

"H.M.S. PINAFORE."

FINE PERFORMANCE BY CHELMSFORD AMATEURS.

The Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society made their first public appearance at the Empire Theatre, Chelmsford, on Tuesday, when Gilbert and Sullivan's comic opera, "H.M.S. Pinafore," was successfully presented.

The formation of the Society was due to the efforts of a little band of enthusiasts who felt that scope existed for an Operatic Society in the Chelmsford district. As the result of a meeting last autumn the Society was launched. Lovers of music and the drama have rallied to its support, with the result that the organisation has been established on what is hoped and believed will be a firm basis. Mr. Collingwood Hope, K.C., consented to become president, and an influential list of vice-presidents was secured. The Executive Committee has for its chairman Mr. W. H. Munday, a most keen and enthusiastic worker, whose previous experience in a similar Society in the West of England has proved of great value. The members of the Committee include Mrs. E. Copland Gray, Mrs. D. Jackson, Messrs. L. S. Bragg, T. Bellamy, and E. G. Brown; with Mr. Percy G. Cheverton as hon. treasurer; Mr. G. E. Bower, L.R.A.M., A.R.C.M., as hon. musical director; and Mr. R. J. Shoobridge as a very capable secretary.

This week's performances were in aid of the Chelmsford Hospital, and it is gratifying to be able to state that before the curtain went up on Tuesday evening the whole of the expenses had been covered by advance bookings, while a fair margin of profit was in addition already assured. This was largely due to the system of honorary membership—people who were ready to pay half-a-guinea, in return for which they received tickets and concessions in regard to booking. Over 260 honorary members were secured, and this very materially assisted the Society in regard to the finances.

THE PLAY.

In choosing "H.M.S. Pinafore" for their initial production the Committee wisely selected a work containing plenty of lively music, and those deliciously humorous situations that give a Gilbert and Sullivan opera something entirely distinctive in comparison with other plays. The story, familiar to everyone, is woven around the love affairs of Josephine, the charming daughter of the captain of the "Pinafore." She is wooed by Sir Joseph Porter, K.C.B., First Lord of the Admiralty, but her affections are set upon Ralph Rackstraw, an able seaman on her father's ship. There is a dramatic denouement when it turns out that the able seaman and the Captain are, through having been changed in infancy by a foster-mother, occupying each other's rightful positions in life. In the end Ralph dons the Captain's uniform, the one-time captain becomes an able seaman, Josephine and her lover are united, and Sir Joseph finds consolation and happiness by marrying his cousin Hebe.

THE PRINCIPAL PLAYERS.

It is a pleasure to be able cordially to congratulate the company on their first performance. The players were exceedingly keen, and they caught, in a highly praiseworthy manner, the spirit that runs through Gilbert and Sullivan opera. Mrs. A. J. Jones has scored several previous successes as a member of the Bury St. Edmunds Dramatic Society. She is an amateur actress of great ability, and interpreted her part with skill; while her singing was delightful, being in fact a feature of the production. Miss Peggy Green charmed the audience by her altogether delightful presentation of Little Buttercup—a character which suited her to perfection. She had a great deal to do, and did it remarkably well. The part of Hebe was pleasingly portrayed by Mrs. D. Jackson, a dainty and vivacious actress, who played with distinction and grace.

Mr. Walter Munday was warmly felicitated on the splendid manner in which he handled the part of Capt. Corcoran. His stage presence was excellent, his quarter-deck manner unimpeachable, and his singing delighted his hearers. Very deservedly appreciated was Mr. Bellamy's appearance in the role of Sir Joseph Porter, a dignified Mid-Victorian First Lord of the Admiralty, with his surprising "official" views on social equality. Mr. Bellamy made the most of his part, and in his singing and acting portrayed that truly Gilbertian idea of a "Lord High Something-or-other," which opera-goers delight in. Mr. Parfitt, in the role of Ralph Rackstraw, the gallant young sailor-lover of Josephine, brought out the dramatic possibilities of the part; and Dick Deadeye was excellently impersonated by Mr. Jeff Shoobridge. A word of praise must be given to the little Midshipman, Master Norman Bellamy, who carried off his part with success; while the boatswain and his mate were exceedingly well represented by Mr. A. J. Jones and Mr. Robertson, respectively.

CHORUS AND ORCHESTRA.

The chorus work was extraordinarily well done, without a hitch anywhere, and there was plenty of life and spirit in the singing. "H.M.S. Pinafore" abounds in attractive music, and the orchestra played admirably, thereby reflecting credit on their experienced conductor who was responsible for training them. The dresses and stage appointments, also, were particularly good.

During the interval on Tuesday Mr. Munday presented Mr. G. E. Bower with a silver-mounted baton as a token of the Society's appreciation of his admirable work.

The performances were continued on Wednesday and last night, and will be given again to-night and to-morrow (Saturday), when, also, there is a matinee.