

Entertaining The Prisoner-of-War

(Continued from previous page)

appear natural—a female impersonator in the vaudeville style was not enough; we could not afford to let the audience laugh at "her," or the dramatic effect would be ruined.

But costuming and make-up overcame this difficulty and the presentation of the character of "Curley's wife" by a young Englishman was extraordinarily lifelike. *Of Mice and Men* was an assured success, and a packed and applauding house of 1500 told us that the Can. p Amateur Dramatic Society (or the "CADS," as we called ourselves) had made history.

From this time on, almost nothing was considered impossible, and among the plays produced during the last year or so have been Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* and *Arms and the Man*; Noel Coward's *Hay Fever*; R. C. Sherriff's *Journey's End*; and Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Ernest*. The players in these shows are truly representative of the Empire, including Englishmen, Australians, New Zealanders, South Africans, and Canadians.

From Camp to Hospital

Later I was sent from Camp 52 to work in a large Italian hospital in Lucca, Tuscany, given over entirely to British sick and wounded. Daily contact with Italian doctors and sisters soon gave me a pretty good working knowledge of the language, and for about a year, with two others, I had the job of translating a daily 10-minute news bulletin in English from the Florence newspapers. This was copied and read in every ward in the hospital, so that the patients and staff had some sort of idea of what was happening in the outside world.

Also, we got busy again on organising and entertainments; concerts were started, and later a dramatic society came into being; and this time we had many advantages in our favour. Apart from having gained experience at Chiavari, we had facilities for rehearsal and a better wardrobe; there were Greek and Slav internee patients in the hospital, and we could draw on their civilian clothing for costumes. In fact, for our

"leading lady" we had a Slav dress-designer create "original" gowns from material bought outside the hospital.

They Wrote Their Own

Our first show at Lucca was the already-proven *Of Mice and Men*, and this was followed by Anthony Armstrong's *10 Minute Alibi*. But once again we faced a shortage of plays, so once again we wrote our own. An Australian, Ted Broomhead, wrote and produced *The Comet*, a thriller, and I followed up by writing and producing a musical drama based on the life of the composer Stephen Foster, and featuring an entire Christy minstrel show woven into the plot. As both these were two and a-half hour shows and received success comparable with that of the work of Shaw and Coward, we felt we hadn't done so badly!

Just before I left Lucca on the long-awaited journey home, our shortage of plays was alleviated through the interest of an Italian officer who secured scripts for us from the Florence Repertory Library, which included the works of Shaw, Maugham, O'Neill, Coward, and many other authors. So there were at least plenty of plays available—but they were in Italian. It merely remained for us to translate them back into English; Translating an entire book or play is no light task, especially when one has to do it all in one's own handwriting. However, before leaving, I completed the full script of that vintage farce by Brandon Thomas, *Charley's Aunt*. A couple of months later, in Cairo, I was able to see Jack Benny's recent film version of it. My translation wasn't so bad after all!

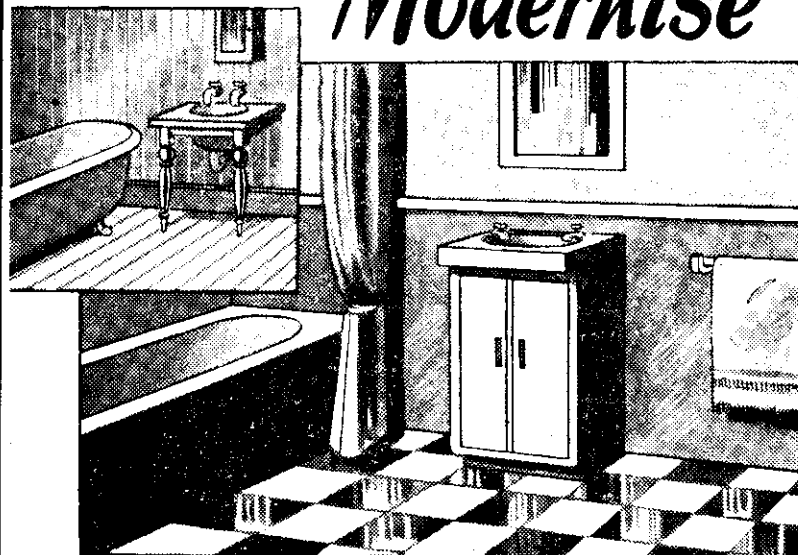
Though my recollections of prisoner-of-war entertainments apply only to Chiavari and Lucca, they may be an indication of the way in which the British and Dominions soldier overcomes the boredom of captivity in every camp, in Germany as well as in Italy. And these concerts and plays should improve even more in the future as those of us who have returned are able to give the British Red Cross an idea of what is wanted—and, as always, that magnificent organisation, which never fails the prisoner-of-war, will deliver the goods.



Readers may remember these as the leading players in Hollywood's version of "Of Mice And Men." The producers of the Italian prison-camp version described here had fewer resources but more initiative

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