

Questors In Goldsmith Comedy

OLD WORLD MANNER NOT QUITE CAPTURED

War-time notwithstanding, there was nothing makeshift or shoddy about the performances given by the Questors in their theatre in Mattock-lane last week-end of Oliver Goldsmith's classic comedy, "She Stoops to Conquer." Certain familiar members of the cast, headed by Mr. Lionel Locke as Tony Lumpkin, a part which almost every actor at some time of his career and nearly every school-child has played, came to life upon the stage, and the well-known lines rolled trippingly from their tongues with never a wondering thought of "What do I say next?" The settings, designed by Mr. Gunter Heilbut, were effective and appropriate, and the costumes, which came from the private collection of Mr. J. Cyril Nairne and were lent for the occasion, were historically correct, and, as was the vogue of the period, as picturesque for the men as the women.

The whole performance, under Mr. Alfred Emmet's direction as producer, ran without a hitch—yet there was some quality lacking in the presentation, best defined, perhaps, by saying that the Questors, mostly young people, in this production offered old wine in new bottles, whereas old dramatic wine of this kind requires old bottles, on which some cobwebs have grown. There was a little too much archness and lightness in some of the acting, a Noel Coward modernism in place of the more sedate manners of those times. Nevertheless, the Questors did their public a good turn by giving them an evening with Oliver Goldsmith at his best in a comedy which was founded on an incident of his own boyhood. Moreover, they gave enjoyment to members of the Ealing Y.W.C.A., who saw the performance by invitation on Thursday night of last week, and to an enthusiastic audience at the ambulance depot at the Good Shepherd Hall on Monday evening.

COUNTRY FOLK

The comedy, in Goldsmith's kindly fashion, is a skit on country ways and town manners. Of the representatives of life as lived in the country at that period Tony Lumpkin is leader, and Mr. Lionel Locke showed throughout the more engaging sides of this amusing character study of brains and wit plastered over by bovine loutishness. His was a lively performance and contributed much to the success of the production as a whole.

Mr. Lister Beck, as Tony's stiff-necked step-father, carried rigidity a little too far, but Miss Peggie Hollier, as his vain and fussy mother, taken up with copying London fashions, caught perhaps more than any other member of the cast the atmosphere of the times. Miss Yvonne Angel was arch and pleasing in the role of Miss Hardcastle, and there was sparkle in her acting, but she was a girl of to-day rather than of that period. Miss Muriel Curtis, in the role of cousin Neville managed to introduce a quality of demureness into her acting which made it fit better with the period without losing its charm. Mr. Brendon Abrams doubled with success the parts of the jovial landlord of the Three Pigeons and the bewildered Diggory, servant to Mr. Hardcastle. Mr. Albert Dynes also appeared in a dual capacity, and so did Mr. F. Williams. The other domestics were played by Miss Betty Harbut and Miss Judy Vaughan. With the servants rests quite a lot of Goldsmith's best by-play.

FOLKS OF FASHION

The fashionable townfolk, dressed in gorgeous silks, satins and laces, had good exponents in Mr. Cyril Box as the nervous conversationalist, Young Marlow, Mr. Francis Williams as his irascible father, and Mr. Philip Allen as Young Marlow's friend, the fashionable gallant, Hastings. Mr. Box is always a competent actor, no matter in what part he appears, and he was so in this production, keeping his shyness at the point of amusing comedy, and not letting it run away with him. His addresses to Miss Hardcastle, his mistakes, his bashfulness and his ardour, were all neatly balanced. Mr. Allen made love excellently to Miss Neville, and bantered gaily with his friend, and Mr. Williams was paternal concern personified.

The stage management by Mr. Fred Robinson, and the lighting effects by Mr. Michael Kelly, were all that could be desired. Mrs. Mildred Emmet (assisted by Miss Peggy Cooper and Miss Winifred Giles) was in charge of the wardrobe—an onerous task where such beautiful clothes were concerned. Miss Jean Macrory looked after the properties.

C.C.

Amateur Stage

THE QUESTORS IN GOLDSMITH COMEDY

"SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER"

BY PETER QUINCE

The Questors: "She Stoops To Conquer," by Oliver Goldsmith: Mattock-lane Theatre, Ealing; Friday, January 12, 1940.

WHEN the B.C.C. recently broadcast a talk on how the amateur theatrical movement of the country has quickened with renewed life since the war, I laughed a cynical laugh, and said "You don't know Ealing; nearly a dozen amateur societies, and they've all got cold feet and the black-out blues, except one."

The exception—is there really any need to say so?—is The Questors. They have just as many difficulties to face as the majority of the other local societies, but instead of pulling long faces and saying "We must disband for duration," they are carrying on.

In the words of Mr. Alfred Emmett, their secretary, "We will carry on until the last ditch, but it is up to the people of Ealing to see whether we will carry on when we get to the other side. We need more non-acting members."

If only the other societies had some of this courage, Ealing would not be such a black dismal place after dark these days. But it is a vain hope, I fear. Few have courage.

GOLDSMITH'S comedy is always fresh and charming. It is claimed as a real Middlesex play, for Goldsmith was living at Wembley when he is supposed to have written it. Always it has held a warm place in my heart; it was the first comedy, outside Shakespeare, I saw performed on any stage.

The Questors manage a costume play extremely well. Maybe this is because their members find themselves more becoming in silks and satins rather than in the colourless fashions of today.

Indeed, it has always struck me that quite a number of the excellent Questors' players would have enjoyed life better in an age that was more colourful and genteel than our own.

Mr. Cyril Box, for instance, as Young Marlow, was the eighteenth century gallant as to the manner born. Almost I could smell the perfume on his lace handkerchief. Mr. Box is blessed by a fine voice, and this attribute helped considerably in his portrayal of the young gallant. It was a sound piece of acting, delivered with punch and persuasion that was good to look upon.

Miss Yvonne Angel—a new leading lady—was as pretty and pert a Miss Hardcastle as these eyes have clapped on. Her pouts and frowns and womanly wiles may have been somewhat overdone—that is, considered from a theatrical point of view—and there should have been an attempt made to give her a country lass's tongue when she was pretending to a barmaid.

But what of these? They are the mere cavils of a critic. Reckoned all in all, Miss Angel's performance was thoroughly competent, and one that added to the zest of the play.

MR. LIONEL LOCKE was a rip-roaring Tony Lumpkin, a scatter-brain creation, entirely after his own heart. Mr. Locke has never failed yet in a comedy role, and his Tony must be reckoned as one of his major successes. It was delivered with fire and humour abounding.

As the becoming Miss Neville, the other young lady of the play for whom happiness must be found, Miss Muriel Curtis gave a gravely graceful performance that lacked nothing in understanding and heart appeal.

Mr. Philip Allen was the other swaggering gallant, Hastings, though his gallantry was somewhat tempered with the pangs of love. It was a good, sound piece of acting such as Mr. Allen can always do.

There was Mr. Lister Beck's creation of Mr. Hardcastle. He did not try to play it as a humorous part—such as I have seen it done—and his dress suggested a well bred town gentleman rather than a country squire. Mr. Beck struggled against many hard points in the part, but on the whole did it successfully, and—what is important—with an immense amount of life.

MISS PEGGIE HILLIER never suggested to me that she had the outward resemblance of Mrs. Hardcastle, but as she played the part with virility and understanding it must be acclaimed a success. She had many good moments, especially in the garden scene.

Small parts were played by: Miss Betty Harbud as a servant; Miss Judy Vaughan as a maid; Mr. Brendon Abrams as the landlord and as Diggory, Mr. Francis Williams as Sir Charles Marlow and as Jeremy; and Mr. Albert Dynes doubled the parts of two other servants.

Mr. Alfred Emmet was the producer. He cut some of the boisterous comedy which I seem to remember taking place in the first act between Hardcastle and the servants, and he did not make Mrs. Hardcastle too much of a figure of buffoonery.

Stage settings were simple but sufficient. They had been designed by Mr. Gunter Heilbut. The costumes had been loaned from the private collection of Mr. J. Cyril Nairne.

This is The Questors second production since the war. May I hope it won't be the last this season? Ealing needs more entertainment of this nature during these abysmal nights.



AMATEUR STAGE.—Tony Lumpkin (Mr. Lionel Locke) teases Mrs. Hardcastle (Miss Peggie Hollier), watched by Miss Neville (Miss Muriel Curtis) and Hastings (Mr. Philip Allen) in The Questors' production of "She Stoops to Conquer."



Young Marlow (Cyril Box) kneels before Miss Hardcastle (Yvonne Angel) in The Questors' production of "She Stoops to Conquer." In the background are Mr. Hardcastle (Lister Back) and Sir Charles Marlow (Francis Williams).