

"THE CRIME AT BLOSSOMS"

Repertory Theatre in
Lighter Vein

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY.

Mrs. Woodman Nancy Fowles
A laundry girl Donna Toppin
Valerie Merryman Mary Bulcock
Christopher Merryman (her husband) Clem Christesen
Mr. Palmer (a grocer) W. Shand Findlay
Mr. Plummer, from the local store W. G. Bennett
Mrs. Carrington Nora Booth
Mr. Carrington S. A. Clayphan
The Rev. Charles Stern Robert Kelly
A Charabanc Driver Tom Pollard
A fat lady Gwenda Hanger
Her daughter Sally Nicholson
A child Mavis Caine
A superior husband W. Shand Findlay
A superior wife E. Burnett
A boy with a Concertina D. Kellett Cameron
An Artist Gordon Marshall
His Friend Dorothy Wheller
An old lady Mary Franklin
Her son H. J. Young
An hysterical lady Beryl Holloway
A sightseer Colin Luckman
A disappointed gentleman Robert Risson
A very late visitor William Williams

"THE CRIME AT BLOSSOMS."

Mordaunt Sharp's semi-comedy-satire-thriller, proved to be as good as the name seems, somehow, to imply, save that the prospective theatre-goer must be warned that Blossoms is not a favourite eating house in Harlem, or even a gambling house in a London alley, but a very beautiful country house in Surrey. The crime has fortunately been committed before the curtain has risen, so that we see only the bloodstains, applied with a pot of red paint, and the confessed murderer is revealed at the end of the play, with plenty of lurid, un-authenticated detail to satisfy morbid curiosity.

It is a semi-comedy because there are really not very many good comedy lines in it, except those engendered by one's own sense of the ridiculous, nor does the satire cut very deeply, while the one tiny semblance of a thrill (if repertory audiences really look for that kind of thing in the fare provided by the Brisbane Repertory Theatre Society) occurs in the last act when a dark, sinister gentleman, the murderer, walks on to bring some sense of responsibility into the minds of perfectly respectable people.

In other words the play presents us with a puzzle as to why an organisation which could select, and produce so well, such a fine piece as Barrie's "What Every Woman Knows" a few weeks ago, should now give us this play. The first act seems to take a long time really to get on with the job in hand.

The second act is brighter and better because we are actually seeing something happen. The show at Blossoms is in full swing. Charabancs are arriving. People are paying their good money to see the bloodstains (in red paint), and buying relics (bought by the dozen at the village store), and generally behaving themselves as self-respecting people never do. The best thing in it is Valerie's magnificent reconstruction of the crime before a hypnotised and sensation mongering herd.

The third act brings Retribution and Realisation of Wrong Done. Valerie

weeps on the shoulders of her husband and hysterically demands that no more of the herd shall cross the threshold of this tainted household.

It all sounds like really good melodrama, which it is. To say that the play is not very well written may be a misjudgment of the position, for last night there seemed to be a fair number of lines that were never heard, awkward pauses in which stage whisperers from the wings carried frantic messages to players enshrouded in uncomfortable silences, were far too frequent. Perhaps some of the best lines were lost at these points.

The casting gave opportunities for quite a number of small part people. Indeed, many new faces appeared, some of them obviously making their first appearance in a major production of the society. The main responsibilities, however, fell upon three people, Mary Bulcock as Valerie, Clem Christesen, and Nancy Fowles, wife, husband and maid respectively at Blossoms. Miss Bulcock did very good work and rescued the play from the abyss. But she had to do so much rescue work that she did not have the time to do herself full justice. It is difficult for any player to provide a smooth, polished performance when she is worried as to who will next be the victim of one of those silences mentioned above. Her best work was undoubtedly in the second act, when, regally gowned, she played the showman with fine spirit.

THE RIGHT NOTE.

Clem Christesen struck the right note of bright irresponsibility from the very beginning. He got movement, and the right kind of movement, into a good deal of his work, except when he ceased being bright to assume a very worried mien. A wretched memory, and a tendency at the beginning to speak too rapidly and run his words together, and an inclination to gag when in a tight corner, made it heavy going for him throughout the piece. With more experience and a cooler head he would have improved his performance 100 per cent. But the central idea of the part was well enough conceived.

Nancy Fowles, who is always good in character parts, got everything possible out of the part of the maid. Her sense of comedy and of timing of that comedy was excellent. In the host of other smaller parts those of Robert Kelly, who brought out some warm ecclesiastical humanity in the Rev. Charles Stern, and William Williams, who seemed completely to change the atmosphere on the stage as soon as he appeared, were the best. Donna Toppin, too, did some good work in the first act.

Miss Barbara Sisley, who produced the play, handled the most difficult side of the production, the crowd scene in the second act, really well. There was a convincing animation in the reactions of the people to Valerie's long, eloquent speech, wherein the mystery of the blood-stained room is laid bare for all to see.

The play will be repeated this evening.

A.H.T.