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## OPINIONS about BOOKS



**ONLY YESTERDAY**, by Frederick Lewis Allen; Harper, \$3.00.

**BERNARD SHAW**, by Frank Harris; Simon & Schuster, \$4.00.

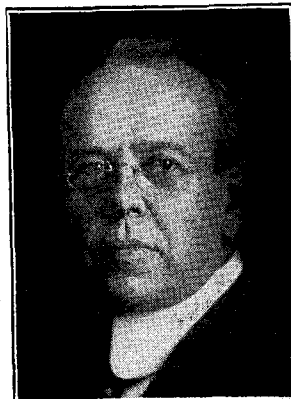
**W**E ARE always inclined to chuckle in a superior sort of way over books depicting the times of our fathers, our grandfathers, and our great-grandfathers — such books as *The Mauve Decade*, *The Elegant Eighties*, *The Fabulous Forties*, and Mark Sullivan's famous series, *Our Times*. Probably we have never stopped to consider how equally ludicrous might be some of the manners, morals, and events of our own age. In *Only Yesterday*, Mr. Allen holds up the mirror so that we may see just how we looked and acted during the decade from 1919 to 1930, and the reflection is startling, to say the least. The end of the war brings the first shower of ticker tape and office memoranda down upon Broadway. We see Wilson returning from abroad with his great dream of a League of Nations shattered. We observe the amazing phenomena of the Red scares, race riots, the Ku Klux Klan, and the struggle of the labor unions. Forgetting these, we turn suddenly to radio, Coué, and Mah Jong and whistle "Yes, We Have no Bananas," as we hurry to work. The younger generation kicks over the traces, and the parked sedan, short skirts, lip sticks, confession magazines, bobbed hair, mixed smoking and drinking, free talk, and unconventional "manners" come into their own. The Harding scandals are followed by Coolidge prosperity. The technic of ballyhoo is developed. Lindbergh wins our hard, cynical old hearts with his dash across the Atlantic. Sinclair Lewis and H. L. Mencken lead the highbrow revolt against the back-slapping, pep-exuding Rotarians. The racketeer becomes a menace, but nobody seems to know just what to do about him, even after Mr. Wickersham writes his report. Florida booms and then backfires. General Motors and Radio lead the great bull market of 1928 — a market which crashes with a terrific thud in October, 1929. The wise men begin to say that prosperity is just around the corner and that conditions are fundamentally sound. And so it goes. *Only Yesterday* is a review of all these astounding events and many others — as fascinating a book as any reader could possibly wish for.

**B**Y THIS time, probably, most people know the piquant circumstances under which this "unauthorized" biography was written and published. The friendship between Frank Harris and Bernard Shaw stretched over four decades. Back in the nineties, when Harris was reaching the crest of his fame, he had the astuteness to pick Shaw as dramatic critic for his magazine, the *Saturday Review* — thus giving him a real chance when he was relatively unknown. Then Harris had the misfortune to survive his best days. In his impoverished and somewhat embittered old age, he watched the man whom he had once befriended climb to dizzy heights of wealth and renown. It was a situation which almost any normal person might resent — and Harris was a royal egotist, a man without much humor, possessed of a temperament radically different from Shaw's. One can hardly blame the latter for trying to dissuade Harris from writing his biography. As events and his letters prove, he foresaw the results quite accurately. He did not foresee, however, that he would be able to have the last word. Harris died last August, just after the completion of this book, and it was Shaw who revised the proofs and added a final chapter which is in part a good-humored word of apology and in part an extraordinarily generous estimate of his biographer. There was a chance for generosity. Much that Harris says is spiteful, biased, unfair — however forgivably so. The very genuine tributes which he pays to Shaw seem to be wrung from him half reluctantly, as a grudging admission of what he could not but recognize as greatness. Furthermore, he dwells absurdly and rather offensively on what he considers the meagerness of Shaw's sex life, which he perpetually contrasts with his own — of course, to his own advantage. This was just what Shaw predicted. Nevertheless, despite its sketchiness, its inadequacies as just and documented biography, this is an amazingly interesting and stimulating book — especially if one is willing to take it for what it essentially is — a lively record of a long-enduring clash between two colorful and self-centered personalities.

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