

of the dark, blinking timorously out from one of the more fabulous caverns of Eldorado. Over his head—a sword of Damocles—hovered a vast and gilded coat of arms.

Nor is this all. The walls of the boxes are wine red, each box containing a large mirror. A luxuriant growth of crimson plush has a stranglehold on the whole interior of the theatre. Over seats and balustrades it has crept, the infection at length spreading to the stage curtains, a flaming phantasy in red fluff, exciting both in appearance and behaviour. To crown all, a chandelier of becoming period and proportion hangs precariously from the roof, poised ready at a moment's notice to pin to their seats the luckless occupants of the centre block of the orchestral stalls.

For an opera house, the floor space is small, but the building is of a height sufficient to accommodate three tiers of boxes and a spacious gallery. Looking down from a third-tier box close to the stage, the effect is rather that of gazing into a capacious bear-pit. Unrehearsed incidents on the stage serve at times to heighten this impression. A curious departure from general practice is that smoking is permitted throughout the performance. What the artists think of this is not considered or recorded, but no one would deny that an atmosphere of the consistency of blue flannel is hardly conducive to the perfect vocalization of anything more tuneful than laryngitis.

So much for the setting. To describe the performance without seeming to be wantonly unkind is more difficult. In spite of crippling handicaps in the wardrobe and properties departments, the company put such enthusiasm into their work that one could not help but applaud their efforts. I was able to see two of them—"Madame Butterfly" and "Lucia di Lammermoor." The first was an unfortunate choice. The leading soprano having succumbed to influenza, a courageous lady who had probably been able to sing "Butterfly" some twenty-five years ago, was taking, or rather filling, her part. The sensation of disappointment as Butterfly, thirteen

stone of thistledown, volplanned heavily from the wings, is still painfully vivid.

As though that were not enough, her irritating but faithful female attendant considered it necessary for the registration of emotion to move at the double in demented circles wringing her hands the while, in the traditional "maid and the mortgage" manner. To crown all, "Lieutenant Pinkerton" was a reedy tenor with an errant Adams-apple and trousers at half-mast, while at least one member of the orchestra was perusing *The Reader's Digest* when he should have been more profitably employed. Some one's suggestion that he was probably busy qualifying for a subordinate part with the Allied Military Government may not have been far wide of the mark.

Costuming and scenery were of the poorest, but that could hardly be avoided in Italy's economic circumstances. "Madame Butterfly" did not suffer severely from lack of wardrobe, as wonders can be performed with a few gaily coloured kimonos, but the scenery was limited to one or two dingy back-cloths and side pieces invariably quite inapposite.

"Lucia di Lammermoor" was of a much more stirring character. Lucia herself was young and commendably shapely, with a soprano voice of a very pleasing quality. Her mother occupied a chair at the extreme right of the orch-

