



A scene from *The Good Humoured Ladies* by Goldoni designed by Mr. Pier Luigi Pizzi in Paris.

Early Italian Masterpiece at Theatre of Nations

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

PARIS, JULY 3

Besides the Compagnia dei Giovani announced for this year's festival, the Theatre of the Nations has played host to two other companies who came along to fill in the gaps left by defaulters. The all-black choir from Atlanta that was to have given a programme of authentic negro spirituals got cold feet at the last minute when the money required for the trans-Atlantic crossing proved insufficient. Fortunately Mr. Vittorio Gassman was in Rome and a trunk-call brought him scurrying to the Vieux-Colombier with a kip full of costumes and a thunder-flash or two ready to take over where Miss Barbara Jefford and Mr. Michael MacLiammoir had shown him the way.

Their type of brilliant one-man virtuosity enabled Mr. Gassman to range with perfect ease over the ground that stretched from Dante to Pirandello, not to mention a couple of hummocks represented by Shakespeare and Leopardi. A small number of critical voices has been heard hereabouts condemning this *genre* as being more exhibitionist than purely artistic. But it evidently makes its appeal to the same sort of audience that willingly supports the actor-manager who surrounds himself with less imposing players than himself provided that they can sit in uncritical admiration at the feet of their idol.

REMARKABLE HUMANIST

The last defaulter was the National Theatre of Cairo which telegraphed its inability to fulfil its engagement here "in view of the present situation". This cryptic message did not explain whether it referred to the inordinate heat-wave in the Egyptian capital or to the cooling-off in Franco-Arab relations in Evian or to some other cause. Whatever the explanation, we were left deploring Egypt's demise and turned our full attention, instead, to the Teatro Stabile di Torino—the Turin Repertory Theatre. This excellent troupe, directed by Mr. Gianfranco de Bosio, presented an early sixteenth-century masterpiece of which the world has so far only read in the history books. *La Moscheta*—wrongly translated in the programme as *La Coquette*, for the title of the play describes a "fancy" way of speaking when country folk exchange their regional dialect for the high-falutin' talk of their betters—is the supposed work of Angelo Beolco, alias Ruzante.

This remarkable humanist before his time, who was the natural son of a Paduan doctor, was the author of half a dozen plays and a number of dialogues long since forgotten but recently unearthed. *La Moscheta*, written between 1525 and 1528, is the prototype of the comedy of humours. First staged in 1950 by Mr. de Bosio with students from Padua University, it has now been revived with professional actors. The charmed world of Beolco is peopled by well-known elemental types that speak to us straight from the shoulder, as it were. Scraping together a miserable existence from the earth, these dwellers on the outskirts of the palaces and houses of the rich have left but a scant account of their way of talking or thinking, though their appearance is familiar to us from the canvasses of such painters as Breughel or Le Nain.

Beolco does for these indomitable and uncomplicated creatures of fortune and the whims of their feudal masters without a trace of condescension what Chaucer or Shakespeare did for their like across the Channel. There is a striking affinity between Betia, the voluptuous wife of the hero, and the Wife of Bath, or between the hero, whom Beolco humorously dubs Ruzante, and, say, Lancelot Gobbo, or Dogberry, or Falstaff, or some of the blaspheming proletarians to be found in Ben

Jonson or Dekker. The Ruzante of the play is a good-for-nothing, scoundrelly coward, who lies and cheats his way out of awkward situations and will even beg his faithless wife for forgiveness if that will save him a further cudgelling at the hands of his brutish neighbours.

Mr. Franco Parenti cringes and cajoles with the inexhaustible energy of one whose life is bitter but inescapable. His is a masterly performance—a shade too drawn out perhaps in view of the unfamiliarity of the Paduan dialect—that fits in perfectly with the other richly drawn portraits: Miss Elsa Vazzoler's of his slut of a wife, and Mr. Alessando Esposito's truculent soldier of fortune, who voices every mercenary's *cri-de-coeur*, surely, when he confides to us in one of those conventional soliloquies of the day how pleasant a soldier's life would be if only he had nought to do but spend his days drawing his pay and spending it in the tavern. The fruity Rabelaisian oaths and turns of phrase roll off the actors' tongues like the sweat off the brows of the toiling goodmen they have to impersonate. For all their humbug, these Paduans knew how to call a spade a spade and made no bones about it!

GOLDONI COMEDY

Mr. Giorgio de Lullo's Company of Youth showed their versatility by appearing to equally good effect in Goldoni's *Le Morbinose* and in *Anima Nera*, a contemporary study of a Roman Jimmy Porter, by Giuseppe Patroni Griffi. The ebullience of the good-humoured Venetian ladies of the former, in search of ephemeral pleasure along the canals, gulling their old-maidenish aunt by sending her the lad from the local coffee-house in the guise of a suitor, and exploiting everyone's natural weaknesses for the sake of a cheap thrill, leaves a bitter taste in the mouth that not even the splendid fooling of Mr. Romola Valli as the absurdly deaf gaffer who has lost every sense but that of taste can allay. Nor do Mr. Pier Luigi Pizzi's spectacular evocations of Venetian street-scenes conceal what is essentially a cruel joke. In the latter play, staged by Mr. de Lullo in the fashionable epic manner—a raised stage with a double bed serving as a *place d'armes* and surrounded by suggestive acting areas—Mr. Paolo Ferrari abuses his inclement world as he abandons his impish wife for a more complacent light-of-love, only to find himself back in his true love's arms at the end. As the woman of easy virtue Miss Rossella Falk gives one more proof of her compelling acting talent.