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"THE SPORT OF KINGS"

A REVIEW

By R. A. F. Handley

I WELL remember seeing, two years before the war, a "racy" play in which one of our most famous actors was playing the leading role. The show was put on in the Provinces as a try-out before having a very long run in London.

This well-known actor had difficulty with his lines, and it was only a matter of time before the inevitable happened — he stuck. A whisper came from the prompt corner, then another, and finally a third. The actor's ears were flapping wildly trying to pick up his cue. Quite suddenly he relaxed, dropped everything and said to the prompter in a perfectly normal voice: "Will you please speak up. The audience cannot hear you — neither can I."

I was reminded of this last night on seeing "The Sport of Kings," a comedy by Ian Hay, put on by the Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society at the Regent Theatre. They will be playing the show every night this week.

I mention the well-known actor above because a stage wait or a missed cue is so rare in a professional show that it sticks in one's memory for a long time. This should be so with an amateur production. It is obviously the thing to aim at. Unfortunately it rarely happens. All amateurs would do well to make a thorough study of their lines before appearing. It would save a great amount of tension on both sides of the footlights and considerably raise their stock.

A Good Show

But wait. The show is good. The criticism above by no means refers to everyone. The guilty few will know. It is very likely that any such mistakes were caused through "first-night nerves" and that dreadful "queasy" feeling in the pit of the stomach before appearing, from which amateurs — and indeed professionals too — rarely escape.

Miss Madge Macklin has made an excellent job of the production. The racy atmosphere is all there, and is well sustained. The men steal the show — but it is mostly a man's play. They have the parts, and the lines, as only Ian Hay can

write them. Honours go chiefly to Tom Parfitt as Algernon Sprigge, Donald Leech as Sir Reginald Toothill, Bart., Leonard Pease as Amos Purdie, and Frank Page as Bates. These four carry the show.

The best scene is undoubtedly between Amos Purdie and Bates, when Amos decides to throw off his cloak of respectability in favour of a temporary job as a bookie on the nearby racecourse. It is really well played, and should warm up considerably later in the week.

Donald Samuel as Joe Purdie is too jerky. He will be greatly improved when he learns to control his eyes. It struck me too that he would have given a great deal to know what to do with his hands. He is ably assisted by Diane Lawson as his sister Katie.

Joan Coultard and Mary Leech as Dulcie Primrose and Mrs. Purdie gave polished performances.

The First Time

The greatest credit is due to the whole of the cast for a delightful show, particularly as I am told that this is the first time the Society has put on a dramatic production. It is a comedy well worth seeing, and a great change to have "live theatre." May it be a regular annual event.

Others in the cast include Dorothy Cox, Phyllis Reed, Rosemary Gornall, Catherine Davies, Cecil Bocking, Jim Welham, Jack Clark, Margaret Summers, Patricia Smith, Betty Wager, Sheila King, Richard Wood, and Maurice Carter. Young Tony Joslin deserves special mention as Albert; played with a delightful Essex accent.

The stage settings were very effective, and the Salon Quintet added a lively touch to the intervals.

Final note: It would add a realistic touch at the end of the show if Algy *kissed* his future wife instead of handling her as though she might have a touch of scarlet fever!