OPENING OF THE ITALIAN OPERA SEASON.

THE NEW AND OLD HOMES OF THE LYRIC DRAMA.

THE METROPOLITAN OPERA HOUSE AND ITS PREDECESSORS—SOCIAL FEATURES OF OPENING NIGHT.

In the new Metropolitan Opera House and the Academy of Music first nights of Italian opera will be celebrated to-morrow. The new structure is sufficiently advanced toward completion to meet all the needs of the operatic performance, the incomplete portions of the building being the assembly rooms and other accessories. The audience-room, vestibules and corridors are finished and the last touch has been given to the decorations of the interior. In surface measurement the audience room is the largest in any opera house in the world, and in construction and ornamentation it is admirable, as will be seen from the appended description. The Academy of Music has been renovated and brightened, and brilliant audiences will gather in the two temples to-morrow night. Diagrams on this page of THE TRIBUNE show the arrangement of the boxes in the parterre and first tier of the Metropolitan Opera House, owned and occupied by the stockholders of the opera house company. The distribution was made by lot last May, but subsequently changed by private agreement among the box-holders.

DESCRIPTION OF THE NEW HOUSE.

THE LARGEST AUDIENCE-ROOM IN THE WORLD—THE DECORATIONS.

In the Metropolitan Opera House, which is to be thrown open to its chief use to-morrow, there is material for discourse for all manner of critics. The architectural wiseacres can have their say about the exterior, the material, the disposition of the lines in the audience-room, and the thousand and one things which lie within their ken. The musical critics can speak knowingly of the laws of acoustics, of sound-waves, tonal nodes, resonators, sound reflectors, and pretend to throw off the veil whose outermost ends have only been touched by Chladni and Helmholz and Tyndall. The art critics—in these æsthetic days a great Committee of the Whole—can dissect the color scheme of the interior decoration and pronounce emphatically and at off-hand on the myriad of details on the tier-fronts, proscenium and ceiling. In fact, a great deal of wisdom on all these points has been expended already, and within fifteen minutes after the orchestra starts the hum of conversation next Monday it may be accepted that they will have been settled in two or three thousand minds at least.

Meanwhile a few will refrain from sitting in judgment until there is a meeting of the conditions which make sound judgment possible; until the pile is finished, the corridors are cleared and the façade stands out complete and free of scaffolds; until within the walls the whole scheme of ornamentation is carried out; until the audience-room is tested by a performance in the presence of a gayly dressed audience who will unconsciously play an extremely important part in the determination of the theatre's acoustic properties; until the gas-jets are fairly ablaze and the flood of yellow light has mellowed the ground tint into a rich ivory color and called out a roseate blush on the draperies of the boxes. For the present, a description to be fair ought only to be general; the settlement of details can bide the time when familiarity will have proved whether or not it will be restful and gratifying to the eye to go frequently to the new temple of music, whether or not the ear will receive its delights there without wearisome straining, and whether there is over all the structure the symmetry, the consistency and the correctness of style which lend repose and abiding beauty.

Several things make the new opera house an object of unusual interest. True to a national tendency, this has a bigger audience-room than any other opera house in the world, exceeding in dimensions the famous structures of Milan, Naples, Paris, London and Vienna. It covers a little over a city block and a quarter, filling to the edge of the sidewalks the plot of ground bounded by Broadway, Seventh-ave. and Thirty-ninth and Fortieth-sts. About one-quarter of this vast surface area is occupied by the audience-room; another quarter is devoted to the stage; and barring a small portion of the upper stories in the Broadway end of the structure all the rest of the space from cellar to roof is given up to the accessories, to vestibules, corridors, staircases, assembly-rooms, parlors, foyer, rigging-loft, artists' dressing-rooms, scene-rooms, green-rooms, band-rooms, property-rooms, draper-rooms, rehearsal-rooms, carpenter-shop, and offices for the management. A few bachelors' apartments will be put in the upper floors of the unfinished Broadway portion after all the requirements of the operatic season have been met. It is hoped that this portion of the building will be finished by New Year's Day. The audience on Monday will find incompleteness only outside the audience-room. Vestibules and corridors will be complete and the last touch will have been given to the theatre, but the foyer will not be finished, and brick walls will bar the way to the suite of assembly-rooms which will occupy the corner buildings.

SAFEGUARDS AGAINST FIRE.

After its size the Metropolitan Opera House is most interesting because of its fireproof character. Here the demonstration is already complete, and with the horrors of the Brooklyn Theatre fire and the holocaust of the Vienna Ring Theatre yet in lively remembrance, there will be no lack of appreciation of the surpassing excellence of this feature. For a long time it has been the crying shame of theatre-builders that occurrences like those of Brooklyn and Vienna have been possible. The indifference of the architects and the stubbornness with which they have clung to antiquated notions of construction in spite of the advance in science is nothing less than a cause for wonder and amazement. This was brought to public attention in Germany five years ago by the publication of a book on theatre fires written by one who deserves to have his name chronicled—August Folsch. In his remarkable little book Herr Folsch has catalogued 516 fires that ended with the entire destruction of theatres and opera houses; and 460 of them happened within the last 100 years. In London alone thirty theatres were destroyed between 1613 and 1878. But more interesting than Herr Folsch's figures was his discussion of building methods, from which it appeared that for 250 years there was practically no advance in the choice of material used in theatre-building. Wooden walls were pretty generally abolished in the seventeenth century after a series of destructive conflagrations, but the use of light timber, canvas and equally inflammable material in proscenium and stage continued without interruption down to the present time. The introduction of gas illumination with its resultant heat which bakes and chars the walls and balcony fronts until they become like tinder only waiting the touch of a spark to leap into flame, might have been expected to bring about an important modification in respect to this, but it did not, and Melpomene and Thalia continue to lure their devotees into the arms of a terrible Moloch. The recent catastrophe in Vienna caused a great commotion in Germany and Austria, and many scientific men applied themselves to a solution of the problem how to make a theatre fireproof. A flutter of excitement was caused here, too, by the burning of Mr. Abbey's Park Theatre, and the building law defeated by a committee of the last Legislature contained several wise provisions on this important subject.

There can be no doubt that the best teachings of the recent agitation are realized in the Metropolitan Opera House. J. Cleaveland Cady, the architect, has said that his plans insure greater safety than the regulations of the Imperial Opera House in Berlin, which were sent to him for study. He has built his house fireproof to all intents and purposes from the bottom up. There is not a stud partition in it; the floors are all of iron beams and brick arches, the masonry being finished and exposed in the corridors, passages and vestibules, but, for comfort, having a covering of wood in the audience-room. The roof is of iron and masonry, the outer covering of slate being secured to the masonry blocks that cover it. The iron roof-beams have over 100 feet span and are mounted on rollers to allow for contraction and expansion. The ceiling of the audience-room is of iron; the ornamental work of the proscenium, the tier balustrades and the frames of the partitions between the boxes are of metal; and the stage is supported by a complex iron system, containing 4,000 light pieces so adjusted that it can be removed in sections to permit changes in the stage above. It will thus be seen that inflammable material has been avoided in the construction of the building so far as possible. To add to the security of the house, moreover, apparatus for extinguishing a fire on the stage—where alone it can originate—has been introduced. A large skylight is weighted to fall open in case of fire; a great water-tank has been placed over the rigging-loft which has connected with it an extensive network of pipes with apertures stopped with extremely fusible solder, so that even a small fire would open the holes and call down a drenching shower from above.

APPEARANCE OF THE AUDIENCE-ROOM.

More interesting to the majority of persons who expect to witness the dedication of the new house on Monday to the purposes of musical art than these details is doubtless a description of the interior as it will unfold itself to their view. The unfinished Broadway corner will probably discourage a long look at the building. They will perhaps see that so much of the façade as is finished is severely and unostentatiously carried out in the style of the Italian Renaissance, and that terra-cotta panels with graceful dancing and singing figures relieve the monotony of the light-colored brick walls. Already here, however, they will catch the pervading color-tone of the opera house—a yellow which is to be mellowed into an ivory tint by the gaslight. If the pleasure-seekers are of that fortunate class that can afford to pay $1,200 a season for a box, to say nothing of the incidentals, and can look the possibility of assessment calmly in the face, they will probably drive under the light iron *porte cocheres* on the Thirty-ninth and Fortieth-st. sides of the building and enter the vestibules there, which are respectively seventy by thirty-three and fifty by thirty-three feet in size. Thence they will seek their boxes by private staircases. The less richly blessed portion of humanity will prefer the main entrance from Broadway, giving access to the principal staircase, which has a vestibule sixty feet long and thirty-five feet wide. Besides these three vestibules and their stairs, use can be made of four staircases leading only to the balcony and gallery which have separate entrances, in the side streets near Broadway. Musicians, artists, choristers and dancers have their own entrances, and there are so many doors opening into the theatre on its four sides that it is estimated that all the occupants of the building could easily leave it inside of three minutes. A few less than 600 persons will have chairs in the parquet; 750 will have chairs in the balcony, and 930 in the gallery. The rest of the 3,500 sittings of the house are in the boxes.

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THE SEATING ARRANGEMENTS AND VENTILATION.

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DIAGRAM OF BOXES IN THE PARTERRE.

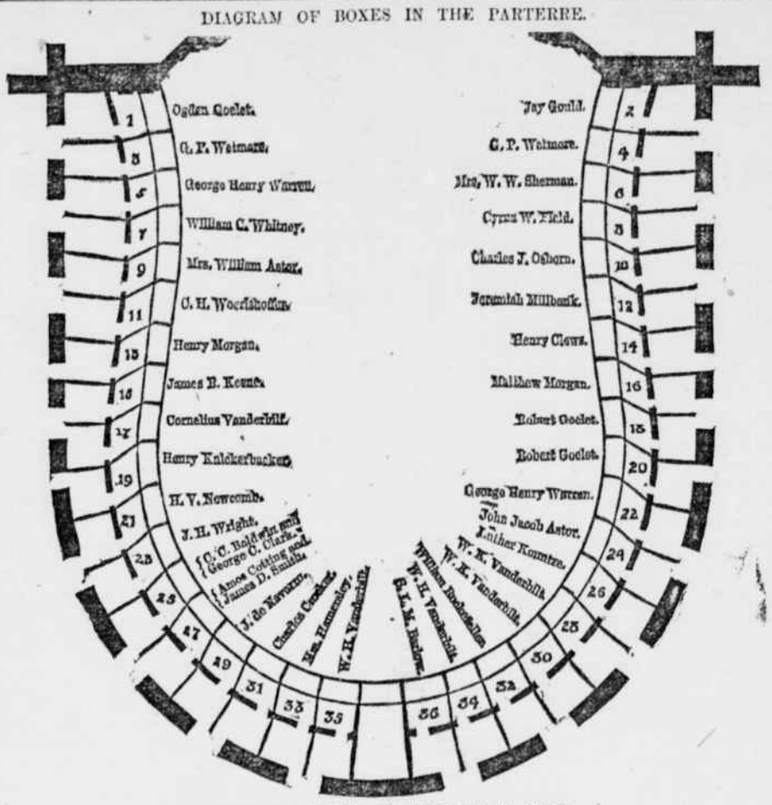
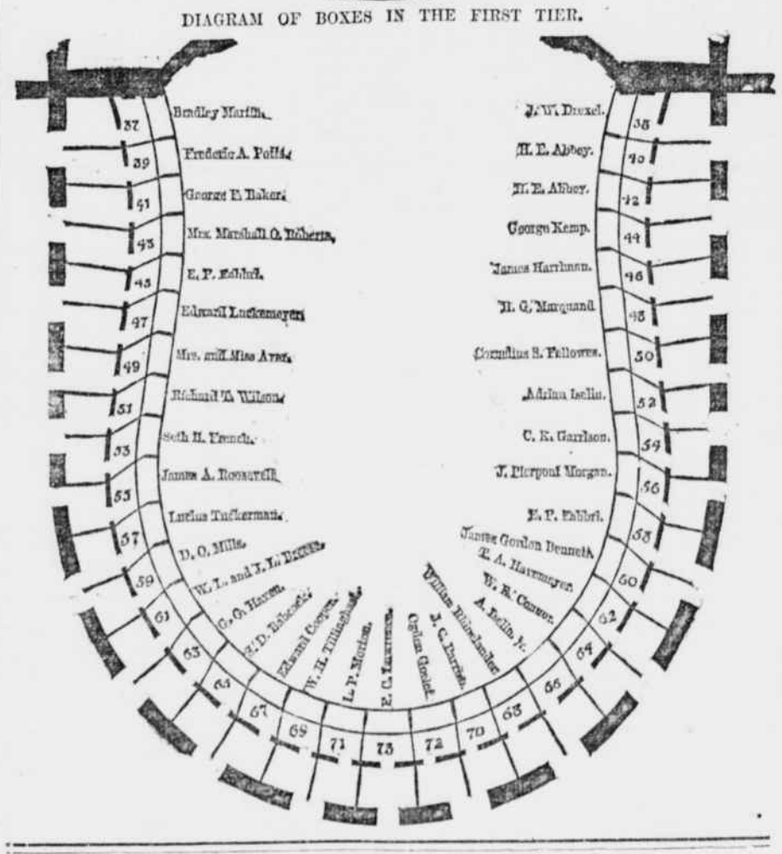


DIAGRAM OF BOXES IN THE FIRST TIER.



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SOCIETY AT THE OPERAS.

THE WAR OF THE HOUSES—WHO WILL OCCUPY THE BOXES.

The burden of society's talk during last week related to the opera season. Where to go is this year quite as troublesome a question as what to wear. The division for opening night was to a great extent made when the subscription lists were closed; but that was a solution of only a small part of the difficulty. After to-morrow night the season remains. It has been hinted that the rivalry of the managers might be followed by as energetic, though friendly, a rivalry among the box-holders, in which the social power of each audience would be exerted to the utmost to give prestige and success to its house. It would be strange if this should not turn out to be at least measurably true. Both houses have loyal supporters in the most influential and fashionable circles who will do all in their power to advance the interests of the management they are identified with. The movement for a new home for Italian opera was started by some gentlemen who were unable to get satisfactory boxes in the Academy of Music. George Henry Warren and George G. Haven were among the foremost in the new departure, and they carried a number of their friends with them. The majority of the Academy people stayed behind, however, though a few of the pillars in the old house have "hedged," so to speak, by leasing boxes in both houses, enabling them, at a considerable cost, to go to whichever place has the greater musical or social attraction. The Astor and Iselin families are examples of these. This fact seems to preclude any bitterness in the social rivalry, and also to prove that it would be far more acceptable to opera-goers and more profitable to the two houses if the companies sang on alternate nights instead of on the same nights, as they propose to do.

OCCUPANTS OF METROPOLITAN BOXES.

It is to make close guesses as to the persons who will be in the boxes at the two houses to-morrow night. There will be a dazzling show of fair faces and brilliant toilets at both places. The parterre and first tier at the Metropolitan might be called golden horseshoes, so immense is the wealth represented by the box-holders. A low estimate makes the total $459,000,000, or an average of over $6,000,000 to the box. To begin at the parterre. The Norseman having reached Newport, Mr. and Mrs. Ogden Goelet are pretty sure to be in box No. 1. Jay Gould and family will appear in No. 2, and it is probable that George Peabody Wetmore will be with Captain and Miss Wetmore and Miss Whiting in one of his boxes. Mr. and Mrs. Lorillard Spencer and Mrs. Berryman are likely to be guests of Mr. and Mrs. George Henry Warren. G. H. Warren, jr., and the Misses Warren will also be present. Mr. and Mrs. Buchanan Winthrop will be in Box No. 7. Cyrus W. and David Dudley Field and Mr. and Mrs. E. M. Field may be looked for in Cyrus W. Field's box. Mrs. William Astor will probably be at the Academy. Her box may be occupied by Mr. and Mrs. J. R. Roosevelt, her son-in-law and daughter. The Woerishoffer, Keene and Milbank boxes will be taken up by their owners. In No. 16 will probably be Mr. and Mrs. Matthew Morgan, Mr. and Mrs. Edward Morgan, Mr. and Mrs. Schenck, and Mrs. August Belmont, jr. Mr. and Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt will occupy their own box, No. 17, and are likely to have with them Mr. and Mrs. Ogden Mills. Mrs. Henry Morgan will have Mrs. Post and Mrs. Street with her.

In Henry Clews's box, besides himself and wife will be Attorney-General and Mrs. Benjamin H. Brewster, who will come on from Washington, and also Mrs. Paran Stevens and Harry Stevens. Miss Catherine Wolfe has taken Box No. 22, one of Mr. Warren's. Robert Goelet's boxes, it is surmised, may contain, besides himself and wife, Miss Grace Stebbins, Miss Merritt and Dr. Dawson. Mr. and Mrs. John Jacob Astor will probably occupy their box. Mr. and Mrs. W. K. Vanderbilt, Miss Smith, Mrs. Vanderbilt's sister, and a number of friends will be in Nos. 28 and 30. Mr. and Mrs. Elliott F. Shepard, Mr. and Mrs. H. McK. Twombly, and Dr. and Mrs. Webb may be expected in Mr. W. H. Vanderbilt's boxes, besides the owner and his wife. Edward Matthews and Robert G. Remsen have taken Box No. 36. It would not be strange to see J. V. Parker with C. C. Baldwin, or Mrs. Appleton and Mrs. Meagher in Mr. Barlow's box. Mr. and Mrs. George C. Clark and Mr. and Mrs. Louis Clark will probably be in No. 25. J. Cleveland King has taken No. 33.

So much for the parterre. Turning now to the first tier, one of the first boxes, Bradley Martin's, will be occupied by Townsend Martin and party, the owner being absent in Scotland. Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Drexel will be in box No. 35, and with them Chief Justice and Mrs. Charles P. Daly, General G. W. Cullum and Dr. Fordyce Barker.

Mrs. Marshall O. Roberts and the Misses Endicott will be in No. 43. In No. 41 will be Mr. and Mrs H. C. Fahnestock besides Mr. Baker. T. A. Havemeyer will probably entertain Mr. and Mrs. Oelrichs and Miss Oelrichs. Lucius Tuckerman will have Mr. and Mrs. Sedgwick. George W. Drexel and Mr. and Mrs. Walter Shillito will be in No. 38. Should President Arthur come to the city he will probably be in the box of Seth Barton French, though a separate box has been offered him. General and Mrs. Robert Potter will probably be with W. L. and J. L. Breese.

Mrs. and Mrs George Kemp will be in No. 44, and Mr. and Mrs. James Harriman with Mr. and Mrs. James Brown Potter in No. 46; the Marquands and Fellowseses being in Nos. 48 and 50. In the Iselin boxes will be Mr. and Mrs. Adrian Iselin, Mr. and Mrs Adrian Iselin, jr., Mr. and Mrs. Columbus Iselin, Miss Iselin, and possibly Colonel and Mrs. Delaucey Kane. J. Pierpont Morgan will occupy No. 56. Mr. Fabbri has rented No. 58. James Gordon Bennett will be absent from No. 60. In No. 68 will be Mr. and Mrs. William Rhinelander, the Misses Rhinelander, and T. J. Oakley Rhinelander. Box No. 45 has been taken by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Hoe; No. 47 by Mr. and Mrs. Del Monte. With Mr. and Mrs. James A. Roosevelt will be Mr. and Mrs. Emelen Roosevelt and Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Roosevelt. With Mr. and Mrs. G. G. Haven may be expected Miss Haven and Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Peabody. Mr. and Mrs. S. D. Babcock, Mr. and Mrs. Henry D. Babcock and Miss Babcock will be in No. 65. Edward Cooper's box, No 67, has been taken by Mr. and Mrs. W. H. Tillinghast, Mr. and Mrs. William Kingsland, and Mrs. E. O. Stanton. Mr. and Mrs. George Bliss and Mr. and Mrs. William Townsend will occupy No. 71. The Laurances will be absent on account of a recent bereavement.

Judge Ingraham, Mrs. Mary Mason Jones, Smith Clift, with the Misses Clift, will occupy baignoir boxes. In the second-tier boxes, among others, will be J. H. Rutter, Dr. W. A. Hammond, Austin Corbin, Mrs. H. E. Lawrence, Mrs. Van Santvoord, Alexander Kursheedt, Professor R. Ogden Doremus, the Portuguese Consul, William Steinway, Mr. Harriot and L. M. Bates. No. 105 will be occupied by Dr. and Mrs. Henry C. Eno, Mrs. William Phelps Eno, Mrs. Stanton and the Misses Lane.

Others who are expected to be present are Mr. and Mrs. John G. Heckosher, General Sickles, Henry M. Sands, L. D. Suydam, H. W. Webb, F. Edgerton Webb, Wright Sanford, Mrs. Turnbull, Mr. and Mrs. Edward Kemeys, Dr. James B. Gilbert and W. H. Hollister, Mr. and Mrs. F. Bronson, Mr. and Mrs. William Jay.

PEOPLE WHO WILL BE AT THE ACADEMY.

There will be plenty of people left to hear Gerster in "La Sonnambula," and among them many society leaders. The Lorillard and Travers families, with Mr. and Mrs. W. Duer, Mr. and Mrs. Kent, and Miss Bulkley, are expected to fill proscenium box A, and the Beekwiths box B. Mr. and Mrs. L. von Hoffman and the Count and Countess de Mores will be in box F, and Mr. and Mrs. W. B. Dinsmore and Mr. and Mrs. C. G. Dinsmore in box D. The proscenium boxes on the other side will be taken by Mr. and Mrs. C. G. Francklyn and Mrs. M. E. Cowles in K, Mrs. Mary M. Garner in L, and Mr. and Mrs. A. Belmont, Perry Belmont, O. H. P. Belmont and others in M. Mr. and Mrs. William Astor, if in town, and Miss Astor, Mrs. Penniman and Mr. and Mrs. J. Coleman Drayton will probably occupy box P, Mr. and Mrs. Israel Corse and the Misses Corse box O, and Mr. and Mrs. R. L. Cutting, jr., Mr. and Mrs. Brockholst Cutting, and Mr. and Mrs. Bayard Cutting box N. Other familiar faces will be those of Mr. and Mrs. John Hoey in box No. 1, Mrs. J. T. Gibert and the Misses Gibert in No. 2, Mrs. Draper in No. 9, A. L. Brown in No. 11, Judge and Mrs. Samuel Blatchford in No. 14, Thomas Paige in No. 15, probably some of the Havemeyers in No. 16, Mr. and Mrs. Edward Parsons in No. 19, Mrs. J. H. Mahony and Mrs. L. F. Post in No. 20, Mr. and Mrs. J. N. A. Griswold and Dr. and Mrs. Gaspar Griswold in No. 21, and Mrs. Caroline E. Johnson in No. 31.

Others expected to be in their accustomed places are Mr. and Mrs. C. R. Robert, Mr. and Mrs. H. A. Johnson, Ward McAllister, Miss McAllister, Arthur Leary, Miss Leary, the Misses Hewitt, Mr. and Mrs. Edward Matthews, General and Mrs. Alexander S. Webb, the Misses Webb, Creighton Webb, Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Turnure, Miss Turnure L. Turnure, jr., Mr. and Mrs. Charles Lanier, General G. A. Sheridan, Mr. and Mrs. F. B. Thurber, Herman R. LeRoy, Mr. and Mrs. Herman S. LeRoy, Mrs. E. A. LeRoy, Judge John R. Brady, Judge Shea, Judge Arnoux, J. H. Starin, ex-Postmaster-General and Mrs. James, Postmaster and Mrs. Pearson, William Belden, W. S. Gurnee, Royal Phelps, the Misses Carroll, Mr. and Mrs. Woodbury G. Langdon, Johnston Livingston, the Misses Livingston, Mr. and