

MAYOR, MAYORESS SEE FRENCH FARCE

Questors in stag party with a difference

MONDAY evening's performance at the Questors' Theatre was paid the complement of a visit by the Mayor and Mayoress of Ealing (Councillor George Ward and Mrs. Howard) and a number of members of Ealing Town Council and some of their ladies.

The occasion was the second night of "Everybody Loves Célimare," a French farce of the Second Empire which the Questors are giving its English premiere and which opened on Saturday.

In response to a curtain acknowledgment of the civic tribute by Mr. Alfred Emmet, who is producing the play, the Mayor said he had much enjoyed it, and expressed the Council's recognition of the work being done by the Questors for the serious theatre and its pleasure that this was being done in Ealing.

"Everybody Loves Célimare"—an English rendering of one of a large number of brilliant farces that Labiche wrote with various collaborators in the mid-nineteenth century—is period stuff, but very French and very amusing. It tells the story of a Don Juan who, on settling down to marriage, has to get rid of a string, not of ex-mistresses but of the husbands he has deceived with embarrassing success.

Mr. Emmet has produced it with considerable skill, taking what opportunities offer to focus the situation for a modern audience. Among these is a Pirandello-like start on an open stage. Laurence Irvin exploits the wit and fopperies of the central character, Bernard McLaughlin and Henry Heilpern, two of the husbands, make well contrasted clowns; and Dilys Dodd is divine as a naughty little peach of a maid-servant.

The heroine and her parents demand more insight into French psychology. But Theresa Heffernan is a commanding presence as the mother, and Patrick Bacon keeps the father funny. Dorothy Boyd-Taylor does as well by the girl as the author, the mother and the French tradition make at all easy.

There will be further performances at the Questors' Theatre, Mattock-lane, to-night (Saturday) and next Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, at 7.30 p.m., and to-morrow (Sunday) at 3 p.m. The performance next Wednesday will be in aid of the New Theatre Fund.

W.H.

Amateur Stage News

EVERYBODY LOVES CELIMARE, by Labiche and Delacour, trs. L. and T. Hoffmann. Questors, London, W.5.

Out of Labiche's phenomenal output between 1838 and 1877 of over 150 light comedies small wonder that some have been overlooked; this English premiere proves this play well in the tradition of French farce, with the cuckold as the butt of all.

Celimare, now nearing middle age, is determined to settle down with a young and innocent wife, after sowing many wild oats. But he is beset by the harvest of his earlier affairs—not in the shape of his mistresses, but their unsuspecting husbands with whom Celimare has been clever enough to form bosom friendships. Naturally, they see no reason why his marriage should change this delightful state of affairs. Many are the complications as the beleaguered Celimare tries to shake off his leeches, finally succeeding only by a trick which touches their pockets if not their hearts.

Produced by Alfred Emmet with an excellent sense of period style, with the aid of additional lyrics by Eric Bentley to the music of Offenbach, it provides excellent Christmas fare and a change from these interminable revivals of melodrama. Laurence Irvin coped well with the tribulations of the "hero".

L.S.

LOVE AND MONEY IN THE 1860s

LABICHE FARCE REVIVED

In the first production in England of *Everybody Loves Célimare*, which remains in the bill of the Questors Theatre, Ealing, to-night and to-morrow, the humour of this 90-year-old farce by Labiche and Delacour rests more in the stage behaviour of the characters, in the speed and ingenuity of the movements invented for them, than in what they actually say to one another or to the audience.

The impression is given that the words do not matter much. These are rattled off quickly, while the actors invite us to concentrate on their "business," their costumes, their stage presence. The essential humour of the situation was buried under these things till it was brought into the open by the lovely twist in the last act.

So long as the newly married M. Célimare was the victim of two old friends who are now an embarrassment because he has been the clandestine lover of their wives, the English text hung fire. Only one of the trio—Mr. Henry Heilpern as M. Bocardon—was able to give point to the comedy of this relationship. But let M. Célimare at last make his discovery—"you can [under the Second Empire] ask anything of a friend, steal anything from him, even his wife; but you musn't ask him to lend you money"—and immediately, by pretending to want to borrow from them and so ridding himself easily of his two old friends, M. Célimare (Mr. Laurence Irvin) set a match to the play and made it crackle. It then blazed prettily in the setting designed for it, and capable of making three different rooms, by Miss Juliette Howard.