

"THE TAMING OF THE SHREW"

Questors' First Shakespearean Show

It is difficult to decide which aspect of the Questors' production of "The Taming of the Shrew" at their theatre on Friday and Saturday last is deserving of the most praise. Whether it be the enterprise of the society in staging a play by our national dramatist, or the innumerable delicious touches contributed by the costume designer, Audrey Perkins, who combined a splendid sense of colour with a keen sense of humour and an authentic suggestion of the period; the simple, dignified setting, designed by Mr. Alfred Emmet, which, while never obtrusive, always contrived to add point to the spectacle presented on the stage; the skill of Mr. Emmet's production, which consisted in driving his team at a fine pace throughout, but never so fast as to lose that close control which is so necessary if the major pitfalls of Shakespearean production are to be avoided; or the undoubted ability and enthusiasm of the actors, their easy transition into an unaccustomed idiom, their evident sense of character and their success in creating an atmosphere of typical Elizabethan heartiness. Success in any one of these aspects in a normal amateur production would atone for failure in the others; success in every aspect, as was the case with the Questors, deserves only the highest praise.

As Mr. Emmet truly said in a programme note, "The Taming of the Shrew" is not Shakespeare at his best. It has none of the exquisite imagery or the masterly character drawing of his greatest work, but it has the great merit, from the modern point of view, of abounding vitality and rapidity of action. It calls for no particularly subtle acting and it has no long soliloquy, in which the earlier dramatists made known to their audiences the turmoil of conflicting thoughts and emotions in the minds of their principal characters, and which amateur actors find so difficult of interpretation. It relies for its success upon vigorous action all the time, and a spirited unravelling of its farcically ingenious plot. It is, therefore, an admirable choice for a society with high ambitions and a sufficient membership of capable and experienced actors.

Mr. Cyril Thomas brought a magnificent roystering swagger to the part of Petruchio, sweeping through his more violent scenes with a gusto that carried everything before it, yet somehow contriving to point the raging torrent of his words with a nicely appropriate gesture. Once or twice the torrent was in danger of becoming a flood, and the individual words lost in a welter of noise, but speed and noise were of the essence of his part, and such momentary lapses were readily forgiven. Bar-

bara Sharp was not quite able to match him in violence and tempestuousness as Katherine, the Shrew; perhaps the softer timbre of a feminine voice was the main reason for this, though she acted with plenty of spirit. But we were left wondering sometimes if Petruchio wasn't carrying things a bit too far; rumour had lied, we felt, in describing his bride as so fearsome a virago—a nasty temper certainly, but really quite a nice girl—and before the end she had all our sympathies. The process of taming, that is, lost some of its point, because the Shrew was half-tamed before it began. Winifred Giles, as Bianca, was in splendid contrast to her sister. Here was sweetness and simplicity, gentleness and charm enough to justify such an army of suitors. There was more music in her voice and more learning in her ways than either of her tutors could teach her, and her acting had an easy grace that was quite delightful. Christopher Spurrier made Lucentio an amusing top, but we could have wished that his fine flowing gestures and artfully-studied poses (all of which were perfectly timed and faultlessly executed) had been just a little more sparingly used. Leonard Hackett threw himself wholeheartedly into the fun as Tranio, his servant, carrying off the impersonation with the ease of one to the manner born, capturing many of his master's foppish mannerisms, and using the rapier of his wit with admirable dexterity. Dudley Clark's characterisation of Gremio, while always amusing, was not always consistent; at times he spoke and moved like a man of 45, while at others his apparent age could not have been less than 90! Clifford Foreman, as his rival in amorous intrigue, Hortensio, protested his love with an excellent suggestion of mock sincerity, and the two of them extracted the maximum of fun out of their scenes together. Eric Nibbs gave a pleasantly restrained portrait of Baptista, in which the dignity that becomes a wealthy merchant and the father of two lovely daughters was blended with a secret enjoyment of the situation which his declared intention to see Katherine married first produced.

Of a host of smaller parts, all excellently filled, the strutting impudence of Betty Mercy's Biondello, an amusing sketch of the lugubrious lackey, Grumio, by Arthur Peters, and two excellent character studies in miniature of Christopher Sly and Vincentio, by John Ruck, deserve special praise.

The action of the play was immeasurably expedited by the construction of a fore stage, which also added to the Elizabethan atmosphere of the production, and by the judicious use of banks of drawn curtains which enabled the many different scenes to follow rapidly on one another without the usual irksome intervals.

P.B.W.

QUESTORS IN "TAMING OF SHREW"

FIRST VENTURE IN SHAKESPEARE VIGOROUS ACTING

"Taming of the Shrew," which the Questors produced in their theatre on Friday and Saturday evenings, provided good and lively entertainment, and since the aim of the players was to make the play live as a vigorous comedy they may be said to have succeeded in their quest. They did not undertake to present the play as a text book.

Mr. A. E. J. Emmet made this quite plain in some notes in the programme and the only fear the reading of them kindled in my mind was that aiming neither to present the play in pure Elizabethan manner nor in the manner of present day theatrical convention, the Questors might fall between two stools. They were never in danger of being in that predicament. It was their first Shakespearean venture.

The permanent setting "based in some measure on the Elizabethan stage, essentially simple, but taking advantage of modern lighting facilities," had much to commend it.

On the positive side, too, the brisk and lively tempo at which the action was maintained could not fail to give life and vigour and, almost without exception, the players acted their parts with the spirit and qualities required of them. They did not allow the lines themselves to be the predominant consideration, but I would have preferred a happy mean between this and the rendering of Shakespeare at a play-reading. I could not help feeling that while the Questors captured the atmosphere and the spirit of the play they did so at the cost of sacrificing some of the lines, particularly when the production was at its liveliest.

LUCENTIO AND TRANIO

John Ruck had again the opportunity of some good work as Christopher Sly, the drunken tinker, in the induction and earlier action, and the only criticism I have of him is that when much later in the play he appeared as Vincentio he did not produce a voice that did not immediately remind us he had played another part earlier in the evening. Christopher Spurrier's Lucentio and Leonard Hackett's Tranio matched up admirably, and both of these parts were

played with discernment and the former with excellent poise. Eric Nibbs' Baptista Minola showed a fitting dignity. Barbara Sharp was presented with a splendid opportunity as Katherine and seized it; she made the shrewishness of Minola's daughter a feature in which it was possible to believe because it was part of a whole performance keyed up to that note. It was for this reason also that Cyril Thomas, as Petruchio, carried the part with the success he did; he pitched it in a major key from the beginning and from that moment it never fell flat, a grand performance. The scenes between Katherine and Petruchio were a delight. Winifred Giles, as the younger daughter of Minola, brought a sweeter air to the part of Bianca, but did not allow the role to melt away in sentimentality and coyness. She also showed a good sense of character. Arthur Peters played up to Petruchio as Grumio, his lackey, and, in fact, the team work of the Questors again shone brilliantly. Dudley Clark and Clifford Foreman gave widely different interpretations of the suitors to Bianco and both deserve to be commended. Marjorie Lees gave a bright performance as Bartholomew, the page in the scene in which the drunken Sly is fooled, and Betty Mercy showed the same quality as Biondello, Lucentio's servant.

Others in the cast were Agnes Copnall, Fred Greenfield, John Heron, Judy Banbury, Phyllis Hutchings, Keith Hall, John Bailly and Laurie Rivers, all of whom in various parts showed ability.

A GIFTED PRODUCER

Alfred Emmet produced and again showed the value of the part he is playing in the amateur dramatic movement.

R.C.W.

AN EALING OPEN AIR THEATRE?

Questors' Plans for Al Fresco Shakespeare

Ealing, like Regent's Park, may have its own open-air theatre next summer.

The Questors, probably the most enterprising of the local dramatic societies, are to make their first venture into Shakespeare in May, when "The Taming of the Shrew" will be given at their own theatre in Mattock-lane.

It is of this play that they hope to arrange open-air performances.

The Questors are carrying out improvements to their theatre. Special attention is being devoted to the stage lighting in order to remove the slight imperfections that were revealed last season.

This work, like the original fitting of the theatre, is being done by the Questors' own members.