CIRCUS OF VARIETIES.

Application for Theatrical Licence.

At an adjourned meeting of the Cambs. County Council, held at the Shire Hall, Cambridge, on (Thursday), afternoon, the application of Mr Y. Vinter for a licence for the use of premises for the public performance of stage plays at the Circus of Varieties, in Jackson-road, was considered.

The Theatres Committee reported that the application came before them at a meeting on the 20th ult., when it was agreed on both sides that the circumstances on which the refusal were based on the following application of last year to that occasion the committee recommended the granting of a licence, upon the following terms and conditions:

"That before making the proposed alteration should be submitted to the committee for approval, and that all necessary steps be taken to light the auditorium by the electric light, and that no lights be introduced anywhere in the building. (2) That the other conditions now imposed by the committee be in no way relaxed, but leave a vacant space all round the building. (3) That the proscenium should be provided with a fire curtain at places to be approved by the committee. (4) That Mr Vinter should enter into a bond in the sum of £500 with two sureties in £250 each. (Signed) Thomas Allen, William Ivy, esqs. pp. 36.) The observance of the following rules as to seating &c. (1) The licensee (2) The payment to the county treasurer of £6 during the time the licence is in force, and (3) That the licence be extended. (4) The execution by the said Thomas Addison, and Mr Vinter of a bond in the sum of £500 with two sureties in £250 each for the observance by the licensee of the rules and regulations made by the Council. But the Council, on the 30th day of March, in the 36th year of 1910, did not adopt the recommendation of the committee, but refused to renew the licence for the reasons that the circumstances the committee submit the licensing of the premises to the Council for the year 1911 were the same as those on the occasion he was upon the previous occasion the decision of the council last year; but do not propose to renew the licence for the reasons set out in the license applied for by Mr Addison.

Mr Thomas Addison (alderman H. G. Ford-ham) presided while the application was being considered. He called on both sides to state cases for the applicant, and any evidence proposed to be submitted, and to cross-examine and the application on the other side. The Vice-Chairman ruled that the members of the Council were disqualified on the premises or in the business carried on there, he was disqualified from acting in the matter.

Mr Ashkam (of the firm solicitor (Mr Armstrong, of London), were then called in.

Mr Ashkam: We also retained the Council Chamber, intimated that he appeared for the proprietors of the Circus, who were the late Mr K. Allen (river of St. Andrew the Less parish), Mr Ben Bennett (Methodist minister at Newmarket-road Tabernacle), the Rev J. Jull (Baptist minister at Eden-street Chapel), Mr W. K. Vawser (Mayor of Cambridge), and many other prayers and owners of property in the district of Newmarket-road.

Mr Armstrong, in his opening address to the Bench, said the application was the same as that contended Mr Redfern, of the New Theatre, Cambridge. He understood that Mr Redfern was going to sit while the application was being considered. Mr Redfern: I have no intention to be any thing but a pure listener. On the last occasion I took no part.

The Vice-Chairman said it was not clear that Mr Redfern had a pecuniary interest in the matter.

Mr Armstrong: It is to Mr Redfern's interest to keep his theatre open. (Laughter.)

Mr Redfern: Not as all; not at all.

Mr Armstrong: I am sorry he has declined to rule that Mr Redfern was entitled to act. He did not know whether he would act.

Mr Redfern: I am certainly not.

Mr Armstrong, proceeding, referred to the reasons for the refusal of the licence last application. Since the previous application Mr Askham had now been three years at this place, and he suggested that there was a public want for entertainment in the building, and that although the people living in the vicinity were of a poor class, the reason why they did not patronise it was enabled to have dramatic fare at a much lower price. He did not wish to have to pay at Mr Redfern's Theatre, which, he was instructed, was much too far from Newmarket-road. The objection mentioned that on the occasion of the last application it was opposed by Mr. Walker, a proctor, and the objection on the present occasion to the Council were pleased to grant this licence, a condition would be made on the premises. He was instructed that the sister town of Oxford had two theatres, and that formerly they were much closer to the place where his client's premises were situated. The Oxford Road has been turned into a mission hall, and one of the opponents to the present application was in the habit of giving entertainments there. He submitted that this objection was opposition was not reasonable. "He is only a pure waste." Mr Askham stated that a large number of people asked for the licence, and that he would give an undertaking not to apply for a music and dancing licence. He would not do so unless. Every undertaking given by Mr Askham would be carried out to the satisfaction of the Council. He submitted that the opposition by one of the opponents was not a proper one.

The applicant, Thomas Askham, of Newmarket-road, was called. He said he was the proprietor of the Circus of Varieties," which was licensed for which had been in existence about seven years. He had applied for a licence for stage plays and dancing only. That had been renewed every year with the exception of last year. He applied for the alterations required by the committee of the Council, and had applied for the performance of stage plays. The plans for the alterations had been approved by the committee, subject to him getting a licence. He was now giving sketches and 'bioscope shows at the Circus. The sketches united the public with applause.

Alderman H. G. Fordham: Do you give those shows without a music licence?

Mr. Askham: Yes, and I was summoned for it. But the case was ruled I am applying for a licence.

Mr Armstrong: And being a law-abiding citizen, you don't want to do anything against the law?

Mr. Askham: My sole object is to avoid doing anything against the law. Besides, the expenses are so great.

Replying to further questions, the applicant said he was asking for the licence for the premises at present in favour of the licence signed by 900 persons.

Mr. Vinter pointed out that the petition was another kind, and contended that it was not relevant to the present inquiry.

Mr. Wright (the Deputy Clerk) produced the petition.

Applicant, continuing, said since the last application he had spent many hundreds—especially on my men—had spoken to him as to the security for the licence being given. He thought the Circus catered for a different class from the Theatre Royal. (Laughter.)

Mr. W. B. Redfern: May I make a correction? It is not the Theatre Royal. It is a touring company, of which I am managing director.

Applicant said he was not aware there was another theatre, earned on, he thought, by Mr. Vawser, or one of his opponents.

Mr. Armstrong: Do they give entertainments there?

Mr. Askham: Oh, tea fights, bun fights, and magic lantern—laughter—and there are some tipsy Jacks and Jills dancing.

Do they take money at the doors?—Well, they have a collection at the end.

Do they give the entertainment for nothing?—I believe they do have a collection, but I never go one thing. I am told by the police——

The Chairman: I don't think we can have that.

Mr. Armstrong: No. Mr. Askham we cannot have that. Do you of your own knowledge know that an entertainment carried on at Mr. Vawser there are entertainments for which people pay money?—I could not say that.

Applicant further said his circus would hold 2,000 people. He obtained the license he would be able to get good companies to appear. He had no intention of applying for a music and dancing licence, and would give a written undertaking not to do any of it required.

Mr. Vinter, in cross-examination, asked applicant to explain the terms upon which he would get companies to perform at the Circus.

Mr. Papworth raised the question of whether this was material.

The Vice-Chairman thought it was material.

Applicant, replying to the question, said he would get the best sharing terms he could with the best companies, who would not get a share of the gross takings. No drink had been given away at the Circus since the performances.

Mr. Vinter handed applicant a small handbill relative to the Circus.

Applicant said he would swear he had never seen it before.

Mr. Armstrong objected to the paper being put in, since it had been proved, and the objection was upheld.

Frederick William Goodey, railway clerk, Albert-street, Fitzroy-street, said he was in support of the application. He said he had been resident in Cambridge for a good many years, and had been in his present house several months. He thought the Circus was a good thing for the working population of the district, and would be beneficial in quieting the young people. He thought the entertainments would be well supported, and he thought Mr. Askham would carry on the place well.

Mr. Armstrong: Do you live there in a sufficient part of the district for a theatrical licence at that place? Witness: Yes, I think.

Mr. Vinter: You are interested in plays and theatres?

Witness: Yes.

Do you frequently go?—Yes.

You know the Theatre Royal in Cambridge?—Yes.

Do you ever go there?—No. I have never been.

Why do you not go there?—You have no objection to the Theatre Royal?—No, I have not.

Councillor Hudson: Why do you say it would make a good place for the working classes?

Witness: It would keep a lot of people out of the street.

Henry Gurney, of the Salmon public-house, Newmarket-road, said he had been in the habit of going to the Circus, and considered it was a very much better seeing a dramatic play. The New Theatre was too far away, and it would suit him better to go to Mr. Askham's place.

Mr. Vinter: I say you like to see a good play?

Witness: Yes, I do.

Councillor Hudson: Well a good play, like there is in other towns. I have been several times to Mr. Redfern's, and could not get in. I had to go to Oxford to see it. That was the reason being squeezed to death. (Laughter.)

The Rev. Ben Bennett said he was for opposition to the application. He alluded to the "shocking" state of affairs caused by the applicant, and he supposed it worked out in this way: that under the Circus he provided a good house. He supposed he engaged would have a poor chance of getting anything at all. He was going to charge cheap prices, and would engage the cheap class companies which the applicant said he expected to get would not come down. He knew his community would come. That brought him to one of the objections which led to the close of plays produced would not be such as would be likely to be for the benefit of the inhabitants or interest them. There was a good theatre in the centre of the town, where high class plays and operas were produced. Those might be called "legitimate" plays. Summed up, his objections were: (1) That the Circus, if licensed for the purpose, would not be such as would be instructive to the working classes, and (2) that the licence would tend to elevate the moral welfare of the district; (3) that a theatre was not wanted, there being quite sufficient theatres in the town already; and (4) that, considering the position of the building, it was unsuitable for the purpose, and