THE HAPPIEST DAYS OF YOUR LIFE
1951

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AMATEUR THEATRE

TEDDINGTON CLUB OPEN SILVER JUBILEE SEASON WITH A GOOD LAUGH

CHLOE CRABBE, who produced "The Happiest Days of Your Life" for Teddington Theatre Club at Ronayne Hall last week, wrote in her programme note that she believed John Dighton's farce to be one of the funniest plays since the immortal "Charley's Aunt." Personally I think it is far funnier. It has real wit as well as the most ludicrous situations and the laughter which greeted the first performance on Thursday night bore out that fact as well as being a tribute to the way it was put over.

Apart from one passage in the first act, when the prompter's voice was only too evident, the action never let up. Every part, too, was played with a due appreciation of character. There was some faulty timing, but considering all the difficulties in a play of this type, the first night went off very well indeed.

The brothers Sinclair, Jack and Ted, played as a perfect team, as brothers should. Jack was the light-hearted master, Dick Tassell. Ted was the unyielding anti-feminist, Rupert Billings, whose one wish is to see the last of St. Swithin's, the girls' school whose invasion of Hilary Hall, through a Whitehall mistake, leads to so many complications. And Ernest Woods, as the headmaster, combined dignity with annoyance in just the right degree.

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CHIEF trouble in casting was in the feminine roles. Teddington women members are all so attractive. Dorothy Oscard was a robust principal of St. Swithin's, but she might have been more formidable. Vera Drew is more fitted to be "the beautiful one" than the hearty Miss Gossage. Her spectacles could not hide her good looks. But she played the part with great gusto.

Mary Sumpton gave a gloriously pert and energetic performance as the Scots school girl, even if she were too mature for the part. Anthony Eva was absurdly out of place as Hopcroft minor. He did better than I expected, but he would never convince anybody that he was 13! It was a pity the part could not be played by a real schoolboy.

Joyce Hewitt made a most promising debut with the club. The part of the attractive young mistress, Joyce Harper, did not give her much of a chance, but she has charm and I shall look forward to seeing her again.

Another newcomer, Joyce Cooper, gave an effective character study as one of the parents bewildered by the strange happenings. Alec Smith was her clergyman husband and Harry Lock and Kathleen Blayney were the other pair of parents. Eric Yardley gave his best performance since his return to the club as the work-shy school porter, although he could have made more of the part.

Altogether a most promising start to Teddington's silver jubilee season.

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FAMILIAR, BUT FRESH

THEATRE CLUB HAPPY IN COMEDY

The first play of Teddington Theatre Club's silver jubilee season—John Dighton's "The Happiest Days of Your Life," presented at Ronayne Hall, Hampton Wick, on Thursday, Friday and Saturday—proved also to be their funniest and most polished comedy production in the past two or three seasons. The play itself, a wildly improbable but equally entertaining farce about a boys' and a girls' school and staff forced to share the same building by the muddling of Whitehall, is familiar from both the West End stage and the screen: but the club's production had the outstanding merit of freshness.

The brothers Sinclair—Jack and Edward—as the boys' school's assistant masters gave performances of considerable humour, just sufficiently caricatured to provoke laughter even without funny lines, but sufficiently lifelike to give the funny lines a sharp point. Their sense of timing and flair for the telling grimace was the most notable contribution to the evening's success.

Mrs. Vera Drew as the pounding and hearty Miss Gossage gave another well-rounded characterisation, full of energy. Mr. Ernest Woods and Mrs. Dorothy Oscard, as the opposing principals, although starting rather weakly, progressed to an enjoyably noisy and staunch rivalry: Mr. Anthony Eva and Miss Mary Sumpton, as two most likeably objectionable pupils, kept the pace moving whenever it flagged and they were available to do so.

Mrs. Chloe Crabbe was the producer and must be praised for whipping up and maintaining a cracking pace throughout.