

# "JACOB'S LADDER"

## Repertory Theatre's First Play of the Year

### Cast of Characters:

David Maxton .. C. B. CHRISTESEN  
 Alethea (his wife) .. MARY GIBSON  
 Esther (his daughter) OLGA MOORE  
 Captain Peter Blazeby .. .. .  
 .. .. . ROBERT KELLY  
 Lord Nevern .. .. SHAND FINDLAY  
 Mr. Dorrincourt LUDOVICK GORDON  
 Tommy Whistler .. .. TOM McMINN  
 Barnes (a parlour maid) .. .. .  
 .. .. . SALLY NICHOLSON  
 Producer: Miss Barbara Sisley.

IS genius a channel of communication between us and the supernatural? And if the answer is in the affirmative, is that a reasonable explanation of David Maxton's mysterious message from a soldier, dead eight years, who gives him the tip that a rank outsider will win the 3.35 race on the morrow at 22 to 1? And having received such a message would a man with only three months to live stake all his savings on the race to ensure the independence of his unfaithful wife and his family?

Such is the rather creaky substructure on which is built "Jacob's Ladder," Norman MacOwan's play produced by the Brisbane Repertory Theatre last night at the Princess Theatre. To those who dabble in spiritualism it may be a very interesting play. To those who do not, it would also be interesting enough if it were better constructed and better written. Technically it is hardly good enough for the Repertory Theatre. It is verbose. There are long wordy scenes that take us a very short distance along the road to the climax, and even where the author wishes to clarify a point, he takes about 200 lines to do it, where ten would have done. In the scene where Lord Nevern is being told of David's fate Maxton tells him in ten different ways that the doctors have pronounced his doom. The playwright does not flatter Lord Nevern's intelligence. Then there is the long scene between Dorrincourt and Maxton after the horse comes home. A long rambling discourse is provided, the only possible *raison d'être* being to underline the strangeness of Maxton's experience, to expound more fully the theory about genius and the supernatural, and perchance to excuse the rather shaky

genius and the supernatural, and perchance to excuse the rather shaky substructure of the play. David, to satisfy Dorrincourt's curiosity, rings for Tommy Whistler, who, we are informed, is down in the kitchen. For nearly ten minutes the conversation on stage continues, and we await impatiently Whistler's arrival. He appears long after Dorrincourt has left.

If all these things may be construed as merely carping criticism of the play, let it be said that it has its moments, especially when Whistler is on the stage. What we could have done without Whistler is difficult to conjecture. Mr. Tom McMinn gave us his best character study ever, and provided what light comic relief there was in the whole play. The most real and gripping part of the play is that well acted scene between Whistler and Maxton when the old soldier is giving him the message from the dead. Not only was Mr. McMinn's handling of the character superb, but Mr. Christensen's by-play during the scene was perfectly in keeping. Later Mr. McMinn consolidated his claim to the acting honours by fine work of an entirely different type.

### VERY DIFFICULT PART.

MR. CHRISTESEN had a very difficult part. He did it well, although one wonders whether he got all that he should have done from it. Certain little mannerisms should be overcome, as, for instance, the habit of opening his mouth very wide as a signal that he is about to speak. He brought on to the stage with him always a cheery nonchalance, with the habit of looking round the room every time he entered as if he had not been in it before. But his acting in the last scene compensated nobly for these things. His passing out was quite a moving piece of work. He has developed an ease of manner and a smoothness about his work that shows that experience is bringing out his latent qualities. Next to Mr. McMinn he shared the acting honours of the evening.

As for the others, it should be borne in mind that in this play the society has endeavoured to give some less experienced members of the society their chance to make good. Miss Mary Gibson, looking far too young to be the mother of Esther, a young lady of some 20 years, did promising work. She needed more vivacity, and more sparkle, in the part. At times her acting was very satisfying. At times she rather failed. Olga Moore as the bright and vivacious daughter made every endeavour to be bright and vivacious, but she rather spoiled it by elocuting her lines too much. Mr. Shand Findlay, with make-up a little awry in the first act, would have been more successful in his scene with Maxton, in which he learns the tragic news, if he could have used a greater variety of facial expression.

the tragic news, if he could have used a greater variety of facial expression. Robert Kelly, who cannot be excused on the score of inexperience, did not quite look the swashbuckling Captain Blazehy. Perhaps this was more a matter of casting, than of acting. Ludovick Gordon had an ungrateful role. In the opening of the first act he does not get the conviction of the zealot into that unnecessarily long introductory scene. Needless to say, with the production in the hands of Miss Barbara Sisley, there was very little amiss in this direction.

All of which may sound rather discouraging. It is not meant to be. If the society wishes to give its members experience those who view the play should be prepared to overlook these little things which, perhaps prevent the play from being an A1 production. And if it were not for a little matter of duty one might add "Aren't we all?" The play will be repeated this evening.

A.H.T.