

Books and Men

Plays—From Noel Coward To Shows For Amateur Societies

A Batch Of New Publications From England

(Specially Reviewed by Victor S. Lloyd.)

"PRACTICAL STAGECRAFT FOR AMATEURS," by Jevan Brandon-Thomas, and published by Harrap, is a book packed with valuable advice to the amateur actor, producer and playwright. The author is a practical man of the theatre. He is the writer of several successful plays, including "Passing Brompton Road," and the son of the author of "Charley's Aunt," which has played for so long and with such amazing success. In this book he covers a great deal of ground—from the organising of dramatic clubs up to writing a play; he even includes very helpful advice on festival dramas.

It is interesting to note that in his chapter on writing a play he speaks of the one-act play by the New Zealand writer, J. A. S. Coppard, called "Sordid Story," which won the New Zealand Drama League Festival last year. Mr. Brandon-Thomas writes: "I heartily recommend 'Sordid Story' to students . . . this brilliant pioneering effort by Mr. Coppard combines a dramatic story well handled, crisp dialogue and a novel setting."

Coward's Latest

NOEL COWARD'S plays, grouped under the heading of "To-night at 8.30," have already been played in London with considerable success, and some have been purchased by Sacha Guitry, the famous French producer, for production in Paris. They are all different from most short plays of today. In volume 1 there are three plays, "We Were Dancing," "The Astonished Heart" and "Red Pepper." The first is in two scenes, both laid on the verandah of the county club at Samolo. It is an extraordinary play concerning the eternal triangle in a new guise.

"The Astonished Heart," in six scenes, the entire action of which takes place in a drawing-room, is another triangle drama treated sympathetically and with a strange pathos. The last play in the first volume is an interlude with music set in a palace of varieties. It is vaporous and amusing, with a vivid back-stage atmosphere and some good lines.

In the second volume Noel Coward includes a light comedy, a comedy and a musical fantasy. The first, "Hands Across the Sea," is very amusing and is really a comedy of errors with very modern dialogue—very easy to stage.

"Fumed Oak," the second of the trilogy, is an excellent character study of a man who suddenly rebels against his sordid life and mean suburban family, which consists of his wife, child and mother-in-law. The third, "Shadow Play," is what its name suggests, and is the sort of thing that Noel Coward delights in.

"Petticoat Plays"

HERE are six plays, published by Harrap, with all-women casts—with a preface by Fay Compton, the famous West End actress. This volume, written by Muriel and Sydney

**Paul Cullen at
2CH, Sydney**

Every Evening at 8

IN a letter to the "Radio Record," Paul Cullen, the popular New Zealand singing organist, who is now in Australia, draws attention to the fact that he is broadcasting over Station 2CH, Sydney, every evening except Saturday and Sunday, at 8 (New Zealand time). Mr. Cullen's session is sponsored by Amalgamated Wireless. He is still giving nightly performances at the Burwood Cinema near Sydney.

Box, achieves what it undertakes—to provide a wider variety of dramatic possibilities for all-women societies than they have previously had. "Martha and Mary," the first of these plays, brings the story of Lazarus into a modern setting—well worth doing. "A Marriage has been Disarranged" is fun from beginning to end, and ought to make a strong appeal to women. "Anticlockwise" is a peculiar play dealing with the revolt of a brow-beaten relative and a mysterious death. It is quite exciting, and ought to prove very effective. "Slow Curtain" is more psychological than any of the others, and is almost a tragedy. It tells of

TRAINED AS a German Spy

MANY stories have been written about spies and their activities during the Great War but the masterpiece has been generally acclaimed as Bernard Newman's "Spy." Now an even greater work comes from the presses of Victor Gollancz—"German Spy."

"Although my book 'Spy' was banned in Germany, it was published in most neighbouring countries," writes Bernard Newman in the preface. "In the autumn of 1935 I received a letter from a complete stranger, a Bavarian named Ludwig Grein, addressed from Vienna (where, apparently, he was an exile from Nazi persecution). The letter stated that he had chanced on a copy of the Swedish edition of my story, and had read it with more than usual interest because, during the war, he himself had served in the German Secret Service."

When they met Grein told Newman of his experiences while serving as driver to a famous British commander, his methods of conveying messages to the Germans, how the French worked a coal mine under the German lines, and how he used the mine passages for personal delivery of the more important messages. But the greatest feat of all was when Grein organised a rebellion among the German prisoners of war immediately behind the front line and almost turned the scales in Germany's favour. Most of his disclosures have been checked over by Newman and found to be true. Newman concludes the preface to this remarkable book with: "I may say that many of the incidents of this extraordinary story are capable of confirmation. But even if it should prove that Grein has done no more than pull my leg severely, I am still indebted to him for one of the most startling, exciting and ingenious yarns in the history of the literature of espionage. I did actually check up his narrative, and had no difficulty in proving that Grein did indeed serve in the British Army, and that some of his incidents were true. Then, reading the story again, I threw up the pursuit, coming to the conclusion that it was such a darned good yarn that it didn't matter a damn whether it was fiction or fact, or a mixture of both, and I have left it at that."

"German Spy," Bernard Newman. Vickers.

theatre folk and the strange effect the play they were doing had upon the two principal characters. A good opportunity here for character work.