

Sombre Play Well Acted

Ibsen Produced by Repertory

CAST OF CHARACTERS.

John Gabriel Borkman W. A. Blake
Mrs. Gumbild Borkman . . . Kathleen Hirst
Erhart Borkman John Dolby
Miss Ella Rentheim Noel Chandler
Mrs. Fanny Wilton Audrey Court
Vilhelm Foidal Ralph Taylor
Frida Foidal Beryl Holloway
Maid Margo Ives

The Repertory Theatre Society aimed high when it chose "John Gabriel Borkman," by Henrik Ibsen, but the production last night at the Princess Theatre proved that the society aimed true and hit the mark, adding another success to their score in thoughtful entertainment. A prominent London critic recently wrote of Ibsen that he was a law unto himself in the matter of dramatic construction. In this piece we do not see a great deal of departure from the accepted rules of theatrical technique, and it is noticeable that when one of the characters indulges in a long and uninterrupted slice of dialogue—such as is seldom heard upon the stage to-day—then occurs the drama's only dragging occasion.

It is a bitter play of human frustration, brilliantly written particularly as regards characterisation. Notice with what spare economy character is etched in. A fine line here, a hint there, and the man or the woman stands as clearly before us as if we had known him all our days.

CONVINCING REALITY.

The plot is one which has been handled before Ibsen, and many times since—the possessive parent dominating the weaker spouse, and the young man at last proclaiming, "I am young, I want to live my own life." This is as old as the theatre and as modern as the happenings of to-day; seldom has it been written with such complete grasp of its theatrical opportunities with such convincing sense of reality.

Only in the last act does one lose a little of this realism. The final scene of all, with its somewhat morbid dialogue, is the least effective in the piece. Also, the meanderings of the old man seem to modern theatregoers a little dull, but this is saved again by vivid little flashes of insight into the human mind, as when he fails to find a reproach for the daughter whose sleigh has tossed him over in the snow, being merely delighted that her equipage was so expensive and magnificent!

Barbara Sisley produced the play admirably. In the first place it was dressed and set in Ibsen's own period, the late Victorian frocking and heavy crowded furniture being suited to the mental attitude of those who spoke of divorce as something one could hardly mention. The contrast in dress of the two main women admirably echoed the clear notes of contrast struck by the author. The one who said bleakly of herself, "I am always cold," dressed in the drab unrelieved ugliness of stuff the colour of stone.

Her more tender sister in a dress on which roses were patterned, and with a little riband of rose colour on her bodice, struck the author's note immediately.

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The producer was right, too, to play this piece quietly, entirely devoid of the restlessness which characterises so much stage work to-day. One cannot pay fullest attention to an author if his characters are eternally moving from chair to couch, from table to fireplace. This is a fact, perhaps, for which some modern playwright should be grateful. Here we have an author whose every word matters urgently and Miss Sisley has paid him due respect.

EARNEST CAST

The whole cast played well and with an earnestness which such a sombre theme deserved. Kathleen Hirst was, perhaps, the most completely in character, and all who know anything of these matters must appreciate the difficulty in a young woman playing so well a middle-aged role of this embittered and possessive type. To have over-played would have been fatally easy; it would also have been to lose for the play half its power.

Noel Chandler must also be congratulated on her character work. She did not forget to act even during those awkward moments when it was her turn to also serve but only stand and wait. W. A. Blake played the megalomaniac quietly, perhaps a little too quietly at times; and Ralph Taylor has been cast so often as an old man that there are few manner-

isms and gestures of senility which he can not assume with ease.

Audrey Court and John Dolby are the symbols for youth trespassing amid the musty airs of old hatreds and jealousies, Beryl Holloway was very charming in a tiny role, and the part played by Margo Ives would suggest that the "maid problem" was exactly the same in those days as it is to-day!

D. L. WARAKER.