

**Torch**

## "CARRIE AND CLEOPATRA "

**By H. E. Bates**

This tale of two sisters has freshness and actuality. Its construction sags towards the close, and we are suddenly confronted with an unlikely marriage without sufficient explanation. Theatrical commerce may complain that the only young man's part is short and unsympathetic, and it is probably true that the balance of the play does need another and better man's part. But such technical omissions are small things to set against the authenticity of the theme and its treatment. Ursula Stephens, known as Cleopatra for a joke, and her sister, Carrie, are the daughters and heirs of what is called a Liberal stalwart (why are Liberals always stalwart and Tories always stout?) in a semi-industrial provincial town. They have a house and grounds and investments and all things solid about them. Ursula wants to keep that bleak security. Carrie is for change. Progress comes, and they could sell their "desirable frontage, ripe for development." Charlie Lewis, the burly, breezy master-builder, wants this land—and gets it. For Carrie goes off with his son and Ursula, more surprisingly, yields to him. He, in turn, sufficiently yields to her to accept her notions of style in developing the new estate, and does it so lavishly as to be ruined when a slump arrives. So both sisters have adventure and neither has security, and life goes on with Carrie earning her keep in a New York office and Mr. and Mrs. Lewis climbing out of Carey Street.

There is no nonsense about this story: it is a faithful transcript of what may be happening wherever trees are being cut down and suburbs are being rushed up—that is to say, all over England. The theatre rarely presents the social fact so closely, and Mr. Bates has made his people actual, too. The study of the builder, a vulgarian with good intentions and a crudely cordial idealism, a man who can be made to ruin himself by talk of "style" from the woman he worships (and that partly because she is above his class), is an acute one, and very well played by Mr. Arthur Young. The sisters are given well-contrasted performances by Miss Hilda Bruce-Potter and Miss Sylvia Coleridge, and two other parts are made vividly amusing by Miss Elizabeth Maude and Mr. Alexander Archdale. It is extremely difficult to criticise acting on so small a stage as that of the Torch Theatre. Possibly everybody is overdoing it, in which case the size of their acting would be just right in a house of normal size.

IVOR BROWN.