

THE IMPORT OF THE SUPERFICIAL

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THE world has become noisy with fundamentalities. Everywhere we see little people strutting about looking for the bottoms of things. Folk whose fathers were content to dabble around in their own particular set of stupidities without speculating much further than the following Saturday's payroll are now discussing problems and movements and fundamental things generally.

Dissatisfaction with things as they exist is pretty general and the little people have started out to adjust it and bring to solution the difficulties of the ages. The expense in good black ink and good heavy paper to which the world has been put to publish the panaceas of perplexing nonentities has never been so great as it is to-day. The stage is largely occupied by puerile problem plays while the press is compelled by popular demand to dispense still more puerile propaganda articles. The cults and the isms are thriving and anyone can start a movement who has six personal friends, a studio and a touch of paranoia.

So we have all these little people roving the realms of sociology, science, philosophy and morals, with big black spectacles fastened to their craning faces and geological hammers ready to knock off projections everywhere on our later half-petrified formations, and to get down to what they expect will be bed-rock. We hear it said that there is no movement that has not its usefulness; and, indeed, the Theosophists, the Single Taxers, the Eugenists and the Cubists, with all the hundred other manifestations of desire for better things in each of their fields, each and all have their degree of merit and worth. They are valuable for one thing particularly, and that is for showing a tendency of the age. They can scarcely be credited with supplying this tendency to our time, since they each drive (or carry, if one feels favorably inclined) in a different direction.

There is something, however, that is common to all of them, and that is that they seek the basic fact of existence, the fundamental remedy of error as they see it. The typical Socialist is

obsessed with the idea of employing economic power; the Christian Scientist is equally obsessed with the use of spiritual power; the Physical Culturist is dominated by the desire to create physical prowess; the Futurist is determined to discard the conventions of the past; while the thorough-going Anarchist would let everybody do just about as he pleases. One might be a follower of almost all the movements, and then he would be a fundamentalist with a vengeance.

That would be the most admirable and desirable type of human being were it not for the fact that there are elements in existence of the greatest import that are not within the scope of any labelled movement. There is a certain calm thoughtfulness and generally progressive tendency common to all genuine and intelligent people that is neither dominated nor dominating. It simply persists aside and in spite of the violent outbursts of propagandists. Contemplation is one of its considerable elements and tolerance is one of its chief effects. The lackeys of new creeds look upon it as a superficiality. Its possessors are not spouting such a volume of water as the more radical whales and so they seem to be sailing in shallow seas. Really, it is never lack of courage that keeps them on the surface: it requires sublime courage not to be an intellectual diver to-day—the epithets of the seekers of the bottom are so fulsome.

What strikes one most forcibly about the habitués of causes is their intellectual ugliness. Generally rasping, their thinking on all subjects is crude and perverted. They possess power, but it is the power of a very lumbering elephant who cannot manage itself when it gets into steep places. If the road is blocked with petty opposition it can knock its objectors over and proceed; but on a free yet rocky path it rolls about from side to side and may even turn a few somersaults on the way.

The man whom the propagandists deem superficial is saved from these mildly ungraceful proceedings. He is commonly supposed to do little more than save himself in this fashion. In reality he goes down the ages as the tribunal before whom all causes and all movements and all propaganda are tried. His is the judgment that will not perish. In art he furnishes taste to posterity. In science he supplies the undiscredited facts of the

future. He is the backbone of the generations; and while difficult to characterize, he is thoroughly recognizable, and decade after decade he goes on being born, growing in thoughtfulness and tolerance and reserve force, and coming to act as the great creative modifier of opposed violences. He represents the most attractive type and the most important, and through him man's lasting and permanent progress must come.

BERNARD SHAW AND THE FRENCH CRITICS

ERNEST A. BOYD

IT is not long since *Candida* first revealed Mr. Bernard Shaw to an unsuspecting Parisian public. After a preliminary experiment in Brussels, this play was produced in Paris in 1908. In the Belgian capital M. Hamon had taken the natural precaution of introducing the author to the public by means of a lecture on the Shavian Drama, thus lessening the inevitable shock which *Candida* must have produced on the uninitiated. In France, unfortunately, the only attempt to soften the blow was a short *conference* on *Candida* itself by Mme. Georgette Le Blanc-Maeterlinck. In the circumstances it is not surprising that the success of Brussels was not repeated in Paris. The acting was far from satisfactory, and resulted in giving an atmosphere of sexuality to a play in which the struggle of sex is purely intellectual. Moreover, the whole play was interpreted in a tragic, rather than a comic key and was therefore unintelligible. The traditional trio of the French drama, *le mari, la femme et l'amant*, seemed to be present in *Candida*, and no doubt it was for this reason that the play was chosen for a first experiment. But, as M. Cestre has pointed out, this apparent resemblance proved the greatest obstacle to the understanding of Shaw. The familiar premises being granted, the French public was not prepared for the apparently paradoxical conclusions which the author drew from them. M. Faguet expresses this feeling clearly when he says that Shaw is not sincere, that his *dénouements* are too traditional, too moderate in view of the audaciousness of the author's theses. Compared with Ibsen he is wanting in depth, his characters are "all on the surface." "We understand why Nora Helmer leaves her husband and children," says M. Faguet, but few French critics would understand why *Candida* remained with Morell. The relations between her and Marchbanks seemed utterly incomprehensible in Paris. The famous scene in which Morell leaves *Candida* and the poet alone was a sad disappointment to an audience accustomed to the passionate interludes of the Boulevard drama. At last it looked