

## THE THEATRE

**I**N the course of a very intelligent review of the past season in the Century Magazine, Mr. Alexander Woolcott writes on the need of "theater sophistication" in the American provinces. Thus:

"In all these lesser cities the very people who would make the best and most intelligently responsive audiences for honest and more aspiring dramatic works have found so little in average fare to whet their appetites for more that they have ceased to go to the theater at all. . . ."

The critic's cure is a preliminary course in the mere habit of seeing plays. That is very good, and since this blessed summer is the moment when one drops the habit, one may stop and regard the published plays to see what our public is likely to find if it does exercise itself by weekly jaunts to the playhouse.

MR. GEORGE MIDDLETON's one-acters of contemporary life are not likely to be produced. MASKS (Holt) gives scant reason for it. The long first play deals with the corruption of an artist's soul when he turns from real life to falsify it—just to prevent his wife's hands from roughening at the washtub and the ironing-board. JIM'S BEAST is a playlet of a triangle spoiled by a diplodocus. It could be amusing. Only in AMONG THE LIONS is there any deftness either of characterization or of action. Mr. Middleton has published six books of plays. He is also a "good property" on Broadway. The American theatre will still have to look elsewhere, not because Mr. Middleton fails to aspire. He fails only to achieve.

THE FIRST PLAYS of A. A. Milne (Knopf) are the work of one of the gayest and brightest of Punch's men. They do not aspire; but they are intelligently amusing and have all the quality of admitting a thousand technical imperfections and carrying them off with wit or the grace of nice human relations. "Probably the whole thing is an invention," says the author about one of the plays. That is the right word. They are all inventions, not without a savour

of reality, and abundant in charm. We other Americans care little for the type of wit which says, "Was it next Thursday or this Thursday you were to come? . . . So confusing to have them both named Thursday, isn't it?" For some reason we seem to lose a certain ironic quality of characterization by our disapproval of lightness. We do want our fun funny.

I SUPPOSE that Frank W. Chandler has read a thousand plays for **THE CONTEMPORARY DRAMA OF FRANCE** (Little, Brown); he has written a book full of meat, sufficiently informed concerning the movements, sufficiently incisive concerning the separate values of the men in them. The combination of enthusiasm and judgement is excellent. But what moves one most as one reads Dean Chandler's summaries of plots is the amazing fertility of the French playwright, his exuberance of fancy and invention, his capacity for putting any plot, any theme, any character on the stage. Surely if we had a drama so rich and so varied, even if it were a drama of small things, the habit of theatre-going would not be hard to form.

MR. THOMAS SELTZER is publishing a series of Plays for a People's Theatre, presumably English in its beginnings, for the first two plays are **THE FIGHT FOR FREEDOM**, by Douglas Goldring, and **TOUCH AND GO**, by D. H. Lawrence. "It will inevitably be a revolutionary (and hence an internationalist) theatre," says Mr. Goldring in his introduction. "People, ah God! Not mannequins . . . not burly pairs of gaiters," says Mr. Lawrence in his. And there is nothing fundamentally internationalist or revolutionary in Mr. Lawrence's play nor anything much beyond mannequins and gaiters in Mr. Goldring's. The advertisement in each case is excellent. Regrettably the performance is unequal to it. I am not sure that Mr. Lawrence has not written the best prologue to a people's theatre; I am sure that these two plays will not be long in its repertoire. Mr. Goldring's best is in the sudden reversal from the expected toward the end of his play, when his theoretical revolutionary becomes human—and a bit detestable for once. Mr. Lawrence, of course, cannot escape his genius. The secondary qualities of **TOUCH AND GO** are superior to the big things in the work of many other dramatists.

GILBERT SELDES