

EALING WOMEN IN NEWS PARADE

THERE is an old adage that says that behind every big piece of work there is a woman. And this, I think, in all sincerity, can be applied to The Questors, the well-known Ealing Amateur Dramatic Society, which can truthfully be said to be one of the foremost in London. Few people, I feel, have any knowledge of the extent of detail work that goes on for weeks behind the curtain of a production. On an opening night they just see the finished product, and note with pleasing eyes the excellent scenery, colourful costumes, perfect in every detail, and sit back and watch the polished acting of the players as they cross the stage. And so this week I am going to take you behind the scenes and introduce you to the woman who "dresses the shows" and who quietly and unobtrusively plays an important role in the work of this Society.

She is Mrs. Mildred Emmet, wife of Mr. Alfred Emmet, the hon. secretary, producer, actor and inspirer of the society, and one of the best-known men in the amateur movement.

"Dressing" a Show

ON her young shoulders rests the responsible job of costume making. In her flat in Grange-road, Ealing, a special room is reserved as the study, and it is here that she does her work. As soon as a new play has been decided upon, her job begins. First, there are the designs for the costumes to be thought out—hours of hunting through books, or taking the designs from old drawings if the play happens to be a period one. After this comes the deciding of the colours and the estimating of the numbers of yards of material needed for all the costumes. Of course, she has a charted record of all the measurements of the acting members, of sleeves, bodices, trousers, etc., and so she is able approximately to decide what is required. She then sets off on her shopping expedition, which takes about five whole days.



MRS. M. EMMET

During that time she goes from one bargain basement to another, in and out quaint bazaars and little old shops in the back streets of London. She carries the designs and colours with her, must be careful to choose the best colours that will show up correctly under the footlights, and pick out the cheapest and most effective materials. Perhaps you may find it hard to realise that she "dressed" Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night," in which there were thirty playing members, on £10. If you happened to see this production, I think you will agree upon the perfection and rich colouring of the costumes.

A Fascinating Work

THEN comes the cutting out. Patterns are mostly cut from newspapers, brown paper being used for the head-pieces. "Of course," Mrs. Emmet told me, "if we hit upon a good pattern which may come in useful in a later production, this is cut out in calico to be kept. The women members of the society are always willing to lend a hand with the cutting out and sewing and this is a tremendous help."

Mrs. Emmet confessed that she had never had a dressmaking lesson in her life and knew very little about making clothes until she joined The Questors. Since then she has made hundreds of costumes for practically every type of play. "It is a fascinating work," she said, "and I love it. Although The Questors and the theatre almost rule our home, I do realise that these are my husband's whole life and they are my interests, too. Sometimes I show a little rebellion because I don't think it is good for two people to be too absorbed in one interest. They would become bored. Of course, I don't think any woman has it in her make-up to become so completely absorbed in one interest to the same extent as a man can and does. And so even if I have to sometimes join the ranks of theatrical widows, I try not to grumble."

Mrs. Emmet also cleans and launders all the costumes after a show. Some are kept for stock, others are re-dyed and the material used for other costumes. The "wardrobe" of the society is also housed at her flat—and there are special lockers, chests and racks in which parts of costumes, trimmings and accessories are all catalogued.

"The costumes for our last play, 'Dandy Dick,' she said, "were made in a fortnight. The women in that were simply wonderful considering they had to be laced in with the old-fashioned corsets until they could hardly breathe." "In fact," she added laughingly, "they were rather regretful when they had to take them off. Often we help, too, with the painting of the sets, and believe me, we are quite useful in 'pulling out nails.'"

On the first dress rehearsal night you will find her busy with her scissors and pins, taking a bit in from that costume, snipping out from another, until all of them satisfy her critical eye.

One of her biggest jobs was in the production, "The Dragon's Teeth," the first play produced in their own theatre in Mattock-lane. It was, I believe, the first time any amateur society had attempted to produce the play. There were 80 playing parts and she herself played three.

Mrs. Emmet, who was born in Ealing, also finds time, besides running a home, to take parts in productions. She is a former member of the Cricklewood Operatic Society, and has always been keen on the theatre. Incidentally, it was through the Questors that she met her husband.

HANWELL Women Conservatives are holding a social afternoon in Hanwell Library on Tuesday. The speaker will be County Councillor Pendred, Chairman of the Harrow Division Conservative Association.

Mr. Pendred will present his prize to the lady who has made most new members during the year; Mrs. Pendred has also given a prize to the runner-up. All new members are specially invited to be present.