

THE DRAMA-BIRD TAKES WINGS

THE THEATRE THROUGH THE AGES.
James Cleaver. George Harrap & Co.
THEATRE ROYAL, DRURY LANE. W. Macqueen Pope. W. H. Allen.

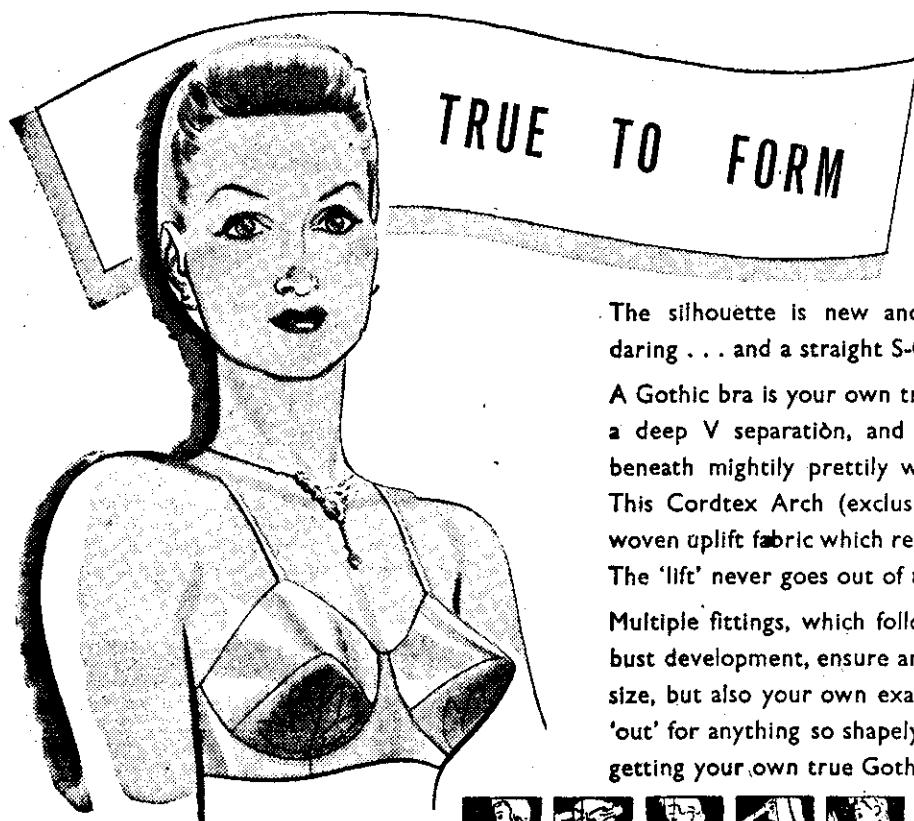
(Reviewed by Ngaio Marsh)

SOME day a book will be written about the renaissance of the living drama at the close of World War II. Its author will find it difficult to avoid the symbol of the phoenix (a favourite figure in the theatre). He may care to say that of all the strange fowl that rose from that prodigious ash-heap, none was more startling or vigorous than the drama-bird. He will note that this creature rose at first like a rocket, achieving its maximum speed and dash early in 1946 and then seemed to flatten out into a steady if less spectacular long-distance flight. Writing of this period, he may add that it was remarkable for the number of books that were published on the subject of theatre and that these, having in the past been confined almost entirely to the punctual exhibitionism of the theatrical autobiography, now concerned themselves with

movements, with technique, with social implications and with the actual history of playhouses. To illustrate his point he may take down from his shelves James Cleaver's *The Theatre Through the Ages* and W. Macqueen Pope's *Theatre Royal, Drury Lane*.

The first of these two is delightful in the hand. It is illustrated with lithographs, drawn on the plate by the author. The pleasant black and white of the lithograph, with its occasional splashes of pure colour and its insistence on design, is entirely appropriate to this kind of book. Mr. Cleaver is an admirable lithographer. He has a nice sense of period and an unerring feeling for illustration. He writes as he draws, clearly and coolly and without fancy-touches. The history of theatre is traced through from the Dionysian festival to the present flowering of the Old Vic repertory. This is done with the greatest economy and a judicious leavening of shrewd comment. The sense of continuity is the more remarkable in that obvious links, such as that between the *comedia dell'arte* and English pantomime are established without being unduly plugged. This is a nice-looking, fresh and stimulating book.

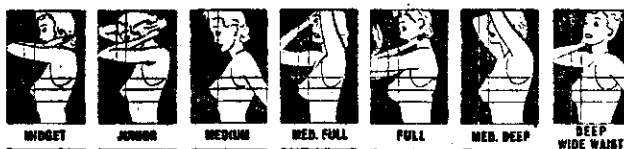
IN the world of theatre, "personality" and "atmosphere" are words that one learns to anticipate with a kind of nervous certainty. One wishes to avoid them and finds that they are almost indispensable. No such squeamishness cramps the style of Mr. Macqueen Pope. His phrases fall with the exuberance of inscriptions on autographed theatrical photographs. His enthusiasms are wholehearted and lavish. Drury Lane is the world's "greatest" theatre. David Garrick, "one of the few great actors of all time," Charles II.'s fling with Nell Gwynne "one of the world's supreme romances," Julian Wyld, "the pantomime king with the heart of a child." And so on. Yet this floridity is not unsuited to his theme. The history of Drury Lane is one of tremendous triumphs and abysmal crashes. The tapestry Mr. Pope unfolds is like one of those vast backdrops before which Kean tried to calm a roaring fighting multitude. Its colour is laid on in great splashes. A full orchestra, reinforced with brass, announces each theme, the thunder sheet rattles and the great names emblazoned round the walls step forward on their cues. One ends by accepting Mr. Pope's gusto and smelling again that indefinable excitement



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