

THEATRE ARTS BOOKSHELF

THE SEASON IN PRINT

Sun-Up, by Lula Vollmer; *Tarnish*, by Gilbert Emery; *Chains*, by Jules Eckert Goodman; *Children of the Moon*, by Martin Flavin; *Aren't We All?* by Frederick Lonsdale; *Casanova*, by Lorenzo de Azertis, translated by Sidney Howard. Brentano's Contemporary Drama Series. Brentano's: New York.

Before the echo of the applause that greeted these plays in the theatres of Broadway has died away, Brentano's presents to the reading public a Contemporary Drama Series largely American in authorship, consisting of six of the season's productions. The winter of 1923-1924 has been marked by a series of spectacular European importations—Duse, *The Miracle*, the Moscow Art Theatre. Hungarian, British, German and Italian writers have contributed comedies and tragedies for the delectation of New York audiences, but in this Babel of many nations, the American playwright has held his own. Indeed he has emerged with one or two contributions of importance, certain of which are included in this series. *Sun-Up*, by Lula Vollmer, whose *Shame Woman* has also had a long run in New York, is a tragedy of the mountain folk of North Carolina, poignant in its exposition of the inarticulate, fate-driven human soul. The Widow Cagle is drawn with force and concentration. From her silences, as from her idiomatic and characterful speech, emerges a figure of more than local significance. The play progresses with a slow inevitable movement toward its double climax and ends on a note of stoic endurance which admits neither resignation nor defeat. Tragedy too is in the air of *Tarnish*; not the ennobling experience of suffering and sorrow, but the tragedy latent in disillusionment—in the fact that the thing prayed for comes so far short of the prayer. Emmet Carr, the hero of Gilbert Emery's play, is a normal kindly young man, "l'homme moyen sensuel," on the threshold of his first real love, who finds that his past entanglements are not as unimportant as he had thought them to be. By a series of far-fetched incidents his fiancée, his past and he himself are brought face to face—with consequent disaster. Except for the occasionally labored effort in plot construction, the play is sympathetically and vigorously expressed. It carries more conviction than does *Chains*, by J. E. Goodman, another comedy of the aftermath of a young man's extra-marital fancy. We have here the unlovely sight of an American family of the successful business-suburban type confronted with the "girl in the case" and treating her with a crudity and brutality hardly edifying. The girl, in this play, is the exponent of common sense, truth and self-respecting dignity—the accepted rôle for the girl-mother today. The action is diffuse and the characterization unsure, so that the author fails to hold the interest that his theme would warrant. There is no failure of reading interest, oddly enough, in the strange mixture of romance and reality which Martin Flavin presents in

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Children of the Moon. Hereditary insanity, as transformed into the moon-madness of the Atherton family, while it loses nothing of its destructive and tragic significance, is less sordid and cruel than it would be in actual life. It is used mainly as a means of showing up the ruthless egotism of a certain type of mother. Very far from the blue-green moonlight of Mr. Flavin's sea coast are the pleasant and amusing trivialities of Frederick Lonsdale's *Aren't We All?* Here, in a comfortable setting of English country house and sunny garden, a group of well bred men and women compose their differences over the inevitable cup of tea while it is agreed that stolen kisses are not as bad as they look and that we are indeed, all of us, what Lord Grenham, in a moment of expansion, called the Vicar. With *Casanova* we slip back almost two centuries to laugh and love and swagger with that most dashing and imaginative of adventurers, the Casanova of three hundred mistresses and thrice three hundred lies. The translation of this play is by Sidney Howard and so contributes to the high percentage of American representation in this group of Contemporary Drama.

ROSAMOND GILDER.

OTHER NEW BOOKS

A Primer of Modern Art, by Sheldon Cheney. Boni and Liveright: New York.

The chapter on the theatre is the final one in Sheldon Cheney's richly illustrated and richly illustrative and informing *Primer of Modern Art*. Not because the theatre is the least or the last of the arts, but probably because, to a worker in it, it is important for a double quality—its own essential theatricality and a secondary quality of using and harmonizing—if not of unifying—all the other arts. In the modern theatre of which Mr. Cheney and his fellows dream, and write, architecture, sculpture, painting, poetry, music and the dance unite, not to create but to set free a new form of theatre as deeply expressive of the soul of modern life as the Greek or the Elizabethan. To know Craig, Appia, Jessner, Hasenclever, Kaiser and O'Neill is important to a worker in this new theatre, but no less so is it to know and to understand the fundamental qualities of time-expression and of self-expression that rule Cezanne and Kokoschka, Picasso, Archipenko and again Cezanne.

The best feature of *A Primer of Modern Art* is that Mr. Cheney really is not, as he says he is not, interested in putting forward or defending a cause. "Modernism is too much alive, too multifold, too fluid for any one really interested to try to stop the current and think about histories and authoritative rankings. It is the sense of aliveness and flow, more than anything else," that he has succeeded in conveying. Not without preju-