

# The Ormond Chronicle

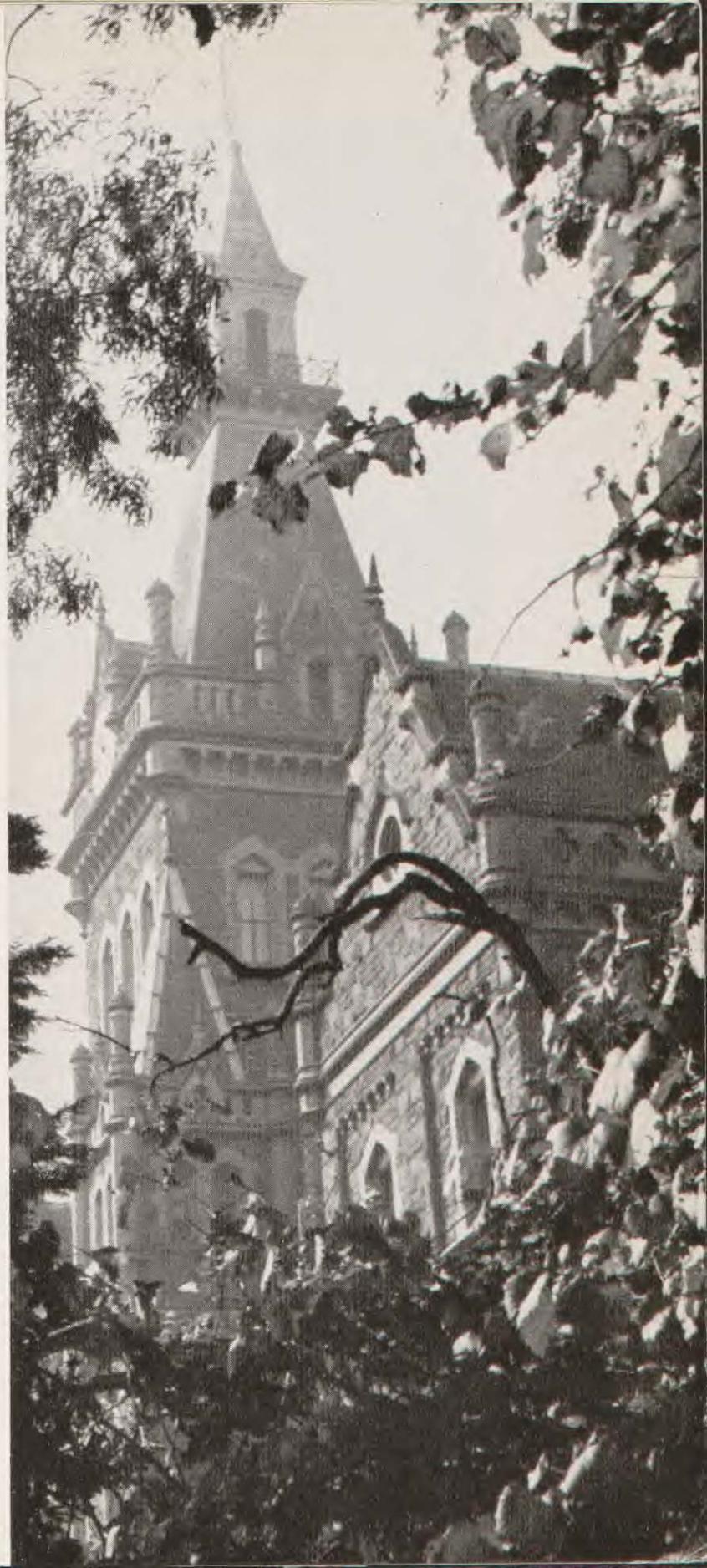
1968

*Editors:*

A. M. McLean

A. D. Hibberd

Number Forty Eight



# The Strongbox

—by CARL STERNHEIM

One of the functions of newspaper criticism is to help people decide what films and performances they will attend. Clearly enough in comments published so long after the event this purpose is absent and it is difficult to outline an aim for this post-mortem. After all, the reactions and impressions of those who saw the play will have long since solidified and those who didn't see the play won't be interested anyway. But perhaps a late evaluation such as this can contain implicit advice for future productions.

Before discussing the actual play and performance it should be pointed out that the production dates were ill-chosen, particularly from a college point of view, with people going down on Friday and Saturday. To ensure better attendances for next year steps should be taken immediately to secure better dates. Perhaps early in second term would be the best time.

In many ways the choice of such a play as "The Strongbox" was very ambitious—ambitious because of the play's limitations. In such a deliberately stark play there are no interesting visual effects to provide contrast and variety—the sets and lighting are

virtually unchanged throughout and the costumes provide no glittering spectacle. There is no exciting narrative line which keeps us guessing as to the next turn of events. In fact the full weight of the performance rests on the dialogue by means of which the actors build their web of fluctuating tensions. If there is bad timing in any of the fast exchanges or an unconvincing gesture then everything is lost. The overcoming of these difficulties shows the success of the performance and the achievement of the producer.

In fact almost any critical comments that spring to mind are directed at the play, not the performance. The set, which worked faultlessly, is deliberately stark and unchanging and, of course, in 1912 it would have had enormous impact as a contrast with the opulent theatre of the day. Now, however, after years of "kitchen sink" and "absurd" theatre, such starkness is more inclined to be boring than shocking. We are ready for another round of illusion.

Perhaps today we are also a little hardened towards "messages" and Sternheim's self-conscious symbolism seems, if anything, a little dated.

John Duigan's sustained performance was a highlight especially his attempts to sooth and reconcile the possessive females. The "camera scene" with Lydia and Silkenband was undoubtedly the most successful. Andrew Clarke's hilarious display of clumsy bravado was ideally matched by Judy Blundell's tentative delight. More could have been made of the night door opening scene but the strangely indecisive conclusion of the play was Sternheim's intention.

To summarize—it was a successful and enjoyable production of a difficult and demanding play. The actors were John Duigan, Agrita Klauverts, Valerie Cook, Andrew Clarke, Judy Blundell, Lilliam Fannoy and Paul Dixon. The producer was Bruce Knappett. Greg Power as chairman of the play sub-committee deserves special thanks for the long hours he spent in organization.

—R. FOSTER

