

# VIRGINIA IS A WINNER

## The Chelmsford Society Scores Once More

The measure of the success can be judged by the fact that the second half of the play was not only well received but an entire Fred Minton to raise a laugh. Moreover he achieved his success by guile and wit, without having to resort to custard-pie humour, without being rough and tumble, it was burlesque of the highest order.

The story of "Virginia" is a matter of course. There is a dyspeptic man who is in love with a girl. In this case the triangle becomes a rectangle. The jocular Fred is one of the players in this geometrical figure, but since Euclid informs us that there are equal angles in a rectangle, we expect to find another of the players with a performance equal to that of Fred; and we are by no means disappointed.

### THE LEAD

This time it is a comparative newcomer who makes a comedy hit. June Gisty in the lead part of Virginia, the millionaire's daughter. A dumb blonde with a difference would best describe her performance. With a drill determination she flings defiance at her irate father and flings herself at the man of her choice with the same energy as an all-in wrestler. A poker face which becomes very expressive on occasions and a faultless Yankee twang in her voice topped a fine performance, which made itself felt by its very spontaneity.

She managed to achieve a disconcerting air of bashful ingenuousness which she mixed quite contradictorily with a very friendly charm. The show was carried by the humour and music, as a musical comedy should be. Some faults there were, but on the whole they were lost in the good humour and geniality of the show. Occasionally the speed of the acting slowed and breaths were held in the audience until they became muffled sighs of relief when the pace quickened again. The applause at the end of most solo or chorus acts was not mere perfunctory handclapping, but sincere ovation which on occasions became a storm of appreciation.

The musical numbers are something of which an amateur company could be proud. The Society are fortunate in having Mr. Herbert J. Dykes as musical director, but the quality of the singing is not attributable to him alone. The old and firm favourite of Chelmsford operatics, Dorothy Cox is again in a leading part and in no way rests on her laurels. Fortunately she is by no means a one voice from the ladies' cast, or she is joined by two comparative newcomers in the two Veras—Vera Stock, soprano, and Vera Garner, contralto.

Plantation scenes, with a negro chorus, have established themselves into the tradition of musical comedy and the opening chorus Act II of "Virginia," "Sun amaking," provides the same atmosphere for this show as "Ole in River" does for "Show Boat." Vera Stock made the most of her only solo, as did Vera Garner with her two songs. Indirectly, the players varied as much as their characters would allow them, which gave them all scope they could possibly need.

### THE PEPPERY MILLIONAIRE

Although Leonard Pease's part as the American millionaire is lost every time he becomes peppy, which was often, his characterization of the bloated hunter was never lost. In the midst of all the comic and burlesque Warren's straightforward acting stood out quite distinctly with pleasant contrast; and although melodrama suffered from the comparison with burlesque, he never missed the smallest chance to make his acting tell. John Taylor suffered from a like fate, but never-the-less made a completely distinguished lord. After the list of congratulations comes one commiseration—for Jack Carter, whose throat, after speaking with a bass negro minstrel accent the whole evening, must be as dry as sandpaper. And, after the individuals, the chorus; the men, who had a dignified air of wolves in sheep's clothing with the fleeces rather matted, and the ladies, whose charm and smiles never faltered during the first chorus dance. The others who fill the smaller parts so admirably are Ken Fox, Ted Coulsham, W. Rondel, Peter Warner, Sid Collicott, Reg. Cornell, Brenda Sharpe, Ray Morris and Diane Lawson. The show was produced by Miss Mavis Ward.

Speaking from the stage after the show, Dr. John Taylor, president of the Society, asked the audience if they had enjoyed the show. The applause that followed was answer enough.

## UNCERTAINTY IN "FRESH FIELDS" HOFFMANN PLAYERS' PRODUCTION

THE Hoffmann Players' production of Ivor Novello's "Fresh Fields" did not quite manage to find its feet in the opening night. It was largely due to the lack of sophistication of Ivor Novello's dialogue and situation, for when this genre was penetrated by humour, the players immediately found to their depth and showed what sound acting they were capable of.

But during the major part of the play, with a few happy exceptions, the players never managed to rid themselves of a somewhat hesitant and tentative uncertainty which made rather listless a comedy which should have been sparkling. The fault, however, lay more with the choice of play than with the players, for all of them proved eminently capable of satisfactory acting, given the chance.

Honours for sizing up a character and extracting the most from it went to Jane Goodchild, as the languid Lady Strawholme. When she entered, an air of old Belgravia and powdered footmen entered with her, and she carried that air distinctly and easily.

Dorothy Greatorex infused a great deal of good humour into the part of the bewildered and tactless Australian ex-hotel keeper, but savoured more of suburbia than Australia. Raymond Kirton and Doreen Edwards both evinced sound and straightforward acting and managed to achieve that rare and unexpected satisfaction of a convincing and unembarrassing love scene.

Two people who both got their quota of laughs were Gordon Richell, a rather over portentous butler, and Douglas Newton. Although Douglas proved to be more like an over-anxious youth of the lower fourth, than a masculine colonial, he nevertheless raised many a laugh.

Caroline Wood achieved a certain regality and Lillian Steele, a pseudo-bohemian note, while Alice Hawley struggled with the part of the secretary whose place in both the household and the play seemed uncertain.

The production ran for three nights at the Hoffmann Social Hall, ending on Saturday. Producer was Kenneth Leatherdale.

## "THE WINSLOW BOY" AT BRAINTREE

### Performance of Merit

The latest production of the Braintree and Bocking Amateur Dramatic Society was the well-known play by Terence Rattigan, "The Winslow Boy." Stanley Hayes was producer and he must have felt very satisfied with the excellent performance his company gave.

The cast included many name-well known to followers of amateur dramatics in Braintree and Jack Pilcher, Betty Phipps, Arthur Joscelyne, Donald Smith and Norman Holmes all lived up to their previous good reputation. Ann Crawley, as Catherine Winslow, had a most difficult part to play, and was to be congratulated on stealing the show from more experienced actors. Brian Joscelyne played the "Winslow Boy" and gave a fine performance for one so young, but he should bear in mind that he has to compete with adult voices. Other parts were taken by Ben Nally, Dorothy Arnold, Kit McLaren and Hugh Burgess. Kit McLaren is particularly well-cast as the rather unusual maid.

The whole cast combined so well as a team that it was difficult to single out members for praise. The play gave them all a chance to show their ability and each in turn grasped his opportunity and made the most of it. Stanley Hayes designed the set, which was typically 1912 period, and was built and painted by Norton Amery, Alec Doughty and Ernest Ashtou. Jacques Lister was stage manager and Norton Amery and Brian Sugden were in charge of lighting. The play ran for three nights, ending on Saturday.

After the final curtain on Saturday night, the President of the Society, Mr. Stanley Perry, thanked the audience for their support and applause. He also pointed out that the Dramatic Society was anxious to enrol as many new members as possible, particularly young people, and hoped that at least one interested would come along to the playreadings and take part in future shows.