

QUESTORS DISCUSS THEIR WORK

Latest Productions
Analysed

THREE-HOUR TALK

On Monday week the Questors had a discussion on their latest production—the Wakefield Shepherds' play, and "Everyman"—a criticism of which was published in last week's issue of the "Middlesex County Times."

It is difficult (Mr. Philip Allen writes) to give a coherent account of the very rambling expression of a multitude of opinions, but from the variety of views that were expressed, it was clear that the plays were not everybody's meat.

The attendance was hardly representative, as there were less than a dozen members of the audience present, though the cast turned up in force. It was unfortunate that a previous engagement prevented the producer of "Everyman" being there.

Mr. Emmet started things off with a few words on medieval drama, and the discussion itself was opened by the reading of three written criticisms, which were instructive, but sometimes contradicted each other. Discussion flowed on from these. Opinions differed as to whether The Shepherds' Play could be said to "get over" with a modern audience, and it was suggested that much of its appeal was to people of its own day alone.

However, the production met with general approval, and the convention of having two scenes set side by side on the stage and switching from one to the other by selective lighting was quite readily accepted; movements and placing received no adverse criticism. On the subject of the setting opinion was divided as to whether the outdoor scene suggested a wintry evening or not. Dresses and lighting were considered pleasing, though some disappointment was expressed that the Star of Bethlehem did not appear in the final scene of the Nativity.

The general opinion seemed to be that the acting was on a uniformly high level, and audibility was commended an interesting point, in view of the obscurity of the language. The singing of the three shepherds was also enjoyed, and reference was made to the pleasing way their voices contrasted or blended in speaking or singing.

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Middlesex County Times
2-I-37

Everyman 1936

"EVERYMAN."

"Everyman," as a play, seemed to have "got over," but some reference was made to the flatness of the ending. It was pointed out that a considerable cut had been made at the end, including a whole scene with the Devil, which it was thought might not have been acceptable. A number of alternative endings were suggested. Production was not seriously criticised though it was suggested that some of the movements were restless, and in some scenes the placing was difficult. The transition from exterior to interior for the banquet scene merely by bringing on the tables was apparently accepted at the performance, though it was agreed that on subsequent reflection the geography of the play was confusing.

Opinion was again sharply divided as to whether the first appearance of Death sitting in Everyman's chair at the banquet was a help or a hindrance to the dramatic effect of his second appearance. The carrying on of Good Deeds on a stretcher came in for considerable criticism, and it was thought that the scene would have been improved if she had been "discovered" by the drawing of a curtain.

The absence of scenery did not seem to have been found a disadvantage, and the lighting met with approval, though it was thought that the scene when the guests first appeared was underlit, and that the final scene with Good Deeds and Faith suffered from the flatness of the lighting; it was also suggested that the cyclorama might have been used for this scene.

The costumes were considered colourful and pleasing, but that worn by Everyman's Mistress was thought to be out of period, and the desirability of Death appearing as a skeleton was argued at great length without any definite conclusion.

Acting and audibility were again praised; in fact, Mr. Emmet's performance as Everyman was mentioned in one criticism as having the doubtful advantage of inviting comparison with professional work. A further criticism was that the rendering of the part needed more light and shade, particularly a lighter touch in the early stages of the play, and that the tenseness tended to become monotonous, though it was agreed that the endless succession of climaxes increased the difficulty of the part.

The supporting members of the cast were all adjudged to have given capable performances, though it was questioned whether Everyman's Mistress and Everyman's Friend had chosen the best interpretations of their parts, and whether they were not both perhaps too sincere.

The enthusiasm of those present made up to a large extent for the smallness of their numbers, and the discussion went on for nearly three hours, during which a very large number of points were touched on.

OTHER ACTIVITIES.

On Wednesday the Questors held a Christmas party for members and their friends at Mattock Hall, and the next social event will be the annual dance on January 15, at the Queen's Hall, Ealing Town Hall, for which tickets are 5s., including refreshments.

After the social events will come the serious job of rehearsing the entry for the British Drama League Festival. The play is not yet chosen, but there is some whisper of a Shakespearean extract.

Meantime, the Questors' "new plan" will not be neglected, and on January 21 they will give a play-reading of Marlowe's "Edward II.," which will bring the society's work up to the end of the 16th century.

THE ATMOSPHERE OF MEDIÆVAL TIMES

Questors' in Miracle and Morality Plays

Taking a flying leap of over 1,800 years, and changing the setting from the sophistication of the Athenian comedy of Aristophanes to the simplicity of fifteenth century drama, just evolving into an existence separate from, though allied to religious ceremony, the Questors staged in their Mattock-lane Theatre, Ealing, on Friday and Saturday evenings "The Second Shepherds' Play," from the Wakefield cycle of miracle plays, which used to be acted by the people of Wakefield, Yorkshire, and, in sharp contrast, the "Jedermann," an English translation of Hugo von Hofmannsthal, German version, of the original English morality play, "Everyman." Miss Rosalie van der Gucht was responsible for the production of the Shepherds' play, and Mr. Ifan Kyrle Fletcher for the morality, and both performed their tasks extremely well, staging something that caught the interest and was sound historically—an important point, as both plays formed part of the society's scheme for giving a bird's-eye review of drama down the ages.

The programme, naturally, was one which appealed to some more than to others, but to those to whom it did appeal, it appealed greatly. No labour had been spared to reproduce in the Shepherds' play the atmosphere of mediæval England, and to present on the most modern stage in Ealing as nearly as possible what the townsfolk of Wakefield saw and laughed at on feast days when it was performed on moveable stages in different parts of their town in the fifteenth century. The moral of the play is not too clear, inasmuch as Mac, the cunning sheep-stealer (well acted by Mr. Clifford Foreman), gets away with his prize, successfully hidden in a baby's cradle. There is plenty of broad, full-blooded, rough-tongued humour of the century in the conversation of Mac and the other three shepherds, all ably acted by Messrs. Laurie Rivers, Lionel Locke and Lister Beck. Miss Barbara Sharp made a very proper sheep-stealer's wife, ready to second her husband's nefarious doings though more fearful of consequences than he. These shepherds, as dissimilar as possible from the traditional company minding their sheep under eastern skies, do, however, see the vision of Mary, the Christ-child and an Angel, and take their offerings. By so doing the play earns the adjective, "Nativity." Miss Muriel Curtis personated Mary, and Miss Peggy Cooper made an angel fair to look upon.

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Middlesex County 112
24-XII-26

"EVERYMAN."

Special interest attached to the Questors' production of the German version of "Everyman," because, not many months ago, the English original was performed in All Saints' Church, Ealing, and comparison was valuable.

Hugo von Hofmannsthal's version is far more ornate—more of a play and more of a spectacle than the English original—but the morality side of it is strengthened by its greater elaborateness of conception and setting, and there was brilliance both of acting and production in the presentation given of it by the Questors.

With one exception—that of the title-role—the play calls, above all things, for fine, smooth team work, and this was forthcoming, without a single exception, from the members of the large cast. The role of Everyman, which that great European actor, Moissi, made so famous in the Salzburg production, was played by Mr. Alfred Emmet, and in it he showed himself a fine actor. The part gripped the audience; his terror at Death's summons seemed real, not simulated, his pleading for more time seemed to come forth spontaneously. Both as the heartless gallant withstanding his mother's appeal, and as the rudderless appealer to relatives and friends, Mr. Emmet put himself into Everyman's shoes. All the other characters in the cast naturally fell into a semi-circle behind this central figure. But each filled in his or her appropriate niche in the dramatic structure of servants, neighbours, guests, relations, and the symbolic characters of Death, Mammon, Good Deeds and Faith.

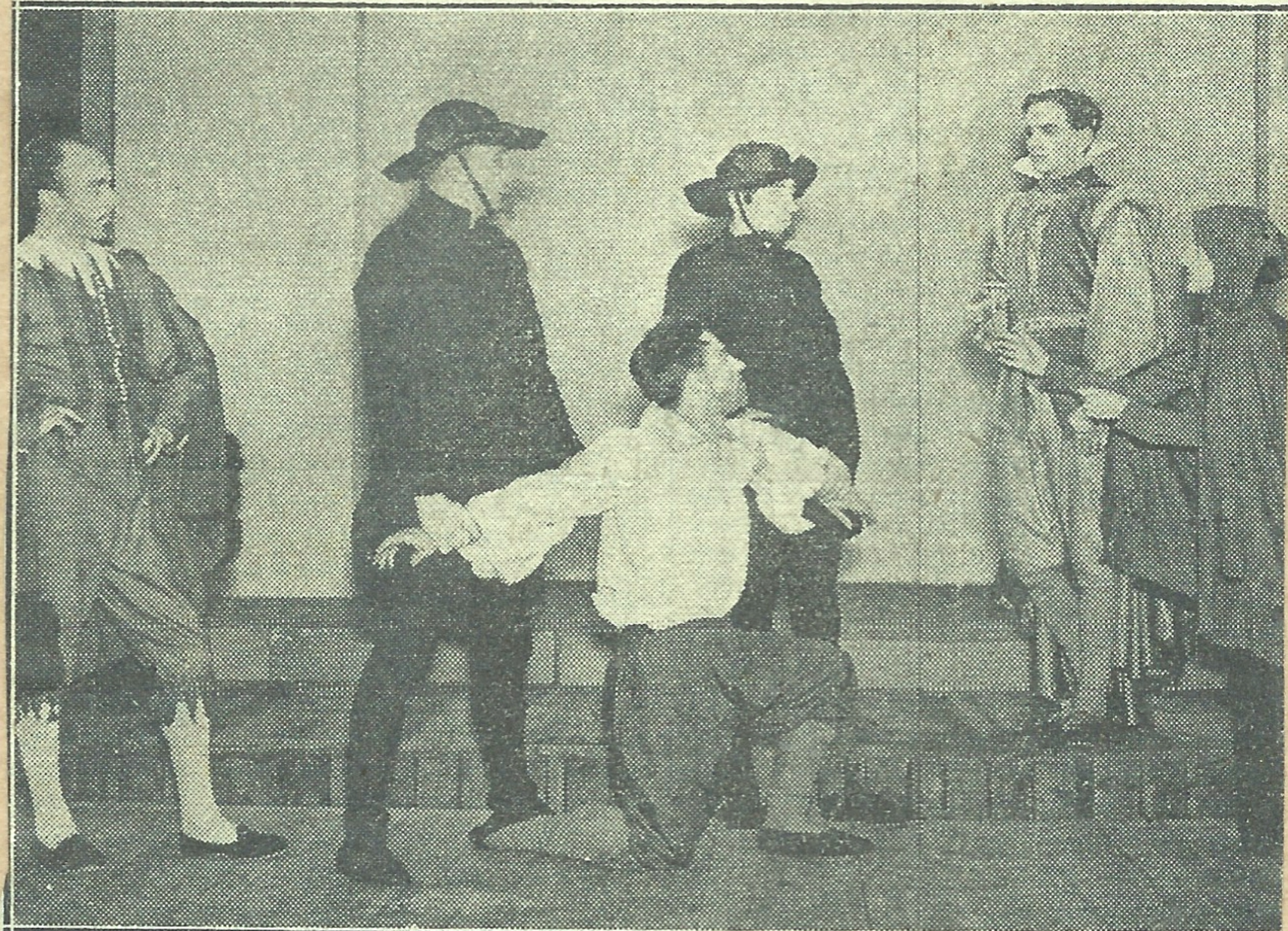
The supper scene, with its pagan Baroque magnificence and lavish display, made an effective contrast to the stern simplicity of the scenes with Good Deeds and Faith.

Mr. Fred Bentall kindly came down at short notice to deputise for the lighting manager (Mr. Will Westbrooke), and the suitable lighting played no small part in the success of the plays. Mr. Fred Robinson stage-managed, Mrs. Mildred Emmet saw to the beautiful costumes which added so much to the spectacular effect, and Miss Winifred Giles was assistant wardrobe-mistress.

Next Wednesday evening the Questors will hold their Christmas party.

C.C.

Questors *Present "Everyman"*



The Debtor (Lionel Locke) pleads with Everyman (Alfred Emmet),
in a scene from the Questors' latest production.

The Questors Give Miracle and Morality Plays

Magnificence of "Everyman"

The Questors: "The Shepherds' Play" (from the Wakefield Cycle of Miracle Plays) and "Everyman" (an English version of Hugo von Hofmannsthal's "Jedermann"): Questors' Theatre, Ealing; Friday, December 18, 1936.

THE QUESTORS go from success to success, from triumph to triumph in their endeavours to present a history of the drama which is their purpose during the next two years.

Those who saw their recent production of "The Birds," by Aristophanes, would have been pleased enough if that admirable production had been the peak of The Questors' success, but now there is the question of "The Shepherds' Play" and a German version of "Everyman" to be considered.

In many ways "Everyman" outshone the classical Greek comedy. To begin with, the players were more at home in portraying human roles than metamorphosed birds—good birds though they were—and, thanks to three superb performances "star" parts were at last shown, though, doubtless, The Questors fight shy of stars.

"Everyman" is the most famous of all morality plays. It has been found in different forms in the English, Dutch, and German languages; the earliest printed edition was a Dutch translation of the English version in 1495, and therefore "Everyman" is said to be of English origin. That plain and unvarnished play is well-known—it was produced in All Saints' Church, Ealing, early this year—but the colourful and dramatic German version has previously not been seen locally. Indeed, I do not know if it has been performed ever before in England.

"Jedermann" is Max Reinhardt's famous production at Salzburg Castle, and its chief difference is that the atmosphere of medieval England has been ignored, and the action takes place in the majestic Baroque period of Central Europe of the 17th Century.

But the story is the same, though the action has been tightened and heightened, and Everyman is called by Death when he is carousing at a banquet.

SUPERB ACTING

There were some superb performances. Mr. Alfred Emmet's Everyman will linger in the memory as the best acted amateur role I have ever seen. Adulation would be idle praise for this well-balanced, majestically uttered, excellently-borne, exceedingly-well acted piece of work. You notice how the lavish adjectives run on, and they are there because Mr. Emmet is worthy of them all, and the only thing that worries me is lest my heart should run away with my head. Only on few occasions have I let my heart better my head, and this should be one of them. On all sides I heard the whispers of sincere praise for Mr. Emmet.

The play ran for about an hour and a quarter, and Mr. Emmet was on the stage for more than an hour. The lines he spoke ran into hundreds, and the words into thousands. From the time he entered with a majestic swagger until the end, when, clasping the hands of Good Deeds and Faith, he awaited the final visit of Death, Mr. Emmet lived his part.

The part was there for him to act, and Mr. Emmet, I suppose, did no more than present it as it should be presented. But a critic's praise is showered on any amateur who does that—especially if the part is a sensible one.

Mr. T. S. Saunders was Death, and I hesitate to say whether this part was also superb because of Mr. Saunders' make-up or because of his acting, or because of the way in which he spoke his lines. I suppose it was an adroit combination of all three, for certainly Mr. Saunders had been made up with a care that struck a chill to the spine, his acting had a grave-yard caress about it and his lines were spoken with a horrible relish.

There was a nerve-tingling, superb performance by Mr. Benjamin Vynreb, as Mammon. This part depends for its success on a raucous voice, and, slobbering, bestial mien. Mr. Vynreb's great success was that he possessed both these in abundance. His voice had in it the din of mammon and all that riches stand for, his smile was that of a person who buys the world with his money. He sprang out of Everyman's treasure-chest with a waving of his arms and a grin that millionaires would envy. This was the third of the three superb roles in the play.

Mr. Philip Allen had a light role, that of Everyman's friend, and he presented it with excellent *sang-froid*. As Everyman's mistress, Betty Mercy portrayed a woman of the flesh with condescending grace, vigour, and purposing intent. A performance of a

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W. J. G.

24-XII-36

different kind—meek, gentle and lowly—was that of Mary Bennett as Everyman's mother.

Judy Bunbury was a patient and suffering Good Deeds. Mr. Dudley Clark contributed a part in subtle humour as the Thin Cousin.

All the others acted well, especially noticeable being Mr. Lionel Locke as a debtor, Lillie Elliott as his wife, and Mr. Lister Beck as the Fat Cousin.

Other parts were by: Mr. Cyril Thomas (messenger), Mr. William Dann (steward), Mr. Clifford Foreman (poor neighbour), Peggy Cooper (Faith), Phyllis Hutchings, Kitty Edwards, Enid Clark, Bobby Emmet and Evelyn Skelton (damsels), Messrs. Fred Robinson, John Heron, Roy Burbank and Laurie Rivers (servants).

Mr. Ifan Kyrle Fletcher produced, and to him goes the highest awards for his presentation of the banquet scene, a blaze of light and colour, with Death grinning in Everyman's chair. Mr. Will Westbrooke was the lighting manager.

As always with The Questors, the costumes were excellent, and were sufficiently varied to please the eye. The wardrobe mistresses were Mildred Emmet and Winifred Giles.

I have no hesitation in awarding the mountain-peak of praise for this glamorous, superbly acted, majestically presented play.

"THE Shepherd's Play," the best-known of any of the cycle religious interludes, is by no means easy to present intelligently to modern audiences. The Questors did their best with it, and, as far as conditions allowed, tried to give the play as the Corpus Christi holiday-makers in the 15th Century Wakefield saw it.

In comparison with the colour and pomp of the German "Everyman" this medieval English interlude was colourless, and its speeches were naïve and simple. It is extraordinary difficult to present at all intelligently, the chief difficulty being the lines.

Who would care to try to bring reality to this language? Listen to the opening lines of the play, spoken by the first shepherd:

"Lord! What, these weathers are cold, and I am ill happed;

I am near hand-dold, so long have I napped;

My legs bend and fold, my fingers are chapped,

It is not as I would, for I am all lapped

In sorrow."

DIFFERENCES

This is a fair sample of the ancient rhyming lines which it was The Questors' mission to try to clothe with living reality.

There was one great difference between the old Wakefield craftsmen and the present Questors. The play is essentially a Yorkshire one; the three shepherds, and Mac, and Gill his wife are people of the Yorkshire moors; the robust humour, elemental and rough though it may be, is of the Yorkshire dales and hills; and it was a pity, in a way, that the play was spoken in the rather emasculated accents of the southern counties.

The acting was honest and arduous, and the cast did their best with these medieval characters. Mr. Clifford Foreman contributed a lively, salacious performance as the rogue Mac, the sheep stealer. He managed to give some of the elemental humour that is in the part, and at which the old Wakefield citizens must have held their sides.

Messrs. Laurie Rivers, Lionel Locke, and Lister Beck were three well-acted shepherds. It was an admirable idea to have them of varying ages, for the play itself gives no hints as to this.

Miss Barbara Sharp had the hardest part of all—that of Gill, and that she failed to bring the air of reality to the part is no criticism of Miss Sharp's acting, but shows that the part was not for her. I suggest that Miss Sharp was miscast in this part; it needed a rougher type, though Miss Sharp certainly fulfilled expectations with regard to Gill's sharp tongue.

Other parts were by Peggy Cooper as an angel and Muriel Curtis as the Virgin Mary.

Rosalie van der Gucht was the producer.

The programme was well contrasted. "The Shepherd's Play" was no mean failure. It seemed to pall besides the blaze and colour of "Everyman," but "Everyman" had opportunities to attract and please the eye and senses, whereas "The Shepherds' Play" had no such opportunities.

The Questors again deserve our thanks for presenting two plays we will be lucky to see again during our lifetime. Few amateurs have The Questors' boldness; that is a pity.