

CLEVER AMATEUR DRAMATICS AT CHELMSFORD

FINE PERFORMANCE OF "THE COUNTRY GIRL."

The Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society has always won popular favour by the choice of its works. This week the Society is giving the musical comedy, "A Country Girl," at the Regent Theatre, Chelmsford, and the members are again revealing the excellent talent there is for this class of work in and around the County Town. A distinct improvement is to be seen in each succeeding production—this is the sixth the Society has undertaken—and a pleasing feature is the judicious manner in which the prominent parts are distributed. A clever member of the chorus invariably gets the opportunity of a more responsible part, and herein lies a secret of the Society's success. The opening performance on Monday was very well attended, and the

sip at the pump completes the journey Nan, for the most part, laughs her way through it all; she enjoys a mild flirtation like any Devonshire girl," and playfully tantalises the better bred men-folk in the village by her popular singing of "Try Again, Johnnie," a great favourite in her native Shire. Nan also has hard commonsense, and expresses it sometimes enigmatically. She puts the real verve into her song, "Come to Devonshire." Her abilities in funny situations are seen when she sings "Molly the Marchioness," whose Court train, "a 20-yarder," is rarely where it should be. Mr. H. J. Jupp, as the Rajah of Bhong, is a stately figure, accompanied by his native attendants (Mr. F. C. Pluck and Mr. H. E. White). The regal picture is completed by the exquisitely gowned and jewelled Princess Mehelaneh of Bhong, for which part Miss Rose Rowbotham is ideally suited. Whether in her royal rôle, or later as the spurned lover of

master, Challoner, for whom he disposes of a tin mine of doubtful worth to the unsuspecting Sir Joseph. Mr. Parfitt well maintains his excellent reputation in local amateur dramatic circles, and Mr. Debnam proves a master of mirth. Their funniest association is during the second act, when as a maiden lady at the dance Mr. Parfitt meets "her" affinity in the stolid nobility of Sir Joseph; he sees his brandy flask quickly emptied at the lips of his breathless acquaintance, whose elegant gown is a serious hindrance when the wearer wants a cigarette from the pocket of "her" trousers. Barry's urbanity spreads with his song, "Yo, ho, little Girls," and he has his own little affair with the demure and piquant Sophie, well played by Miss M. F. Spalding. Some bright and humorous scenes take place between these two, and they sing "Two Little Chicks" with amusing effect. Barry, in the female sense, tells in funny vein the story of "Me and Mrs.

personating a typical Granter Mummery in the first act, and the pompous announcer in the second. Mrs. A. J. Hobart well sustains the part of the fashionable Mrs. Quinton Raikes, and Mrs. W. Ralph Catt is a vivacious, light-hearted Lady Arnott. Quite a feature in the early part of the second act is the dance by Miss E. Bowhill (as Miss Carruthers). Besides being a clever dancer, Miss Bowhill lets everybody know how happy she feels. She has been re-called at every performance so far. Others not already mentioned who take name parts successfully are Mr. W. T. Rondel (Lord Anchester), Mr. R. G. Morrish, secretary of the Chelmsford Hospital (Major Vicat), Mr. A. W. Ward (Rube Fairway), Mrs. C. H. Smith (nurse), Mrs. C. L. Bocking (Lady Anchester), Mrs. H. P. Pedley (Miss Powyscourt), Miss L. Davies (Miss Courtland), Miss K. Bowhill (Miss Greville), and Miss D. G. Reed (Miss Ecroyd).

A special note must be made of the



Spalding Photo.
Left to right: Miss E. Bowhill (as Miss Carruthers), Miss Lois Davies (Miss Courtland), Miss K. Bowhill (Miss Greville), Mrs. A. J. Hobart (Mrs. Quinton Raikes), Mr. W. T. Rondel (Lord Anchester), Mrs. H. P. Pedley (Miss Powyscourt), Miss L. Davies (Miss Courtland), and Miss D. G. Reed (Miss Ecroyd).

name may be said of the succeeding performance tonight. They will be continued this (Friday) evening and tomorrow evening, and there will be a matinee to-morrow afternoon. The audience are most appreciative, and individual, chorus, and orchestral work are deservedly encored.

"A Country Girl" is in itself a delightful study in contrast. There are two acts, and they transport the audience to two widely different places. In the first, everything subserves to the very real atmosphere of a country village in Devonshire. The happy laughter of the pretty village maidens, mingling with the jovial, ruddy-faced rustics and their light-hearted betters within the parochial boundary, bring animated life around the village pump and the golden cornfields yonder. The second act is laid miles away in fashionable Town, giving a peep into the dazzling sights at a Fine Arts Dance. Such a change of surroundings calls for stagecraft, and let it be said at once that the Chelmsford Society is this week showing how near to perfection an amateur cast can go in accomplishing all that devolves upon it.

DOWN IN DEVON.

Selection of the name parts has again been most happily done. Everybody contributes his or her best to the general scheme, and the latent possibilities of each have been fully utilised with a success at once observable. As Marjorie Joy, "A Country Girl," Miss Ivy H. Fisher won instant admiration. Coy, and of charming manner, in a voice that the birds in the cornfield seem to echo, Miss Fisher does all that is required of her with a grace that her watchers are quick to appreciate. She becomes almost everybody's lover; at least, they all look happier when she is about. The hero, Geoffrey Challoner, the Naval officer, home from the sea, is all the more a hero because he comes back to pretty Marjorie. Mr. Cecil L. Bocking, as Geoffrey Challoner, brings home to Devonshire a breezy, good-hearted nature, not without its serious side. Miss Fisher sings "Coo" so beautifully that four charming little children (Rosemary Fitch, Mollie Price Smith, Douglas Catt, and Leslie Fitch) stop in their wheelbarrow frolics to listen, then two of the children rush to Marjorie, and they finish the song together, a picture of harmony. While Marjorie is swinging in the orchard, she and Geoffrey sing "Boy and Girl" in taking fashion.

The good-hearted, buxom Nan has given an opportunity to Miss Peggy Green to be her natural self, not always so easy as it sounds before the footlights, but in which Miss Green is adding to her already high reputation in the records of the Society. Miss Green is herself a Devonshire girl. Join to one of her native "hers," and you are half-way to the land of honey and cream. To see her and hear her go-

Geoffrey Challoner, Miss Rowbotham displays her undoubted gifts with a freedom and a self-control that make her presence a feature. Her attendants, Miss M. Courtman and Miss C. Hart, by their classical poise, add grace to the charms of their mistress.

FUN PROVOKERS.

Humour in full measure runs through the story, and two of the more prominent fun provokers are Mr. E. T. Parfitt, as Barry, and Mr. Gerald Debnam, as Sir Joseph Verity. They do a good deal together, in the inimitable style for which both are well known. Barry, quick-witted and suave, returns from sea with his

Brown," after tripping over his gown and losing his "sweet auburn" wig in the fall. The concerted number, "Take your pretty partner at the ball," was sung and danced to sparkling music by Marjorie, Nan, Sophie, the Rajah, Lord Grassmere (Mr. J. Myall), and Douglas Verity (Mr. V. C. Spurgeon). Miss Rowbotham sings in her best style "Under the Deodar," and has been called upon to repeat it often. In "There's plenty of love in the world" she combines vocal and artistic gifts.

OTHER PARTS.

Mr. W. H. Tutt, the popular hon. of the Society, shows versatility by



Miss Ivy H. Fisher (as Marjorie Joy) and Mr. Cecil L. Bocking (as Geoffrey Challoner).

Spalding Photo.

beautiful costumes of the principals and the chorus. The scene in particular in the first act, that featuring the shepherdesses and the haymakers, is of impressive charm, while the dance dresses in the second act are a spectacle of colourful animation as the gay couples move about laughing and joking. The ensembles are effectively carried out, and would do credit to a much larger Society.

The work of the chorus, who have plenty of scope in many pleasing scenes, as usual reaches a high level. The members are: Miss B. Baker, Mrs. J. Banham, Miss R. C. Cannon, Miss U. M. Cannon, Miss V. Cannon, Miss A. E. Chinnell, Miss K. Claydon, Mrs. E. C. Cousens, Miss E. M. Cousins, Mrs. J. Darby, Miss N. Doole, Miss I. Guest, Miss A. Hawkins, Miss D. L. Mann, Miss C. G. Marks, Miss L. Marshall, Miss E. S. Myall, Miss E. M. Peggs, Miss E. Proctor, Miss L. M. Redgwell, Miss E. Snyers, Miss K. Young, Miss M. Turner, Messrs. W. R. Catt, J. N. Franklin, C. C. Firman, J. W. Hawkes, F. Hiner, A. J. Hobart, H. K. Mitchell, J. Nokes, T. Thomas, H. Tomalin.

Such a production as this depends a great deal for its success on the capabilities of the orchestra—the programme says the music is its first and most charming quality—and here the Society have first-class performers, who splendidly interpret the tuneful passages. Mr. G. Kenner Dryden is the capable musical director. The orchestra comprises: Messrs. Maitland de Lacey (leader), C. E. Oliver, A. H. Trim (1st violins), S. H. Clark, V. F. Waldau (2nd violins), Mrs. C. Price Smith (viola), H. M. Mann (cello), W. L. Barclay (double bass), Brown (flute), W. Beeton (oboe), Camillis, E. J. Wright (clarinets), E. Newcombe (bassoon), H. Hodgson, E. A. Joyce (cornets), T. W. Appleton (trombone), W. Wareham (drums), and Laurence Hey (piano).

"A Country Girl" abounds in droll sayings. Here are one or two:—Nan: Anybody can have a sailor boy for me; I like a man I can keep my eye on. For a wife who doesn't flirt, and will wash your Sunday shirt, come along to Devonshire.—Barry (speaking of an opposing election candidate): He is about as popular as a glass of milk at a masonic banquet.

The comedy is admirably produced and stage managed by Miss Madge Macklin (by permission of Sir George Dance). The music is by Lionel Monckton, Paul Rubens, and Percy Greenbank, and the lyrics by Adrian Ross. Miss Macklin also arranged the dances. Mr. F. W. M. Powley is the hon. prompter, Mr. B. E. Howes hon. call boy, and Mr. W. J. Beeton hon. property master. Mr. Gerald R. Balls, the manager of the Regent Theatre, and the staff and orchestra of the theatre have rendered valuable help. Mr. Laurence Hey is the Society's enthusiastic hon. pianist and chorus master, and Mr. C. Coe and his helpers have assisted throughout.

Monday's performance was under the patronage of the Chairman, Committee, and staff of the Chelmsford and Essex Hospital; on Wednesday the President and members of the Chelmsford Chamber of Commerce; this (Friday) evening the patrons will be the Essex farmers; tomorrow afternoon the President of the Society (Sir Henry Curtis-Bennett, K.C. M.P.); and to-morrow evening the Mayor (Cr. Hugh Wright, M.B.E., J.P.),

and the Corporation.