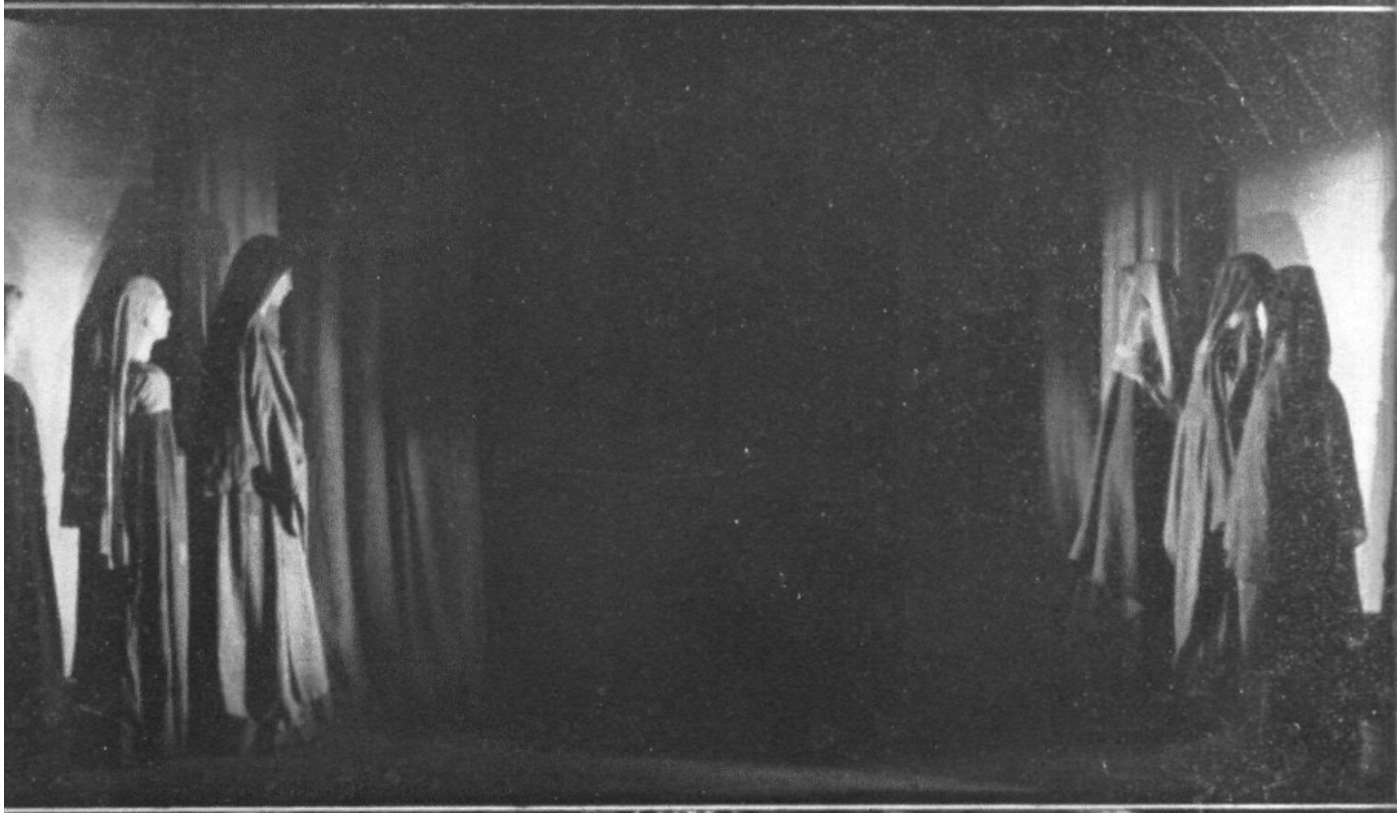
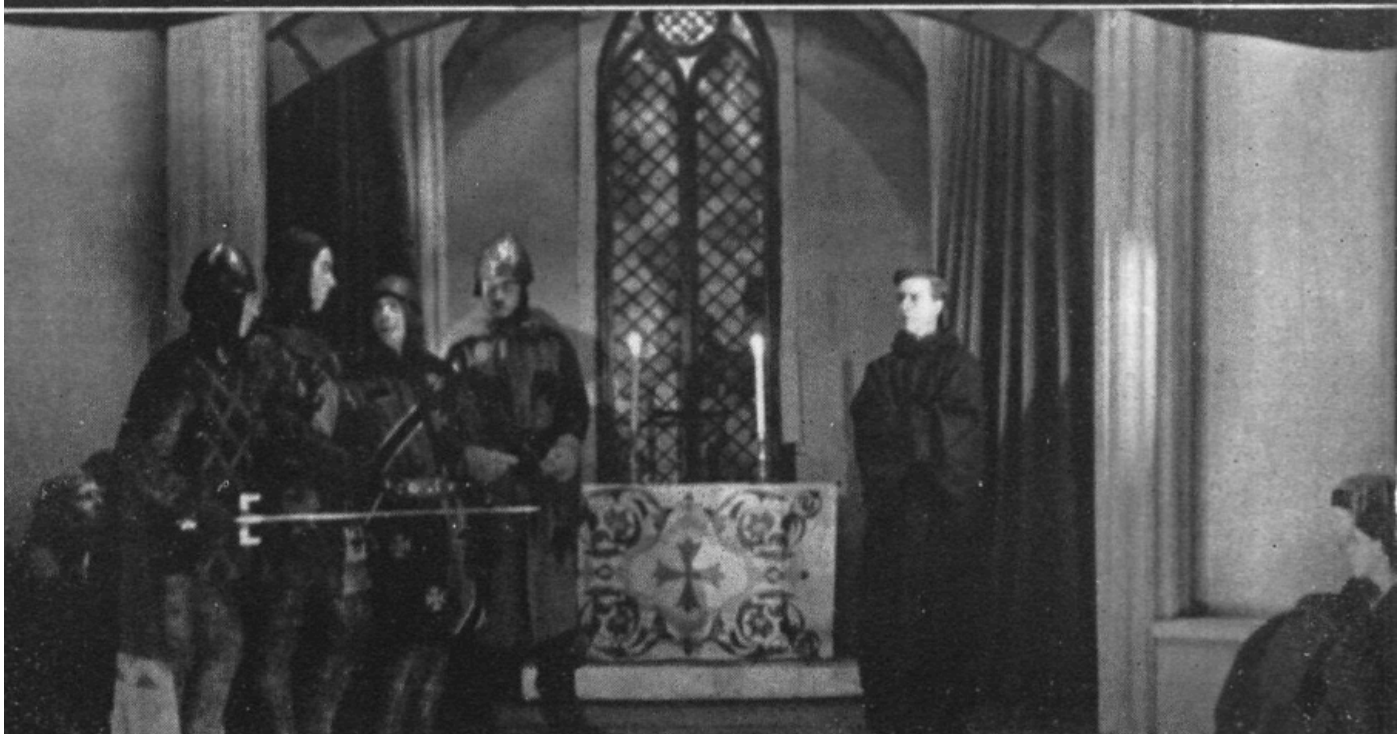






JULIUS CAESAR

At the end of last term members of R1 produced scenes from Shakespeare's 'Julius Caesar'. After only three weeks' rehearsal the acting was, on the whole, confident and imaginative. Four scenes were selected, and the excellent prologues and epilogue composed and read by D. B. Thomas did much to indicate the missing context.

The small part of Caesar was played by A. P. Ryle, who spoke his lines well, especially as the Ghost. Taylor was well suited for the part of Mark Antony, but might, perhaps, have used a little more emotion in parts of his speeches to the crowd. Comic relief was afforded by Cinna, the poet, which was played with assurance by Chapman. The last scene was, in many ways, the best because of the mutual combination of Wheeler and Gass taking the parts of Brutus and Cassius. Here confidence, combined with an understanding of their parts, produced a good portrayal of the quarrel before the appearance of Caesar's ghost.

E.V.P.

MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL

'Murder in the Cathedral' is in no sense of the word an easy play, for it is both original and unique in its theme and in its treatment. The common ingredients of plays—spectacle, action, sex interest and supernatural occurrences—are here entirely lacking; there is only the personal tragedy of Becket and all it implies to command the attention.

He stands apart, a great, though human, figure, assailed by certain temptations which, however, are not the conventional temptations of the old moralists, but a group of four alternatives: pleasure, power, ambition and glory, one of which Becket must choose. He can return to a life of good living and cultured ease; he can take office as the chief vassal of the king; he can strike out for supreme power in his own name; or fourthly, he can, by seeking martyrdom, promote the glory of both himself and the Church of God. The last is the only one to commend itself to Becket, but even here he cannot see complete good, unless he resolves his own personal glory into something higher. This he achieves by identifying his will with that of God, as his Christmas Sermon bears witness. 'A martyrdom is never the design of man: for the true martyr is he who has become the instrument of God, and who has lost his will in the will of God. The martyr no longer desires anything for himself, not even the glory of martyrdom.'

Eliot believes—as we have possibly perceived for ourselves—that as

our actions cannot be completely disinterested, there can be for us no absolute standard of good and evil, and that therefore our conduct must be regulated by a pursuit of what appears to be the most disinterested and self-abnegatory end. Such a conception of morality as Eliot expounds must inevitably make considerable demands on the alertness and receptiveness of the audience, for new truths are not easily learned. This, of course, implies no alleviation of the responsibilities of the actors or the producer: a clear and precise idea of the upshot of the play, and the ability to interpret it to the audience, are essential to a successful production. The XXI Club was not found wanting in this respect; all the actors appeared to have a clear idea of the significance of the action, and were able to dovetail their parts into a harmonious whole, which is all the more remarkable since only one of them had had any previous dramatic experience.

The outstanding performance was the portrayal of Becket by A. C. Wilson, who displayed adequate dignity and considerable understanding. The dignity of his bearing was matched by his dignity of diction, which, while pleasantly modulated, betrayed little of the conflict within him. Even in his bitterest moments he remained an archbishop. The Christmas Sermon he delivered neither in the manner of a professional preacher, nor in that of a layman reading another's homily: he was rather the understanding father of the flock, talking to them in their own idiom. If anything were lacking in his performance, it was some slight indication of his state of mind; under such a strain even an English archbishop might be excused some display of emotion.

His evil geniuses were played by B. W. Ritchie, J. K. Perring, K. T. Sawyers and A. Ferguson, each in turn offering his wares in a sufficiently businesslike manner. They might have made more of their sinister airiness, for as creations of the imagination they can hardly be overdrawn. When later embodied as knights, they retained their individual characters and were a little more solid in appearance and bold in manner, though their tipsiness was slight enough to escape notice. As murderers these four took full advantage of their opportunity to justify their act, vying with each other in plausibility and variously expressing themselves in the jargon of the chairman of a public meeting, an electioneer, a big-business man and Father Coughlin.

The rest of the cast, comprising the chorus and the priests, for the most part echoed each other's perturbation. As actors they are spectators and as spectators actors; for, acknowledging themselves as 'type of the common man', they demonstrate the value of tragedy, both on the stage and in real life, in fortifying and strengthening the resolution of the onlooker. The dull toneless intonation of the women, set the background of drab, apprehensive dejection, which even the gaiety of

their costume could not alleviate. The chorus would have varied their tempo a little, though not their tone, with added effect: their discipline was worthy of note, for not a word was indistinct—a fine achievement, considering the difficult phrasing of Eliot's verse. They might have looked a trifle more dejected as occasion required, for as flat characters they have no other means of expression. The priests in turn could have made more of their agitation; they gave the unfortunate impression that once they had uttered their lines they were waiting for the next one. Otherwise they were adequately priestly both in manner and attire.

A criticism must not be allowed to degenerate into a panegyric, but in this production it would be difficult to find any serious defect: no misinterpretation was apparent, no actor was particularly weak; the standard of diction and verbal accuracy was extremely high. Only the full tones of the adult voice, which a boy cannot be expected adequately to produce, and a sense of spaciousness, which cannot be realised on a small stage, were absent.

Of the incidentals—music and lighting—little need be said; that they were unobtrusive is their highest recommendation. The stage setting, though a strange pastiche of Saxon, Ionic and quasi-Gothic, seemed to blend with the music and the chorus to form a bare austere background to the action.

It would be foolish to evaluate this production by comparison with any previous production, for comparison would serve only to illustrate the versatility of the XXI Club; nor can its success be judged by the volume of applause. If, however, it has caused even a few of the audience to think—and of this there is little doubt—then, and only then, can this production be said to have been worthwhile.

F. C. Barnes (Old Novo).

FENRIS

The pale light of the moon, silvering the sky and redding the clouds,
Reflects sharply from an unexpected window.
Crisp, clear steps of metalled boots cut the silence like a knife,
Echoing through the plain square houses,
Chimney-tipped with featherlets of smoke.
The lumbering colliery-stack waves a black banner over roofs,
And the regular chiff of the engine jerks.
Above, the Plough comes tumbling down the sky,
Orion prides the jewels of his belt before
The shrinking Pleiades apeep.
Coarse laughter from a corner breaks the rope,