

from one scene to another, from one set of actors to another, seemingly unrelated, group. The effect is startling at times, but never confusing, and in the end, if not before, one discovers that no thread, no strand, could be spared without a weakening of the total impression. The opening gives no clue to the end, and many chapters pass by before the reader even suspects which figure is to carry the emphasis of the story. Every figure is a piece of lifelike portraiture, rich in those minute details that we observe only in members of our most intimate set.

The world in which they move, whether it be high or low, rich or poor, conventional or placed above or below conventions, is rendered strangely familiar too, like streets passed daily on our way to and from work. The life of that world is like a life really lived—full of brave things and foul, of nobility and sordidness, of soul-compelling beauty and repelling vileness. And Mr. Wassermann gives it all as he has found it—the hopelessly commonplace mixed with the strikingly exceptional. His presentation of every detail is marked by a directness that will undoubtedly be questioned here, but his frankness is coupled with artistic restraint, and back of it all lies an earnest conviction that nothing but a merciless telling of the truth can cure the evils of which crime and misery and ugliness are merely symptoms.

Still more significant, however, is the subtle understanding of life's secretive ways and mysterious motives that illumines passage after passage, making you feel that you must return to ponder them at ease as soon as the thread of the story has been followed to the point where it breaks with a little ironical laugh before it ends in a parable of characteristic oriental origin.

This may seem the picture of a flawless work. "The World's Illusion" is quite human, however, and there is no intention here to represent it otherwise. But the shortcomings of which it may be held guilty are of such secondary importance when one considers the value and the rich charm of the work as a whole, that it would be a waste of space to dwell on them. The book is big in every respect—one of the biggest produced by our own day—and the skill of the translator has given us its original spirit unimpaired.

*The World's Illusion.* By Jacob Wassermann. Harcourt, Brace and Co.

## PLAYS AND SO FORTH

By Walter Prichard Eaton

WHEN a dramatic reviewer whose life has been more or less spent in the actual playhouse sits down with a pile of new books before him, either printed plays or books about the theatre, his instinct takes him at once to the plays which are potent in production—which, in short, are practical dramas. Naturally in any pile of new books which contained the text of Barrie's "A Kiss for Cinderella", that volume would be opened first: not that one has forgotten in the least what is in it potentially, but to see how much of the drama's charm can be imprisoned in the feeble black types. Strange, that so excellent a novelist as Barrie was should be so supremely a playwright also, so that even his own unique "stage directions" prepared for the text (in themselves the beginnings of novels, the evokers of moods) are quite unequal to the task of suggesting one quarter of the delight a drama of his contains. Unique as is the

Barrie flavor, in novel or play, there is yet a method in his dramatic writing which belongs to many of the most successful dramatists; he quite definitely aims to hold the attention and arouse the emotions by an appeal to the eye, by pantomime, by putting before us familiar objects in odd or significant light, in short, by transferring to the stage the results of his own twinkling and unresting observation of people and things. "A Kiss for Cinderella" is delightful reading, but because Barrie is so thoroughly at home in the theatre, so completely the artist not with words but with actors, properties, lights, "situations", when he abandons the novel for the stage, it is pale enough beside the acted version. As a dramatic text-book, however, it is invaluable.

In startling contrast is a blank verse tragedy called "Caius Gracchus" by "Odin Gregory", whoever he may be, a drama which Theodore Dreiser, in a curiously uninformed introduction, says would be a great success on the stage. Well, he is entitled to his guess. Anybody who could more than guess would command a princely salary as a play reader. But we venture to hint that such a prophecy about a Roman drama in uninspired blank verse is dangerous business. Mr. Dreiser plunges bravely in, however, with the further assertion that "Odin Gregory" has made "one of the really notable contributions to English literature of the last three centuries". Well, well! this is at least interesting, if true—almost as interesting as Mr. Dreiser's statement that no English dramas, except those written by Shakespeare and Sheridan, have survived the test of a century. (And this just as the revival of "The Beggar's Opera" has entered its second year in London, and has been produced in New York.) But never

mind that, or the real reasons why we don't see our classics on the stage (not even Sheridan). Odin Gregory has *not* made a contribution to our literature, this work aiming to be a play, unless it is effective in the theatre. After it is produced, we can judge of that, but not before. Even the Olympian Mr. Dreiser is talking nonsense when he makes such an assertion. On the evidence of the text, the drama shows us a great Roman democrat overthrown by the forces of privilege and reaction; the matter has its undoubted modernity, but the manner is archaic, and neither the emotional qualities of the story nor the quality of the poetry seem distinguished enough to break through this crust of convention. Far better for us Shaw's manner in "Cæsar and Cleopatra". As a critic, we think Mr. Dreiser an excellent realistic novelist.

The editor has also sent, in this pile of books, one for which we committed an introduction—three plays by James Forbes, "The Famous Mrs. Fair", "The Show Shop", and "The Chorus Lady". This book is chiefly to be commended because it enables that small but growing number of theatregoers who take a critical, or technical, interest in the playhouse, to study at leisure three plays by a popular native dramatist, two of which have been enormously successful in the accepted sense of attracting the public. The least successful of the three, "The Show Shop", is, we think, the best play. Its subject-matter, however—stage life behind the scenes—was too sophisticated for audiences outside of New York. But what a kindly yet pointed satire it is, how full of wit and observation, how neatly constructed, how technically expert! We need not apologize too much for our native

drama when we can show a work like this.

Four one-act plays by John Drinkwater have been collected in a volume called "Pawns". They have all been produced in England, but none of them, unless it is "X = O: A Night of the Trojan War", quite escapes from the poetry of the printed poem into the poetry of the spoken word and the moving drama. Drinkwater's "Lincoln" may yet turn out to be one of those happy accidents that sometimes befall a writer who is not truly born to the theatre.

That Arthur Symons was born to the theatre, his most ardent admirer could hardly maintain. "Cesare Borgia", the title-play in his latest volume, is difficult even to read. "Iseult of Brittany" is a mere fragment, a whiff of faint music, a sketch seen through ancient glass. Only "The Toy Cart", adapted from an Indian source, could be acted with hope of success. This is a naive little drama in five acts, written in prose, and at least shows the fundamental value of plot and suspense. It also makes you wonder why literary artists like Symons cannot occasionally come out of their ivory towers long enough to realize that the dramatic fundamentals must be in every work which assumes the high title of drama, or else it is a vain thing, and worth nobody's time.

Nobody has insisted, in season and out, more energetically for recognition of the fundamentals of drama than Clayton Hamilton, formerly a critic, now a producer of motion pictures. Mr. Hamilton's latest book, "Seen on the Stage", records his impressions and judgments of the more important productions made in New York during the past few seasons; and in recording his impressions he tells us much about those things which are essential

to successful play making. But we do wish he were sometimes less portentous about it. When we read Mr. Hamilton, we too often feel as if we ought to be taking notes, preparatory to a mid-year exam. It is characteristic that when he writes of Harry Lauder, he begins with a quotation from Emerson, and when he writes of Drinkwater's "Lincoln", he begins with a homily on hero worship which betrays him into such mirth-provoking nonsense as this:

The almost tragic need for heroes accounts for the abiding popularity of such otherwise inconsequential games as baseball, football, and boxing. Prize-fighting justifies itself when it permits a world of men and boys to worship such a hero as Georges Carpentier. . . . Most of us are lowly people, and lead lowly lives; and, in order to "carry on", we need the spiritual sustenance of lifting our hearts up to the hills, whence cometh our strength.

We fear Mr. Hamilton has betrayed himself into a form of sentimental balderdash he would severely condemn in G. M. Cohan. Besides, he has misquoted his Scripture. But Mr. Hamilton, in spite of the formality of his method, the sometimes platitudinous homily preceding each specific review—a flourish of rhetorical trumpets and enter, Harry Lauder!—is a critic of taste and judgment and sympathy. His fault is that he takes his job rather more seriously than the occasion usually warrants. It is a fault that might well be more common, for the good of the craft. We are sorry he has gone into the movies. We cannot imagine what a serious critic can do in the movies, except lose his reason.

A Kiss for Cinderella. By J. M. Barrie. Charles Scribner's Sons.

Caius Gracchus. By Odin Gregory. Boni and Liveright.

The Famous Mrs. Fair and Other Plays. By James Forbes, George H. Doran Company.

Pawns. By John Drinkwater. Houghton Mifflin Co.

Cesare Borgia. By Arthur Symons. Brentano's.

Seen on the Stage. By Clayton Hamilton. Henry Holt and Co.

## THE CONTRIBUTING EDITOR'S CORNER

WELL, then, whom *would* you say?" she asked.

We had been discussing, this young woman and I, Mr. Chesterton's long delayed visit to the United States. As she was very beautiful I would have discussed anything with her. As she was also very intelligent, we happened to discuss this. And I had been saying (I am afraid at some length) that Edwin Markham, who was the gentleman chosen (presumably by the lecture management) to do this, did not seem to me to be at all in the picture as the one to "introduce" Mr. Chesterton at his first public appearance in America.

Dr. George W. Cabot had introduced Mr. Chesterton in Boston. And in New York again he had been presented to his audience by Hamlin Garland (who did it very well, remarked the lady) and by Gelett Burgess. Now Dr. Cabot is, so to say, quite a different story from Mr. Markham; one does not confuse Mr. Garland with Dr. Cabot; and Mr. Burgess is hardly a replica of Mr. Garland. I should not fail, I think, in my appreciation of the abilities of any one of these highly talented men. I savored the position and the personality of each, and again I firmly and sadly shook my head. No one of them (to my mind) filled this particular bill, so to put it.

Well, what was needed was, of course, a humorist. I thought of George Ade and of Finley Peter Dunne. But neither of them seems to be around much any more. And they were not quite right, either. More of a literary touch was required. I thought of Francis Hackett. Way off,

of course, from Mr. Chesterton in spiritual philosophy, and not nearly enough human and ruddy. I thought of H. L. Mencken. But the lady, who did not seem to fancy my friend Mr. Mencken, declared that Mr. Chesterton would probably destroy him. Joyce Kilmer certainly would have been an affinity in mind, still.... Don Marquis occurred to me, but....

"What would you think of Booth Tarkington, or Joseph Hergesheimer?" inquired the lady.

"Different sort of birds altogether."

"James Huneker?" she suggested.

An interesting idea, I thought. Mr. Huneker was a man of congenial presence. More, he was what was awfully needed, a "figure". I thought of William Marion Reedy. He was right in so far as he was in a measure an American institution.

"What about Amy Lowell?" asked the lady. She smiled. But it seemed to me that Miss Lowell would not be an unhappy choice at all for the rôle.

The idea of contrasting physical presence put into our heads the amusing notion of Gerald Stanley Lee.

A couple of very bad bets, I said, would be William Lyon Phelps and Dr. Henry van Dyke.

William Dean Howells. Good, too. And yet no one we could think of was wholly satisfactory. A replica of Chesterton in mind and stature was not what we wanted. But a humorist, a philosopher, a figure, a national institution, a personality as representative of America as G. K. C. is of England.

"Mark Twain, of course," said the lady, "would have been ideal."

He would.

R. C. H.