

## THE QUESTORS IN "CANDIDA"

Edwardian Atmosphere  
Recaptured

### GOOD ACTING

The production of Bernard Shaw's "Candida" by the Questors in their theatre in Mattock-lane, Ealing, last Friday and Saturday evenings brought the society's two-year historical programme very nearly up to date, the comedy being up to date inasmuch as its author is still living, but historical inasmuch as it was written in 1894-5, and was first produced at the Strand Theatre, London, in 1904, and presents life as it was then lived. The play was "dressed" in the Edwardian period, and, what was far more essential, the production captured not only the spirit of its time, but also the "something" about that spirit which, because it is a great play, "Candida" makes undateable and enduring.

One word sums up the production, and that word is "excellent." Nor is it loosely applied, for everything that required to be understood was understood, and, moreover, that understanding was passed over from the stage to the audience. "West End" is an adjective which meant to imply a high standard, and certainly the Questors' production, for which Miss Rosalie Van Der Gucht was responsible, equalled at moments any professional West End interpretation. Sincerity was its keynote, but sincerity in this case was backed up by technical knowledge of how to express to others the feelings felt by each individual player.

#### THE PRINCIPAL TRIO.

It took, perhaps, a little while to get completely under the skin of the Candida which Miss Winifred Giles created and presented, but it was worth the time and effort because it turned out to be a very human, understanding and understandable creature, a blend of womanly tenderness and intuition, manly frankness and common sense. Hers, one felt especially in certain passages, was the sort of psychological Candida Shaw must have had in mind, depending upon a deep calmness of mind and conviction that everyday happenings could stir to action only in order that they might be smoothed out, but which could never be ruffled into nervy recrimination. Miss Giles worked up splendidly to each climax in the play, but worked up without losing the essential calm strength of Candida's character.

Mr. T. S. Saunders as her clerical husband, and Mr. Alfred Emmet as her enthusiastic young poet-lover, made admirable foils for each other, each showing his true love for her in the way a man of his mental make-up would, and both having in them—unknown to themselves but clear as a star to Candida—a strong streak of the youthful adolescent. Her husband's deep and abiding affection for his wife was a little starched, goffered and restricted by college ties and a clerical collar, but it rang true and was vulnerable to jealousy's darts, once such a possibility had been opened to his view. The other, with his ardent poet-nature and wild impetuosity mingled with self-conceit and humility, loved no less truly, and gave proof of it by going away quietly out of Candida's life.

Mr. Emmet has played many parts in his time, but his acting as Eugene Marchbanks, the young poet, must take high rank among them. It was a compelling piece of work, intimate and sensitive, and the part was played with the utmost conviction and sincerity. The production owed a great deal to him.

#### THREE LESSER LIGHTS.

While all the things which matter in this play lie in the keeping of the trio of players just mentioned, and were in safe keeping, no performance which cast the three subsidiary parts carelessly could merit the adjective "excellent." Mr. Philip Allen gave a thoroughly human portrait (as drawn by Shaw) of the character of Mr. Burgess, Candida's father, with his mixture of cringing and push. He never overdid his part, yet created the impression it was meant to do. Mr. Lister Beck was just the rather milk and watery curate prevalent in those times, and Miss Peggy Cooper certainly gave definition and accent to her study of Miss Proserpine Garnet, the vicar's self-assertive typist, but she was a little aggressive at times even for so independent a creature just exercising her rights in the labour market. A little lighter touch might have been all to the better.

The setting, designed by Mr. Dudley Clark for the vicar's drawing-room at St. Dominic's, was effective, and set the right Edwardian note. Miss Giles herself and Mrs. Mildred Emmet designed and executed the women's dresses, and Miss Helen Macdonnell as stage manager, and Mr. David Willmot as lighting manager, did their jobs well.

An interesting discussion on the production was held on Monday evening.

C.C.

## THE AMATEUR THEATRE

# THE QUESTORS IN "CANDIDA": MOST DIFFICULT PLAY

By Peter Quince

The West  
Middlesex Gazette  
19 March 1938

The Questors: "Candida," by  
Bernard Shaw: The Questors  
Theatre, Ealing: Saturday, March 12,  
1938.

"And when I feel, fair creature of an  
hour!

That I shall never look upon thee  
more,

Never have relish in the fairy power  
Of unreflecting love—then on the  
shore

"Of the wide world I stand alone,  
and think

Till love and fame to nothingness  
do sink."

IT is on these lines from John Keat's  
lovely ode on "The Terror of  
Death"—recited with dramatic effect  
to open the third act—that Mr. Shaw  
has built the facade of what many  
critics adjudge to be his second best  
play.

Just as the play, "Candida," is sur-  
passed only by the superb structure of  
the play, "St. Joan," so is the character  
of Candida a good second in dramatic  
intensity and womanly knowledge and  
guile to that of St. Joan—and Candida,  
because she is a woman of our era, is,  
perhaps, better appreciated, and her  
feminine skill more finely pointed, than  
Jeanne d'Arc, heroine of France.

"Candida" is a sincere story of the  
passions of human jealousies, and of  
man's eternal weakness compared with  
the strength of frail womanhood. The  
plot is more psychological than active;  
its truth is undoubted; its strength,  
gigantic.

This was by far the most difficult  
play The Questors have tried in their  
Two Year Plan of the history of drama.  
What have we had so far?

There has been the Ancient Grecian  
comedy, "The Birds," by Aristophanes,  
a phantasy founded on human truths;  
the picturesque German version of  
"Everyman" and the miracle drama  
"The Shepherd Play" (from the Wake-  
field cycle); a long jump over the ages  
to Coleman's "Jealous Wife," remnant  
of England's artificial comedy; "Dandy  
Dick," the mid-Victorian farce; and  
now "Candida." The plays have to be  
remembered in their due succession if  
The Questors *modus operandi* is to be  
appreciated.

And now is the very difficult task of  
adjudging a balanced criticism of their  
last production. From what the audi-  
ence thought of "Candida" it would be  
easy to pen a shrill paean of praise,  
which—in comparison with the produc-  
tions of other societies—would be  
worthy.

But I am satisfied that The Questors  
(unlike the majority of other local  
societies) do not want such praise.  
That their production and acting may  
have faults—if only minor ones—they  
will readily admit. Of this I am sure  
—I who have so often been accused (as  
though it were something of which to  
be ashamed) of being a Questors' fan!

FIRST as to the production. The  
Questors dressed "Candida" in  
the style of 1900, the year the play had  
its first production. In this I think  
they did well. Though it would have  
been easier to have had the settings  
and costumes of 1938—without losing  
much of the effectiveness of the play—  
we have to remember that The  
Questors presented "Candida" as a  
history piece, as a part of their Two  
Year Plan.



"Candida" needed the 1900 atmosphere. The Questors had every detail of that atmosphere perfect. Even the typewriter and newspapers were in conformity.

The highest praise is bestowed upon Miss Winifred Giles and Mrs. Mildred Emmet, who designed and executed the women's costumes. They were excellent, and the graceful picture afforded by Miss Giles on her first appearance—with her muff and petite round hat, trailing skirt and flushed cheeks—is among The Questors' major achievements.

What of the acting? Never has this society—at least during its historical project—had to play characters of such depth and human sincerity as Candida, the Rev. James Mavor Morell, and Eugene Marchbanks.

Around this trio is bound all the dramatic intensity of the play, and to give pointed utterance and achievement to every line and motion of the three parts—which is needed to build up the whole conception of Mr. Shaw's purpose—three absolutely first-rate players are wanted.

The question is, had The Questors such talent? Had they three players, who by their fitting into each other, and yet retaining their individual personalities, could give just more than an ordinary presentation of such dynamic people?

After considering this important question—on which the success of "Candida" stands or falls—and realising as I do the most difficult task The Questors had, I say with all honesty and vehemence that these three parts were played with vigorous success.

Trite words, indeed, to describe the strength of Mr. Saunders Morell, Mr. Emmet's poetical Marchbanks, and Miss Giles' winsome, understanding Candida!

The only criticism I have to make is that Miss Giles did not look old enough for Candida. She presented, in outward appearance, the bloom of seventeen. But in giving expression to Candida's personality, her womanly understanding, the flashes of her anger, the charm of the character, Miss Giles delved deep into the soul of Candida.

Skilful make-up might, perhaps, have added a few years to Miss Giles' looks, and have given just that final touch to have made perfect her part. This however, is but a mere pin-prick of criticism. It does not detract from the worth of the performance.

Strong, silent, passionate, humanly weak. This is the character of the Rev. J. M. Morell (Vicar of St. Dominics, Hackney), Christian and Socialist. Mr. T. S. Saunders played the part with that virility and strength of purpose with which he invests all his roles.

His diction was smooth and excellent; his mannerisms copious, well illustrative, and natural. Best moment of all came late in the third act—when Morell thinks that his wife Candida is about to give him up. Mr. Saunders acted that moment with dignity and temperance.

Mr. Alfred Emmet gave to the part of the young poet, Eugene Marchbanks, an almost hysterical, lyrical intensity. As Shakespeare's poet, his eye was in a fine frenzy rolling, and for the calf love of Eugene for the mature Candida, Mr. Emmet gave it nobleness of intent.

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**W**E felt, with Mr. Emmet, that if Eugene did not have Candida, then he would never relish again the fairy power of unreflecting love—and yet, when Candida had made her choice, and Eugene knew that he, an emotional poet, was stronger than the strong Rev. J. M. Morell, Mr. Emmet gave us that feeling that he had transcended the blisses of earthly love, and was soaring the clouds of glory by himself.

Mr. Emmet has acted many parts of different calibres. I do not think that he has given a finer, more studied, deliberately satisfying performance than his Eugene Marchbanks. In fact, I cannot imagine that critic of critics—a British Drama League adjudicator—finding a particle of fault with it.

The three supporting roles were in capable hands.

There was Mr. Philip Allen's part of Mr. Burgess. He acted it with a fine relish for the sly roguery that Mr. Burgess tries to cover up. His stooping gait was natural and his make-up—his beard—excellent.

Miss Peggy Cooper was a vivacious Miss Prosperine Garnet, the spinster typist, who tries so hard to be vinegary. Though it may have been somewhat as a shock to Miss Cooper's friends to find her natural graces hidden beneath a pair of spectacles and a strait-laced demeanour, yet the part demanded it, and Miss Cooper was not found wanting. The audience appreciated her 1900 typist's attire—and Miss Cooper wore it as though she were of that generation.

Mr. Lister Beck contributed a study of an adulatory young curate, the Rev. Alexander Mill, with natural presence and vigorous intent.

Miss Rosalie Van Der Gucht was the producer. She had a good cast to help her, and this, with the excellent settings and costumes, considerably lightened the task she must have had to present so appealing a performance of "Candida."

Mr. Dudley Clark's setting of the stage was good.

From every point of view—production, acting, dramatic achievement, and general appeal—I place "Candida" as first of the plays The Questors have given during their studies of historical development.

The experiment ends on April 29 and 30 with the modern play "A Bride for the Unicorn." Its excellence will have to be almost superlative if it is to surpass "Candida." As a mere critic I can only stand agape at the continued worthiness of The Questors. Long may they continue to appeal and surprise.