

SATURDAY, AUGUST 12, 1944

FIRST IN NEW DRAMA YEAR

Questors To Give "Martine"

The first production of the new Questors' year is to be "Martine," the delicate and subtle play by Jean-Jacques Bernard, translated by J. Leslie Frith. "Martine," which is a study of the inarticulate character of a simple French peasant girl, is probably one of the best known of Bernard's plays, and is generally regarded as his masterpiece. It is a story of great beauty, told with that imaginative realism which so characterises the work of this author, and for which he holds so deservedly high a reputation in his own country. It has been described as "... an exquisite thing. It has the quality of bleached linen; a simple but very subtly woven loveliness of texture." "It glows like the sundrenched fields amidst which it opens ..."

The production is once again in the hands of Mr. Alfred Emmet, and the first performance will be to-day at 7.30 p.m. This will be followed by a matinee on Sunday, at 3 p.m. and two further evening performances on Monday and Tuesday, August 14 and 15, both at 7.30 p.m. A special performance will be given on Thursday, August 17, at 7.30 for members of local Youth Groups.

QUESTORS IN TRANSLATED FRENCH DRAMA

"Martine" At Mattock Lane

IT is difficult to find words adequately to describe the delicacy of texture of Jean-Jacques Bernard's play "Martine." It was the Questors' choice as the first production of their fresh year of work. They presented the play at their theatre in Mattock-lane, Ealing, on Saturday and Monday evenings, with a matinee on Sunday, and an additional performance for members of local youth groups on Thursday. The quality of this play, first produced at the Comedie Francaise in 1922, and in this country at the Gate Theatre Studio seven years later, is preserved by its translator into English, J. Leslie Frith. It can, perhaps, be likened to the egg-shell fragility of Sevres porcelain—something easily broken, yet unbroken, of outstanding beauty.

"Martine" is a play about three women, whose dispositions the author places under his psychological microscope, revealing a beauty that glows in the kindly, understanding enlargement focussed upon them. The women hold the stage, the two men in the cast are, as it were, necessary to the plot. The two finest of the five scenes in the play are (a) in scene III, in which the two women, Jeanne and Martine, who are each in love with the same man, approach one another in friendship, and (b) the interview in the following scene, where the old French grandmother strives to comfort her little peasant friend, who is the loser in the romantic contest. Another asset in this play of "the dialogue of thought which underlies speech" is the natural way in which the tragedy is born from the very nature of the characters themselves. It is something inevitable, an integral part of the story, not manufactured by the author for the purpose of showing how his characters react under it.

Sensitive Treatment

Such a play requires careful and sensitive treatment, and this it had in full measure in the capable hands of Mr. Alfred Emmet as producer, and in the acting of an eminently well-chosen cast.

The title role of Martine, the French peasant girl of the village of Grandchin, the most difficult because she has to express "feelings that lie too deep for words," and who is handicapped by being inarticulate, was played by Miss Leonie Metcalfe with a reserve of strength and natural beauty which deserved the highest praise. Her Martine lived, and her soul's desires were revealed under the very inadequate words in which she could give them utterance. It was a tragic and pathetic part, beautifully and artistically played in the right key and with every note and gesture true. Miss Betty Mercy's Jeanne was equally as French in character as was Martine in a lower social scale. Jeanne, the polished, intellectual Frenchwoman of the better class, was quite delightfully personated; it had both brilliance and resilience.

Many are the character roles which Miss Barbara Hutchins has successfully taken in the past, but her delicate and beautifully conceived study of the aristocratic, wide-visioned old French grandmother, Madame Mervan, ranked high among them. It was an exquisitely tender portrait of mellowed old age. On the shoulders of Mr. Philip Allen fell the major work on the men's side. He made a spritely, vivacious Julien, who flirted with Martine in indulgence of a thoughtless whim, and, after marrying Jeanne, with utmost selfishness, and to please his semi-poetic romantic cravings, tried to re-kindle dreams in Martine which, since her marriage to a fellow peasant, she has only half-successfully buried deep in her heart. He is a light,

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despicable character, quite unworthy of the love of the three women with whom he comes in contact. The author's touch is less sure in the case of Julien, a reporter on a French newspaper, than with his women characters, but Mr. Allen, though, perhaps, a little too British in his treatment, made good in the role. Mr. Lempriere Hammond's contribution as Alfred, Martine's peasant lover and husband, was comparatively small, but it was an eminently sound bit of acting.

The settings, designed by Mr. Fred Robinson, were in keeping with the tone of the play and pleasantly simple. The apple tree, however, looked too weary and wan to have thrown any of the grateful shade on the sun-dried roadside, as it was supposed to do.

Miss Barbara Hutchins acted as associate producer with Mr. Emmet.

A lively discussion on the play and its treatment took place at the theatre last evening.

