

THE NEW YORKER

Yogi Night at the Provincetown Playhouse — The Drama Finds a New Level in "The Depths" — A Wife Who Had to Know — The "Ring" Returns to the Metropolitan — A French Modern Competes with Zuloaga's Posters — "Enkindled Driftwood" — Hot Afternoons There Have Been in Urbana.

DURING the past month, in the course of reading some of the vast number of periodicals and newspapers which plague our nation, the New Yorker stumbled upon an extraordinary sentence in a review by Stark Young, one of our most intelligent critics, which read: "People who take the theatre as mere pastime will not find the piece at the Provincetown Playhouse to their liking."

On the face of the matter, the sentence appears to be a simple statement, yet on considering it one finds there the kernel of a philosophy which largely dominates the spirit of experiment in the world of contemporary art and letters. The obvious query to such a statement is, "Well, if the theatre does not exist for the sole purpose of providing pastime, why does it exist at all?" Are we to make of the theatre a sort of mental gymnasium whither we turn our steps regularly to exercise our brains? Are we to consider it a sort of higher mathematics? Are we to work at our theatregoing? One might have slipped past that opening sentence without noticing it save for the inclusion of the word "mere". There is about the nice placing of that word, about the inflection it demands, something which indicates a certain polite condescension. It says, "The theatre is all very well but it is not the place for one to go in

search of diversion. Or, at least, it should not be such a place."

It would appear that these newcomers in the history of the theatre would change the whole basis of its existence. They would make it something to be taken painfully. Fortunately there is no danger of such a revolution. Once the theatre becomes painful the public will desert it, and so there will be no theatre at all.

The play which Mr. Young was engaged in reviewing at the moment of his self betrayal was an extraordinarily painful exercise translated from the German of Walter Hasenclever, called vaguely "Beyond", and produced on the stage of the Provincetown Theatre. Save for the Theatre Guild, the public owes a greater debt of pleasure to the Provincetown group than to any management in New York during the present dull season. "Beyond" came as a blow. At the dress rehearsal the little theatre was crowded by spectators who could be divided roughly into three classes: (a) the "arty" ones who gasped with awe at hidden wonders of the piece, (b) those who received it in a mildly dazed condition, and (c) those who, in defiance of the hostile glares of the "arty" ones, laughed through three acts and then, abandoning the final two, went home to listen to the radio.

The evening might well have been

called "Yogi Night at the Provincetown Theatre". Hasenclever, according to program notes, is an ardent Buddhist. The notes, however, neglected to say that, so far as one can judge from this piece, his mind is an extremely mediocre one which ejects quite regularly the most ponderous bromides. The piece had but two characters, but this lack of variety was compensated by the number of scenes, totaling twenty two, labeled variously "cellar", "telephone", "roof", "bed", etc., etc. Not that the piece was a spectacle; on the contrary, the variation of scenes was denoted by the shifting of a chair, a sofa, a bed, from one position to another, and by the periodical appearance of a pair of shutters. Nevertheless the lighting and the settings were by far the best part of the piece. Under the skilful hand of Robert Edmond Jones they attained an amazing degree of insinuating beauty and effect.

The play was stupid. One was told that perhaps it was beyond comprehension, and of course, such a statement can be taken quite easily in two distinct senses. The author aimed to eliminate all save the essential speeches or, in other words, to clear away all the detail which makes for interest and is so troublesome to the playwright. The result was a series of such revolutionary and brilliant speeches as "What is reality? Reality is nothing." Well, everybody knows that. The story is that of a man who becomes involved in a love affair with the wife of his friend, at the moment of his friend's death. Eventually the ghost of the first husband returns and drives the second to kill the wife of both. Much to the confusion of the clear-minded, there is an immense amount of mystical Yogi talk.

"Beyond" was by no means so in-

telligent or so interesting a piece as "Processional", the experimental play produced earlier in the season by the Theatre Guild. Helen Gahagan, in a handsome red velvet gown, played the wife, and Walter Abel, with the gestures of an automaton, essayed the rôle of lover. Fortunately no helpless actor was assigned the rôle of the dead husband.

The month was notable for the production of two utterly incredible plays: one called "The Depths" and the other an unnamed play staged by Richard Herndon at special matinées with the offer of a prize for the best title. The New Yorker has thought of several titles, but they are not printable. Jane Cowl was the excuse for "The Depths", and on this occasion not a very good excuse. The original play by Hans Mueller had, so reports go, extraordinary merits as a psychological study of the time old situation between a woman of the streets and a pure young man with whom she falls in love. Somewhere along the way, these merits were dropped overboard. One has the impression that, during the lengthy road tour of the piece, it was entirely rewritten according to the desires of the cast or the manager rather than the author. The result, in any case, is one that is prize taking in its banality. And the program is prefaced by a quotation from Havelock Ellis which refers scornfully to "old platitudes"! Miss Cowl is quite bad.

At the Times Square, Grace George returned after much too long an absence from New York in a charming comedy by Paul Gerald dealing with the absurdity of a woman's character. It is called "She Had to Know" and is concerned with the desire of a wife to know whether she is appealing to men. The whole comedy is whipped cream, but the cream, fortunately, never

sinks; throughout the piece there were volleys of masculine chuckles which testified to the accuracy of the author's psychological details. Miss George, as usual, gave a spirited, graceful, and intelligent performance. At this sort of comedy she is unexcelled. The cast included Bruce McRae, who was delightful as the heavy, honest, unimaginative husband profoundly in love with his wife. For intelligent people this is a refreshing piece.

For the first time in nearly nine years the complete "Ring" of Wagner is being given at the Metropolitan. The war, of course, made it for a time impossible, and after the war there was a shortage of German singers. But now all is well again and the Metropolitan is doing itself proud on every score of the production save possibly that of the scenery which, owing to the hocus-pocus which Wagner placed in his librettos, has never been properly solved. In addition to the Wagnerian singers of the past season or two, the Metropolitan now has a host of strength in Nanny Larsen-Todsen, Maria Müller, and Karin Branzell. These three women are not only fine singers and gifted with dramatic power but, strange as it may seem, are handsome in appearance and look like goddesses. Indeed, the physical appearance of the singers now doing the "Ring" is startling; they look much as the heroes and heroines of the "Nibelungen Lied" should look, and the operas gain accordingly. Bohnen, as Wotan, is magnificent. There is but one thing to be hoped for—that some day Siegfried and Siegmund and Parsifal and all the others will give up wearing wigs which resemble frayed hair matresses. There are times when it is worthwhile breaking with the grand tradition, even at the expense of angering Frau Cosima Wagner.

THE DRAMA SHELF

"One Act Plays for Stage and Study", preface by Augustus Thomas (French). One of the best collections of producible one act plays yet published.

"Eight Little Plays for Children" by Rose Fyleman (Doran). Slight plays filled with fanciful humor.

"The Discovery" by Mrs. Frances Sheridan (Doran). Aldous Huxley has done a charming, subtle, and highly entertaining thing in this rewriting of a famous old play.

"Too Much Money" by Israel Zangwill (Macmillan). A farce by the provocative gentleman whose visit to America last year will be remembered as a strong one.

"Twenty-five Short Plays (International)" edited by Frank Shay (Appleton). A worthwhile collection both for production and study by this veteran among play anthologists.

"Acting and Play Production" by Harry Lee Andrews and Bruce Weirick (Longmans, Green). A competent text, well illustrated.

At Scott and Fowles Gallery Paul Manship held an exhibition recently of some fifteen examples of his recent work in portrait and decorative sculpture. It was a singularly satisfactory show. The busts, in which he abandoned his archaic style and adopted a straightforward conventional model, are as good as any that have been done during the present generation. Best among them are the portraits of former Dean Frederick Keppel of Columbia College, and the dean of Bryn Mawr. There were also some fine bronzes, and the models for two heroic figures in the manner which has come to stamp Manship and his followers.

Three water colors by Horace Brodsky were notable in a charming small

exhibition which included the works of Gordon Craig, Henry Dixon, Eric Gill, Miguel Mackinlay, and John and Paul Nash.

At the Brummer Galleries, where one can always find pictures that are alive and interesting, there was an exhibition of Seurat, who in the twenty years since his death has come in for great *réclame*. He is, in many respects, one of the most difficult of French painters for the conventional to understand. The New Yorker found a deep interest in his pictures without being greatly moved by them. And yet they were of greater merit and beauty than the obvious Zuloagas half a block away. While hordes of people trampled each other before the portraits of Julia Hoyt and Michael Strange, the Seurat show went almost unnoticed. Art, perhaps, is but a matter of publicity.

Some day, when the New Yorker feels affluent, he plans to offer a prize for the best translation made of the writings of Scofield Thayer. Mr. Thayer, together with Paul Rosenfeld and one or two others, is commonly reported to be writing English each month in "The Dial". Next to cross word puzzles, the New Yorker has found the writing of Mr. Thayer consistently the most fascinating of games. He writes in the February "Dial" concerning Marianne Moore: "I should here like to expose certain literary fragments, torn jaggedly from the hard contexts, fragments which, being felt out with the hammer of our intellect, return the consistency of rock crystal, fragments which, being thrown upon the hearth of our sympathetic under-

standing, betray the immense, the salt-veined, the profoundly meditated, chromatization of enkindled driftwood."

Now what *does* all this mean? To be sure, he is writing of Miss Moore whose "enkindled driftwood" won the "Dial" prize of \$2,000 as a great contribution to letters. Not since the poetess who entertained Mr. Pickwick and his friends, has there been such verse written. Mrs. Leo Hunter, it will be remembered, was the perpetrator of the verse ending:

On a log
Expiring frog.

Miss Moore's poetry is something like this, save that she arranges it in novel fashion. Rearranged by her mystical touch, the same verse would doubtless appear as "enkindled driftwood" in somewhat this fashion:

on a Log
Ex- piring frog.

"The Nation", by the way, awarded its poetry prize to Eli Siegel for a gem of a verse called "Hot afternoons there have been in Montana". To fully appreciate it, one should read this prize poem. The nearest approach to it is a verse written by Ben Ray Redman called "Hot afternoons there have been in Urbana", in which the closing line, which rises to new heights in crystallizing the character of our times, is "Red Hot Mamma."

Altogether the month has been a delightful one!

LOUIS BROMFIELD

THE PUBLISHERS AND THE NEW SEASON

II

ACROSS Fifth Avenue on East Forty Fifth Street are the small but excellently furnished offices of a young publishing firm, Minton, Balch and Company. Their list boasts distinguished and popularly inclined volumes. There is "Lenin", written by none other than Trotsky, an unconventional biography which contains, among many other impressions, a somewhat violent one of H. G. Wells. "The Last Cruise of the Shanghai" sounds like the most exciting of the new travel books. It is written by Judge F. De Witt Wells, and is an account of his voyage in Icelandic regions for four thousand miles in a forty foot boat, his shipwreck in a hurricane on the Newfoundland coast, with tales of heroism and fortitude. Fiction on this list includes Elias Tobenkin's "God of Might", which appears to be an unusual and powerful consideration of certain phases of the Jewish problem in the middle west. The always amusing Richard Connell has a new volume of short stories. V. R. Emanuel's "Middle Years" is said to discuss marriage from the angle of the middle aged man.

On Fifth Avenue is the imposing front of Scribner's bookstore. Nor are the offices less imposing. A quiet library with a long table and comfortable chairs offered solace while I considered this list. Scribner's fiction boasts two of the most brilliant of young Americans, Fitzgerald and Lardner. The former is represented by a novel, "The Great Gatsby"; the latter by "A New Book of Stories

and Sketches". Another collection of short stories which sounds promising is E. Earl Sparling's "Under the Levee". Three Boyds coincidentally appear as members of the Scribner fold: Ernest, the critic, with the first volume of a series of "Studies from Ten Literatures"; Thomas, author of the superb "Through the Wheat", with a collection of short soldier sketches which he calls "Points of Honour"; and James Boyd, a southerner, whose "Drums" is said to be a brilliant story of the south in Revolutionary times.

The Roosevelt-Lodge letters will, naturally, gain international attention. So, too, Edward Bok's additional autobiography, "Twice Thirty". And particular importance is attached to a new edition of Sir Sidney Colvin's "John Keats" because of the Amy Lowell volume on the same subject. Arthur Train's "On the Trail of the Bad Men" has already awakened interest in the legal profession. Among many Russian books this season, "Speckled Domes" by Gerard Shelley is probably the most unconventional in treatment.

Farther up Fifth Avenue, and somewhat similar in dignity and general appearance, are Dutton's bookstore and the offices of E. P. Dutton and Company. "The George and the Crown" by Sheila Kaye-Smith tells the story of the lives and loves of two young Englishmen, great friends but of decidedly different character. In "The Rational Hind", Ben Ames Williams writes another realistic character study with the same background as his earlier "Evered". Louis Joseph Vance sticks to melodrama — "hell-