

# THE GARRISON PLAYERS

Standard Of Previous Productions  
Maintained If Not Excelled

## "THE SACRED FLAME"

(By ALEC M. HARDIE)

Last night at the King George's Hall, The Missions to Seamen, The Garrison Players maintained, if not excelled, the standard of their previous production. But what a waste of talent on a play that surely contains more cliches, long-winded outpourings and embarrassing emotional moments than any reputable playwright ought to include outside a parody.

The theme was simple and has been treated successfully before and could be again, but Somerset Maugham dragged out the whole unravelling to an indinate and tiring length. It is to the credit of the cast that the Third Act was received so attentively by the audience. They deserve all possible sympathy for having to utter such lines and doing so with such conviction.

The story concerns an invalided husband, confined to his bath-chair, with an attractive young wife sacrificing herself willingly to him. But she has already fallen in love with her brother-in-law. Also in the house are his mother and his very brisk Nurse.

Between the First and Second Acts Husband dies, apparently naturally, but Nurse has other ideas; the bottle of pills is empty, and was outside the reach of the dead man. Murder! And the loyal wife, rather more involved with her brother-in-law than we at first realised, was the last person to see her husband. With two Acts to fill out news travels slowly and Nurse grows more and more hysterical; her jealousy of the Wife and her long suppressed ideal love of husband all burst out. She eventually makes the accusation. Wife is the murderer! "The Sacred Flame" is not a "who-dun-it" and so the gradual, and how gradual revelation of the emotions of the leading characters has to occupy far too much time, space and repetition of words. With a plentiful supply of paper tissues the final moments can be survived.

The Cast worked very hard and enthusiastically, and the blend of some very attractive clear voices helped to submerge the banality of much of the

script.

Although only on stage for the first Act, Ian Vergen gave a very accomplished and sensitive interpretation of the invalid. He suggested the character of one who hates his bath-chair and the careless pity bestowed upon him. His break-down was one of the embarrassing moments; he acted too well for the script.

As the Doctor, Brian Slevin gave a natural easy performance as a country-squire-type practitioner. He had confidence and is a personality on the stage—even during long periods when he has nothing to say. Edward Swinley as the retired Major of the Indian Police seemed to grow into his part and became more authoritative as the play evolved. He was particularly careful in his more inquisitorial parts, and it was not his fault that he had to advise a young girl to go and shoot herself. Roger Needell as the lover of his brother's wife ambled his way through; rather like a possible tea planter, but not too much like an English country gentleman.

Betty Roberts had a most difficult task as the Nurse and she tackled the part with great enthusiasm. Unfortunately the author supplies her with the most awkward lines at her crucial moments, but Miss Roberts survived and never quite made us dislike her "merit" and "virtue."

The Nurse, Mother and Wife had to carry the main burden of the play and they all did so with some depth of emotion and feeling.

Janet Tomblin gave a placid sincere interpretation of the doting but enlightened Mother. I think the part demands a more gantle figure, more quietl

maternal and obviously affectionate. Some of her movements were contrived, but, again, she too managed to put over her final words.

Her performance was matched by June Hanby as the Wife. This was a fearful part that demanded much courage to utter some of the emotional trite sayings that were required. Miss Hanby kept her position on the stage, and gave a very controlled performance. Her sincerity and the emotion that she was trying to hide and her loyalty to a husband that she no longer loved were all expressed with some artistry. An exhausting performance for any actress.

Nancy O'Connell showed much of her usual skill as Producer. It was a disciplined, clean production played on a clear stage. Some of the movements were awkward, particularly in the last Act when the continuous running around the chairs as though we were witnessing a form of musical chairs, was unfortunate.

As a successful tour-de-force for Cast and Producer "The Sacred Flame" should be seen. A very high standard is reached.

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