place of resort at that time as well as in later days. After being here some time they removed to a house in the Old Ropery.\* Here the drama was represented until a regular theatre was built and opened in 1759, in Drury Lane, a street which then ran into the Old Ropery. Drury Lane was called, previous to the erection of the theatre, Entwistle Street, being named after an old and highly respectable as well as influential family of Liverpool, of which two members held the high office of recorder for many years. Mr. J. Entwistle was appointed recorder in 1660, and held the office until he resigned from age and infirmity in 1709, when he was succeeded by his son, Mr. Bertie Entwistle, who continued in it till his death, in or about 1723. Another

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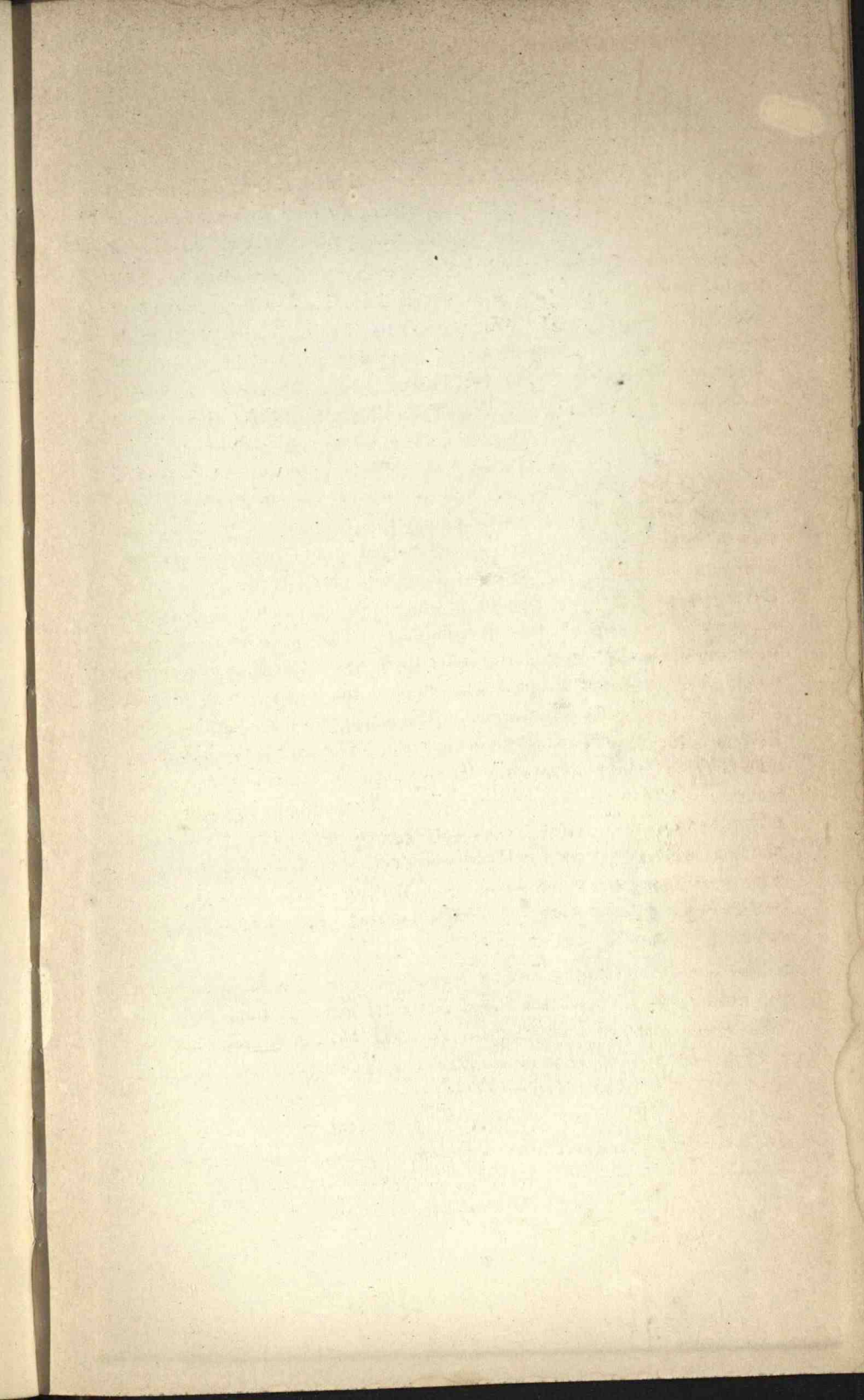
\* On the formation of Brunswick Street, projected about 1786, this thoroughfare was carried down, what was called "Smock Alley," through the houses on the west side of Chorley Street, thence through Drury Lane, sweeping away a portion of the north end of the theatre, thence through Old Custom House Yard,—on the site of which stand the Goree Piazzas—to the formerly called "New," but now George's Dock.

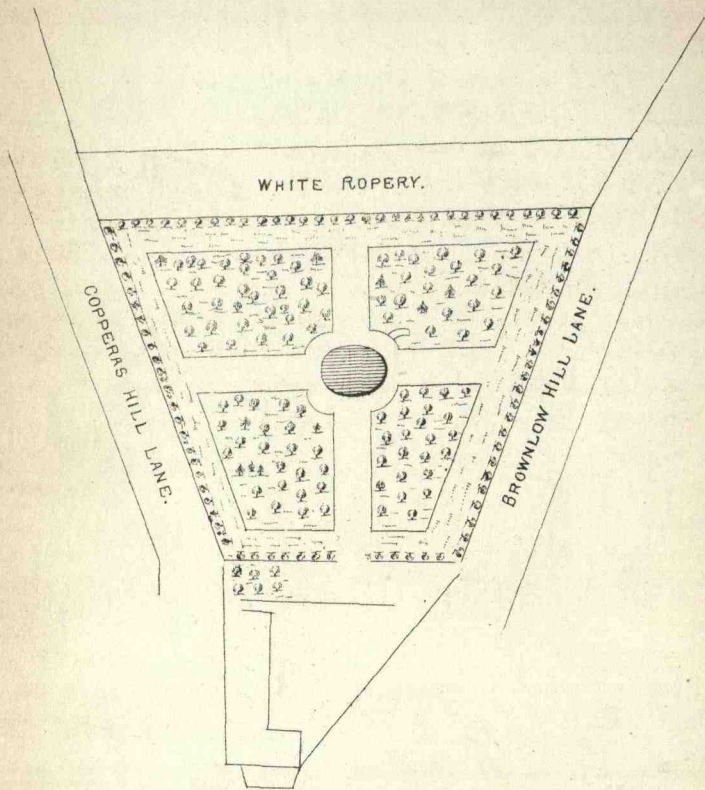
of Mr. Entwistle's sons was, in 1731, churchwarden of Liverpool, an office at that time of some dignity. It is to be regretted that the name of the street was changed, as it seems a good thing to perpetuate the memory of old inhabitants and worthy people of a town, as well as tried and long trusted public servants. On the completion of the theatre, the name of Entwistle was "expunged from the calendar," and the present name of the street was given, in imitation of the whereabouts of the great temple of Thalia and Melpomene in the metropolis. This theatre stood on the site of the present Corn Exchange, Brunswick Street, opposite the upper corner of Drury Lane. It is described as being a handsome structure, 20 yards in front and 16 deep. The interior was elegantly decorated, and the scenes are said to have been extremely well painted by London artists. There was a pit, boxes, and gallery, and by the prices, 3s., 2s., and 1s., it appears that the admission was similar to that charged at the theatres at present. The house held, when full, £80, so that we may conclude that it was about the size of the late Liver Theatre, in Church Street, which held about £80 at precisely the same charges of admission. The house was only open three times a week. Behind the boxes there was a refreshment room, in which a young woman presided, who supplied the audience with tea and coffee, wine, and other refreshments. The manager was the facetious Ned Shuter, of whom many odd anecdotes are told. The bill \* before us is dated July 13, 1767, being five years after the opening of the theatre. The company seems to have been a good one, as we find several names of metropolitan celebrity appearing in the cast of the Tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*. Mr. Bensley and Mr. King were London favourites, while Mrs. Mattocks and Mrs. Parsons were equally prominent members of the London boards. Mrs. Mattocks was an excellent and charming actress, and was highly spoken of by the critics of her time.

The next bill to which attention is drawn is one announcing a musical performance or concert at the theatre in Drury Lane, for the benefit of a Miss Brent. It is dated 20th September, 1762. It will be seen that it is divided, as our modern concerts are, into two parts. Miss Brent had evidently some pretensions to be a vocalist, by the quality of the music she selected; and it will be noticed that amongst the performers appears a Mr. Arne, jun., a relative, doubtless, of the celebrated Dr. Arne, whose compositions

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\* See objects exhibited.





**RANELAGH GARDENS**

Now occupied by the Adelphi Hotel.

are predominant in the vocal portion of the concert. This theatre or "play house" as it was termed, was taken down about the close of the last century. It had previous to its removal been used as a carrier's warehouse, and for similar purposes.

The next bill is an advertisement of a concert to take place at the Ranelagh Gardens, for the benefit of Mrs. Ellis. It is dated August 27, but the year is not given. We may, however, infer that it was issued about the same period as Miss Brent's bill, as we find that the paper, type, and imprint, being that of a man named Sadler, are similar in each case. The Ranelagh Gardens were a very favourite resort of the people of the last century. The tavern, which was formerly called the "White House," stood upon a portion of the ground where the Adelphi Hotel now stands. The premises had a frontage of about 60 feet. In the interior there was ample accommodation for the public, and the house was well furnished with every requisite to conduce to the comfort of the guests. In it there was a spacious concert-room, in which, doubtless, the concert, advertised by Mrs. Ellis, was given. When the gardens about the house were converted into a place of amusement, the name of the "White House" was changed to Ranelagh or Ranelagh Gardens, in imitation of the celebrated place of public resort at Chelsea, in Middlesex, then so much in fashion. The proprietor was a man named Gibson, whose brother kept the "Folly," in Islington, which stood on the site of Christ Church. The gardens were laid out very tastefully, with an abundance of flowers and shrubs. In different parts were alcoves, or arbours, for the reception of company, in which refreshments were supplied.

In the centre of the gardens there was a large fish-pond, in which were great numbers of carp, tench, and other fish. The gardens were a favourite resort of ladies in the afternoon, when the fish were fed by the fair visitors, much amusement being created by the struggles of the finny tribe to secure whatever was thrown to them. Near the fish-pond was an orchestra, where in a band of music played constantly during the evenings. At the close of the evening a display of fire-works occasionally took place. The bill before us gives a list of the pieces to be fired.

When these gardens were in existence the neighbourhood was scarcely built upon. Where Warren Street and the streets adjacent now are, was at that period all open country. Lime Street was then called Lime Kiln

Lane, from the lime works then in operation in it. Ranelagh Street takes its name from the Gardens. It was called formerly the Road to Wavertree. The last concert that took place at Ranelagh was about 1796. Some years previous to this, a portion of the upper part of the gardens had been taken off and converted into a ropery, called "the White Ropery."

The fourth and last bill bears date January 22, 1768, and advertises a performance at the Golden Lyon, in Dale Street, one of the four inns then only established in the town. The entertainment is to be given in the Buck's Room, and the admission is 1s. 6d. This "Lecture on Heads" was very popular at that period, and had attracted crowds of persons in London when first produced. It is surprising that some of those whose talents enable them to entertain an audience single-handed have not resuscitated this clever lecture. We must, however, rejoice that lectures now are given on subjects of more importance, which, while they occupy the public mind, tend to amuse and at the same time instruct; and in conveying information they also awaken a spirit of enquiry into the subjects which are brought under notice.