

Books and Men

Victor Gollancz's Place in the Publishing Sun

Praise for Volumes of Famous Plays

IF Messrs. Victor Gollancz published nothing else but their bi-annual books of famous plays, they would still be deserving of a considerable place in the publishing sun. These volumes, starting back in the heyday of "Young Woodley" and "Journey's End," have advanced through years made notable by such productions as "The Barretts of Wim-

a war play that is not in the same street as "Journey's End," and whose chief claim to fame is that it was the vehicle chosen by Robert Donat for his first excursion into London actor-managership. But even the prepossessing Mr. Donat couldn't save the play, and it was withdrawn after a comparatively short run. The public has had enough of war plays just now.

Entertaining from beginning to end is "Call It a Day," the new Dodie Smith play in the collection. This girl seems to have worked like a Trojan since she left her shop counter, and her plays are gaining in interest and strength as she goes along. The play covers one day in the life of an average London family—husband, wife, two daughters and a son—and the whole thing rings with spontaneity and homeliness.

The first play is "St. Helena," a collaboration between R. C. Sherriff and Jeanne de Casalis, the famous actress. This play has some exceptional merits, but the London theatre public was apathetic. And then it was given a personal recommendation through the London Press by no less a person than Mr. Winston Churchill. Interest was immediately revived—so much so that the play has just concluded a most satisfactory run of six months.

There is an American play in the book, "Awake and Sing," by Clifford Odets, an Irish play, "Katie Rocke," by Teresa Deevy, and Rodney Ackland's latest "After October." Although this new volume doesn't quite measure up to "Famous Plays of 1935" its variety lends it uncommon interest.

"Famous Plays of 1935-36." Various playwrights. Victor Gollancz. Our copy from the publishers.

Exposing the Evils of Buying by Instalment

"IF I Have Four Apples," by Josephine Lawrence, attacks the problem of the family which persists in destroying its happiness, its integrity, its very life, by living on the instalment system. The Hoes are people whom we meet every day in trams, trains, shops and cinemas; blurred, messy-minded people who refuse to face things as they are, but who go micawbering along waiting for something to turn up.

Miss Lawrence draws her picture

"The African Witch"

Fine Reading About An Unusual Place

COMMERCIAL travellers and insurance canvassers know that "you gotta go places if you wanta get results." Mr. Joyce Carey, the author of "The African Witch," has been places, and he has capitalised his powers of observation and penetration in this new novel in a way which heartily deserves results. The book is remarkable for its subject. To combine a study of life in an out-of-the-way portion of Nigeria with the personal stories of a handful of most unusual characters—that is, unusual to New Zealand stay-at-homes—is to provide readers with something that they may enjoy on only rare occasions.

For this reason, the reader cannot fail to be impressed by the revelations of conditions as they exist in Nigeria. The devilish power of the ju-ju, the simplicity and savagery which survive among the blacks, the pros and cons of European education for natives, the practical working of the Christian missions, revealing some of their less favourable effects, and the amusing diplomacy necessarily practised by the Resident all help to build up a publication which even apart from this informative angle is worth reading for the fact that it is a splendidly written novel.

But both the blacks and the whites of the book provide some fun, and the frank descriptions of certain incidents and of such little devils as the boy Musa are given in a way that convinces the reader of the sincerity of the work. To gloss politely over such portions would have spoiled the general effect.

"The African Witch." Mr. Joyce Carey. Victor Gollancz. Our copy from the publishers.

with a very vivid pen, her uncanny knowledge of the Hoes based on her experiences during the many years that she worked on a newspaper in charge of the question and answer department. We see them struggling in a fog of bewilderment, on the brink of bankruptcy, not realising that they can't economise on their little luxuries simply because they don't. They try to work on the system that if I have four apples and eat three, I have eight left. We watch their floundering from our superior plane, coolly interested and rather pitying, and then, somewhere toward the end of the book, we suddenly realise, abashed, that our own name is Hoe.

That is only one triumph of a book that is different. It is Miss Lawrence's second novel, and with it she achieved an unprecedented distinction by a Book of the Month selection in America for two successive novels within two years.

"If I Have Four Apples." Josephine Lawrence. Our copy from the publishers.

Lunching With a Sultan

Margaret Macpherson at Johore Bahru

AT present travelling in the East is Margaret Macpherson, well-known writer and frequent contributor to the "Radio Record." Writing to the paper she says: "I have been the guest of a real live monarch—the Sultan of Johore. Staying in Malaysia I decided to write to the Sultan and he responded by lending me his car and his aide de camp to go all over Johore Bahru and see everything, and I ended by having luncheon with the Sultan at his palace. He gave me three lovely books on Johore, all inscribed and sealed with the royal arms, and he gave me three photographs of himself inscribed 'To Margaret Macpherson.' He is the potentate, you may remember, who gave a cool half million, just as if it were a China orange, to the late King as a jubilee present to be used for the strengthening of Singapore."

pole Street," "Richard of Bordeaux," "The Wind and the Rain," "Lover's Leap" and "Night Must Fall."

The 1935-36 volume is now to hand—and for almost the first time since we started reviewing this series, we must carp and criticise. Perhaps it is that, in their haste to be early on the market, the publishers have made a less careful choice than usual, but the fact remains that at least one of the plays is certainly not deserving of the title "famous." It is "Red Night,"