

AMUSING COMEDY

Successful Repertory Play

THE Repertory Theatre Society last night staged "The Return of the Prodigal" by St. John Hankin, in the Princess Theatre, Annerley.

The play is by no means a dramatic masterpiece and probably will not be remembered long after the audience has left the theatre, but what all will remember with gratitude to playwright and players is that it offered an evening of amusing entertainment. It was first staged about thirty years ago; but it is only dated as far as externals are concerned, such as an allusion to the newness of the electric light. A play which concerns itself with human nature rather than actual happenings, is welcome and comfortable in any period, especially if it brings with it an air of gaiety and many excellent jests. Some references to the pre-election behaviour of parliamentary candidates, and to those who approve of Sunday sport, proved unexpectedly topical!

On the whole, acting honours for the evening go to the women members of the cast. Whenever the voice of the prompter was loud in the land, it was in response to a masculine SOS. "Gagging" is always regrettable, but particularly so in a play which is generous in wit and economical in words; and surely in St. John Hankin's day a young man would not refer to a woman—even a too-clever one—as "a nasty piece of work," just after she had been shown to her carriage. Such an anachronism should not be necessary if all parts were as well studied as some obviously had been.

To Jim Felgate was entrusted the difficult role of the prodigal—an amusing waster whom one despises but cannot help liking. Mr. Felgate was affected by a heavy cold and did not quite convey the debonair charm of the character—who can be charmingly impudent with a cold in the head? He was more effective in his serious moments, and gave added point to several of his lines by simple but good gestures. He was so completely at home on the stage as the prodigal was comfortably at home in borrowed clothes or new ones he had no intention of paying for.

Kathleen Radford had been very well cast by the producer, Mr. J. Pendleton, for the part of Lady Faringford. She always enunciates her lines cleanly and clearly with a commendable respect for the playwright she interprets, and she has a concise crispness of style which suited her part to perfection. This was an outstanding piece of work; but as Time has not yet had an opportunity to apply any of his cosmetics to Miss Radford's face, she should dip into her make-up box more heavily when she wants to look middle-aged.

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Rhoda Felgate, in addition to her experience, has a very pleasant voice and a strong sense of comedy. Both these gifts added to the pleasure she gave the audience as the futile motherly woman who is quite useless at any time and worse than useless in a crisis. Marjorie Mant played well the colourless character of her daughter who spends life doing nothing more stimulating than finding her mother's smelling salts, helping her father to coffee and embroidering handkerchiefs. The part of Violet offers only one scene of any dramatic worth. This is when the smouldering resentment at her frustrated womanhood flames into words in a talk with her brother. Miss Mant gave this little scene a delicate restraint and real feeling.

Jack Cover, as the virtuous brother, gave a performance which holds much promise. He never forgot that he was on the stage and his facial expression was good whether he was taking part in the dialogue or merely listening to others. Frank O'Sullivan has played so many ecclesiastical parts that he must feel quite accustomed to buttoning his collar at the back! He could, with advantage, speak his lines louder.

Mr. W. Blake may always be trusted to play a character part with good effect, and his Dr. Glasher must be added to the several he has undertaken for the society. Clare Clarke played amusingly a small part as the smug wife of the rector; and Andy Hirst and Pat Roberts were two footmen whose superb velveteen suits should have delighted the old family doctor, for they certainly gave "tone"—a word he found so useful with patients when diagnosis was a little beyond him!

There were several new players in the cast, and all of them made good efforts to catch the spirit of the play and to disguise their inevitable nervousness. Perhaps the most successful was Anne Greenhill as

Stella Faringford; she looked suitably charming, moved easily and wore no obvious self-consciousness. Ludwick Gordon as the moneyed manufacturer, hopeful of securing a seat in Parliament and a daughter-in-law in the peerage; H. G. Harper as a local magnate, and H. J. Busch in the humble but effective role of Baines, the butler, all gave of their best with helpful results.

The production was careful and smooth; but the second act needs a little speeding up, which the experienced producer will no doubt achieve before to-night's performance.

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