

HALF-HOURS WITH THE W.E.A.

CANTERBURY

Roman Drama—An Abyss of License

Drama under the Wrong Conditions can be a Most Potent Instrument of Degradation—Early Plays in England—Professor Shelley's Work for the Repertory Movement in Christchurch.

ONE of the main features of social life during the last twenty years has been the great development of organised adult education. This is due to a great extent to the wide range of interests that has characterised the individual during the period. The Great War shook the structures of social life to its foundations, while economic forces changed the relation of social classes. These changes encouraged the spirit of inquiry so that causes could be discovered. But later this interest turned to Literature and Drama, and now these two subjects are the most popular in the courses organised by adult education movements.

NO one has performed a greater work for the appreciation of Drama in New Zealand than Professor J. Shelley, the Director of the Canterbury W.E.A. As soon as he arrived in New Zealand in the year 1920, a class for the study of Drama was organised for him. This class commenced with a membership of 50, but in subsequent years the membership increased to over 200. The organisation of Summer Schools was commenced in the same year, and in these schools Professor Shelley again led the study of Drama and inspired his students to undertake further study.

AS the result of this work there were now sufficient persons interested in Drama to form the nucleus of a Repertory Society. Therefore, Professor Shelley undertook the task of organising a Repertory Society for Christchurch. The success of the Society in producing first-class plays for the citizens of Christchurch is now known from one end of New Zealand to the other. Through the instrumentality of the W.E.A. the interest in Drama spread to Auckland and the other districts of the Dominion, until at the present time there is sufficient interest in the Drama to guarantee the success of Dramatic Festivals organised by the local branches of the British Drama League.

SIR BARRY JACKSON, of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, writes:—"The Drama is a vital form of art which follows human civilisation in every form, from the most civilised races to those of the lowest known intelligence. The history of the Drama in England takes its origin from the representation of sacred dramas il-

lustrating the truths of the Bible, and, as in most countries, this particular form is almost immediately cast aside for representations of existing conditions from a very wide angle of view. The main idea underlying the progress

most immediately vital, in that it depends on the association for a few hours of a great number of people whose mental energies are all concentrated in the same direction. As an instrument of education, Drama, always supposing that education means a knowledge of leading a life best calculated to help the community, stands alone without rival. It knows every phase of life. It brings the whole of man's life into compass of two and a half hours; it throws a light on the fundamentals of life through mimic action; it shows the infinite significance of small actions on human affairs, and thus enables a man to weigh up his actions and to sort out his moral ideas."

IN Greece, Drama had grown rapidly out of primitive ritual until it reached its full development in the fifth century B.C., at Athens, when some of the world's greatest masterpieces, both in tragedy and in comedy, were produced. The conditions under which the dramatists worked were most favourable, and such as no dramatist has been so fortunate as to enjoy since. Greek Drama had both a really intimate connection with national religion, and the full support of the Athenian State. Greece, in fact, illustrates most forcibly our conclusion that the Drama can be, under right conditions, a great instrument of progress. Rome, on the other hand, illustrates our conclusion that, under wrong conditions, Drama can be a most potent instrument of degradation. At best it was borrowed from Greece and was dilettante in character. At its worst it descended into an abyss of license and brutality, culminating in the actual burning in the arena of a criminal in the last act of *Hercules Furens*.

THE influence of the plays presented under the auspices of the Church, and later taken over by the Guilds, was direct and far-reaching in England. It was not only that every town of any importance had its plays, but these plays were acted by amateurs. The carpenters produced their play of Noah building the Ark; the shepherds their Nativity play; and while payment was made to the performers for loss of time, there was no idea of professionalism. The plays were performed first in the Parish Church and later in the street. The populace crowded round the movable stage, and when a messenger pushed his way through them to the stage, or Herod descended and raged among the people, they must have felt that they were more than spectators.

The W.E.A. Talks From 3YA For November

Following are the W.E.A. subjects and speakers scheduled from 3YA during November:—

"Plays, Play Actors, Priests and Puppets." Professor J. Shelley, Canterbury College: Friday, October 26: "Plays and Play Actors."

Friday, November 2: "Sir Arthur Salter's Suggested Changes in the Economic System." Mr. George Manning, M.A. Dip. Soc. Sc., W.E.A. Secretary.

Friday, November 9: "Plays and Play Actors." Friday, November 16: "Plays and Play Actors."

"Trends in British Agriculture and its Relation to New Zealand." Dr. W. Brydon, Ch.Ch. Technical College. Monday, October 29: "Some Further Points on the Relation of Live Stock to the British Farmer." Monday, November 5: "A Comparison of British Agricultural Methods with those in Vogue in New Zealand."

"The Story of the Tolpuddle Martyrs." Mr. Geo. Manning, M.A., Dip. Soc. Sc., W.E.A. Secretary. Friday, November 12: "Trade Unions in the Early 19th Century." Friday, November 19: "The Trial of the Dorsetshire Labourers."

of the Drama through the ages is a vivid representation of ideal life. It teaches humanity quite directly to what it should aspire and what it should cast aside as base and worthless. Drama cannot be called a pure art: it is of composite form gathering together to one end, poet, painter, musician and dancer. Of all arts it is the

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NEVER forget that your deeds will one day become tradition.—The late President Hindenberg.