

have been one-act but monopolises a volume as a three-act comedy. It is an amusing story of Welsh village life about a mean farmer who endeavours to win the church vote in a council election by giving a cow to be raffled in the church bazaar. It is a sick cow, a very sick cow, and the comedy comes from the efforts to keep this fact secret and the cow alive. Four one-act plays in the last volume are good reading and offer a choice to amateurs seeking this form. "The House with the Twisty Windows," an incident in Russia under the Terror, is a gripping little drama if we will accept the dubious premises of its situation of a group of English people held prisoners as ransom for an anti-Soviet agitator. "The Marble God" is a comic sermon on the text *De mortuis nihil nisi bonum*. "The Net" and "Incorrigible" are respectively a little tragic dialogue and a rather long-winded satire on the errors of literary criticism; but with the table spread to provide fare for producers of all degrees there are doubtless some who will choose these.

The third Series of One-Act Plays issued by Harraps has the characteristics of its predecessors in presenting a fifty-fifty mixture of the "old staggers" and unknowns. Harold Chapins' "The Dumb and the Blind," Dunsany's "The Golden Doom," Houghton's "The Master in the House," Norman McKinnel's "The Bishop's Candlesticks," Gertrude Jennings's "Between the Soup and the Savoury," and Yeats's "The Pot of Broth" are here—one almost writes, inevitably. They are the safe anthology pieces, and good examples of their various types. Each in its way implies the rules underlying the one-act form: the unswerving movement to one climax, rapid characterisation, swiftness in getting off the mark, and elimination of detail other than that absolutely essential.

Some of the new-comers prove a trifle thin in this company. "Mimi," for example, which demands the most exquisite lightness of touch to convey the cheery pathos of the Bohemian life from which it borrows its incident, marks time heavily when it should be pirouetting; Herbert Far-

jeon's "Friends," of the genre of Lady Gregory's plays, telling of the vicissitudes of the friendship of a doctor and an undertaker in an Irish village which has to be hidden to avert the suspicion of a business co-operation, is a good story none too well handled; and John Brandane's Scotch comedy, "Rory Aforesaid," employs the cumbersome machinery of a Court scene to convey its anecdote. "Master Wayfarer," by Harold Terry, on the other hand is a closely-knit, sound drama, as is also "The King's Hard Bargain," by Lt.-Col. Drury, although this latter offers big difficulties of production. A Pastoral, "How the Weather is Made" by Harold Brighthouse, completes the volume and will be welcomed as a specimen of that *rara avis* the open air play.

## TWO FOREIGN PLAYS.

By GRAHAM SUTTON.

That lovely thing, *The Cradle Song* by Martinez Sierra, has been produced at the Fortune, for the first time professionally in London, though it was done at the Abbey, Dublin, a few years ago. It and *The Romantic Young Lady* differ more than one would think it possible for two plays by one author to do. Here in this sunny convent of Dominican nuns, all is peace and simplicity. Little foibles and weaknesses of human nature there are—too slight for censure, though for lack of worse they have to pose as "sins," with appropriate penances: too transparent and lovable for all but the gentlest ridicule. "Well, what progress are we making in holiness to-day?" smiles the kindly Doctor. Much the same as usual. A young novice has written some ingenuous verses for the Prioress's birthday, and the sisters' delight in these must not betray them into the "sin" of pride. A birthday present comes from the world outside—a canary: and the whole convent is a-flutter over it. Two years ago a wounded dove fell in the garden and was cared for: it is talked of still. And

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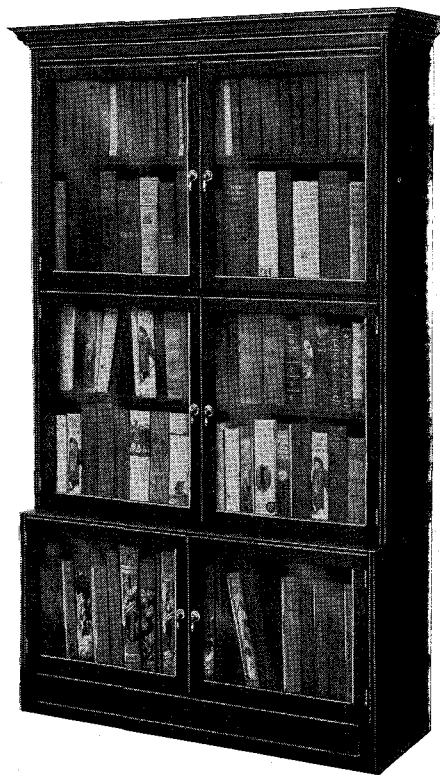
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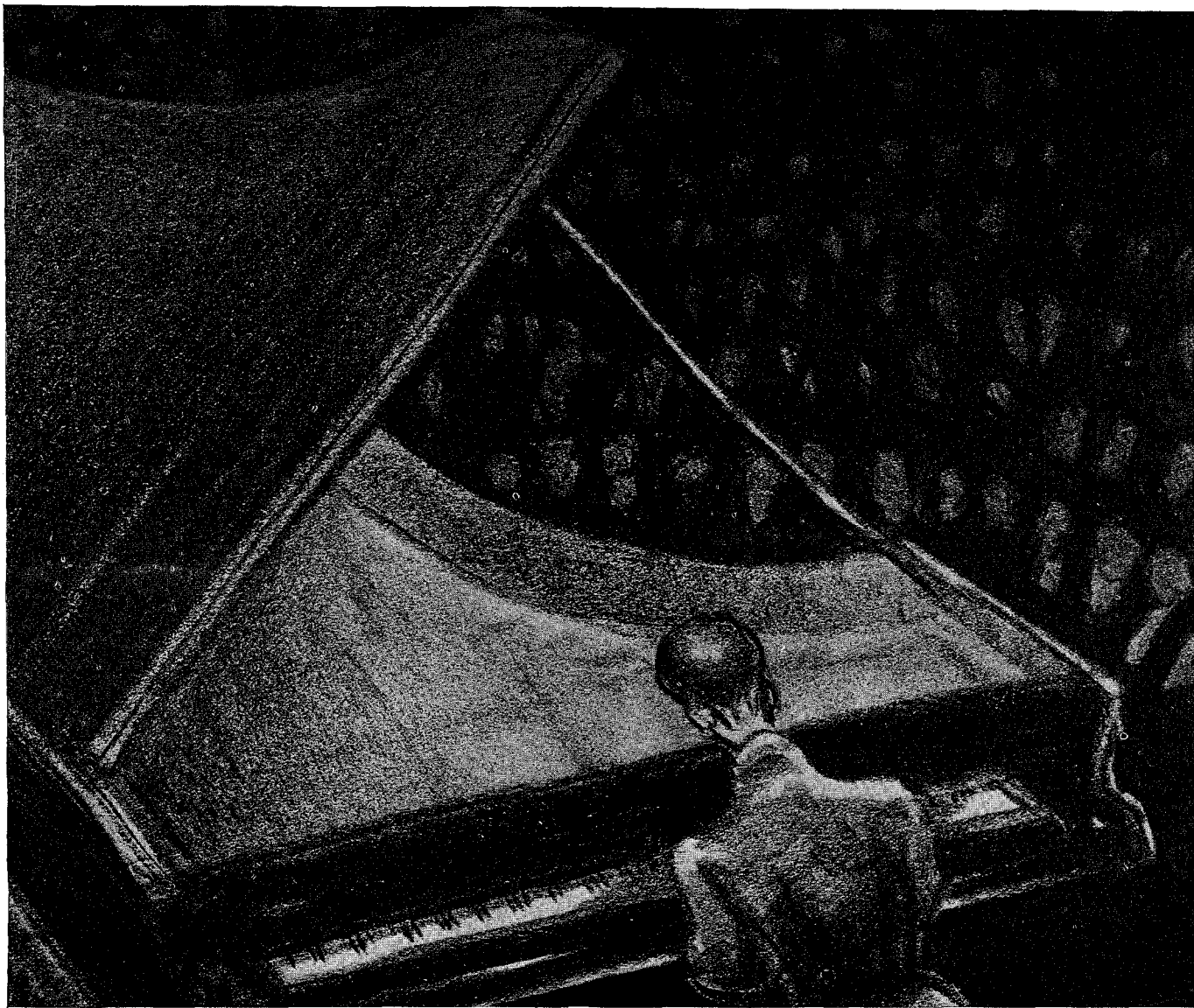
then—an epoch-making event—a real baby arrives, left outside the door with an appeal to the sisters' charity. There is some opposition from the Vicarress—"It was against *my* advice that that creature [the dove] was received; but afterward we had good reason to regret it, with this one saying—Yes, I caught him!—and that one—No, I took care of him! . . . Vanities!" How much worse will it be, to have the good sisters vying with each other in the care of a child? "Dissipation!" But she is overruled. The novice, fresh from many little brothers at home, is told off to mother the child . . . though indeed it is the repressed maternity of the whole sisterhood that takes charge of her ("Legally you have no right to maternity"—so the doctor, gently chaffing them again). And the convent-life is resumed, in a kind of tremulous calm where even this new joy must go circumspectly, lest it become a sin.

Eighteen years pass. Teresa leaves the convent to marry. There are farewells, not the less poignant for their restraint. The Vicarress, softened by the lapse of time, tries to maintain her sternness: almost succeeds. A door slams, a carriage drives away. Routine reasserts itself. "I have observed of late—that some—in the prayer—have not been marking sufficiently the pauses in the middle of the lines . . ." But even the Vicarress has a catch in her voice. The nuns troop out to choir. Their life will be as it was before—or nearly so—as nearly as possible . . . Curtain.

It is all utterly simple, unforced, hauntingly beautiful. Sierra reveals himself a master of sincerity, of quiet effect. The first act, perhaps the more perfect poem of the two,

was almost perfectly played. In the second, I thought the producer had allowed his Teresa too much licence. Her dress was just not right; and some of her gestures and mannerisms . . . it may be arguable that the movie-graces come natural to the female child, yet in this play they jar. (And Teresa talks authentic Dublin. Why? And in the front-piece, the presumably-Spanish lover has stepped right out of *Potash and Perlmutter*. Why, again? Are there not character-parts for character-voices? Or has the fount of pure speech run so low, that we must make shift with these grotesquely inappropriate accents?) Make what allowance one would for legitimate contrast—for Teresa's vivid youth as set against the ageless placidity of the nuns—one still felt that in this second act, either through misproduction or miscasting, the exquisite balance of the play was subtly deranged. It may adjust itself. Whether or no, *The Cradle Song* is worth seeing.

I should not like to say so much for George Kaiser's *Gas*; though it was pleasant a few weeks ago to make the acquaintance of the Gate Theatre Salon, in Covent Garden, and to find that its programme includes plenty of plays not elsewhere accessible (Vildrac's *S. S. Tenacity* is due on December 6th). *Gas* itself, for all its reputation among the elect, seemed a stupidish play: having few ideas in it, and those neither new nor striking: and losing the thread of its own argument in the middle act. But I speak without the text, and with only this one performance to enlighten me. I had a feeling that the expressionist form of the play, though sometimes helpful, was more often distracting our thoughts from its meaning. As thus—



Recital.

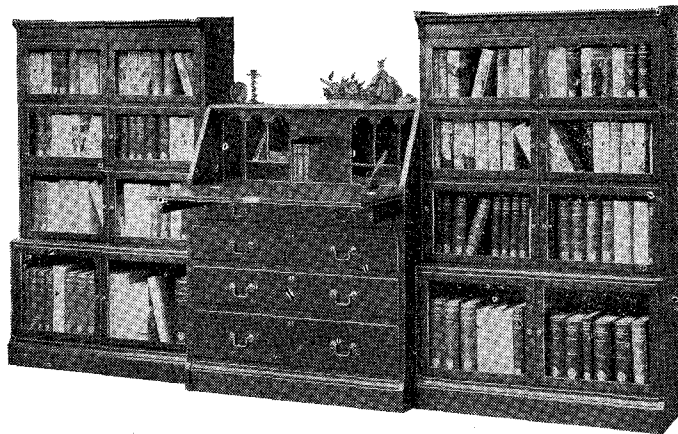
From "Pastiche: A Music Room Book." By Yvonne Cloud and Edmund X. Kapp. (Faber & Gwyer). See page 21 of Supplement.



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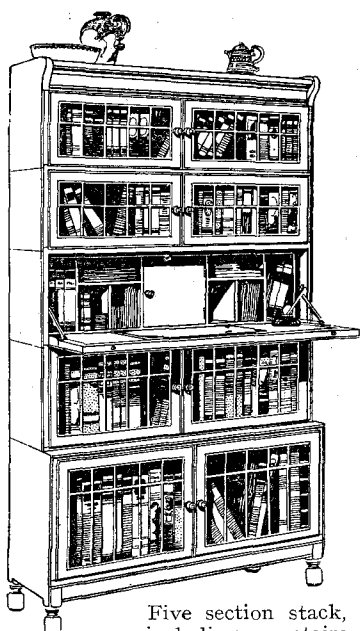
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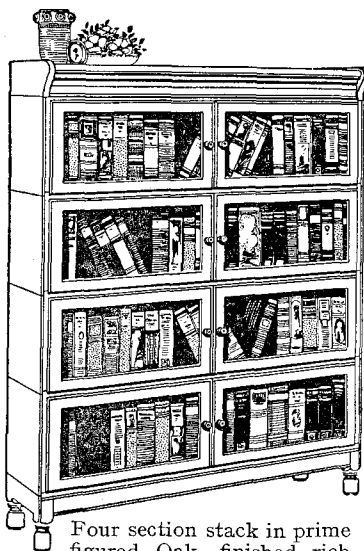
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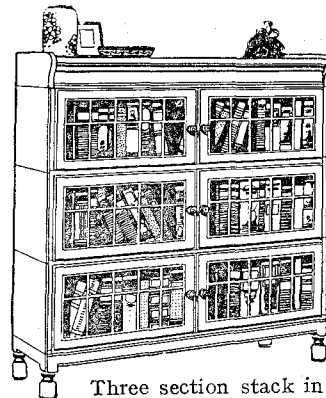
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four captains of industry come in: all black-coated, all bald-headed, all exactly alike: the implication (that captains of industry are a type) is clear, this time. But elsewhere, the reverse. We espy a character whose lips are jet-black: an office-staff whose way of going down-stairs is to leap heavily into space: or a clerk who, after first working at his desk in pitch darkness, turns on a light which shines from the floor into his eyes. Surely, such violent contradictions of normality must have symbolic meanings? But in our efforts to discover these meanings, we are losing touch with the play. . . . What is expressionism, anyway? I protest I ask in all seriousness. No one seems to know this secret, except earnest folk without the gift of imparting it. Even Mr. Ashley Dukes, most lucid guide, walks round it gingerly. "One of the aims of the expressionists," he says in "The Youngest Drama," "is to present character subjectively. We are asked to regard the persons on the stage, not only with our own eyes, but through their own emotional nature—" But my own eyes, both physical and spiritual, are baffled by the black lips and so forth; the floor-lamp throws no light on anybody's nature, for me. What is expressionism? It seems a fertile theme for the debating societies.

**ALL GOD'S CHILLUN GOT WINGS.** By Eugene O'Neill.  
7s. 6d. (Jonathan Cape.)

There are three plays here—the title-play, "Desire Under the Elms" and "Welded." The last is the simplest, the most stageable, the pleasantest, much the most coherent. It is the story of two lovers five years married, torturing themselves and each other with the hatred that is sometimes so queerly near to passionate love. They try to break away, to kill their love and find peace. And they fail. An old tale, but told with an intensity and intimacy that revitalise it. I suppose it is the best play of the three; nor, fresh from reading them, can I give any reason why, nevertheless, I feel that I shall remember "Desire Under the Elms" long after the others have faded.

For "Desire" (and "All God's Chillun" to a less degree) is a tangled and difficult play. You recognise the hand of Mr. O'Neill in the illusion *motif*—in this case, old Cabot's illusion that to outlive his kin, to prolong his cursed ownership of the farm, is *life*. But the expressionism, which Mr. O'Neill made so magnificently his servant in "The Hairy Ape," here runs away with him. (It showed signs of getting out of hand a year previously, in "All God's Chillun," where the lovers' home is seen physically to shrink on them as their madness grows.) The old farm is cursed and haunted. Horror and hate brood there, personified by the sentinel elms which "brood oppressively over the house . . . like exhausted women resting their sagging breasts and hands and hair on its roof." You are made aware of sinister influences, unseen—the unquiet presence of the dead mother, slaved to death years ago by grim old Cabot: the tragic might-have-been of the three sons slaved to death in their turn ("only none of us hain't died yet"), brutalised almost out of their humanity: the tragic and murderous illusion of old Cabot, mentioned above: and over all, the oppressive fist of God—the "hard" God of their superstition, despised and hated almost as much as He is feared: He at whose bidding old Cabot chose this barren farm for the sheer lust of toilsome possession: and to whom even now, sometimes, they stand looking up, like grotesque and horrible parodies of Millet's "Angelus." Side by side with these ghostly influences, Mr. O'Neill is at pains to show the telepathic reaction of his folk on each other, in lust or hatred, even from separate rooms; for which reason he gives you the whole farm at once—the outside with its elms, and the four rooms seen through their windows. (In "All God's Chillun" he showed two streets at once, the white and negro "quarters.")

For the reader, this is a powerfully effective device. The farm haunts one, with its sense of lives going forward independently, yet interdependent. And there is no reason why it should not be equally effective, staged.

**THESE PLAYERS.** By Doris Westwood. 7s. 6d. (Heath, Cranton.)

A most ingenuous book, this diary of a year with the Old Vic Company. The author is frankly stage-struck, frankly a hero-worshipper, frankly idealistic. The result might well have been the most dreadfully mawkish stuff, but is not. It is saved by its utter sincerity—a gift so rare, that if this is a first book (it reads like one) Miss Westwood is going to make a name presently. Style apart, her central theme commands interest. This is, in brief, a super's reaction to Shakespeare. The super sees each play from two angles at once. The actors' mask-like make-up, the blank gaps in the scenery around, all tend to shatter illusion; and yet one's closeness to the play makes it ten times more real, in patches at any rate, than if one sat in the stalls. This is unreasonable, but (*crede experto*) true: a psychological oddity, which Miss Westwood presents with conviction. In passing, she gives a number of thumbnail sketches of Vic personalities. A queer, charming book.

**REFLECTIONS FROM SHAKESPEARE.** By Lena Ashwell.  
21s. (Hutchinson.)

In theory, the first part of Miss Ashwell's book deals with Shakespeare's life and times, the second with certain of his plays. In practice, she takes the poet as a whole, with a sort of hurricane gusto which declines to be limited by chapter-labels. She is gay, racy and sincere, tumbling out her thoughts as they come; idea suggests idea; her mind is too swift and various to submit to pigeon-holing. Is the Elizabethan Puritan her subject? Straightway we find mixed up with him the morality of modern America, and what a British colonel thought about play-actors. So in the Hamlet-chapter, cheek by jowl, come jostling Danish geography, Shakespeare's sources, Mary Fitton, costumes and how to wear them, the attitude of the critics to Hamlet, some points of psychic phenomena, *The Vortex*, boy-actors, and the right interpretation of Gertrude. The point of view is that of the intelligent actor—or rather, actress: for "my special interest is in Shakespeare's personal life, as mirrored in particular by the women of the tragedies"; and there are no more striking passages than those on Desdemona and Cordelia, whom Miss Ashwell refuses to swallow whole as idealised heroines. Pedants will pick a hole or two in her scholarship (e.g. Shakespeare *does* mention insurance-companies—*Tempest* iii, 3, 48: the name Eros does not mean the dawn: and a false derivation is implied for the word "barbarism"). But the vitality and range of her ideas provide more stimulus than a shelf-full of pedants' books.

**RIVERSIDE NIGHTS.** By A. P. Herbert and Nigel Playfair.  
7s. 6d. (Fisher Unwin.)

It is always instructive to read the book of what one has seen acted; most of all the book of a revue, which owes more to its actors than a close-knit play. And this one, unlike most, is nearly all readable. On the whole the text confirms one's stage-impressions. "The Policeman's Serenade," "Simmel and Warbeck," "It May be Life" and "Love Lies Bleeding" are its best items—and will seem so, I think, even to readers without memory of the production to help them. On the other hand some of the Victorian "dug-outs" are even duller to read than to hear (this is a controversial subject, no doubt; but may one suggest that "Tommy Make Room for Your Uncle" is one of the unfunniest songs in existence; and that even the celebrated "Sell No More Drink" is too long? Indeed, all these dug-outs are too long, and too obvious; Harold Scott's rakish style and his inspired accompaniments saved some of them, but without his art they are dire). There remains a point of literary interest. On the stage the Tchekov skit fell between the two stools of burlesque and parody; in print this confusion disappears; it reads pure parody, and is the best thing in the book.

G. S.