

Questors to give Flemish comedy

CIVIC PERFORMANCE ON MONDAY

To-night (Saturday) at 7.30 the Questors will present the opening performance of the third production in their current season. The play, entitled "The Hopeful Travellers," was written by Andre Obey and G. M. Martens and it has been translated by Iris Capell. There is to be a civic performance on Monday, January 7, and the run continues until Wednesday week, January 16.

This play, based on a Flemish folk story, is an enchanting, rich, joyous comedy, mixed with a touch of simple sentiment, which should appeal very much to children as well as to their elders; and, at the same time, should strike just the right note in the festive season of Christmas and the New Year. It was first produced in this country some two or three years ago, since when it has been performed at various repertory theatres and broadcast under the title of "Scamps in Paradise." It has also proved a favourite choice for schools.

The box office is open at the theatre and members are advised to make immediate application for their free seats to ensure they will not be disappointed. Non-members who are interested in the work of the Questors are invited to apply for full particulars of membership and a synopsis of the club's work. Enquiries should be sent to the Theatre Manager (Miss Rena Rice), the Questors Theatre, Mattock-lane, Ealing. W.5; or phone Ealing 5184 and ask your questions.

Questors **Romeike & Curtice Ltd.**

EXTRACT FROM
MIDDLESEX COUNTY TIMES

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EXTRACT FROM
Stage

13 JAN 1952

"The Hopeful Travellers"

"The Hopeful Travellers," a play by André Obey and G. M. Martens, translated by Iris Capell, will be seen at the Questors', Ealing, on Saturday next. This little-known Flemish play is being produced by Alfred Emmet in settings by Beryl Anthony. The same translation was first seen in London at the Tavistock Little Theatre in 1949. "The Testament of Cresseid," by Alexandra Mikelatos, will be seen at the Questors' on March 1, produced by Barbara Hutchins. Pirandello's "Right You Are If You Think So" is scheduled for production in September.

EXTRACT FROM Stage

10 JAN 1952

THE QUESTORS

"THE HOPEFUL TRAVELLERS"

On January 5, at their theatre in Mattock-lane, Ealing, the Questors presented the play by G. M. Martens and André Obey, translated by Iris Capell,

"The Hopeful Travellers."

To say that this is essentially a religious play may give the wrong impression. It is also a morality play of our own time, where spirituality is leavened with honest vulgarity, where satire reveals the full glory of half-forgotten simple truths, and where burlesque shows

faith flourishing in the midst of the blackest despair.

Boule and Rietje are two rollicking Flemings with a partiality for things of the flesh, symbolised by a love of good food and drink. Disguised as St. Nicholas and St. Nicodemus, they are involved in a street accident when on their way to distribute toys to children. Although apparently dead, they visit an unpleasantly convincing Hell, gain their release by an act of simple faith, experience a little difficulty with St. Peter at the Gates of Heaven, but are reprieved by the intercession of the Virgin and return to earth to lead—not without difficulty—a more virtuous life.

The production by Alfred Emmet, in some of the scenes at least, has much in common with the technique of the modern Continental cartoon, and the brevity of line in Beryl Anthony's décor—which is itself an integral part of the production—adds to this impression. Supported by a large and capable cast, Frank White and Wilfrid Sharp as Boule and Rietje are two likeable metaphysical adventurers clearly showing the strength and weakness inherent in mankind, and as the Duke of Alba, an infernal Gauleiter, Reginald Hamlyn is sufficiently fiendish and sulphuric. The play was first produced in England in 1949 by the Tavistock Repertory Theatre, London.

QUESTORS' THEATRE

"THE HOPEFUL TRAVELLERS"

The Questors' Theatre at Ealing has appropriately chosen, in the middle of its gallant struggle to raise enough money to purchase its theatre and continue its notable work, that play by M. André Obey and G. M. Martens of which the English title is *The Hopeful Travellers*. Although this play does not appear to have been acted professionally on the stage in England, it has been broadcast by the B.B.C. and performed by another amateur organization, the Tavistock Repertory Company. The hopeful travellers are two good-natured rascals who, full of drink and good food, dress up as St. Nicholas and St. Nicodemus to make their rounds with presents on St. Nicholas's day in a Flemish town. Soon after they have begun they are knocked down by a motor-car and discover themselves in Hell, where, badly frightened, they try to pass themselves off as the real saints, hoping for good treatment.

The Hopeful Travellers will be given in a translation by Miss Iris Capell and will be acted at the Questors' Theatre from to-morrow until January 16. In March Alexandra Mikellatos's *The Testament of Cresseid* will be produced by Miss Barbara Hutchins and later there will follow *You Can't Take It With You*, by Kaufman and Hart, Pirandello's *Right You Are If You Think So*, and a new play, the title of which is yet to be announced.

Theatre Newsletter

2 Feb 1952

QUESTORS

**THE HOPEFUL TRAVELLERS, by
Obey and Martens (Questors Theatre)**

THE Questors' reputation as a theatre where serious work can be enjoyed is justified again in the choice of *The Hopeful Travellers*, a play produced at the Studio de Champs Elysees in March 1945 but not yet performed on a professional English stage.

Adapted by André Obey from a work by Flemish author G. M. Martens, *The Beggars in Heaven* as it may be more literally translated is a modern morality play. Two Flemish villagers, one over fond of his stomach and the other of his wine dress up as St. Nicholas and St. Nicodemus in a village procession. Unfortunately they are knocked down in a street accident to wake in the nether regions still garbed in their processional clothes.

Hell is not deceived for long—they are not two real saints bored by the other place—and gauleiters and threatened torture bring forth their latest religious beliefs, strong enough to allow them to reach the gates of heaven. But St. Peter (a brilliant performance by Frank Smith) is as difficult to deceive as the Devil and the unfortunate arrival of the real St. Nicholas and St. Nicodemus ruins their attempt at a gate crash. With many sins written in the Book their case is brought before the Great Judge but they successfully persuade the Virgin Mary to intercede for them. Her plea is perhaps for the Flemish people (the play bears marks of its war-time origin) but the sinners are pardoned, providing they return to earth to show that their repentance is real.

Although in keeping with the traditions of the original moralities, I found the farce of the third act—an effective piece of knockabout on the joke of two "dead" men waking as the undertaker arrives—irrelevant to the mood of Act Two; previously the play had farce subordinate to the action and had made its heroes men as well as comics. Kept waiting for the demonstration of repentance on earth I found the act dragged. And the final rejection of sausage and wine-bottle seemed an inadequate gesture to their heavenly experience.

K. G.

"THE STAGE"

10th Jan. 1952

THE QUESTORS

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QUESTORS SCALE THE HEIGHTS

And so provide their own most telling appeal

AT the Questors Theatre, Mattock-lane, on Saturday, a warm welcome was extended by the first-night audience to "The Hopeful Travellers," a charming comedy by G. M. Martens and Andre Obey, ably translated by Lady Iris Capell. The run finishes next Wednesday.

This is the story of Boule and Rietje, two amiable rascals whose annual joy it is to dress up as Saints, on St. Nicholas' Day, and amuse the children in their Flemish village. This year, though, just as they leave their tavern, dressed in their finery and at the peak of jubilation, they are knocked down by a car. Their bodies are brought in, hovering between Life and Death.

When we next see them they are in Hell, being treated as real Saints until they give themselves away and are tormented by Lucifer and his demons. They eventually aspire to the gates of Heaven, and St. Peter nearly lets them through; but, restrained at the last moment, they are told they must return to the earth and lead better lives. In the last Act we find them both in bed, very much alive though presumed dead; and considerable fun develops from this situation until they finally return to the arms of their families.

All this is delightful, and it provided one of the most amusing and moving evenings I have known at the Questors Theatre. To give credit where it is due would involve creating another New Year's Honours list, for the cast alone runs to forty-odd names, not counting Beryl Anthony, whose stylised sets were remarkable, or Theresa Heffernan, who was responsible for the stupendous array of costumes.

Alfred Emmet produced with the smooth precision and eye for detail that always stamps his work; but here he had added something else, that indescribably simple feeling of sheer joy, of rumbustious life which took the play soaring way above the merely good, the soberly sound, into the dazzling atmosphere of tear-filled eyes, of caught-up breath, of laughter, and of those several finer elements that occasion-

ally serve to make hopeful travellers of us all.

This quality pervaded everywhere. Frank White's beautifully portrayed Boule, with his persuasive simplicity, was wonderful. The play did not really start to move until he spoke of his lost daughter; and when Flavie, his wife (Elizabeth Oddie) cried to him to stop, we might have been in unison, Rietje, Boule's faithful companion, was played by Wilfrid Sharp, who gave his finest performance since that of the father in "Six Characters" four years ago. Oddly enough, this play was, to my mind, the last truly outstanding peak in the Questors' history.

Other performances that must be mentioned include Ruby Feast's Manse, Anthony Holloway's Djakke, William Elkin's Barman in Hell (and congratulations to Eric Kirby who wrote the negro song for this part, as well as the rest of the songs used); Francis W. Smith's St. Peter, Sheila Wallis's Virgin Mary, Harry Ives's undertaker (his best part yet, by a long chalk); and David Lorraine's barber. There was a very moving scene done by a child, who might have been one of the three named in the programme; but I expect they will all deserve a bouquet, along with the rest, by the end of the run.

One final word. Everyone who can should see this production, for it provides the most telling argument for all of us to support the Questors in their present appeal for funds. If each person who reads these words were to give only half a crown it would add up to an assurance of the Club's continuity. If they should fail, won't we all feel rather ashamed when we think how much so little might have done for something so manifestly worth-while? If you agree, you can best prove it by sending a donation to the Questors; or drop it in at the County Times Office, addressed to me. I will pass it on and see that you get a receipt.

PAUL BEDFORD