

'JOHN FERGUSON' IS STRANGE STUDY

George Somnes, Lillian Fraser Hamilton and Others Give Best All-Round Little Theatre Performance of the Present Season.

BY WALTER D. HICKMAN

St. John G. Ervine in writing his four-act play, "John Ferguson," has attempted to construct a play of as many moods as characters.

"John Ferguson" is a gloomy play and as far as I am concerned its logic is as confusing as its characters.

Indianapolis had its first chance last night to see this highly discussed play. Its demands upon the actor is gigantic.

"John Ferguson" is a serious study of faith upon a household on a farm in County Down many years ago. It is so serious in some of its moods and so ridiculous in others from the standpoint of modern logic that one shudders to see it presented but by experts.

I am more than willing to go on record here and state that the cast headed by George Somnes and Lillian Fraser Hamilton gave the most careful, thoughtful and sincere performance of the current season.

I realize that such a statement is in the language of the day "a mouthful" but I can best prove my statement by asking you to go to the playhouse this week and study both the play and the acting.

First let us approach the great demands made upon the cast by studying the characters. First we have John Ferguson, an invalid, who is first seen in his chair reading his Bible. He is waiting for a letter from his brother in America with sufficient money to pay a mortgage upon the farm. He trusts in the words he reads in the Bible, but he has some little faith in the mail and his brother.

While he is waiting and praying, he fails to study the numerous dangers in his own home. Into the home comes a weak chap by the name of James Caesar, who wants to marry Hannah Ferguson, John's daughter. James is a coward and he says he will pay the mortgage if he can marry Hannah. Hannah knows that he is weak, even pitiful.

Hannah listens to the high-sounding lecture of her father to follow her own desires but at the same time she regrets leaving the old farm. In the meantime, her mother, Sarah, is taking all care to persuade her

daughter to see her duty by her aged father.

While the bargain is going on, Henry Witherow, a farmer and a cruel man who holds the mortgage, arrives and bullies the entire family, including Caesar. He tells Hannah that she is good looking and goes away in a great temper when Caesar tells him that he will pay back the money.

By this time we are ready to meet "Clutie" John Magrath, the village fool, who has an unhealthy way of letting people see evil. Caesar is bragging that he wants to kill Witherow because he has done him evil and many others.

Then, Andrew Ferguson, the only son, arrives from work and tells his father that his sister is being forced into a most unhappy marriage, just to keep the roof over their heads. Then again, John Ferguson through his weakness and his old age sees the light and sends Sarah to Witherow to tell him to take the farm because he hasn't the money to pay the debt.

Hannah goes trotting off to Witherow's home. While there he successfully attacks her and she comes home in a most pitiful state.

And here is where we get the strange logic of the play. John Ferguson turns to his Bible and turns his left cheek after the right one has been slapped. Andrew calls Caesar a coward and tells him that it is Caesar's duty to kill Witherow. Caesar gets enough nerve to start out to do the deed and the elder Ferguson starts out after Caesar to prevent the deed and at the same time to warn Witherow.

In this desire to prevent harm to the enemy, John Ferguson leaves his own home unguarded again. This time, the village fool plays upon the weakness of Andrew Ferguson to that point that Andrew

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grabs his gun and starts after Witherow.

Now we are up to the last act. The elder Ferguson is worrying over Caesar, who is missing. Finally, Caesar arrives and admits that he was a coward and had failed to kill Witherow. Some of the situations that follow are mighty disgusting on Caesar's part.

Then the news arrives that Witherow has actually been killed. Andrew points out that Caesar is a coward. Caesar is led off to jail, protesting his innocence while the elder Ferguson cries out for him to confess.

Then for some time we see Andrew battling and finally confesses that he killed the man who attacked his sister. And then another pretty kettle of fish. John Ferguson forgets his Bible and insists that his son run off to America and join his brother, whose late letter had arrived with the money.

Mrs. Ferguson aids her husband in his desire to have her son escape. For a little while they do not care if Caesar gets hanged by the neck until dead or not for a crime that he did not do.

But Andrew sees that he is the coward in hiding behind Caesar and disses enough teachings of his father from the Bible to give him strength

ignorance of what love and faith always mean. Here is one of the biggest performances of the season. The entire cast is as follows:

Sarah Ferguson.....Lillian Fraser Hamilton
John Ferguson.....George Somnes
Hannah Ferguson.....Dorothy Farley
James Caesar.....Neil Firestone
Sam Witherow.....Robert Robinson
Sam Witherow.....Donald J. Sehl
"Clutie" John Magrath.....Hardin J. Callahan
Andrew Ferguson.....Albert O. Beluse
Sergeant Kernaghan.....Hamilton Clark
Two Constables.....
Villagers: Jane Ogden, Mary Florence Fletcher, Mrs. Dick Richards, Virginia Byers, Robert W. and Ewell Newman. Splendid is the work of Mrs. Hamilton as Sarah Ferguson. She is always in character and gives a most satisfying performance of a difficult role. They will be talking about Miss Farley, who is making her first appearance with the Little Theatre. Her is true and honest acting as well as bitter and cruel work. A big triumph. I should go into detail concerning all in the cast. I have only praise for all of them.

The stage set is as perfect as the acting. "John Ferguson" is at this writing the big accomplishment of the Little Theatre so far this season. At the playhouse tonight and rest of the week.

Other theaters today offer: Thurston, magician, at English's; Siamese Twins at the Lyric; Gaston and Andre, European adagio dancers at Keith's; Ben-Hur at the Ohio; "Feel My Pulse" at the Apollo; "My Best Girl" at Loew's; Bright Eyes at the Mutual; "Chicago" at the Circle; "Sporting Goods" at the Indiana and movies at the Bandbox.



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