

This Week's Special Article

Will The Little Theatre and Public Walk Hand in Hand?

WITHIN the last few weeks most of the little theatre societies in New Zealand have either announced or produced the first play of their 1938 season.

Personally, I have seen two productions, each in a different centre, and, if the offerings are typical, the 1938 season is going to be much on a level with the 1934-35-36, and -37 seasons.

That remark is not made in any derogatory sense. Taken all in all, Little Theatre standards in New Zealand cities surely compare favourably with Little Theatre standards in most other English-speaking countries. Much progress of the internal variety is being made.

But I do look forward to the day when I shall be able to go to a repertory show in New Zealand, and, without knowing a soul in the cast, be able to enjoy the presentation of a play for its own sake. In most, if not in all cases, this is frankly not possible in New Zealand to-day. Until it is possible the Little Theatre movement will not have come to maturity.

Why is it that third-rate professionals so often entertain us, where first-rate amateurs so frequently bore us? Considering the problem from all angles, I think the explanation lies mainly with two factors—selection of material and discipline in production.

Nowadays stage management and costuming are very adequately attended to by the larger societies. In Wellington, particularly, I have seen plays pro-

duced by amateurs in which the staging and dressing were so nearly up to professional standard, that the difference hardly mattered. But I have yet to see an amateur production anywhere in New Zealand in which the casting is 100 per cent. logical, and in which ambition does not obscure acting ability with its ham-head!

THE beginning of the repertory season of 1938 gives point to this article by "Sari" on the politics of amateur dramatic societies in New Zealand. Even if the societies disagree profoundly, they will probably admit that the writer's opinions are stimulating.

The system on which most amateur societies is run is fundamentally unsound. Usually the committee decides what plays will be lined up for the season, quite irrespective of the acting personnel of the society, and of the possibility of finding a competent producer. If committees were to make their first and chief duty the selection of a competent producer for each performance planned, and leave the selection of the play, and, above all, the casting, to him, the Little Theatre would not be piling up between itself and the general public a whole mountain of mistrust and prejudice. In a few years the very dynamite of genius will be needed to demolish that mountain before the amateur theatre and the general public can walk hand in hand.

Members of any society taking part in a public performance of a play should be prepared to subject themselves to professional, or near professional, discipline—to permit (without recourse to committee-canvassing), the producer to say both how a part should be played and who should play it. Working along such lines, a really competent producer should be able to turn on an entertaining show with almost any material. With good material he should be able to turn on a first-rate show. (Ctd. on next page.)

In the Wake of the Week's Broadcasts

Stupid hoax was played on a 2ZB announcer during the week-end by some outside person which led to the announcement of the death of Mr. Eric Riddiford while he was still very much alive. The practical joke to be funny must be harmless.

CRUELTY IS OFTEN STUPIDITY

To say that a man is dead may cause a great deal of unnecessary mental pain to relatives, may upset business affairs. Cruelty is often nine-tenths stupidity and lack of intelligence. At the same time, the incident shows that radio stations should be as careful in checking their facts as newspapers.

"Three Women," portraits from three of Katherine Mansfield's stories. "Ma Parker," "The Lady's Maid," and "Miss Moss," served to introduce New Zealand's best writer to many listeners last Monday night. As the presentations consisted of purely and simply three "portraits," it would be unfair to say whether Katherine Mansfield's works are suitable for radio presentation or not. A thousand and one short stories, by any writers at all, would have provided material similar to that presented by Miss Anita Winkel and her party. The portraits were only character

PORTRAITS DONE IN RADIO.

studies, each one brief, yet each one very well done, and possibly the credit of any success should go more to the producer than to the author. Reduced to their lowest level, each portrait was little more than an elocutionary sketch, and as such each was exceedingly well done. But, as I have said, almost any writer's works would have produced similar material and consequently the question of the value of Miss Mansfield's stories for radio broadcasting remains unanswered. Only in one particular might these excerpts have been described as "truly Mansfield." They were all slightly morbid.