# EVENING LEDGER-PHILADELPHIA, SATURDAY, JANUARY 8, 1916.

SOCIETY AND "G. B. S."

# Evening & Ledger

## AMUSEMENT SECTION

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PHILADELPHIA, SATURDAY, JANUARY 8, 1916

#### Bernard Shaw, Our Leading Playwright

UNMISTAKABLY this is the week for Philadelphia to ponder the words of George Jean Nathan, printed in the Amusement Section last week: believe with what is almost a 42-centimetre imbecility that poor George Shaw is our most talented living playwright." Translated into the commonplace English with which most of us critics have to be satisfied, it means that the who wrote the delightful fable play at the Adelphi, "Androcles and the 10369 Lion," is the one outstanding playwright of England or America whose large output excels in such notable qualities as wit, humor, wisdom, caprice, intelctual grasp, observation, technique, characterization, topicality, philosophy, both vigorous and delicate English and mysticism. A rather large order; in fact, a particularly large order in view of the fact that the public has only just begun to recognize his entertaining qualities, twenty years after his start and ten after his prime. As for the critics, they are still a little afraid of "taking Shaw seriously." . . .

## Why?

Leaving the critics to their fate-which is to enjoy Shaw-let us try to find out why we have waited till 1916 to make a stir about the man who wrote his incomparable comedy, "You Never Can Tell," back in 1896. The answer, it seems to me, is that the very qualities of his greatness defeated large-scale appreciation at the moment, and that America has a theatre system which must keep ten years behind the demand in order not to lose too much money. "Barbarian" Germany-where Shaw has been far more popular than Shakeapeare and Shakespeare far more popular than George Cohan with us-barbarian Germany had the right sort of theatre and barbarian Germany rather liked the "defects of his qualities." . . .

### **On Walking Too Far Ahead of the Procession**

Shaw had a habit of being ahead of his time-a terrible insult for which tore than one man has suffered the cross. It wasn't till 1911 and "Fanny's First Play," that he had the grace to slow down a bit and the rest of us the bnergy to catch up.

To give just a few cases. Shaw wrote the first "white slave drama" in 193 or '94, and had the misfortune of seeing "Mrs. Warren's Profession" acted unprofitably ten years later by Arnold Daly and Mary Shaw; while, if the producers had only waited another decade, would have been quite in fashion. 'Arms and the Man" took the Balkans in hand too early and left Oscar Strauss to reap the profits at the proper time with "The Chocolate Soldier." In 1905 Shaw explained a good deal about munition making, via "Major Barbara"; and now the European war has turned it into a success for Grace George.

#### . . . Advanced Journalism and Advanced Thought

All that is a matter of too advanced journalism. The same thing applies to his advanced thought. We have caught up to "Widower's Houses" at last, "Fanny's First Play" is a primer of youthful rebellion, and "Pygmallon" and "Androcles" seem almost conservative commonplaces. But Mr. Shaw's mind is too varied and too alert to be completely captured. We can still worry over one thing or another. Yet the fact that large areas of Shaw's thought still seem all wrong to us at the present moment, shouldn't deter us from liking mental exercise and from getting ready to like his other ideas some day-about the time we give up those we now accept. For that is only the history of all worthwhile thought, including large portions of the Bible. Thought is, after all, only a pleasurable human activity, a deluding dissipation, that helps us on our way today and leaves us sadder and wiser men and women tomorrow.

#### . . . The Double-track Mind

Even radicals of Shaw's own kidney have had trouble with him. For Shaw is no mere enthusiast, no panacea-peddler with a one-sided vocabulary. As a humanitarian he has always hated war. But he did not, like so many, deny its coming. With singular prophecy, he made Ferrovius say in "Androcles," "In my youth I worshipped Mars, the god of war. I turned from him to serve the Christian God; but today the Christian God forsook me; and Mars overcame me and took back his own. The Christian God is not yet. He will come when Mars and I are dust."

Shaw is just as firm a democrat, but he does not for that reason exalt the poor of today. For his purposes he eschews the mass of mankind as dramatic material. "Industrial slavery," he writes, "is not compatible with that freedom of adventure, that personal refinement and intellectual culture, that scope of action, which the higher and subtler drama demands." On that basis he has erected a marvelous structure of philosophic high comedy, which reaches a fine and rare mysticism in such characters as Keegan of "John Bull's Other Island" and the mayoress of "Getting Married." Such drama is a princely thing, but it is not easily recognized or applauded, and it denies too much the immense emotional domain of the drama. There lies his prime fault; it is his glory that he exceeds in his own field the easier efforts of other playwrights in theirs. . . .

## Shutting Off Drama From the Masses

By this deliberate intellectualization Shaw would shut off drama from the By this deliberate intellectualization blaw down drama by the exclusion of any occasions thought of writing you, but not being a letter fiend. I never did write



When G. Bernard Shaw was showing Broadway one of his typically satiric comedies, Boardman Robinson caught for the New York Tribune the benignly sarcastic pose of the author of "Androcles and the Lion."

# LETTERS FROM THE PLAYGOERS

# Readers and Theatre Patrons on Current Topics of Both Hemispheres of the Amusement World

# **Objects to Vaudeville Scenery**

To the Dramatic Editor: In response to your request for letters of criticism, I desire to call your attent tion to the scenery at a vandeville the istre. It is the policy of the management to

change their prostam of acts every week, or oftener, which is a good thing, but why stop there." When an act requires a full stage set one is always sure to see the same scenery, which I believe has been in use since the place opened some 12 years ago. Then there is the overworked street and conservatory drop cur-tains. And the furnishings, too. Why, I remember seeing the same old red pillows and hear rugs used, not to mention the many different small pieces of decoration. What a great relief it is to find an act which has the foresight to bring its own scenery, and how much better it is shown to its own advantage. Why cannot scenery be changed as well as the acts? VAUDEVILLIAN.

Enjoys Movies To the Photoplay Editor: From the very beginning of your editorship of this department I have been clover, just and certainly admiring your clev most refined taste.

most refined taste. At one time a regular first-nighter of the legitimate drama, I have for various reasons, particularly, of course, because of continuous disappointments, not been to a first-class production in several years. Since the Stanley Theatre opened I have been attracted to the moving-picture art more and more, and I have on several

can't understand why they cannot have men like A. P. Terhune and Bronson Howard, of "Smart Set," April, 1913, to 1914, staff, rewrite their "Raegen" and Broadway character . series respectively scenario plots. I am positive that such productions would command the respect and actual admiration not alone of the general public, but of such masters of ritleism as George Jean Nathan, W. P. Saton and others

play masterpleces like "Carmen," The Girl of the Golden West" and others could easily be surpassed by such a play for instance, as could be made of the



# Golden West"--by the way, where is

Golden West"-by the way, where is she? And what is the matter with series like the John Bunny sea stories? Would not the public appreciate them far more than the series of "fickel shock-ers" now being produced as series, with such able casts, too, some of them? But enough for a start. If you are kind and patient enough to read this, and per-haps even think it worth your while to publish this, in revised form, of course. I shall appreciate such kindness on your part and shadly and gratefully submit to you several questions and suggestions. T am not familiar with the rules, but may I ask for a personal reply if you can possibly afford R? Gratefully. HARRY F. WALD.

### Why? Why? Why?

To the Photophay Editor: In the 'movies' I find the follow-ing pests to mai my enjoyment: First. Why does the political bess al-ways smoke so furfously and roll his cigar

about his mouth? Second. Why does every actor have i

valet? Third. Why do all reporters on the screen take notes in a book? Fourth. Why do news films seem so atrong for pictures of funerals? Fifth. Why do gentlemen in film plays, wearing evening dress, go in for bisarre to dress of funeral sets ties watch nlet?

tre next week in "The Lure of a North." The mountain of snow is he of soap bubbles and the curtain ne upon a scene of dazzling snow and is huge billowy masses the snow mountain cover the back of the stage and its far as the eye can reach into its of the roenes. Your first impressies that the old subterfuge of cotton has bused, but that hypothesis will so an because of the way the dance charge sink through the snow, disappear in feathery depths and renpuen. The mo

in dress-affecting queer vests, ties, watch

and velour hats? th. Why do all villains when in despair, gulp liquor, glass after glass, in rapid succession? Seventh. Why not rest the overworked Sixth.

dissolving feature? Eighth. Why do we have to wade through a lengthy screen-filled caption-tell it in the pictures?

Ninth, Why do all miners always find unps of gold? Tenth, Why not a rest from courtroom

scenes 1 Eleventh. Why not ease up on Wall street stories, failure and a pistol always

Tweifth. Why do all ingenues strive for Miss Pickford's type of curls?

# Bringing a Mountain

Stage producers have gone to heretofore unheard-of extremes to prouse sensa-tional and spectacular effects, especially since the rage of the "movie" melodramas has predominated. It is doubtful, how-ever, if anything more startling or more original in idea has ever been shown than the mountain of snow used in the dancing pantomime of Alice Els and Bert French, who come to B. F. Keith's Theastory "At Seventy," by J. Johnson, pub-lished in the Smart Set of June, 1913, pro-dured with a cast such as Theodore Rob-erts, S. Hayekowa and the leading woman

NEXT WEEK



ALICE EIS

At Keith's next week.

feathery depths and reappear. The stains rapidly dissolve before your gaze, just as snow does before the way





of Lasky's production of "The Girl of the

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Thrilling 4 Act Melodrama

worst of places for such worship of the mind. The drama deals fundamentally with emotion, the stuff upon which intellectualism must be based, the stuff that, roused by environment and circumstance, dictates those processes which we flatter ourselves by calling mental. Such emotion, with its reflection in the intellectual, is rich in all of us. It is often deepest, most violent and moving in those whom Shaw eschews. The wide ranging subtlety of the novel, for the classes; the drams, for the masses-even if it is only the "movies."

#### . . . **Pupils** in the Great School

When Shaw writes, "A poor man is useful on the stage only as a blind man is: to excite sympathy," he is doing more than deny the possession of human and therefore interesting emotions, human and therefore important reactions, to any but the cultivated leisure class. He is denying them anything but the part of pupils in a school which he has described as "a factory of thought, a prompter of conscience, an elucidator of social conduct, and an armory against despair and dullness and a temple of the ascent of man." He is assuming the aristocratic position that all truth, all goodness, all progress He with a single class. The masses are to worship in this temple of the ascent of man only by adoration or execration of the cultured; they are not to learn by contemplation of themselves; and the cultured classes are not to learn by the contemplation of the average run of life.

Shaw forgets the realities of this world, as well as such examples of the over bright works of Bunyan and Foxe, when he says, "When poverty is abollahed and leisure and grace of life become general, the only plays surviving will be those in which none of the persons represented are troubled with want of money or wretched drudgery. Our plays of poverty and squalor, now the only ones that are true to the lives of the majority of living men, will then be Vernon Castleclassed with the records of misers and monsters, and read only by historal students of social pathology."

It is a curious kink in Shaw's thinking to recognize poverty as falsely wicked, and yet to see as a pre-vision of a desirable future state the leisure which this poverty and exploitation make possible. The truth is rather that the life of leisure and luxury which figures in our plays nowadays is as detestable as the life of poverty which prevails in our slums; and that the play which presents that life will stand as much of a chance of "being read only by historical students of social pathology," unless some great dramatist like Shaw animates it with the fire that keeps it ever young. K. M.

BIAN WALCH

PURCHASES

FIRE-HORSE

AN OLD

(SEE)

#### HOW TO DO IT

HOW TO DO IT The basis of all art is sincerily. Every which is not true to himself. No main of an ereate an art without being true to be the source of the sincerily alm of the set of the sincerily alm of the set drame want us to do is simple: To book at Hoston. Peoria, Emports and the set drame want us to do is simple; to book at Hoston. Peoria, Emports and the set drame want us to do is simple; to book at Hoston. Peoria, Emports and the set drame want us to do is simple; to book at Hoston. Peoria, Emports and the set drame want us to do is simple; to book at Hoston. Peoria, Emports and the set drame want us to do is simple; to book at Hoston. Peoria, Emports and the set simple; to 'reioles in our demos the set simple; to 'reioles in our demos the set in the Handel France. Perhaps bla sums up the ideal: To write like the set simple would be simple; the best may be ideal: To write like the set simple and to circulate the the set simple and to circulate the the set set of the france of the set of th

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TELL.

DRAMA OF

HORSE FLESH

WITH J. WARREN CURRICOMB

K - TIN

Questions and Answers Inquirer-The address of D. W. Grif-fith is, Care of Triumph Pilm Corpora-tion, 71 West 23d street, New York city. L. K. B .- Moe Marsh is now working R. D.-able Marsa is now working in a Triangle film to be produced shortly.
K. D. R.-(I) No. (2) Blanche Sweet is still with Lasky Corpany.
Florence-Virginia Pearson and Charles Richman are both Vitagraph players, Richman played the lead in "The Battie Cry of Peace."

NIXON Today at 2:15 Tonight at 7 and 9 The Four Roses; Mile Spellman's Bears Knickerbocker THEATRE PLAYERS MARKET & 40TH The Ninety and Nine Mats. Tues. Thurs. Sat Trocadero Girla A Princess Kalama

Now, however, I read your editorial and took courage and the liberty to do so. With such splendid organizations as the Laskey Company and a few others, I



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