

The Bookshelf.

By DELTA.

BOOKSHELF FEUILLETON.

Robert Louis Stevenson and George Bernard Shaw.

HERE is probably no modern writer, whose utterances, spoken and written, provoke such extravagant eulogy or adverse criticism, as those of Mr. George Bernard Shaw. For, curiously enough, one either admires Mr. Shaw immensely or dislikes him intensely, which, of course, speaks volumes for his powers as a reflector and a moulder of modern thought and feeling. Fresh from a remarkably good rendition of that splendidly written comedy of his that bears the enigmatic title of "You Never Can Tell," and a fourth period of a letter written by R. L. Stevenson, so long ago as 1887 or 1888, to Mr. William Archer, the eminent writer and critic, regarding G.B.S.'s "Castel Byron's Profession," which Mr. Archer had sent to Stevenson, we reviewed a past, rather harsh judgment of Shaw, feeling that a writer who could so splendidly approximate the real good that lay beneath the repulsive exterior of a Crampton, and who could divine the single-heartedness and the unselfishness of a William Robin (alias Boin), and endowed with all the attendant clearness of vision that had gone to the making of "You Never Can Tell," must be a man, who, if he has satirically and mercilessly laid bare the hollow shams, conventions and pretensions on which society is based, at least comprehends the inherent generosity and self-sacrifice that lies deep down in the heart and soul of most men. So interested in deed have we been in this letter written nearly a quarter of a century ago, when Shaw was just coming into prominence, that we have ventured to give our readers the letter intact. Here it is:—

Saranac Lake, Winter, 1887-88.—My dear Archer. What am I to say? I have read your friend's book with singular relish. If he has written any other, I beg you will let me see it; and if he has not, I beg him to lose no time in supplying the deficiency. It is full of promise; but I should like to know his age. There are things in it that are very clever, to which I attach small importance; it is the shape of the age. And there are passages, particularly the rally in the presence of the Zulu King, that show genuine and remarkable narrative talent—a talent that few will have the wit to understand, a talent of strength, spirit, capacity, and sufficient self-sacrifice, which last is the chief point in a narrator.

Shaw Described As a Delirious Visionary.

The second part of the letter is devoted to Stevenson's summary of "Castel Byron's Profession" as a whole: "As a whole," continues Stevenson, "it is, of course, a fever dream of the most feverish. Over Bashville the footman I howled with derision and delight; I dote on Bashville—I could read him for ever: de Bashville je suis le fervent—there is only one Bashville, and I am his devoted slave; Bashville est magnifique, mais il n'est guère possible. He is the note of the book. It is all mad, mad and deliciously delightful; the author has a taste of chivalry like Sir Walter Scott's or Dumas', and then he daubs in little bits of socialism; he soars away on the wings of the romantic griffin—even the griffin, as he cleaves air, shouting with laughter at the nature of the quest—and I believe in his heart he thinks he is labouring in a quarry of solid granite realism. It is this that makes me—the most hardened adviser now extant—stand back and hold my peace. If Mr. Shaw is below five-and-twenty, let him go his path; if he is thirty, he had best be told that he is a romantic, and pursue romance with his eyes open; or perhaps he knows it; God knows! My brain is softened. It is horrid fun. All I ask is more of it. Thank you for the pleasure you gave us, and tell me more of the inimitable author. (I say, Archer, my God, what women!)—Yours very truly, Robert Louis Stevenson."

An Interesting Analysis of Shaw's Art.

In a postscript to the above, Stevenson dissects Shaw's art, componently, as follows:—One part, Charles Reade; one part, Henry James, or some kindred author, badly assimilated; half-part, Disraeli (perhaps unconscious); one and a-half parts, struggling, overlaid original talent; one part blooming gaseous folly. That is the equation as it stands. What it may be, I don't know, nor any other man. *Vivere fortes*—O let him remember that—let him beware of his damned century; his gifts of insane chivalry and animated narration are just those that might be slain and thrown out like an untimely birth by the Daemon of the epoch. And if he only knew how I adored the chivalry! Baskerville!—O Baskerville! *J'en chortle* (which is fairly polyglot). This letter and postscript shows clearly that Shaw's work must have moved him profoundly, presaging as it did the coming signs of the times. In a later letter to William Archer we find the following postscript:—"Tell Shaw to hurry up; I want another."

A Coming Great Australian Novelist.

In the current number of the Melbourne "Book-lover," Mr. Champion, its versatile editor and proprietor, gives a very interesting sketch of Mr. Alfred Buchanan's career, together with a prediction of his coming fame as a front-rank novelist. Mr. Buchanan will be, perhaps, best remembered as the author of "The Bubble Reputation." Should Mr. Champion's prediction be verified, there will be, as in Mr. Marriott Watson's case, considerable discussion as to whether this Dominion or Australia shall have the privilege of claiming him as one of her distinguished sons. Mr. Buchanan was born in Southampton, England, in September, 1872, but at the early age of two he was brought to Canterbury, New Zealand. He went through the New Zealand University, winning the Junior and Senior Scholarships in 1891 and 1894 respectively, and also won the Bowen prize for English. At 20 he graduated as B.A., and two years later he went to Australia, and joined the staff of the Sydney "Morning Herald." In 1898 he joined "The Age," with which he has been connected ever since, with the exception of four years, which he spent in Perth, W.A. His latest and fourth work, "Where Day Begins" (John Onseley, London, 5/6) is a book that should on no account be missed.

Approps Australasian Literature.

Mr. Champion has, we think, but voiced the opinion of many lovers and critics of literature in Australasia, in the following excerpt, which we have taken from his journal:—"It is," he says, "perhaps the misfortune of literature that in Australia the writer has to get his living, and there are but two ways open to him—the life of the 'free lance,' which ends necessarily in long sleeves and a handsome memorial; and the ordinary journalist's work; than which nothing can be more corroding to the finer self. If you want a proof of this statement, look around you! How many men are there who can and have written books? Donald Macdonald's 'of The Argus', Ambrose Pratt (of 'The Age'), Edward Dyson (of 'Punch'), and one or two on the Parliamentary 'Hansard' staff—they have shown a certain aptitude, and then got swallowed up in the coil of things." "When Day Begins," followed by a still better novel, which Mr. Champion evidently thinks Mr. Buchanan is equal to writing, would place that author on a pinnacle attained by few Australian writers of fiction, for in this return to the province of fiction Mr. Buchanan has shown "that he has the power of drawing a dramatic story out of the Australia of to-day, without either bus-brangers or gold-diggers figuring in it."

A New Corelli Novel.

We state candidly that we are no admirer of Miss Corelli's art. But many readers and writers do admire Miss

Corelli's novels very much, and a thinker and scholar as profound as the late William Ewart Gladstone confessed himself delighted and impressed by "A Romance of Two Worlds." In the early autumn Methuen and Co. are going to publish a "New Romance," by Miss Corelli, entitled "Life Everlasting." The advance demand for this new life is tremendous, it is said. "Life Everlasting" deals with the occult and unseen. It will be remembered that Miss Corelli started her career with a psychic novel, namely, the novel aforementioned. The present work is also psychic, and deals with the love story of a mortal and an immortal. There are also, we are told, some new and startling suggestions on the cause of life and death. The latest discoveries in science have been used to elucidate the theories the author has advanced, and altogether, considering the fascination of the subject, the book should sell here like hot cakes.

Some Other Methuen Autumn Publications.

Mr Methuen has written a short book on the reform of the Peers. It is entitled: "A Simple Plan for a New House of Lords," and is published at 2/ by Messrs. Methuen. Mr Methuen's pamphlets on the Boer War and the fiscal controversy were very successful. "The Crooked Way," by Mr William Le Queux, was added to this firm's "Novelist" series on July 13. On the 27th of the same month an exciting romance of the wilder North America of to-day, entitled "Two on the Trail," was issued by this firm. It is an exciting account of a husband-hunt which ends in the saving of a life.

What Constitutes Plagiarism.

A lady correspondent writing to a Melbourne literary journal proposes of an appreciation of Mr John Masefield, which appeared in that paper, complains as follows:—"Your contributor charges Mr Noyes with borrowing the idea of 'Apes and Ivory, Skulls and Roses,' in 'Stunks of Old Hong Kong,' from Masefield's poem 'Cargoes.'" Our readers will doubtless remember this latter poem, as it is a favourite one of ours in its class from which we quote when we wish to instance an example of perfect word painting. Well, the Book-Lover's correspondent says that Masefield borrowed "ivory and apes and parrots" from the first Book of Kings, chapter ten, and twenty-second verse, which states that "Once in three years came the navy of Kharshish, bringing gold and silver, ivory, apes and peacocks." It is quite possible in the near future that some other extensive reader of "Stately Spanish Galloons," and "Dirty British Coasters," etc. but it won't detract in the least from the value of the poem as a gem of an example of perfect rhythm, a mastery of colour, and absolutely correct local colour. Just where real plagiarism begins, it is difficult to define, since for every theme there must be inspiration, and there is nothing new under the sun, least of all themes that have not in some shape or form been improved or elaborated upon before. There is a glory of Mr Alfred Noyes, and there is a glory of Mr John Masefield. And there is glory enough for each in their separate orbits. In this double suggestion of plagiarism, it is interesting to read what R. L. Stevenson says about the inspiration that prompted him to write "Treasure Island," the said inspiration it was afterwards suggested, being stolen from various works of fiction. Here it is below:—

"Treasure Island."

"On a chill September morning," said Stevenson, "by the cheek of a brisk fire, and the rain drumming on all the windows, I began 'The Sea Cook,' for that was the original title of 'Treasure Island.' I have begun (and finished) a number of other books, but I cannot remember to have sat down to one of them with more compacency. It is not to be wondered at, for stolen waters are proverbially sweet. I am now upon a painful chapter. No doubt the parrot one belonged to Robinson Crusoe. No doubt the skeleton is conveyed from Poe. I think little of these, they are trifles and details; and no man can hope to have a monopoly of skeletons or make a corner in talking birds. The stockade, I am told, is from 'Masterman Ready.' It may be, I care not a jot. These useful writers had fulfilled the poet's saying: 'departing, they had left behind their footprints on the sands of time.' Footprints which perhaps another—and I was the other! It is my debt to Washington Irving that exercises my conscience, and judds so, for I believe that plagiarism



WHEN EVERYTHING ELSE FAILS THE CAPITALISTS CAN TRY THIS.

Orator: We live under the grandest Government in the world's history—we are a people that knows no monarch of Divine pretence, that accepts no ermine of heredity nor bends the calloused knee to nitred might. But, instead, we recognise that every citizen is a sovereign in his own right—that each individual is a king and rules the destinies of a glorious commonwealth. In conclusion, gentlemen, I have a pleasant surprise for you—as you pass out of the hall each of you will be presented with a beautiful crown.

[A Week Later They Fawn Them to Pay the Butcher.]