

Education by Wireless

W.E.A. Lecture—Modern Social Drama



FOLLOWING are the notes of a lecture to be given from 4YA on Tuesday, May 14, at 7.30 p.m., under the auspices of the Workers' Educational Association, University of Otago.

If one could take off the roofs of all modern buildings and peer below, one would get an idea of the scope and variety of modern plays. No subject is too sacred, too petty, too sordid, too lofty, too intimate for the modern writer. He will write about anything. At one moment he is lifting us to the heights with an inspiring interpretation of Christ's martyrdom, as in Masfield's "The Trial of Jesus." In another he is dragging us into the depths, as in Jean O'Casey's "The Silver Tassie." He can reproduce the terror of war and revolution or recreate the glory of St. Joan or Florence Nightingale.

The Subjects.

AN important social problem is the future of machinery. Will it reduce men to the status of mere machine-minders? Will it bring increased leisure and an improved standard of living for all? What does the dramatist think of Henry Ford? "R.U.R." is an effort at interpretation. The machines are controlled by men who themselves are made by machines. These Robots, as the machine-men are called, are efficient—they have no emotions, they do not waste time in love-making or eating, they

so small in comparison with the large voltages delivered that its effect is hardly felt. However, with the "A" things are different. The voltage delivered is very small, and any fluctuation means a big percentage in the output. It can be overcome by floating a battery, that is, by connecting each lead from the eliminator to an "A" battery of the required strength, and from this leads are taken to the set in the usual manner. Current will then be supplied only when the potential drop makes the output of the transformer lower than the battery.

Magnetic-bar Amplifiers.

WOULD you please inform me if it is possible to build a bar amplifier for a crystal set, and in doing so what steps to take?—"Crystalline" (Wellington).

A.: Bar amplifiers are unsuitable for amateur constructors.

merely work. Here is an attempt not to portray individuals, but to interpret a problem.

"The Rumour" by C. K. Munro deals with the engineering of wars in the interest of financiers. "The Insect Play" reduces men to the size and status of insects, and miserable, petty being they are! "Masses and Men" tries to explain the economic forces that underlie a modern revolution.

Then there are the dozens of plays that stress the problems of the individual—marriage, love, patriotism, duty, and so on, according to the dozens of theories of conduct that are floating around in the modern world. The impression is very puzzling, worrying, and to some decadent. We live in an age of experiments.

The Scenery.

REALISTIC subjects need realistic scenery. There is a growing tendency to replace the flat scenery by curtains, screens and lights which suggest rather than portray. In "The Adding Machine," by Elmer Rice, an effort is made to represent the monotony of much of modern life. The characters are given not names, but labels, which try to suggest the universality of the problem. Each actor, further, has two streams of speech to manage—one which represents the bald, ugly conversation of life, and another which reveals hidden thoughts and emotions—more violent and even more ugly. At one point it is necessary to flash coloured lights across the stage to reveal the full extent of the leading character's emotions.

In a Russian play at the back of the stage is a type of speedometer which registers the speed of the emotions of the actors—the wheel turns slowly when they are bored, and whirls rapidly in a love scene!

In "Hoopla," to denote the passing of years between the scenes, a film of world events is shown. To make for rapid action, the author uses a setting which enables four scenes to be presented simultaneously. In some plays there is no such thing as scenery, but suggestions, or symbols, or constructions.

The scenery is used not to please the eye, not even to complete the picture, like a bowl of flowers in the

study, but merely to help on the action, or to assist the interpretation.

Again, in an attempt to suggest that the stage is merely the mirror of daily life, the audience may be drawn in by singing a song relevant to the play, the actors may come up from the audience, or they may hold a discussion across the seated people.

In a Russian theatre the actors change their costumes before the audience.

Discussion.

A LIBRARY would be needed to keep up to date with the modern plays, but the following are selected as being characteristic of the contemporary movements: "R.U.R."—Capeh; "Masses and Men"—E. Toller; "Hoopla"—E. Toller; "The Insect Play"—Capeh; "Your People"—Miles Malle-son; "A Strange Interlude"—R.U.R.; "The Rumour"—C. K. Munro. Those interested in modern drama are invited to join the D.E.A. Correspondence Course, attached to which is a library of plays.

Next week, Dr. Fisher will begin a series of wireless lectures on "Why Incomes are Unequal." Further lectures on the drama will be given when listeners in inform the Otago W.E.A. of their desires. In the meantime the Association invites correspondence on the following questions:—

1. Do you believe that many modern plays will live? Why? We know that both Aristophanes and Euripides were propagandists. Why, then, can we still read them with satisfaction?

2. Do the great problems of life vary from age to age? If Shakespeare were alive to-day in what form and style would his plays be written? Did Shakespeare get the effects in his plays that the moderns are trying to get—realism, the inner thoughts of the characters, full emotional expression, realistic scenery, social forces, the events outside the play, the experiences of war and revolution?

3. Do you think that there are any subjects that should not be placed in a play? Or do you think that the important factor is how the subjects are treated by the author or producer? Do you think actors should swear?

All information, suggestions, criticisms, answers to "Radio Lectures," Secretary, W.E.A., Otago University, Dunedin.

The Poor Printer!

EXPERIENCE shows that it is a physical impossibility to avoid an occasional printer's error. This is understandable in view of the pace and pressure under which most newspapers are evolved. Some of these errors contain a deal of unconscious humour. Some of the best that have come under our notice for some little while are contained in the following paragraph. Is it possible that the reward promised in the concluding sentence will act as a stimulus to original wireless research?

"Wanted! The Benignant Beam.

"I note a recrudescence of reports about alleged 'death rays,' and I see that our old friend who kills mice by radio has battered his way into the papers again. Why do men dream so much about easier ways of killing when to kill is so much easier than to cure? I want to see the scientist begin the search for the benignant ray which will heal tissue, purify blood, destroy evil germs and arrest the progress of malignant growths. Immorality waits for its discoverer."

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