

G.B.S.

George Bernard Shaw was born in **Dublin**, Ireland, on Saturday, July 26, 1856 at 3 Upper Synge Street, now numbered and renamed 33 Synge Street; he was the third and youngest child and only son of George Carr Shaw and Lucinda Elizabeth (née Gurly).

His father (1814 - 1885) was said to be one of the greatest - grandsons of William Shaw, a captain in the army of William of Orange, who was the first Shaw to settle in Ireland. Being the "younger son of a younger son of a younger son", George Carr Shaw inherited aristocratic tendencies which he lacked the money to gratify, for according to the British system of inheritance at that time property passed to eldest sons and left younger sons impoverished. He was brought up along with thirteen brothers and sisters by a widowed mother whose poverty kept the household on short rations. Born with a kind heart, he grew up to be a genial but ineffective man with a sardonic sense of humour and of anticlimax, a gift which he plenteously transmitted to his son. At first he obtained a sinecure in the Four Courts, the department of justice, in Dublin until 1850, when the office was abolished and he was given a pension of £ 60 a year, which he sold in order to invest the money in a not very lucrative corn-merchant's business. But his total lack of professional aptitude or commercial ability prevented the mill from ever flourishing, and it scarcely maintained him.

Lucinda Elizabeth (1830-1913), his wife, was the daughter of an improvident country gentleman with a small estate deeply embogged in debt. She detested the shabby pretences of her father's house and, as a firm-willed girl, left it, as she was to leave her husband's later, to live in Dublin with her mother's only sister, Miss Ellen Whitecroft, a hunchback of moderate means with a pretty face and a fierce puritanical temper. But she found her life there was as desolating as her life with her father had been and she was, consequently, eager for a home of her own. So she grasped her first chance and married George Carr Shaw, a poor fellow with a squint but undoubtedly a gentleman. Love played no part on her side. At the time of their marriage, his age was thirty-eight, and hers was twenty-one, a disparity of nearly seventeen years.

Their marriage proved to be deplorable. Lucinda found out soon enough her husband's frequent drunkenness and his inability to maintain a wife and family. Born cold-hearted, she became colder and harder and despised her own husband. Her capacity for love and affection rapidly decreased.

Into this graceless, ill-managed house, George Bernard Shaw was born. As his mother had no talent nor desire for domesticity, and, more distressing, little maternal passion, Shaw and his two elder sisters were abandoned entirely to untrustworthy servants.

"I had my meals in the kitchen," G.B.S. says, "mostly of stewed beef, which I loathed, badly cooked potatoes,

sound or diseased as the case might be, and much too much tea out of brown delft teapots left to "draw" on the hob until it was pure tannin." ¹

The bitter remembrances of the deplorable conditions of his upbringing were enough to make him cry out thirty years after: "Oh, a devil of a childhood,.....rich only in dreams, frightful and loveless in realities." ²

There was no display of affection in the family; no one seemed to care for or to be dependent upon any one else, which accounted for the lack of ordinary emotion in the later Shaw and his apparent prejudices against parental affection or intimacy of parents towards their children as can be seen in Heartbreak House and its preface.

Shaw grew up and took care of himself unguided. "Nobody forbade me to discover what I could of its (the world's) wonders," ³ he stated. It was a perfect atmosphere for the development of anarchic self-determination. Shaw gradually became a freethinker, developing an individualism from the very early phase of his life which became more and more intense as he grew up.

¹ London Music, 1888-9, quoted in St. John Ervine's Bernard Shaw: His Life, Work and Friends (Constable, 1956), p.17

² Ellen Terry-Bernard Shaw, A Correspondence, Edited by Christopher St. John (Putnam's Sons, 1931), p.152

³ Bernard Shaw and Mrs. Patrick Campbell. Their Correspondence, quoted in St. John Ervine's Bernard Shaw: His Life, Work and Friends (Constable, 1956), p.18

While he was still young, his servant used to take him into the slums to visit her private friends who dwelt in squalid tenements. The piteous conditions of these slums and his own shabby-genteel conditions laid the foundation of his lifelong hatred of poverty and of his devotion to the task of improving the condition of the poor.

"The adult who has been poor as a child," G.B.S. remarked late in life, "will never get the chill of poverty out of his bones."¹

In Major Barbara, Shaw made Andrew Undershaft, a millionaire Saint, declare his doctrine that poverty is not the natural and proper punishment of vice, but a social crime—the worst of all crimes.

Shaw received his first moral lesson from his father, who expressed such a horror of alcohol that the boy made up his mind never to touch it. Nevertheless, there occurred an incident which opened his eyes to the fact that his father was a helpless victim of alcohol. One evening, his father took him for a walk along a bank of the Grand Canal, and feeling jocular, threatened to throw him into the water, and, in a clumsy pretence, very nearly did.

¹ Bernard Shaw: His Life, Work and Friends by St. John Ervine (Constable, 1956), p.16

"Mamma," he said on his return home, "I think papa is drunk." And she replied: "When is he anything else?"¹

This discovery and the deep memory of his father's tippling made him a convinced teetotaller all his life.

His father's habits had two considerable effects on his family: they were cut off from the social life of the numerous Shaw clan; and in self-defence, they had to develop a sense of humour at which Shaw was the most successful then and later.

The only member of the family who did not find any fun in this was Mrs. Shaw. She was born without a sense of laughter. Yet she was interested in music and possessed a mezzo-soprano voice of extraordinary purity of tone. She retreated from the family responsibilities which she would not shoulder into the world of music— an important step of great influence on her son's life spiritually and mentally.

In his Sixteen Self Sketches Shaw wrote that his mother "took lessons from George John Vandaleur Lee, already well established in Dublin as an orchestral conductor, an organizer of concerts, and a teacher of singing so heterodox and original that he depended for his performances on amateurs trained by himself, and was detested by his professional rivals, whom he

¹ Sixteen Self Sketches by Bernard Shaw (Constable, 1949) p.12

disparaged as voice wreckers, as indeed they mostly were. He extended this criticism to doctors, and amazed us by eating brown bread instead of white, and sleeping with the window open, both of which habits I acquired and have practised ever since. His influence in our household, of which he at last became a member, accustomed me to the scepticism as to academic authority which still persists in me." ¹ Shaw himself acknowledged Lee's influence on his thoughts, some of which appear in the play entitled The Doctor's Dilemma, its preface, and also in the first act of Too True to be Good.

Lee imparted his method to Mrs. Shaw and trained her voice so well that she became his leading singer. Being a bachelor, when his brother died in 1866, Lee shared a house with the Shaws at No. 1 Hatch Street which he filled with music and where he stimulated the family's conversation. Here they were joined by Lucinda's brother, Walter, a ship's surgeon, who lived with them between voyages. Walter's profanity and obscenity in conversation influenced Shaw remarkably. To listen to Uncle Walter and Lee and his father discussing religion and the Holy Scripture was an invaluable experience for the young Shaw.

In 1869, the family stayed temporarily in Lee's house at Dalkey, the Torca Cottage, which overlooked Killiney Bay and was almost encircled by the Dublin and Wicklow Mountains, a very beautiful and delightful place to live in. Here Shaw first

¹ Ibid, p.14

became aware of natural beauty and was exalted by it.

".....a vast and ever changing expanse of sea and sky far below and far above.... I had only to open my eyes there to see such pictures as no painter could make for me. I could not believe that such skies existed anywhere else in the world until I read Shakespeare's "This majestic roof fretted with golden fire", and wondered where he could have seen it if not from Torca Cottage. The joy of it has remained with me all my life." ¹

There is a reflection of this joy in the opening scene of The Apple Cart (1930) when Sempronius says: "I should have been as happy as a man in a picture gallery looking at the dawns and sunsets, the changing seasons, the continual miracle of life ever renewing itself. Who could be dull with pools in the rocks to watch ? "

During the next four years the boy was surrounded by musical people constantly rehearsing Italian and German operas and oratorios which he came to know as thoroughly as young people nowadays know recent dance tunes and film hits, so that before he was fifteen, he was able to boast that he "knew at least one important work by Handel, Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, Verdi, and Gounod from cover to cover." ²

Shaw's formal education, apart from his instruction by Miss Caroline Fill, the governess who taught him to read and

¹ Ibid, p.72

² Bernard Shaw: His Life, Work and Friends by St. John Ervine (Constable, 1956), p.25-26

write English, and the Latin he learnt from his clerical uncle, Mr. Carroll, was, he fiercely declared in after life, entirely useless.

In 1867, at the age of eleven, he was sent to Wesley Connexional School, a Protestant school now known as the Wesley College, where he was "generally near or at the bottom of the class"¹ and seemed to his teachers to be an incorrigible dunce, "a source of idleness in others, distracting them from their studies by interminable comic stories he himself had invented."¹ However, he knew more Latin than any boy in his first form at Wesley, a result of his uncle's instruction. There was an occasion when he jumped up suddenly to the second place because of an unexpected display of Biblical knowledge. This was also the occasion when he revealed his ambitious character very clearly by telling his master that he "did not want the second place, as it merely proved that there was a boy who knew more than he did."¹ It is also an early example of the abounding wit he greatly developed afterwards.

Meanwhile, his liking for literature made him read not only these books a normal lad generally reads but also works which a normal lad would denounce as dull or unreadable. These included William Robertson's History of Charles the Fifth and his History of Scotland. It may be said that Shaw's wide knowledge came much more from his own intensive reading than

¹ Bernard Shaw: His Life, Work and Friends by St. John Ervine (Constable, 1956), p.25-26

from his formal education at school. Shaw himself realized this; and in several of his writings, professed the little faith he had in schooling.

As a youth he haunted the National Gallery of Ireland so often that he knew "enough of a considerable number of painters to recognize their work at sight."¹ This self-acquired knowledge of painting and music qualified him for the job of art critic to The World and The Star in London during the year 1886-1894.

After leaving the Wesley Connexional School, Shaw entered for short periods a private school in Glasthule and the Central Model Boys School; from all three he developed a horror of school and the impression that a schoolmaster is a "common enemy and executioner."²

Financial necessity compelled him to leave school in 1871, and to go to work as junior clerk for a Dublin estate agent. His quick wits and his intelligence enabled him to do his work uncommonly well and he became chief cashier, equal to any of the staff, and the most active and responsible member of it at the age of sixteen. He remained in that office through four and a half years, carrying out several office duties, one of which he later referred to in Widowers' Houses — that of collecting rents of slum houses.

"I became accustomed to handling large sums of money,

¹ Ibid, p.27

² Sixteen Self Sketches by Bernard Shaw

(Constable, 1949), p.28

meeting men of all conditions and getting glimpses of country house life behind the scenes," ¹ all of which were to become valuable to him as a playwright.

Shaw admitted in his Sixteen Self Sketches that working there, he had "some fun and the society of university men." He found the company of the premium apprentices very congenial and enjoyed the mental stimulus he received from these young men fresh from Trinity College, on whom he was able to sharpen his wits and with whom he learned how to hold his own in civilized discourse.

Leaving this office in 1876 to migrate to London, he was given a testimonial certifying that he was "a young man of great business capacity, strict accuracy, and thoroughly reliable and trustworthy. Anything given him to do was always accurately and well done. We parted from him with regrets and shall always be glad to hear of his welfare." ²

Shaw's determination to leave the estate office had two causes. In 1875, Shaw wrote a letter which appeared in Public Opinion, expressing his ideas which were regarded as a declaration of atheism (Shaw had, in fact, forsaken orthodox religion while he was still young as a result of his parents' indifference to religion) which caused frequent and prolonged discussions among the premium apprentices and himself so that his employer, Charles Townshend, had to draw from him a pledge

¹ Bernard Shaw: His Life, Work and Friends by St. John Ervine (Constable, 1956), p.46

² Ibid, p.54

to refrain from religious controversy in working hours. Shaw felt that it was an intolerable restraint upon his freedom of conscience though he agreed that Mr. Townshend had reason. He had another grievance: Mr. Townshend had offended him by introducing his nephew into the office and placing him in authority over Shaw, though the nephew had no experience to support him in that position. So Shaw decided that an office career would be impossible for him. His mother's departure for London to set up as a teacher of singing shortly before this served as a strong incentive to him to follow her example; Shaw decided to fulfil himself by authorship. The itch to write drove him out of Dublin to the literary world of London, the realm where he later became king.

In 1876 Shaw joined his mother at Fulham Road, London, where he was received without enthusiasm. His first three months were spent in concert halls, picture galleries and, more than in these, at the British Museum, the biggest source of his literary knowledge. Searching in vain for a suitable job, he was at last invited by George Vandaleur Lee (who had come to live in London in 1872) to "ghost" for him as music critic on an unimportant weekly paper called The Hornet, while Lee drew half the pay. This provided Shaw with a hand-to-mouth existence until 1877 when the paper collapsed and he was again out of work.

His life in London at this time differed profoundly from his life in Dublin. There he had risen rapidly in authority so that he was doing a man's responsible work while he was still

under age, but here he seemed unable to find a position equal to his ability and experience. The fact that he had been the chief cashier in a large office in Dublin made no impression on anybody in London; and the only posts that were offered to him were excessively subordinate and wounded his pride. Consequently, he set himself to writing novels in 1879:

"I bought supplies of white paper, demy size, by sixpennorths at a time; folded it in quarto; and condemned myself to fill five pages of it a day, rain or shine, dull or inspired. I had so much of the schoolboy and the clerk still in me that if my five pages ended in the middle of a sentence I did not finish it until next day."¹

His first novel, entitled Immaturity and costing him five months' labour, proved a failure. It was not published in Great Britain until fifty years later.

On October 5, 1879 Shaw drafted a letter to the Edison Telephone Company of London, asking for employment.

"My only reason for asking commercial employment is a pecuniary one. I know how to wait for success in literature, but I do not know how to live on air in the interim; my family is in difficulties,"² he wrote.

He was finally accepted by the company, and worked efficiently until 1880 when the company was amalgamated with

¹ Preface to Immaturity (1921), p.XXXVII

² Bernard Shaw: a Chronicle by R.T.Rattray (1951), quoted in St. John Ervine's Bernard Shaw: His Life, Work and Friends (Constable, 1956), p.66

another. Shaw was one of the employees who were to be reinstated but he refused the offer so that he might devote himself entirely to writing.

Shaw again toiled at his daily task of filling five pages of paper with words. Between 1880-1883 he finished four more novels:

The Irrational Knot,

Love Among the Artists,

Cashe! Byron's Profession, and

An Unsocial Socialist,

for all of which he failed to find a publisher. It was not until his fifth novel had been declined that he abandoned the sixth he had begun and gave up his attempt to become a novelist.

During this period of unsuccess Shaw lived mainly upon his mother's income. Having little liking for the conventionally artistic people with whom his mother and sister associated, he sought the new society of men and women who had a more distinctive character and more advanced opinions, whose knowledge of life was drawn from experience. Some of them were undoubtedly cranks; but their oddity did not distress him who was himself an oddity and was about to become a crank: that is to say, he was about to abandon mass beliefs and show that he had a mind of his own. Mixing with these people, he was able to perceive what he believed to be disadvantages in a capitalistic society. Thus Shaw was on the way to Socialism.

In 1879 Shaw was taken by a friend to a debate held by the Zetetical Society,¹ a body which met regularly in London to discuss public affairs. During that debate, Shaw spoke for the first time in public and was so nervous that he determined to seek thenceforward every opportunity he could make for addressing audiences and so turn himself into an effective public speaker. So he joined the Zetetical Society and many other debating societies. While carrying out his resolution, Shaw suffered agonies that no one suspected:

"During the speech of the debate I resolved to follow," he recorded, "my heart used to beat as painfully as a recruit's going under fire for the first time. I could not use notes; when I looked at the paper in my hand I could not collect myself enough to decipher a word. And of the four or five wretched points that were my pretext for this ghastly practice of mine, I invariably forgot three — the best three"²

Yet the self-distrusting young man of twenty-three who first spoke to the Zetetical Society in 1879 became the world-famous Bernard Shaw whose career as a "platform artist" lasted until 1941, when he retired from public speaking at the age of eighty-three: sixty years of successful oratory.

¹ The word zetetical means seeking: for the truth, presumably. The Society was founded in imitation of a more famous one, the Dialectical Society, which spent a great deal of time and energy in discussing John Stuart Mill's essay, On Liberty.

² George Bernard Shaw: Man of the Century by Archibald Henderson (1956), quoted in St. John Ervine's Bernard Shaw: His Life, Work and Friends (Constable, 1956), p.87

Meanwhile he formed a large circle of acquaintances. Three of the members of the Zetetical Society he became closely acquainted with were James Lecky, a notable authority on music who was also deeply interested in the study of phonetics, Sidney James Webb and Sydney Olivier who were clerks in the Colonial Office. Through Lecky, Shaw met Henry Sweet, a don at Oxford, and Alexander Ellis, both of whom were students of phonetics. This encounter strengthened Shaw's profound and lifelong interest in the English language and provided him with material for Pygmalion (1912). For nearly eighty years, from his youth to his extreme old age, he had studied and tried to promote the science of phonetics and was eager for the reformation of the English alphabet. After his death, he left a considerable sum of money with which to realize his scheme.

The other two, Sidney Webb, Sydney Olivier, and Shaw himself were to become the most active members of the Fabian Society, whose influence on British affairs and on the world was remarkable.

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In 1882 Shaw listened to Henry George, a persuasive American economist, author of Progress and Poverty, and was quickly converted to Henry Georgian economics, believing in the Single Tax as a remedy for economic ills. Soon afterwards, however, he read Karl Marx's Das Kapital for the first time and was once again converted to Marxism, the belief that all forms of capital should be nationalized. He then consistently proclaimed himself a Socialist. But his socialism was always secondary to his inborn individualism. He never confined himself

to any party doctrine. To him, Socialism was neither an immutable dogma nor a sentimental creed:

"Socialism to me has always meant, not a principle, but certain definite economic measures which I wish to see taken,"¹ he wrote.

Shaw joined the recently founded Fabian Society in 1884. The main aims of the Society were to "frame a working parliamentary programme for a British Socialist government when such a government should be elected; to attract to Socialism, by education and studied methods of moderation, types and classes of people who would not countenance extremism."²

He also persuaded Sidney Webb and Sydney Olivier to join this Society, and together they set to work to make Socialism "constitutional, respectable and practical". They remained close friends and colleagues until Webb died about seventy years later. We may rightly assume that the present English Labour Party is largely the product of the Fabian Society.

A fortnight after he was elected a member, Shaw wrote the second pamphlet of the Society, A Manifesto, in which he supported women's rights in political affairs. Apart from his several Fabian essays Shaw was ostensibly a platform Fabian. The work he did for the Fabian Society, especially in its early years, was immense in its variety and all of it was brilliant.

¹ Bernard Shaw by H.C. Ward (Longmans, 1957), p.21

² Ibid, p.22

It was also unpaid, though Shaw was poverty-stricken in comparison with his colleagues; and his pride forbade him to mention his poverty even to his intimates.

In short, we may say that by 1884 Shaw had become a public speaker, a Fabian, a writer with five unpublished novels behind him, a vegetarian, and a sort of atheist as a result of reading Shelley.

Shaw's formal career as a journalist began in 1885, when William Archer, dramatic critic and translator of Ibsen into English, introduced him as a book reviewer to The Pall Mall Gazette, and, in the next year, to The World as art critic. In 1888, The Star, a Radical newspaper, was founded. Shaw was invited to join its political staff as the leader-writer. But his articles were full of socialistic propaganda as if the paper were the official organ of the Fabian Society. So, after a while, he was transferred to the post of music critic.

His criticism, collected and published in several volumes forty years after, displays not only Shaw's wit and humour but his wide knowledge of music and art, and is of lasting quality. The following lines reveal the principles on which he worked:

" It is the capacity for making good or bad art a personal matter that makes a man a critic. Let all young artists pay no heed to the idiots who declare that criticism should be free from personal feeling. The true critic,

I repeat, is the man who becomes your personal enemy on the sole provocation of a bad performance, and will only be appeased by a good performance."¹

As a music critic under the pen-name of Corno di Bassetto, Shaw made his readers realize that music is much more than a melodious noise; that a piece of music is an attempt to describe in sound something felt or seen or believed by the composer. During this period of criticism, Shaw's reputation rapidly increased, but he was still known only to a narrow circle of intelligent admirers.

The beginning of his prosperity put an end to his long deprivation of the close company of women. Shaw now discovered, greatly to his surprise, that he was singularly attractive to them: an attraction which he retained into his old age. From 1885 up to 1896 he flirted with many intellectual and revolutionary women: Mrs. Anne Besant, a first-class platform orator, Mrs. Jenny Patterson, a fiercely passionate widow, Florence Farr, an actress, Miss May Morris, a beautiful daughter of the famous William Morris, Ellen Terry, a talented actress, and some others. The affairs he had with these women provided him with enough material for him to have made his fortune as a writer of emotional scenes. As it was Mrs. Jenny Patterson with her ungovernable temper, for instance, became the model for Blanche Sartorius in Widowers' Houses and Julia Craven in The Philanderer.

"Mrs. Patterson was my model for Julia," he wrote to Hesketh Pearson, one of his biographers, "and the first act of

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The Philanderer is founded on a very horrible scene between her and Florence Farr."¹

With Ellen Terry it was different. Their relation was purely a paper flirtation. For years they did not meet.

"The ideal love affair is one conducted by post," he assumed. "My correspondence with Ellen Terry was a wholly satisfactory love affair. I could have met her at any time; but I did not wish to complicate such a delightful intercourse. She got tired of five husbands; but she never got tired of me." ²

This statement is justified by a piece of evidence that appeared a few days after Ellen Terry's death: on a piece of paper labelled "My Friends", she had written the name of Bernard Shaw second.

It was a period of Shaw's philandering as well as a period of his progress as a Socialist. Shaw put his work as a Socialist first; his recreation as a philanderer came second in importance. His own remark supports this statement:

"A man's socialistic acquisitiveness must be keen enough to make him actually prefer spending two or three nights a week in speaking or debating, or in picking up information even in the most dingy and scrappy way, to going to the theatre, or dancing or drinking, or even sweethearting, if he is to become a really competent propagandist." ²

This explains a good deal in his relationship with woman.

¹ Bernard Shaw by Hesketh Pearson (The Reprint Society, 1948), p. 121

² Ibid. p. 112, 113

The idea of writing plays had not occurred to Shaw until William Archer suggested in 1885 that they should collaborate in one. Archer confessed to Shaw that although he could construct a plot for a play, he could not write lively dialogue. This was convenient for Shaw who could write flashing dialogue but could not construct a plot. To join their talents together would be a very promising thing. So Archer contrived a well-knitted plot from Emile Augier's Ceinture Derée. But he was very surprised when Shaw informed him that he had used up all the original and additional plot in two acts, and was asking for more. Finally the collaboration collapsed; and the incomplete play was put aside.

In 1891, J.T. Grein founded the Independent Theatre Society in London for the production of new plays of quality which failed to attract the commercial theatre managers. After the first play was performed, William Archer's translation of Ibsen's Ghosts, Grein told Shaw that he had not received a single play of any worth in response to his appeal. Shaw then turned back to the incomplete 1885 script, added the third act and sent it to Grein. The play, entitled Widowers' Houses, was put on the stage on December 9, 1892.

The mentioning of slums on the stage was considered bad taste. So, though amusing and witty, the play was attacked by several critics as a piece of Ibsenism then very unpopular. It was not revived until 1949.

"I was denounced as a pamphleteer void of dramatic faculty," wrote Shaw, "but all the stage effects I had planned



came off perfectly; and this was what convinced me that I was a born master of the theatre." ¹

Thus Shaw was eager to write more plays. His second piece, The Philanderer (1893), followed quickly. Written in haste, the play was, consequently, not a good one. It lacked vivacity and wit, and was not performed until 1905 when it was unfavourably received. (It is worth noting that this included the first of his attacks on doctors which became sharper in The Doctor's Dilemma (1906))

In his next play, Mrs. Warren's Profession, which was written in the same year, Shaw presented the sort of heroine he admired, Vivie Warren, a modern, independent-minded and active woman, the type who became the model for many leading women in his later plays, such as Barbara in Major Barbara; (1905); Lina in Misalliance (1910); Eppy in The Millionairess (1935); "Z" in Village Wooing (1933). The play was well-written and skilful. But the fact that it dealt with such an "indecent" subject as prostitution prevented it from getting past the British Censor until 1902.

Arms and the Man (1894), his fourth play, was warmly received. It was the play that brought him the first substantial sum he ever earned. The play revealed Shaw's intention of depicting a new reality on the stage. His soldier hero was no longer the conventional stage soldier who experienced no fear, nor defeat. He was just an ordinary human being who suffered from want of food, sleep and so on.

¹ Sixteen Self Sketches by Bernard Shaw (Constable, 1949), p. 40

While Shaw was continuing to write plays, he did not stop his work as music critic. In 1894 he resigned from The World on its editor's death, to find another editor who was not afraid of printing anything unusual. Finally he accepted the post of theatre critic from Frank Harris, who had just become editor of The Saturday Review. Shaw wrote later, as G.B.S. "my fame at once increased with a rush; and thenceforth for years my name seldom appeared in print without the adjective brilliant, which I disliked, as it suggested a glittering superficiality which I abhorred. But I could not shake it off." ¹

During 1895 he finished two other plays namely: Candida, and The Man of Destiny. In 1896 he met Miss Charlotte Payne - Townshend, a rich Fabian, who later became Mrs. Shaw. He broke the news to Ellen Terry on August 28th:

"We (the Fabians) have been joined by an Irish millionairess who has had cleverness and character enough to decline the station of life - 'great catch for somebody' - to which it pleased God to call her, and whom we have incorporated into our Fabian family with great success. I am going to refresh my heart by falling in love with her. I love falling in love - but, mind, only with her, not with the million." ²

Later he described Miss Payne - Townshend for Ellen's benefit: "Miss P.T. is a restful person, plain, green-eyed,

¹ Ibid, p.41

² Ellen Terry and Bernard Shaw : A correspondence, edited by Christopher St. John (Putnam's Sons, 1931), p.34

very ladylike, completely demoralized by contact with my ideas, independent and unencumbered, and not so plain either when you are in her confidence." ¹ They were on familiar terms now, and during the time of their deepening friendship, Shaw wrote two more plays, You Never Can Tell and The Devil's Disciple.

In 1897 Shaw became a vestryman of the London District of St. Pancras for six years and proved himself a good committee man whose service to the Vestry is still remembered.

By the beginning of 1898, Miss Payne - Townshend had become his secretary, unpaid. In March, she started off with Sidney and Beatrice Webb on a tour round the world; but they got no farther than Rome, when they received a wire informing them that Shaw was seriously ill and lying neglected in disagreeable surroundings at 29 Fitzroy Square, a house where he lived with his mother. So Miss Payne - Townshend took the first train back. His room appalled her. She promptly took a house near Haslemere and proposed to take him there and nurse him back to health. But Shaw was careful of her reputation. Therefore, marriage seemed the only solution. They were married on June 1, 1898 at West Strand Registry Office en route for Haslemere. The bride was forty-one, and the bridegroom was forty-two.

Shaw's surroundings were now entirely changed. For the first time of his life he had a clean, satisfying home, and was properly and regularly fed. The first play he wrote after

¹ Ibid, p.199

his marriage was Caesar and Cleopatra. It widely influenced the literature of his time by initiating a natural and humorous treatment of historical subjects, and it was the first play written by him on the grand scale.

In May 1898, Shaw resigned from The Saturday Review, partly because he was breaking down from overwork and partly because he was fed up with being theatre critic. The success of The Devil's Disciple in America enabled him to maintain himself even though he was deprived of his main regular source of income. He now devoted his time to writing plays.

He began his first philosophical play, Man and Superman, in 1901. It was his first attempt to define his theory of the Creative Evolution and the Life Force which he extended afterwards in Back to Methuselah.

The year 1904 was the beginning of Shaw's wide renown. Some of his plays, for instances, Arms and the Man and The Devil's Disciple, were translated into German by a young Viennese, Siegfried Trebitsch, through the suggestion of William Archer. The Continent began to be conscious of Shaw as a dramatist. In the same year, he was adopted as a Progressive candidate for the London County Council but was defeated in an election. His defeat was fortunate. Had he been elected, he would have wasted his time and energy in Council Committees when he should have been spending them on plays. He again set about his proper task with increasing popularity.

Man and Superman was finished in 1903. It was followed in 1904 by a brilliant short play called How He Lied to her Husband, which is commonly considered to be a skit on his own Candida, and by John Bull's Other Island. In 1905 came Major Barbara, and in 1906, The Doctor's Dilemma. He worked at this rate for a large part of the rest of his life, in addition to the work he did for the Fabian Society and the lectures he still delivered in various parts of the country.

In 1908 Shaw produced his first "disquisitory" play entitled Getting Married, a long conversation piece. The play was not a financial success; but it interested people who liked good conversation and were not afraid to listen to ideas being discussed. The main argument of course concerned marriage.

His plays from 1909 up to 1914 varied in themes: for example, Press Cuttings (1909) is about politics, Androcles and the Lion (1912) is about religion, Pygmalion (1913) is about phonetics.

The First World War profoundly affected Shaw. Like all sensible men he hated war. Any war was to him a public calamity. But since it could not be avoided unless something was done, he made two practical proposals. The first was that England should propose to France and Germany a triple alliance. If France attacked Germany, England would combine with Germany to crush France; if Germany attacked France, England would combine with France to crush Germany; and if any other Power were to

attack either France or Germany, the three would line up together against that Power. This idea was partly justified in the Second World War. The next proposal was that England should have compulsory military service, together with a considerable increase in national armaments; so that she would have a ready and powerful expeditionary force. These proposals, unfortunately, were ignored.

When the war broke out, Shaw published a manifesto entitled Commonsense About the War, in which he pointed out that England was not fighting in defence of Belgium, but in defence of herself. This was a declaration of the right thing at the wrong moment. He was, therefore, strongly suspected of being anti-British; and became intensely unpopular. His plays were no longer performed. His appearance at any public function caused the instant departure of many people present. Even some of his friends disowned him. In February 1917, however, Shaw was invited by Sir Douglas Haig, the British Commander-in-Chief, to tour the Flanders front for a week.

During the War, Shaw wrote several articles about the war and some one-act plays: O' Flaherty y.C., The Inca of Perusalem, Augustus Does His Bit, and Annajanska, The Bolshev'k Empress. Early in the war, he had begun his long play, Heartbreak House, which he finished in 1919. The play reflected his sorrowful feeling about the war. Heartbreak House is England as seen by him in 1913, a ship drifting on to the rocks.

"And this ship we are all in," says Hector Hushabye to Captain Shotover, "this soul's prison we call England." ¹

Between 1919 - 1920, Shaw worked on his most ambitious play, Back to Methuselah, a gigantic play of five long acts which can be considered as five plays combined into one. In the first act, Shaw went back to the time of Adam and Eve, and in the last act, with its subtitle As Far As Thought Can Reach, he extended his imagination to the future, A.D. 31,920, when, according to him, man aims at getting rid of his body and becoming simply an immortal soul. In this play he defined his theory of Creative Evolution in much more detail than he had done in Man and Superman.

Shaw was sixty-five and honours had been heaped upon him when Back to Methuselah was published. But his energy did not flag. At an age when most men are thinking of retiring, he astonished the world with Saint Joan (1923), which was immediately acknowledged as a masterpiece. Its first productions in New York, London and Paris were highly successful. Shaw's world renown was firmly sealed. But the following year brought him an irreparable loss. William Archer, his benefactor and loving friend, died after a minor operation. Archer's death deeply distressed Shaw, and in his grief he spoke and wrote harshly about doctors and surgeons, almost accusing them of having killed his friend. The little faith in doctors which he had had now seemed to leave him entirely.

¹ Heartbreak House (Constable, 1933), Act III, p.138

In 1925, when he was seventy, Shaw was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Before this he had always refused titles and honours. He refused the prize at first, saying that "the money is a lifebelt thrown to a swimmer who has already reached the shore in safety."¹ It was not until he realized that he could use the prize, roughly the equivalent of £ 7,000, for a laudable purpose that he consented to accept it. The whole of the money went to the Anglo - Swedish Literary Foundation, a society for making Swedish literature available in English.

The Apple Cart (1927) was the first full-length play Shaw wrote after Saint Joan. His seventy-three years did not diminish his ability to create brilliant arguments. The play exposed the weaknesses and follies of Socialist rule and showed his apparent advocacy of the monarchical system.

The remaining part of his life was spent mainly in travelling to many countries. In 1931, he made a trip to Russia. On his return to London after his nine days' visit, he announced that Russia was heaven established on earth. After that he toured round the world, visiting South Africa, Sweden, New Zealand and the United States. On these trips he wrote about ten more plays. Among these are Geneva (1936) and In Good King Charles's Golden Days (1936). The former shows his preference for Mussolini, apparently a man of mind, to Hitler, apparently a man of emotion. The latter play is full of rich, sagacious and witty lines.

¹ Bernard Shaw by Hesketh Pearson (The Reprint Society, 1948), p. 404

In 1948, five years after the death of his wife, Shaw presented the English stage with a new "comedy of manners" called Buoyant Billions. It was a small play; yet it indicated that Bernard Shaw, when well past ninety, could still talk an audience into attention and start it into mirth. The play is a sustained debate upon his favourite subjects -- money, matrimony, education and others. The curtain - line at the end of the third Act is:

"The future is with the learners."

Shaw's last works are: a little play called Farfetched Fables; a biographical piece entitled Sixteen Self Sketches; a short puppet play, Shakes versus Shaw; and an unfinished play entitled Why She Would Not, which was written in the year of his death, 1950.

Kidney trouble brought him down. Shaw passed away calmly on November 2, 1950 at 4:59 a.m. at Shaw's Corner, Ayot St. Lawrence, Hertfordshire. His age was ninety-four.