

THE SHADY LADY GOES BONKERS IN GREAT STYLE

AS this year's excursion into Victoriana the Questors Theatre has decided to afford patrons three attractions for the price of one. The programme—lasting till January 6—begins with Mr. John Maddison Morton's "Box and Cox," which bears a distinct resemblance—apt enough in view of the pantomime season—to the story of Goldilocks.

Its central situation (two lodgers unaware that they are sharing the same room on a shift basis) allows considerable scope for humour of the who's - been - eating - my - porridge variety.

"Under the express and personal supervision of Mr. Nixon" (to quote the invaluable broadsheet), Messrs. Irvin and Whelan perform the material for all it deserves, making the most of every "Hel-lo!" and "Hark'ee!"

"Well Played!"

The major item of the evening is, however, "Lady Audley's Secret", adapted by Mr. C. H. Hazlewood from Mrs. Braddon's novel. Her ladyship turns out to be a bigamist who attempts to croak her inopportunistly resurrected first husband with a croquet mallet, provoking on the night your reporter was present hearty shouts of "Well played!" among the sportloving English audience.

(At another stage in the action, her admission that she is "over-matched" by her enemies drew from one masculine watcher a speculative "And over-sexed, perhaps?": while hubby's cries of "Woe! Woe!" on realising his spouse's perfidy did not fail to bring forth a restraining chorus of "Whoa!").

Staunchly acted

"Arranged and managed" by Mr. Green in the intervals of chronicling the deathless romance of Rodney and Fiona, the piece is staunchly acted

Mrs. Field (née Craik) hisses and swishes to the manner born as the polyandrous protagonist, depetalling flowers with maniac malevolence before finally going bonkers in a style fully worthy of that other shady Lady (no, not Chatterley; I mean the Thane of Fife's wife).

Messrs. Wright, Imbusch, Drake, and Bradbury, Mrs. Estop and Miss Oscar, offer valiant assistance. And there is a climactic fire scene in which the smoke filling the auditorium leaves the incense of "Luther" standing.

Yet for this critic (and, to judge from the applause and encores, his fellow-spectators), the greatest pleasure of the divertissement is provided by the Temperance Quartet (unrelated, I hurriedly add, to the Seven) that regales us following the refreshment break.

Here indeed are fair women and brave men!

Memories to cherish

Mr. Howard's basso profundo interjections on "Have courage, my boy, and say no"; Mrs. Emmet's affecting trill at a pathetic moment in a lyric; Miss Taylor's primly folded hands, clear proof of her determined abstinence; Mr. Taylor's fervent pulling gesture on "Hear the temperance bells" (although possibly reminiscent of something rather different from a bell-rope); these were memories to cherish long after "Pasadena" has passed into limbo.

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