

in the play without trace of his obvious amusement with his task and his keen pleasure at doing it so skilfully. Yet scratch the surface of this frivolous piece, examine it closely, and underneath you will find something a little hard, a little sharp. For Mr. Bennett's mind, however relaxed and at play, is never softened; his intellectual equipment is like an assortment of knives, some of them very small and fit only to carve out trivialities, but none the less bright and polished and mercilessly sharp. However foolish the material it works with, Mr. Bennett's mind never yawns; it never misses fire, it has the tireless, accurate fluency of a machine-gun. His chief joy in life is to pull the trigger, and we scarcely believe him when he confesses—again in *The Truth About an Author*—that "my aim in writing plays . . . has always been strictly commercial. I wanted money in heaps. . . ." Well, he deserves it.

R. L.

Mr. O'Neill's Plays

The Emperor Jones. Diff'rent. The Straw, by Eugene S. O'Neill. New York: Boni and Liveright.

A NUMBER of things—for some of which Mr. O'Neill was not responsible—in the stage performance of the *Emperor Jones*, the color and dignity of Charles Gilpin's acting, the mysterious novelty of the scenery, the power of this dramatic experiment, left a series of unforgettable pictures on the mind. Had one been wise enough to come away before the end, the impression would have been better, for the last scenes were each less good than the one before, and each tried to squeeze a few more drops of effect out of a situation that was dry before the end came. And so the final impression was of a magnificent idea diluted and spread thin beyond its strength, ridden to the last gasp, a creation with its centre of gravity quite misplaced. Dazzled, even enchanted a little by the first scenes, one only half noticed that the words were not nearly so remarkable as the pictures built upon them.

If one liked *The Emperor Jones* on the stage, it would be a mistake to read it in cold print. For it would confirm one's suspicions about the words. In black and white no current runs through them; they are bare, charmless, a little poverty-stricken, and mercilessly to the point. It is like having been thrilled by some bright balloon a-sail in the sky, a little lop-sided perhaps, but none the less a strange and valiant experiment, and then later coming upon it sprawled flat upon the ground in its prosaic envelope and network.

One imagines that, like the *Emperor Jones*, the defects of the other plays in this volume would seem much less important on the stage. In them, too, Mr. O'Neill has a way of driving his point so ceaselessly, so ruthlessly into the mind of his listeners that after a while one feels much the same fatigue that is produced in the unwilling audience of a pneumatic riveter. Mr. O'Neill makes doubly, triply sure that no one is going to miss his meaning, and if undeniably these plays have power, it is too often the power of someone trying to make himself heard by a deaf man. There are no half-lights in *Diff'rent* or in *The Straw*, no gray shades, nothing small, nothing fragile or delicate. They are built of only the most obvious lumber—nothing less than two-by-fours, which are not so much fastened together by necessary nails as studded with the giant spikes of Mr. O'Neill's reiterated emphasis.

V. S. G. L.

Bernard Shaw on Keats

ONE of the most interesting things in the Keats Memorial Volume (John Lane) is the paper by Bernard Shaw. I remember wondering a long time ago, when I first became familiar with Shaw's theory of criticism and realized that he proposed to put in the first rank of literary masterpieces only those works which combined with artistic beauty some revolutionary assault on the ideals and institutions of their times, what he would have to say when confronted with a poet like Keats,—whom he had, so far as I knew, never mentioned. Keats, I thought, had no conceivable revolutionary intent and yet, since Shaw had a fine appreciation of poetry, how could he deny Keats's greatness?

Well, my question has been answered now and Shaw, it seems to me, has betrayed with unexpected plainness the impossibility of his position. For he first says that Keats is great because he wrote beautiful lines—"Keats's strongest lines are so lovely, and there are so many of them, that to think of him as a minor poet is impossible"—and then afterwards, falling back into his old formula, proves Keats to have been a social revolutionist on the strength of some stanzas in *Isabella*—"of which it may be said that if Karl Marx can be imagined as writing a poem instead of a treatise on Capital, he would have written" this one—finally concluding that, since, if the poet had lived, he would certainly have gone on to do more in the same vein, "Keats manages . . . to win a place among the great poets in virtue of a future he never lived to see, and of poems he never lived to write."

Here, then, we are confronted with two entirely different views: the utilitarian-radical view and its direct contradiction. On which account would Shaw have us believe that Keats was a great poet: because he wrote beautiful verse or because he attacked the middle class? E. W.

Selected Current Books

John Keats Memorial Volume. John Lane.

A collection of articles and poems, by authors from Dr. Henry Van Dyke to Bernard Shaw, issued in celebration of the centenary of Keats's death by the Keats House Committee.

The Salvaging of Civilization, by H. G. Wells. Macmillan.

A set of essays on "the probable future of mankind."

The Tyranny of the Countryside, by F. E. Green. George Allen and Unwin.

A study of the land problem and the agricultural laborer in England.

The Mystic Warrior, by James Oppenheim. Knopf.

An autobiographical novel in free verse.

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