

Middlesex County
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Back to the Nineteenth Century with Questors

AFTER the first night of the Questors' latest Victorian melodrama (Tom Taylor's "The Ticket of Leave Man"), at Ealing my companion for the evening happened to mention, during a brief conversation with an acquaintance in the play's cast, that I hadn't enjoyed the entertainment so much as in 1959.

The acquaintance replied that the piece was "less black and white" than its predecessor "The Drunkard," and this seems to me true.

Whether or not you prefer it, therefore, depends on whether you like your Granville revivals highly stylized. For me, any move towards naturalism in these offerings tends to expose their essential incredibility; perhaps the root of my faint disappointment in Michael Green's current production lies with the lack of extravagant size in its villains compared with Paul Imbusch's splendid Lawyer Cribbs last year.

Lancashire hero

It is even possible to feel Mr. Imbusch's present appearance as the easily led Lancashire-lad hero slightly inferior in intensity to Alan Drake's desperate alcoholic. But enough invidious comparison.

This remains a stalwart portrait, a Glossopian variation on the same actor's Kentish Town innocent in "Misalliance," which proves nowhere more delightful than in a sudden bout of shoulder-clutching D.T.'s right at the start.

And it receives some stalwart support. The compulsional comedy of the Imbusch clutch is matched at one point by David Evans when he narcissistically anoints himself with eau-de-cologne. Carla Craik's heroine brings warmth to her loving wifely injunctions: "When better times come—as come they will—we shall thank God for them together," and "Where the clouds are thickest, the sun still shines behind them."

Bill-broker

Nor may be omitted John Howard's inconsoleable repetition of "You have deceived me!", as the honest bill-broker finds he has employed in Mr. Imbusch an ex-gaolbird on "ticket of leave" parole; or Jennifer Osgard's delivery of the sensation ballad "The Maniac's Tear," which an 1863 Jukebox Jury would unquestionably have voted a hit.

Yet the palm must finally be awarded to Philip Wright for his deerstalkered detective. Hawkshaw is the best, the least fussy, the most wittily disciplined performance I have seen Mr. Wright give: and his chivalrous decision to ignore the prison record — "Poor devil, he paid his debt at Portland"—drew from me louder applause than anything else in the show (which ends tomorrow).

DOUGLAS McVAY.