

## DRURY LANE.

## THE RECONSTRUCTION.

The Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, has, by a wonderful scheme of reconstruction, been transformed from an old, ugly building into a new, elegant, comfortable and commodious theatre. The work of reconstruction is the more remarkable because, for doubtless good reasons, the exterior walls had to be left standing, and all the old rubbish and new material had to be taken out and brought in through existing doorways or holes cut through the walls. Further, the work of demolition and of reconstruction had to go on together, new internal walls and piers having to be built in places before it was safe to pull down in others. The job, therefore, was a difficult one for both architect and builder. How well they have each done their work is shown by the veritable "transformation scene" that has taken place within the walls of "Old Drury."

Unusual difficulties were encountered in carrying out the architect's designs. For one thing, every bit of the old work left standing had to be tested, and generally strengthened. Further, the condition or even the exact positions of these old pieces of structural work were not, in many cases, known. All sorts of curious conditions and even irregularities of construction were discovered during the work of demolition—relics of the old build-

ing of 1812 and of the various alterations the old edifice had undergone. One result was that the architects' plans had, in several cases, to be modified to meet these unforeseeable obstacles, and many minor feats of applied engineering had to be performed by the contractor. The bringing in of the steel girders to bridge the proscenium span, 88 ft. wide, themselves measuring 6 ft. deep and weighing hundreds of tons, and the moving back of the great steel safety curtain on the stage for the widening of the proscenium were triumphs of skill—performed, as they were, within the restricted area of the four square walls of the old building.

The former horseshoe shape of the auditorium has been replaced by a rectangular arena, thus allowing far more space for seating. The four old circles and gallery have been replaced by three new circles, and these have been extended inwards, so that they each hold twelve instead of six rows of seats. To provide this greater spacing, the galleries project, in some cases, for an extra 16 feet. The overhanging portions are constructed on the cantilever system, so that there are no pillars or any other obstructions to the view of the stage from any seat in the house. On the first tier there is a spacious apartment for Royalty, and there are twenty-one large, comfortable boxes. The well for the orchestra has been enlarged, in view of giving performances of grand opera. Another important alteration is the provision of commodious dressing rooms for the artists—a thing too often lacking in the old insanitary days of theatre construction. The stalls are now reached by a new short stairway, running direct from the main entrance hall; the pit is raised so as to overlook the whole ground floor.

An important feature of the scheme was the new roof, which has replaced the old one. It has been raised some 8 feet higher than the level of the old one; it will not obstruct the view of the last man in the topmost row of the highest gallery, and it will give greater air-space, and allow of more thorough ventilation. Behind the topmost seats in the upper gallery, a projection cabin has been built. It is the largest of its kind, having a floor area of 32 feet by 17 feet, and it houses twenty powerful lamps for flooding the stage with any kind of powerful or coloured light. The cabin, and indeed the whole roof, has been constructed of ferro-concrete, which material has entered largely into the formation of many of the structural features of the practically new building. The ventilation of the new "Old Drury" has been most thoroughly and scientifically carried out. Besides all the now usual means for exhausting the vitiated atmosphere of large, crowded buildings, there is installed the latest system of ventilation known. The fresh air admitted into the theatre will be not only filtered by passing through sanitary cotton-wool, but also by being forced through a spray of water which, also, can be blended with disinfecting liquids.

Exteriorly the theatre has been redecorated, the old walls, columns, and piers made good, and distempered and painted in pleasing colours. Internally the house has been decorated and upholstered in the latest styles of theatre art ornamentation.

It is probable that sentiment prevented the demolition of the outer walls, and though the cost of rebuilding was great—over £100,000—it was doubtless worth it, for the maintenance of the old traditions and associations connected with London's oldest theatre.