

# EFFIE ELLSLER'S BIRTHDAY

FEW of the present day theatregoers remember Effie Ellsler, "the oldest living actress in the world." Of course there is Effie Ellsler, not unknown to fame in this generation, but then she who was better known a good many years ago than she is now, is a daughter of THE Effie Ellsler who on Nov. 20 celebrated her ninety-first birthday over at her home in Nutley, N. J.

Maybe if "Hazel Kirke" had not been written Effie Ellsler, the mother, that is, would occupy a much more permanent place in the minds of theatregoers than she does. Her success in that rôle in that play of mawkish sentimentality was so great that it overshadowed everything else she had ever done. After playing it continuously for three years her physician commanded her to retire from the stage.

"Hazel Kirke" was played at the old Madison Square Theatre and, contributing to its success, was a double stage and a cooling plant, which were marvels in their day. If the machinery had only got out of order or the cooling plant refused to do its work, perhaps "Hazel Kirke," with its relentless miller, would have gone the way of some of the Broadway plays of this season and Effie Ellsler would have been saved to attain the heights to which she aimed.

At the birthday celebration in Nutley last week a few old-time actors and actresses gathered to do honor to Mrs. Ellsler. But there were few indeed who could go back in their own experiences further than her latter days. For Mrs. Ellsler played with Junius Brutus Booth and with Edwin and John Wilkes Booth right at the start of their

careers, and she made trips to Philadelphia, and to Pittsburgh by canalboat to appear on the stages of those cities, to the great delight of ante-bellum audiences.

Mrs. Ellsler, whose husband, John A. Ellsler, dead these many years, was associated in acting and management with Joseph Jefferson, quit the stage in 1873. It was when she was nine months old that she made her first appearance before an audience, being "carried on" in the arms of a nurse.

Effie Ellsler was bred in the atmosphere of the playhouse, and in her childhood the air she breathed was the air of the theatre and her hopes and ambitions were bounded by "wood wings" and back drops. When she was three years old she had a speaking part, that of the Genius of the Ring in "Aladdin." A little later she was hailed as a child prodigy for her performance of Eva in "Uncle Tom's Cabin," long before the civil war. The next few years she was sent to school in a convent, at the same time being prepared for a career as a première danseuse. At 15 she left school and joined the stock company conducted by her father out in Cleveland, and at 16 she had played Juliet and Rosalind to the complete satisfaction of the capricious critics of those days.

Then came her long career with the leading actors of the time and her career is really the career of the theatre of that day. No other actress ever seemed more destined to go down into history as America's foremost star than she; but as "Hazel Kirke" was written with the melodramatic curses of the melodramatic old miller, some one invented the double stage and the cooling plant and Effie Ellsler will always be remembered by those who remember her at all as Hazel Kirke.