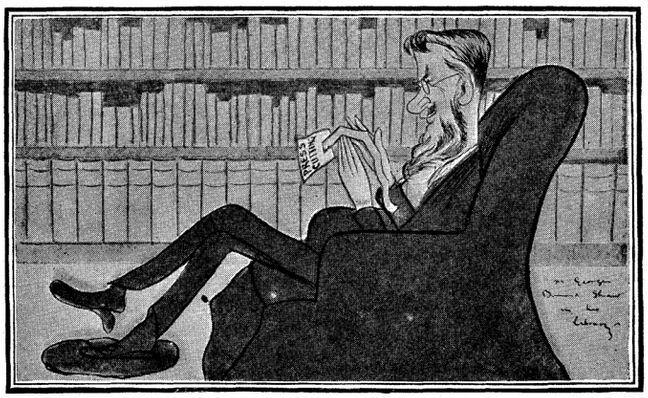
LETTERS AND ART.

SOME ATTEMPTS TO "PLACE" BERNARD SHAW.

IN three recent magazine articles attempts are made toward a critical estimate of Mr. George Bernard Shaw, who appears to many the most baffling personality in contemporary literature. Mr. Shaw has impressed himself on the popular imagination in many aspects, as a Fabian socialist, as vegetarian, as teetotaler and anti-tobacco advocate, as interpreter to the British public of Ibsen and Wagner, of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, as journalist and critic, as novelist, and finally as a writer of much-discussed plays. He remains nevertheless, according to F. C. Bettany, "a personality singularly compact, consistently of a piece." Moreover, continues the same writer (in the London *Bookman* for July) "it is a fallacy which regards Bernard Shaw as a farceur; he is a profoundly and persistently serious person." This underlying seriousness of purpose is emphasized also by *The Edinburgh Review*, and by Mr. Herman Simpson in the New York *Independent*. But a man must have some mask, says Mr. Simpson; "and so, by reaction, Mr. Shaw has chosen the comic mask."



MR. BERNARD SHAW.

As caricatured by Max Beerbohm, in the London *Sketch*.

Although the author of twelve plays Mr. Shaw's success as a playwright is a recent and a qualified success. Some of his earlier plays were received with disfavor and even hostility, while others have not yet been staged. During the last dramatic season in London, however, four of his pieces enjoyed successful runs, while two found favor in New York. That his plays are not more popular is due to certain moral and social distastes, says *The Edinburgh Review*. For instance, "he is interested in new orders of things; his public, in the old." Hence his moral attitude, or, as the public would say, his immoral attitude—"is a source of continual exacerbation." Mr. Shaw, *The Review* points out, never puts his own seriousness into direct conflict with that of the public. "His touch is always lightest where his convictions are most involved." We read further:

"He is a dramatist because he is a moralist. For art's sake he would have nothing to do with art. He ranges himself beside the men with a message—with Blake, with Bunyan, with Micah the Morasthite. That would appear a very promising position from which to interest a public that worries itself considerably about the moral intent of art. Unfortunately, however, the public and Mr. Shaw have different conceptions of morality. The dramatist's desire is to make things moral; the public's, to keep them so. The difference is disastrous when worked out in art. For while the public deems nothing needed by the social structure but the decencies of repair, Mr. Shaw thoughts are in the excitement bent on abolition. Not that he is a mere iconoclast; he has a constructive scheme of his own, but it is one that necessitates rebuilding from the foundations. And inevitably this preoccupation of the mind's eye with an architecture of the future makes it a somewhat unsympathetic critic of the fabrics at present occupying the ground."

Another characteristic which militates against Mr. Shaw's popularity, states *The Edinburgh Review*, is his attitude toward romance. We read: "He regards romance as the great heresy to be swept off from art and life—as the food of modern pessimism and the bane of modern self-respect,' and declares that 'idealism, which is only a flattering name for romance in politics and morals,' is as obnoxious to him as romance in the sister religion."

Another, and closely related, obstacle to popularity is "his treatment of that attraction between the sexes which may be regarded as the tortoise on which the cosmic elephant of the drama stands." According to Mr. Shaw's theory, woman is the pursuer, man the pursued. In his own words: "The men, to protect themselves against a too aggressive prosecution of the women's business, have set up a feeble romantic convention that the initiative in the sex business must always come from the man, . . . but the pretense is so shallow that even in the theater, that last sanctuary of unreality, it imposes only on the inexperienced."

To quote again from *The Review*:

"He has complained, with reason, that people who have been much to the theater have lost all sense of the unreality and insincerity of the romantic drama. 'They take,' he says, 'stage human nature for real human nature, whereas of course real human nature is the bitterest satire on stage human nature. The result is that when I try to put real human nature on the stage they think I am laughing at them. . . . I am simply writing natural history very carefully and laboriously; and they are expecting something else.'"

According to the same writer, Mr. Shaw's determination "to accept problems as the normal material of the drama," and his understanding of drama as "the presentation in parable of the conflict between man's will and his environment," are a pledge at least of vitality in his ideas.

THE MUSICAL PARASITE.

"FROM the dawn of art until recently the musician has been the *para-sitos*, the eater at another's table; but since the eighteenth century he has changed places with his patron." That is to say, the present-day hostess has become a kind of parasite, preying upon the talent of the musician. This is an abuse which cries for remedy, urges Mr. Robert Haven Schauffler, in a contribution to the New York *Outlook*. The executive musician, as Mr. Schauffler points out, is the only artist whose victimization is sanctioned by society. As he feelingly states the case:

"The clever hostess will invite a pianist or a singer time after time to entertain her guests, but she has not yet arrived at the point where she would approach Mr. Abbey for just a few figures on my parlor ceiling,' or ask Mr. Hastings just to 'dash off an idea for a little country house.' The executive musician is the only artist whose victimization is sanctioned by society. It is a curious conclusion of the practical money-making public that the musician ought to pay taxes for the privilege of living with his lovely art, and the public on more considerate than it speculates on the diet of the harpings seraphim. It simply inverts the tramp's philosophy, believing that the musician owes it a tune. The hostess who asks a violinist to dinner *qua* violinist does him a manifold wrong. His feelings are hurt, for a player regards his art with an impersonal and jealous eye. To prefer his fiddle above him is to strike at the inherent dignity of his manhood. To feed him in exchange for his services is to place him on the same footing with the stranger within the back gate. If he is a true artist, the food will choke him.

"After hurting his feelings, the irresistible hostess 'holds him up' for perhaps fifty dollars' worth of his time and strength. 'But,' some one will object, 'he enjoys his music so!' The ox doubtless takes a certain animal pleasure in treading out the corn, but no artist ever enjoyed his work under such conditions. Besides, it must be remembered that the play of the dilettante is the toil of the professional. What right have I to ask a man to take