

Evening Sentinel, Thursday, February 14, 1935

REPERTORY PLAYERS

“Honours Easy” Success

HUMOUR AND DRAMA

Kate Frost	Kathleen Rochelle
Ann Winter	Betty Harrison
Ronald Blayne	W. Dawson Ball
Ursula Barton	Youla Harris
Harry Markham	Alfred Timmis
Commissionaire	John Hollinshead
Colonel Bagnall	C. W. Healey
William Barton	Jim Hudson
Sir Henry Markham	Hugh Anstey
Nellie	Constance Chatfield
Rachel Markham	Sheelagh Hollinshead
Tweed	Geoffrey Swann
Footman	S. F. Mill
Sergeant Tarbuck	Stanley Jones
Joe Budd	John Hollinshead

In "Honours Easy," by Roland Pertwee, the Repertory Players chose for their latest production a play which is always thoroughly effective, and which is calculated to entertain an audience and hold its interest closely from start to finish.

The Players gave their first performance of the play in the Repertory Theatre, Shelton, last night, before a large audience. It will be repeated nightly until Saturday week, February 23rd.

The play has a somewhat intricate plot, to the shaping of which the characters of several of the people in it contribute. There is, for example, William Barton, a successful picture dealer, whose abnormal capacity for amusing a grudge provides most of the motive force for the action. His young lieutenant, Harry Markham, has been with him for a year only when the play begins. Markham is the son of Sir Henry Markham, a South African Jew who changed his name from Markheim on receiving his baronetcy. When Sir Henry invites Barton for a day's shooting at his country house, the latter recognises in

Markham the Markheim who used to employ him in South Africa in his youth, and who once refused to give him a reference, on the not unreasonable grounds that he had forged a cheque to pay gambling debts.

THEME AND CLIMAX

Instantly, Barton looks about him for a means of avenging himself. Fortunately for him, there is a safe robbery at his office, and he is able to “plant” this with some plausibility on Markham. To clear himself, Markham’s only course is to provide an alibi. But he cannot do this honourably because part of the time in which he might have committed the theft, he spent at a hotel in Surrey with Mrs. Barton, with whom, for some time, he had been carrying on a mild love affair. This is pretty dilemma. Finally, the situation is cleared up, and many faces are saved, by the sensible behaviour of the two women of the play.

My criticism of all this is that, even allowing for Barton's peculiarly vindictive nature, the grounds for his spleen against Sir Henry Markham are too slender to be convincing. Markham, indeed, appeared to have behaved with unusual generosity towards him. After detecting him in a forgery, he did not hand him over to the police, or even dismiss him. The only ground for Barton’s grudge is that Markham refused to give him a testimonial five years later - which refusal does not appear to have affected very adversely Barton's subsequent career. This is really a very thin reason for holding a lifelong grudge against a man, and running the risk of prison for conspiring to gratify it!

However, the play makes very good “theatre”. The plot is well worked out, and technically, the play is well constructed. The characters are drawn with a lively hand, and there is plenty of wit, as well as a good deal of shrewd psychology, in the dialogue.

DRAMATIC EFFECT

Mr. Eric Pidduck's Triumph of Production

Mr. Eric W. Pidduck produced the play and has done his work most admirably. The pace seems just right and the interpretation of every scene and character strictly in accordance with the author's intention. Particular praise is due to Mr. Pidduck and of course to the two players, the Hon. Mrs. Harris and Mr. Timmis for the handling of the "hotel scene" between young Markham and Mrs. Barton. The scene, a short one, is brilliantly written. Some of the ice is of the thinnest, but in this production it is skated over very adroitly.

Mr. Pidduck also handles particularly well the scene leading up to the climax of the last act, which makes a really striking dramatic effect when it is reached.

The play has been well cast. Mr. Hudson makes Barton the thorough-paced bounder the author means him to be, yet contrives to be amusing with it - and even, at the end, to move one's sympathy a little. It is difficult to be really cross with an art dealer who thinks a Landseer with twelve stags on it a dozen times as good as a Landseer with only one!

MASTERLY PLAYING

The playing of the Hon. Mrs. Harris and Mr. Timmis, in one scene has already been mentioned. They interpret the complex emotions of the characters capitally here. The

woman, beside herself with vexation and mortified pride, conceals her feelings by keeping up a running fire of sarcastic comments. The man is desperately anxious to do "the right thing," yet feels a mighty cad for doing it. This is masterly playing on the part of both artists. They are admirable elsewhere also, save for a tendency last night to underplay the opening passages between them in the first scene just a little.

Mrs. Betty Harrison is a charming Anne - a model of good sense, sympathy and tolerance. Miss Rochelle plays the part of the underpaid, overworked and generally harassed typist in a quiet restrained key, which is most effective. Her exceptionally pleasant speaking part is a great asset; none of the smaller parts in the play is better done than this.

Quiet and restrained are also the words to apply to Mr. Austin's Sir Henry Markham, and the result, again, is an effective and dignified performance. Mr. Healy has a rich part. He is a real "stage" colonel of the fruitiest type. He plays it for all it is worth, and gets many laughs, without directly playing for them. He did nothing better than the first scene, in which a good deal of humour is derived from the spectacle of this military Diehard confronted with a fearsome example of modern "art." He buys the picture, reflecting with unexpected philosophy that it only means another room in his house that he won't be able to enter! There were times last night when Mr. Healy, seeking to maintain that particular type of vocal inflection with which dramatists always seem to invest the higher ranks of the Army, became a little difficult to follow.

OTHER COMPETENT ACTING

Mrs. Sheelagh (Miss Hollinshead) is delightful in the small part of Sir Henry Markham's sister Rachel. Mr. Hollinshead "doubles" effectively the parts of the commissionaire in the first scene and the hotelkeeper in the last - the latter part is played with a sure, convincing touch - and in smaller parts there is very competent acting by Mr. W. Dawson Ball, Miss Constance Chatfield, Mr. Geoffrey Swann, Mr. S. F. Mill and Mr. Stanley Jones.

The play is well staged, the setting for the last act being particularly charming. Mr. J. G. Jackson is the Players' stage manager and lighting engineer.

"Honours Easy", though not, perhaps, a suitable subject for very close analysis, is first-rate theatrical entertainment, and the Repertory Players production is a highly successful one.

G.T.