

Kean's Love Letters Tittilate Public



Mary Evans Picture Library

Edmund Kean as Othello

Kean threatens to give up acting

1825: Just days after his scandalous court appearance Kean returned to Drury Lane with a performance of "Richard III". Rival factions, pro and anti Kean, disrupted the entire performance. Four days later Kean was back with an "Othello", and this time the disturbance was overwhelming, with fruit and vegetables pelted at him. The play was stopped by Kean who then told the audience he refused to be judged for his private life. They must judge him for his acting, he said, and if they found him wanting in this respect then he would immediately retire from the stage. There were cries of "No, No! Kean forever!", and the rioters dispersed and left the theatre. Kean remained at Drury Lane for the remainder of the season and then began a highly successful provincial tour. He has announced that he will next undertake his second tour of America.

1825 : Edmund Kean's passionate love letters to Charlotte Cox were read out in court as part of the case against him. He is accused of the "criminal conversion" of the wife of Alderman Cox. The letters drew laughter in court and ridicule in the Press. Until now Kean has been adored by the theatregoing public who see him as the country's finest actor. At the same time he has been loathed by much of the theatrical profession who see him as a conceited, drunken and unreliable performer. The scandal of the court case, in which Kean was found guilty and fined, may well change the public's attitude.

Kean, who is 38 years old, has been the country's leading actor since his spectacular success as Shylock at Drury Lane eleven years ago. His performances are frequently wild, passionate and frenzied, and his personal behaviour is said to be uncouth and untameable. His drunkenness is legendary and his wife, Mary, has long been estranged from him. Yet he is in great demand in polite society, and has insisted that his son, Charles, be educated at Eton. His success in British theatre is unparalleled. The poet Samuel Coleridge has compared seeing Kean act to "reading Shakespeare by flashes of lightning". He had equal success in New York a few years ago and was lionised as the greatest actor ever seen in the USA. However, on that same tour he was forced to flee the city of Boston in disguise after he insulted the audience and was threatened with a lynch mob.

The Eagle is a new kind of "Music Hall"

1825 : Former tea-rooms in Shepherdess Walk, City Road have been turned into a "music hall" - a place where entertainers provide songs, dances and comedy while the audience eat and drink. There is no charge for admission, only for the food and the liquid refreshments. The enormous popularity of this new kind of establishment suggests similar venues will open around London in the very near future.

Long Run and Hit Song for Madame Vestris

1825 : The Haymarket has achieved a 114 performance run with "Paul Pry", a comedy by John Poole. The star of the show is the 28 year old actress-singer, Madame Vestris, who sings a song called "Cherry Ripe" to enormous cheers. She is now the most popular performer in the London theatre.