

ceptions handed to playwrights, his main need throughout was patience. As he only set out to tell a simple story of one play any further suggestion as to what he might have done would be ungenerous. There yet remains to be written the detailed story of the chaotic conditions in the theatre as they affect the playwright: this book is the nearest approach to any that we have, and while it is limited intentionally, it is of exceptional interest. The sly humour, and skilful thrusts at several well-known actors and play agents, the large number of personal letters from prominent managers give to the entire story that personal touch so necessary in a book of this sort.

After recounting how the idea came to him to write a play upon a Colonial theme, the author proceeds to give a list of the number of people who read the play and their various reactions. The reason plays are turned down are here partly revealed—at least why this particular play was rejected. One amusing touch is contained in a letter from E. H. Sothorn, who wanted a play “with a big part for me.” Another actress writes of the leading feminine rôle: “Pamela is not strong enough for me, I see her charm.” From these phrases the budding playwright may deduce that one of the first rules in selling a play to a star is that the leading rôle should be a “fat” one. Even when the play was eventually produced by Henry Miller, the letters reveal that many lines were taken from one character and given to him. As this is a perfectly natural procedure it is merely interesting to call attention to it—as a lesson in practical play-writing. A very revealing letter is one written by Mr. Miller to the author when the play had run a short while, begging him “to build it up.” Here we see the author and actor working in complete harmony as to changes—which is in itself a phenomenon. Inside views of the mystery of the “booking department” is also shown the reader, who may often have wondered how plays reach the city. In fact, an amusing anecdote is told of Mr. Frohman who, seeing an enthusiastic no-

IV

LOUIS EVAN SHIPMAN'S "THE TRUE ADVENTURE OF A PLAY"*

It is no easy task to tell a very intimate “inside” story yet not violate taste and a sense of proportion. Mr. Shipman, in recounting the adventures of his play, *D’Arcy of the Guards*, has not only avoided such pitfalls, but, with his usual grace of expression, he has brought forth a little story which will be of infinite assistance to all playwrights—who are or would be. Indeed it is in a spirit of helpfulness to others that he has approached his idea, and certainly no aspirant for fame on Broadway could fail to see a phase of theatrical conditions illumined by this detailed account of facts which reveal the uncertainties of play producing. It is well to warn the reader, at the start, that the story which Mr. Shipman tells is in no way exceptional. In fact, if there is any criticism at all, one might say that, on the whole, he had a very easy time of it. He at least achieved production for his play by two distinguished artists, and while he suffered somewhat from the usual de-

*The True Adventure of a Play. By Louis Evan Shipman. New York: Mitchell Kennerley.

tice of the play written in the *Evening Sun*, thought it was by Acton Davies. On the strength of this, Mr. Frohman consented to see the play and it was eventually "booked" in one of his New York theatres. But before it opened it had to be rehearsed under Mr. Frohman's eye with further resulting changes more or less important. From all of which one deduces the truth of Boucicault's remark, "that plays are not written, but rewritten."

It is unnecessary to give in detail the further adventures of *D'Arcy*; although the London complications with three well-known stars seeking it is as amusing to the reader as it must have been tragic to the nervously anxious author. After three years it saw the light. London, New York and all the "stock" cities in

the country gave it a hearing, and when all was thought over the author recounts an offer to have it done in motion pictures. All of which shows that a play has a peculiar life if it once gets started with anything like success.

At the end of the volume Mr. Shipman gives several contracts which should serve as models to any playwright approaching a sale for the first time. These are of the usual phraseology, but they are instructive samples to guide the ignorant in the mazes of theatrical business. The book is, therefore, valuable to the playwright; and because of its charm and personal note is not uninteresting reading to the layman who would know of the things on the other side of the proscenium.

John Blakeslee.