

HEDGEROW GROUP

BY J. M. SHEPHERD

Group Coming Here is One of Most Famous of Its Kind in America

Deciding that drama should feature its second offering in the current lyceum course, the Bryan-College Entertainment Series will present the Hedgerow Players, enacting A. A. Milne's British comedy, "The Romantic Age," in the Assembly Hall, Tuesday, November 20th.

Professionally acclaimed the most active theatre group in America, and ranked only by the Prague Players in world renown, the Hedgerow group is on its first trans-continental tour since their initial production in Rose Valley, Pennsylvania, twelve years ago. During this period in which only the most representative works of contemporary and classical playwrights have been presented, this organization has written an inspiring chapter in theatrical history—one that has become an outstanding development in the evolution of the American legitimate stage.

In 1923 Jasper Deeter, eminent director and actor, became dissatisfied with the commercial theatre. It was his belief and firm conviction that the rapidly increasing commercial interests in theatrical productions were stifling the artistic and dramatic abilities of actors. He foresaw the death of true drama at the hands of those who were interested in plays only because of box office receipts; he visualized future years in which all actors would become mere robots reciting lines and so disturbed, he made a distinct innovation in theatrical circles. Deeter organized a theatre that was built: "by actors for actors and managed solely by actors." No financial backing was solicited; no ballyhoo publicity was made. Every method was employed whereby the members of his casts would be free from the compulsions of commercial contracts and routines. The actors in his theatre would be able to offer unreservedly those dramas which all America should know and remember—in the manners they thought most effective.

The success of Deeter's theatre is well known. From the inauspicious setting of a rented barn and borrowed church pews, for an audience that failed to materialize at his first production, it has achieved that far beyond the ordinary.

Deeter has steadily demanded that strict attention be given his performances, on account of the effortless

perfection characterizing every production. Now, any presentation at the Hedgerow Playhouse in suburban Philadelphia is of significant importance, and Eastern critics and first-nighters forsake Broadway to attend.

Such famed actors as Ann Harding, Morris Carnovsky and Eva LeGallienne have appeared on the Hedgerow roster, which, at present numbers more than six hundred, but none have ever been featured or given preference. A cast sheet in the foyer is the only credit asked by the players. This perhaps is the cardinal characteristic of the group, and undoubtedly accounts for its remarkable success. The perfection and ease of performance of any of its large repertory of one hundred and eight plays can be credited to the common desire of the cast to give its united best in maintaining all the artistic beauty of the classics and interpreting most effectively the modern forms of theatre entertainment.

Jasper Deeter has selected four plays from the active list for his present mid-western tour. Fifteen of Hedgerow's most experienced troupers, headed by Deeter and including such famous actors as Miriam Philips, Francis Torchiana, Ford Nofer and Catherine Reiser are playing Milne, Glaspell, O'Neill and Ervine. Milne, which the group will interpret here, is one of England's most popular modern writers, ranking with Sir James Barrie and Lewis Carrol. Author of such successes as "The Dover Road", "Mr. Pim Passes By," and "Michael and Mary," he is known as a writer who portrays the contemporary scene with all the humor, tolerance, and effectiveness of a civilized Britisher.

"The Romantic Age" is considered one of the most delightful of Milne's comedies. Depicting a search for and discovery of romance in the twentieth century, this light British play was a great stage hit in London, and has been presented more than ninety times by the Hedgerow players. Francis Torchiana, as the whimsical Melisande, and Ford Nofer, as Gervase Mallory—the practical man with imagination enough to visualize the beauty and romance of the world about him—again portray the characters they created in the original cast. Jasper Deeter will appear as Gentleman Susan, the travelling peddler of infinite wisdom. Harry Sheppard as the humorous husband and Catherine Rieser as his semi-hypocondriac wife provide many comic scenes. Others in the cast are Adriene Bancker, Walter Williams, David Metcalf, and Miriam Philips.