

"A COUNTRY GIRL" AT CHELMSFORD.

ANOTHER SUCCESS BY THE OPERATIC SOCIETY.

The Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society are presenting the musical comedy, "A Country Girl," at the Regent Theatre this week. Altogether there will be six evening performances, which commenced on Monday and conclude to-morrow (Saturday), and there is also a matinee to-morrow. So far the attendances have been excellent, and the "house" on Monday, the opening night, represented an increase of £20 on the takings compared with last year. Consequently there should be a satisfactory balance to hand over to charity as the result of the performances. Already the Society has raised £350 for this purpose.

Formed in 1920, the Society has now become well established in popular favour. Not only is this the case, but the standard of the productions is appreciably higher as one season succeeds another, indicating that the members take a delight in their work, and strive to give of their best in whatever class of piece they put on. The first four productions were all Gilbert and Sullivan operas. Last year "Miss Hook of Holland" was staged with conspicuous success. On the present occasion the choice fell upon that delightful musical comedy "A Country Girl" (by permission of Sir George Dance). It can be said at once that the play is splendidly staged, smartly acted, and that the musical numbers are wholly delightful.

"A Country Girl" is certainly a very attractive musical comedy. It is not that there is an easily discernible plot; on the contrary the "story" may be dubbed fragmentary from the onlooker's point of view. Nevertheless, there is a happy blending of love and politics, with plenty of amusing situations and not a few examples of cross-purposes. Taking them all through, the characters represented are a very cheery set—optimists with a strong faith in human nature, who take every opportunity of making the best of their surroundings and the most of their opportunities. So what matter if the plot be a trifle "thin" when there is plenty of good acting, tuneful music, and humour that simply compels laughter. Added to these there is the delightful contrast in setting between a typical bit of rustic Devonshire and the Oriental splendour associated with an Eastern potentate and his retinue. Above all, as every theatre-goer knows, the most charming quality of "A Country Girl" is its music, particularly that of the first act, in which Mr. Lionel Monckton has caught the real flavour of madrigal England.

STORY OF THE PLAY.

Told briefly, the story of the play runs as follows: The hero, Commander Geoffrey Chalonier, R.N., returns to his native Devonshire after roving the sea for five years, to find his father financially embarrassed through a mine speculation. His old country house has been sold to Sir Joseph Verity. The hero announces his intention of returning to sea, but suddenly his servant, Barry, takes his master's affairs in hand. He most ingeniously disposes of for him a tin mine of doubtful worth to Sir Joseph Verity, and also secures Chalonier's election to Parliament, instead of Douglas Verity, Sir Joseph's son, who had been put up for the constituency. Then a dusky princess who has fallen in love with Chalonier during the voyage from the East, appears on the scene, and would fain become the wife of the hero. His former village sweetheart, Marjorie Joy ("A Country Girl"), mistakenly thinking that the princess's charms are more effective with Geoffrey than are her own, goes to London, where she becomes a great singer. In the second act a fancy dress ball at the Ministry of Fine Arts provides the setting for the proverbial happy

ending, in which the hero and his sweetheart are re-united, the quick-witted Barry brings his own little affair with Sophie to a successful conclusion, and the good-hearted Nan, who has a prominent place in the general scheme, makes glad the heart of Douglas Verity.

THE CAST.

The cast is as follows:—

Geoffrey Chalonier	Mr. C. L. Bocking
The Rajah of Bhong	Mr. H. J. Jupp
Sir Joseph Verity	Mr. G. Debnam
Douglas Verity	Mr. V. C. Spurgeon
Granier Mummery	Mr. W. H. Tutt
Lord Anchester	Mr. W. T. Bondel
Lord Grassmere	Mr. J. Myall
Major Vicat	Mr. E. G. Moirish
Eube Fairway	Mr. A. W. Ward
Rajah's Attendants	Mr. F. C. Pluck
Barry	Mr. H. E. White
Marjorie Joy	Miss E. T. Parfitt
Princess Mehelaneh of Bhong	Miss I. H. Fisher

Madam Sophie	Miss Rose Rowbotham
Mrs. Quinton Raikes	Miss M. F. Spalding
Nurse	Mrs. A. J. Hobart
Miss Carruthers	Mrs. C. H. Smith
Lady Anchester	Miss E. Bowhill
Miss Powyscourt	Mrs. C. L. Bocking
Lady Arnott	Mrs. H. P. Pedley
Miss Courtland	Mrs. W. R. Catt
Miss Greville	Miss L. Davies
Miss Ecroyd	Miss K. Bowhill
Princess's Attendants	Miss M. Courtman
	Miss C. Hart

Nan Miss Peggy Green

Ladies of the chorus.—Miss B. Baker, Mrs. J. Banham, Misses E. C. Cannon, U. M. Cannon, V. Cannon, A. E. Chisnell, K. Claydon, Mrs. L. C. Cousins, Miss E. M. Cousins, Mrs. J. Darby, Misses N. Doole, I. Guest, A. Hawkins, D. L. Mann, C. G. Marks, L. Marshall, E. S. Myall, E. M. Peggs, E. Proctor, L. M. Redgwell, E. Sayers, M. Turner, and K. Young.

Gentlemen of the chorus.—Messrs. W. R. Catt, J. N. Franklin, C. C. Firman, J. W. Hawkes, F. Hiner, A. J. Hobart, H. K. Mitchell, J. Nokes, J. Thomas, H. Tomalin.

Children in Act I.—Rosemary Fitch, Mollie Price Smith, Douglas Catt, Leslie Fitch.

Act I: A Devonshire Landscape.

Act II: Interior of the Ministry of Fine Arts.

The orchestra was composed as follows:—First violins, Mr. Matland de Lacey (leader), Mr. C. B. Oliver, Mr. A. H. Trum; second violins, Mr. S. H. Clark, Mr. V. F. Waldau; viola, Mrs. C. Price Smith; violoncello, Mr. H. M. Mann; double bass, Mr. W. L. Barclay; flute, Mr. Brown; oboe, Mr. W. Beeton; clarinets, Mr. Camillis, Mr. E. J. Wright; bassoon, Mr. E. Newcombe; cornets, Mr. H. Hodgson, Mr. E. A. Joyce; trombone, Mr. T. W. Appleton; drums, Mr. W. Wareham; piano, Mr. Laurence Hey.

ABOUT THE PLAYERS.

The roll of Marjorie Joy, "A Country Girl," is gracefully portrayed by Miss I. H. Fisher, a new-comer to the ranks of the Society's principals. She is an artless village maiden, a taking lover, and above all possesses a soprano voice of great sweetness and purity which soon captivates the audience. In her song "Coo," surely one of the prettiest in any musical comedy, she scores a great success, and her duet, "Boy and girl," with Geoffrey Chalonier is delightfully sung. Appreciative applause greets the appearance of Miss Peggy Green, who has always been given a leading part in the Society's productions. She takes the role of Nan, who ostensibly a flirt, but incidentally very good-hearted and also quite clever in her contribution to the general scheme of things, relying not a little on her unaided efforts in setting right other people's love affairs. Miss Green can reproduce Devonshire "bregue," and this was a great asset to her in her portrayal of the part. She radiates genuine humour all the way through, and carries off her part very skilfully. In her songs, "Try again, Johnnie," "Molly the Marchioness," and "Come to Devonshire," in each case supported by the chorus, she is particularly happy. The part of Princess Mehelaneh of

Bhong is allotted to Miss Rose Rowbotham, who gives a vivid study of a woman scorned in love, infusing quite a dramatic element into her appearances with Chalonier, whom she vainly tries to secure as a husband. Miss Rowbotham, too, is an accomplished singer, as she proves in her rendering of "Under the Deodar" and, later, "There's plenty of love in the world."

Miss M. F. Spalding was very happily cast as Madam Sophie, the part little dress-maker, who quickly seizes her opportunity of entering Society, and carries off her new position with plenty of aplomb. She was excellent in the intriguing scene with Barry, whom she greets with a kindred spirit with a soul for art and with whom she sings the well-known duet, "Two little chicks," which, with its catchy music, makes a distinct hit. Later she is associated with Barry in another amusing duet, "Quarrelling."

Mrs. A. J. Hobart displays the qualities of a true actress in the part of Mrs. Quinton Raikes, a fashionable lady, and though the part gives her comparatively limited scope she makes the most of it. The other principal ladies' parts are creditably filled, and mention should be made of the clever dancing in the second act of Miss E. Bowhill (as Miss Carruthers), which is a deservedly popular item.

Mr. C. L. Bocking gives a capital interpretation of the difficult part of Geoffrey Chalonier, the hero of the piece. As a naval officer he does not forget what is due to the dignity of the Senior Service; on the other hand he has his lighter moments and love passages in which he is equally happy. His stern refusal of the princess's overtures is very well done. In the song, "The Sailor Man," he gives a spirited rendering which is highly popular. It is no exaggeration to say that the success of the play depends to a very great extent on Barry, Chalonier's sailor servant. Mr. E. T.

Parfitt fills the role with conspicuous success. No sooner does he appear on the scene than he seems to take charge of everything and everybody, and he does it with such droll humour and breezy geniality that he becomes a general favourite and remains so throughout. He is most amusing, of course, when in the second act he disguises himself as a lady and turns up at the fancy dress ball. Mr. Parfitt certainly adds to his laurels as an amateur actor by his performance. Another favourite with the audience is Mr. Gerald Debnam, who exploits the part of Sir Joseph Verity to the full, and puts into it the versatility which it demands. One or two local topical allusions are very skilfully worked into his dialogue, which the audience are not slow to appreciate. Mr. H. J. Jupp, as the Rajah of Bhong, successfully accomplishes that combination of dignity and humour which the part demands, and gives a capital rendering of the song "Peace." Mr. V. C. Spurgeon does very well as Douglas Verity, Sir Joseph's son; and Mr. W. H. Tutt, the popular hon. secretary of the Society, impersonates Granier Mummery with skill and success. A very pretty feature of the play is the appearance of a group of village children in the first act; they are quite charming and deserved favourites with the audience.

The Chelmsford Society has always been fortunate in its chorus, and this production is no exception to the rule. The company have fully caught the madrigal spirit which is expressed in the first act, and are equally happy in the tuneful incidental numbers that are found in the second act. Taken all through, the production is one on which the Society may be unreservedly congratulated.

Miss Madge Macklin is once again producer and stage manager, and Mr. C. Kenet Dryden is the musical director. To both of these the company as a whole are greatly indebted, and the unanimity of purpose displayed both behind and in front of the footlights is largely responsible for the

renders good service as hon. prompter, Mr. B. E. Howes as hon. call boy, and Mr. W. J. Beeton as hon. property master.

On Monday the performance was under the patronage of the Chairman, Committee, and Staff of the Chelmsford and Essex Hospital on Wednesday of the President, Committee, and members of the Chelmsford Chamber of Commerce; and to-night (Friday) the Essex farmers. To-morrow's matinee is under the patronage of the Society's President, Sir Henry Curtis-Bennett, K.C., M.P., and the evening performance, of the Mayor and Mayoress, members of the Town Council, and officials of the borough.

SOME OF THE SCENES IN "A COUNTRY GIRL."



Illustration on the left shows a group of lady characters in the song, "M. and Mrs. Brown." In the centre is Mr. E. T. Parfitt (Barry), who appears disguised as a sailor in the second act. Back row, standing, reading from left to right: Mrs. W. R. Catt (Lady Arnott), Mrs. H. P. Pedley (Miss Powyscourt), Miss E. Bowhill (Miss Carruthers), and Miss K. Bowhill (Miss Greville). Seated: Miss L. Davies (Miss Courtland), Miss D. G. Reed (Miss Ercroft). On the right picture on right depicts Miss Peggy Green (Nan), supported on her right and left, respectively, by Mr. J. Myall (Lord Grassmere), and Mr. J. W. Hawkes. On the left of the picture are Mr. V. C. Spurgeon (Douglas Verity), and Mr. J. N. Franklin; and on the right Mr. R. G. Morrish (Major Vicat), and Mr. H. Tomalin. A row of pictures: On left, a characteristic pose of Mr. C. L. Bocking (Geoffrey Chatterton), the hero of the play, and Miss I. H. Fisher (Marjorie Joy, "A Country Girl"). On right: Mr. Parfitt in his role of the sailor servant of the hero, with Miss M. F. Spalding (Madam Sophie), as they appear in the duet, "Two little chicks." Photos: Spalding, Chelmsford.