

THE QUESTORS IN "THE FANTASTICKS"

Presentation Of Period Light-Comedy

"LIGHT, easy rhymes,
Old dresses;
Love in a park,
Fluting an ancient tune."

These concluding lines of the English version of "The Fantasticks," spoken by Miss Joyce-Linley Gapp in the character of Sylvette, the heroine, and the only woman in the cast, give an apt verbal description of this piece of period light comedy, which was presented by the Questors in their Theatre in Mattock-lane, Ealing, on the evenings of Saturday, Monday and Tuesday.

The play, a good choice for a time of war-strain, is a bit of delightful dramatic fooling from the pen of the Frenchman, Edmond Rostand, best known in this country, perhaps for his play, "Cyrano de Bergerac."

The English translation in rhymed couplets, by George Fleming, preserves the almost feather-down lightness of the French original. It has a spritely playfulness which is skittish and sardonic by turns and gives the players the opportunity for good acting in character parts.

There are but seven named characters in the cast, but there should be eight, for as in the classic interlude of Pyramus and Thisbe in "A Midsummer Night's Dream," a wall plays an important part in the plot. It is the wall which separates the estates of two old French card-playing cronies Pasquin, father of Sylvette, the heroine, and Bergamin, father of Percinet, the hero. The wall, too, plays a role in the "first-class rape" or abduction which the two old gentlemen stage for the specific purpose of ripening a romance between their offspring. How their plan to throw down the wall and thus to unify their two parks at first miscarries, spoiling their tempers and the happy hours they used to spend at bezique and cribbage, and how the excessive sweethearting on the part of the young lovers frays their nerves, leads to the rebuilding of the wall and a happy ending all round after a lovers' quarrel and make-up have provided comedy situations.

The play, for all its lightness, has some poetic and musical lines scattered here and there in the dialogue of the lovers, and thanks to Mr. Alfred Emmet's production, due value was given to these as due spirit was given to the comedy.

The picturesque costumes, more magnificent for the men than for the solitary woman, were authentic and were lent for the occasion by Mr. Cyril Nairne. Miss Eleanor Bishop, as property mistress, took good care of them, and they were a great asset to the production, which Mr. Fred Robinson stage managed and for which Mr. Michael Kelly manipulated the lights. The stage setting was designed by Mr. Fred Robinson.

THE PLAYERS

Acting honours as to finish went to Mr. Eric Voce, as Father Pasquin, and to Mr. Charles Leno, as Bergamin. Their mannerisms and stilted ways, their amiable chit-chat alternating with angry conversational outbursts, made delightful comedy. Miss Gapp, who is on holiday from the Land Army, touched-in the character of Sylvette in graceful contours. She was charming in her romantic ardours, as she was in her more pettish moods. A pleasant, fresh and eager youthfulness marked the acting of Mr. Charles Lepper in the role of the lover, Percinet. His voice has an attractive quality in it and his diction is clear—both comments apply equally to Miss Gapp.

Mr. Bili Bayling had a right-down, desperado part to play as Straforel, the mercenary villain, who will do anything for money—stage an abduction, or pretend to make love as a bravo. His part needed exaggeration and received it. Mr. Francis Williams made the most of the minor role of Blaise, a bewildered gardener. It was a small part, exceedingly well handled. Mr. Lionel Locke looked distinctly awesome as a notary, and the Misses Joan Angel, Eleanor Bishop, Joan Cowderoy and Leonie Metcalfe, and Mr. Michael Kelly made a brief appearance as bravos, musicians and witnesses.

A discussion on the play and its presentation was held in the theatre on Wednesday and criticism was invited from members of the audience.

The Questors are now at work on Tchekov's "Uncle Vanya," their next production.

C.C.