

QUESTORS' CALENDAR.

SEASON 1949-50

- May 15th—24th *The Gentle People*. Sixth production.
May 17th Civic Performance of above.
May 24th Building Fund Performance of above.
June 3rd B.D.L. Week at Bournemouth. Production of *The Gentle People* at Palace Court Theatre.
June 24th Garden Party in aid of the Building Fund.
June 28th Club Night. Reading of a new play by Richard Wood.
July 8th First night of *Miss Elizabeth Bennet*, by A. A. Milne.
Seventh production.

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THE QUESTORS



PRESENT

“The Gentle People”

BY

Irwin Shaw

SEASON 1949—50

SIXTH PRODUCTION

PRICE 6d.

A BIT OF PLAY ACTING

A learned judge lately asked the jury to consider whether a bit of play acting would do any harm to anybody. In the particular case the jury clearly thought it would not, but the question can have a wider application. Leaving the audience out of the argument, play acting can cause exquisite agony to some who take part. No sympathy is needed by those who, like Bottom, first and greatest of the amateurs, believe themselves capable of Pyramus, Thisbe and the lion all at once, but there is nearly always some pathetic creature dragged in most unwillingly by the heels to play a minor character. There was once a dear old gentleman who as a docile subaltern had been forced to take part in some regimental theatricals. For the rest of his long life he kept a tattered cutting from a local paper, as a warning to anyone who should try to tempt him again to tread the boards. "Mr. So-and-So," thus ran the passage, "bears an honoured name, but he will pardon us for saying that he is not a delineator of character." There have been others, to whom the criticism would have been equally applicable, less appreciative of their own limitations. Fortunately most of us are of the same opinion as was poor little Fanny Price when she was pressed to play the cottager's wife in the theatricals at Mansfield Park. "Me!" she cried. "Indeed you must excuse me. I could not act anything if you were to give me the world."

That particular performance of *Lovers' Vows* came, it will be remembered, to a sad end. After Edmund had at first objected on grounds of decorum and then given way, after Mr. Rushworth had wondered whether he would know himself in a blue dress and a pink satin cloak, after the bookshelf had been moved and twenty pounds or so spent on a little carpenter's work and a green curtain, Sir Thomas Bertram put an end to it all by returning prematurely from the West Indies. Yet the preparations had occupied six whole delightful chapters for which we are eternally grateful, and indeed it seems that literature was once much fuller of private theatricals than it is to-day. Private theatricals! the very name seems to have about it something of an elder fashion. There was, for example, that grand entertainment at Lord Steyne's when Becky played Clytemnestra and the little French Marquise, at once the consummation of her triumphs and the beginning of her downfall. Descend to a humbler but pleasant walk of life, Frank Fairleigh, and there is the charade they acted at Heathfield set out at full length. Moreover, at a later date du Maurier's enchanting drawings in *Punch* are full of ladies in powder and patches and the ambitious couple who mean to give *The Cup* in their back drawing-room. It would almost seem that now the times are too hard and too busy and the paraphernalia too expensive. There are, of course, more numerous than ever, the immensely

serious and skilful amateur performances, played almost professionally on a proper stage; but a bit of play acting is now only an amusement for the nursery on a wet day.

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IN OUR TIME

When reviving a play which is nearly contemporary it is essential that either the events or happenings to which the play refers have changed very little or else the play is still pertinent to present-day conditions; otherwise it appears dated and ineffectual.

The Gentle People, by Irwin Shaw, was first produced at the Belasco Theatre, New York, by the Group Theatre Company in January, 1939, followed by a very short run in London in July of the same year. It was written and produced in the face of pressing world events and at a time when we all were on the brink of a great disaster. At the time of the revival of *Thunder Rock* in April, 1946—a play written and produced at the same time as *The Gentle People*—the producers had this to say: "To-day in an uneasy world still heaving in the aftermath of war, civilisation is faced with the utter necessity of finding an answer to its problems if it is to survive at all."

Since 1939 we have experienced a world war of tremendous proportions. Does *The Gentle People* refer only to 1939 or is it pertinent to the present day? It presents the case of the "gentle people," the exiles, the refugees and those nearly defeated by the world. Philip Anagnos, one of these people, says: ". . . all my life I wanted only peace and gentleness. Violence—leave it to gangsters like Goff"; but his friend Jonah Goodman replies: ". . . if you want peace and gentleness you got to take violence out of the hands of the people like Goff and you got to take it in your own hands and use it like a club. Then maybe on the other side of violence there will be peace and gentleness."

This play, whilst telling a simple story of two old men, reflects the spirit and feeling of the time in which we live.

Unlike many contemporary American plays it is full of humour and an essential humanity. Without bathos or sentimentality Irwin Shaw has written a beautiful play with forcefulness, vigour and a real appreciation of truth.

P. C.

“THE GENTLE PEOPLE”

BY

IRWIN SHAW

Characters in order of appearance :

JONAH GOODMAN	FRANCIS W. SMITH
PHILIP ANAGNOS WILFRID SHARP
HAROLD GOFF	REGINALD HAMLYN
MAGRUDER	EDWARD SCRIVENER
STELLA GOODMAN	RACHEL WOLFF
ELI LEIBER	PATRICK BRAIN
FLORENCE GOODMAN BETTY OGDEN
ANGELINA ESPOSITO JOYCE BASS
JUDGE JOHN HOWARD
LAMMANAWITZ FRANK WHITE
POLACK	GREGORY COKER
FLAHERTY ROY AMBROSE

Producer : PETER CURTIS.

Designer and Associate Producer : ERNEST IVES.

MUSIC.

Adagio for Strings - - - - -	Samuel Barber
Tragic Overture - - - - -	- - Brahms
Symphony “New World” - - - - -	- - Dvorak

TIME — 1939.

ACT I.

Steeplechase Pier, Coney Island. A mild winter night.
The living room of the Goodman house. Later that night.
The Pier. Two nights later.
The living room. Evening. A month later.

ACT II.

Steeplechase Pier. The following evening.
Night Court. An hour later.
The Pier. A half-hour later.
The steam room of a Russian bath. Later that night.
The Pier. The following evening.
Out in the bay. Ten minutes later.
The Pier. One week later. Evening.

There will be an interval of 15 minutes between Act I and Act II during which refreshments will be served.

Stage Manager :

JOAN SAWKINS.

Assistant Stage Managers :

JOHN KNIGHT. BEN BOULT. DOROTHY BARNETT.

Set Construction :

PETER ELLIS AND THE STAGE STAFF.

Costumes

Executed by ELIZABETH WELLMAN and the STAGE STAFF.
(Miss Wolff's dress designed by JENNIFER CRAIG).

Lighting

Executed by GERRY ISENTHAL, assisted by EILEEN KEMP.

Music and Effects

Arranged and played by ALBERT GIBBS and MARY NEWCOMB.

Props.

RUTH MILNER and EDWARD ROBINSON.

House Manager : ARCHIE COWAN. *Stewards :* BILL COLLINS and STAFF.
Refreshments : GERTRUDE MARCUS & STAFF. *Programmes :* VI MUSK & STAFF.

DISCUSSION.—The Discussion on this play will be held in the theatre on Thursday, May 25th, at 7.30 p.m. All members and friends are invited.

In the interests of both players and audience, you are requested to restrict smoking in the theatre while the play is in progress.

“APPLAUSE”

It is undoubtedly a sign of the times in which we live when we are confronted with devices for measuring applause in terms of sound volume, when the main point of all applause lies not in its quantity but its quality; and no machine can measure quality, which is an attribute measurable only in terms of human understanding. But even human understanding, frail creature that it so often is, sometimes fails to make a true distinction between the meanings of various types of applause; though no one who has witnessed a genuine ovation, in which the main ingredient is feeling, can fail to be moved by it or easily forget it. However, the type of thing I have in mind is quite a rarity in our Theatre as it is not often that an entire audience is moved to raptures. Nor do I mean anything even remotely akin to first-night hysteria.

The actor thrives on applause, we are sometimes told, but any experienced actor can soon discern the value of his applause at any particular performance; and what he really thrives on is audience response, which need not be expressed in audible terms. In fact, usually (and I am here referring to response *during* a scene) applause signifies a lack of real feeling on the part of the audience, who, if they were genuinely entranced would not readily break the emotional spell by the physical action of clapping. That is why we so often find deplorable displays of histrionics being met with obvious approval from the audience while genuinely moving moments of true acting pass apparently unheeded. I would even go so far as to suggest that any actor whose performance is greeted with a round of applause, rather than beam with contentment at the stage manager should start to consider what is wrong with his playing that he cannot hold his audience. For such behaviour (and it is really bad manners for an audience to interrupt the action of a play) can never express anything more than a transitory satisfaction on a purely unemotional plane.

The audience that is genuinely appreciative is invariably reluctant to applaud: a good audience will never do so during a good performance of a good play. Further, the same reluctance is still equally apparent at the end, the greatest tribute that any audience can pay to any play being to wait while the curtain falls, pause a second, and then, the spell broken, thunder out its appreciation as one man. The secret of success is suspended in that spellbound silent second, which no machine could hope to measure, or record. Indeed, to live through that moment is a rare emotional thrill that can only be experienced within the precincts of a living Theatre; and even there it is an unfortunately infrequent occurrence which even regular play-goers may never be fortunate enough to know. But while we strive for the ideal, which can never be consciously attained, it is as well to be aware of the fact that applause is a living thing; not so much dead sound and fury signifying nothing. Moreover it might not do any harm to reflect that the Theatre is also a living thing and for those that have eyes to see and ears to hear, with all due respects to cinema and television screens, no one has yet succeeded in reproducing any form of life by mechanical means.

P. B.

S. BURGIS PARISH

F.V.A., F.F.S.(ENG.)

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