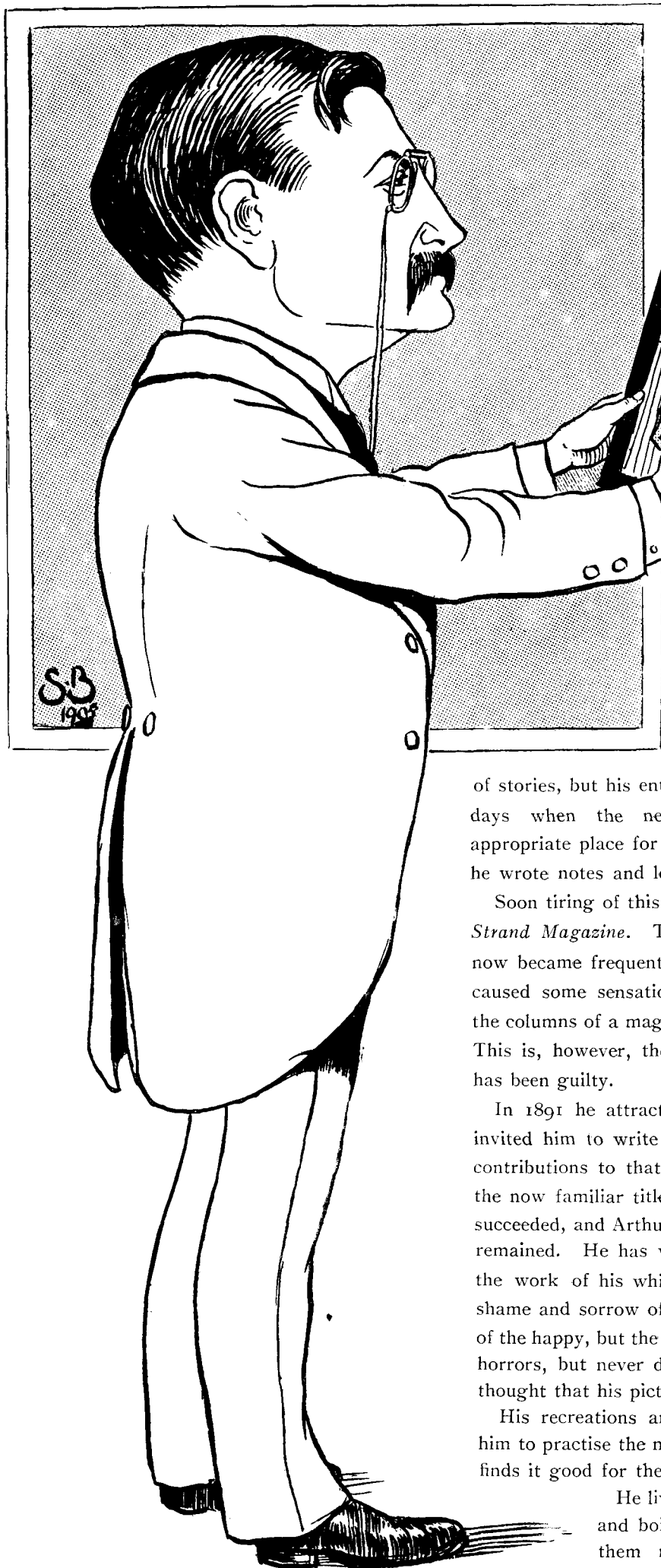


THE BOOKMAN GALLERY.

ARTHUR MORRISON.



ARTHUR MORRISON. Born 1863. He is understood to be the favourite novelist of the Prince of Wales, and he himself owns to a weakness for "royalties." He began life as a secretary, thus at once emerging as a man of letters. The secretaryship, which was connected with an old charity, gave him much work

in the East End, and upon the experience which he there gained he was afterwards able to draw for literary purposes.

Five years later he took to journalism, joining the staff of an evening paper. He had already made some name for himself as a writer

of stories, but his entry into Fleet Street took place before the days when the news-editor's chair was considered the appropriate place for the clever writer of fiction. Accordingly he wrote notes and leaders.

Soon tiring of this work, he passed from Fleet Street to the *Strand Magazine*. To the Newnes monthly his contributions now became frequent. About this time it is recorded that he caused some sensation amongst spiritualists by inventing, in the columns of a magazine, a "legend" about an Essex ghost. This is, however, the only form of "ghosting" of which he has been guilty.

In 1891 he attracted the attention of W. E. Henley, who invited him to write for the *National Observer*. In 1894 his contributions to that journal were reprinted and issued under the now familiar title of "Tales of Mean Streets." The book succeeded, and Arthur Morrison "arrived." Since then he has remained. He has written detective stories and the like, but the work of his which counts is that which depicts for us the shame and sorrow of the little squalid streets. He writes, not of the happy, but the unhappy mean. Often he makes us behold horrors, but never does he let us escape with the comforting thought that his pictures are overdrawn.

His recreations are various. He boxes because it enables him to practise the making of hits, just as he cycles because he finds it good for the circulation.

He lives near Epping Forest, where gipsies camp and boil their pots. But he leaves pot-boiling to them now-a-days; he has given up "Martin Hewitt."

From a drawing by Stuart Boyd.

THE READER.

MR. BERNARD SHAW, WRITER OF PLAYS.

By F. G. BETTANY.

THOUGH his personality is singularly compact, is indeed consistently of a piece, Mr. George Bernard Shaw has impressed himself on the popular imagination as a man of very many aspects. There is Bernard Shaw—for he has dropped his first initial—the Irishman and the conversationalist of infinite charm, Bernard Shaw the vegetarian and teetotaller and anti-tobacco man, Bernard Shaw the revolutionary assailant of marriage and property and of our social and economic systems generally. There is, or was, Bernard Shaw the Fabian socialist and the municipal politician—a disillusioned socialist and a discarded vestryman now. There is Bernard Shaw, distiller of Ibsen's quintessence and perfect Wagnerite. There is Bernard Shaw the disciple of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, and—to some extent—Tolstoi. There was a Bernard Shaw the journalist, most entertaining of musical and dramatic critics. Finally, not to mention the novelist who produced in his "nonage" that story of pugilism, "Cashel Byron's Profession," there remains the Bernard Shaw whom I fancy most of us know best, the writer of plays, and the writer, I may add, of voluminous explanations, expositions, prefaces, and annotations of those same plays. It is to this last phase of Mr. Shaw's multiform activity that I propose confining myself in the following appreciation. But as the author of "John Bull's Other Island" is a thinker who possesses very strong convictions and composes his plays in order to voice his ideas, I must have the reader's indulgence if I am found stepping somewhat outside the limits here laid down and treating of other Bernard Shaws than the one strictly under discussion.

The mere circumstance of Mr. Shaw's having twelve plays to his name is not in itself particularly remarkable; other theatrical authors of to-day can boast a much better record. What is the significant fact in connection with Mr. Shaw is this, that he, the man of most intellectual originality now writing for the English stage, is fast making his way into general popularity. On the strength of two Hamlets (one quickly eclipsed), and a short-lived revival of "Romeo and Juliet," and Mr. Tree's spectacular production of "Much Ado," and his interesting Shakespearean Festival week, certain wiseacres of the press have described London's present dramatic season as a season of Shakespeare, but it might quite as properly be called after Bernard Shaw as after his Elizabethan rival. For what have we just seen at the Court Theatre? There an enterprising management has contrived to run for three months four Shaw plays, usually with two performances daily. To some people, accustomed to Mr. Barrie's two-hundred-night successes, such an achievement may appear by no means wonderful. But what it really means is, that at length Mr. Bernard Shaw has conquered fashion. And since the fashionable world, much as we may deplore its influence, sets the fashion in the playhouse, let us be thankful that for once, in

both Mr. Shaw's and Mr. Barrie's cases, society has attached itself to the right men, that for once playwrights of real brain power are in fashion. Little as our smart set may grasp the Shavian philosophy and merely amusing as it may find the Irishman's wit, totally different from the author's intention as may be the entertainment it derives from his work, society's patronage can do Mr. Shaw's cause no harm and will certainly ensure him a larger audience.

There were valid reasons, however, for the public's long neglect of the Shaw theatre. If the truth may be told, Mr. Shaw lacks some of the qualities which go to make the genuine dramatist. He is not a bad stage technician—in such matters as that of getting people on and off the scene reasonably. He can give his public its desired "thrill" in the startling revelation of a secret or in a sudden burst of eloquence. He shows on occasion a brilliant gift of observation and characterisation, witness his cockney chauffeur, so proud of a Board school and Polytechnic education. He can at all times win his audiences to laughter by his wit and humour. But his hatred of what he calls romance—"the great heresy to be swept off from art and life"—not only prevents him from employing, unless with a satirical object, what is rightly or wrongly a large part of human nature, but makes him turn out his characters too much from the same mould, and give too many of them a common element of his own unidealistic disposition. Owing also to his preoccupation with ideas, which he considers the all-essential requisite on the stage, he fails to respond to the playgoer's demand for a stimulation of his emotions; Mr. Shaw's appeal even to the emotions is addressed to the head. Meantime, though as convinced as Mr. Walkley himself that true drama must represent a conflict of wills, he cannot, in illustrating such conflict, confine himself to tense, dramatic dialogue, he will indulge in rhetoric; the moment the action of his plays begins to quicken, he sets his puppets declaiming and explaining themselves in set speeches. Again, he has scarcely the art of binding his scenes together, of ruling out irrelevancies, and of relating every passage to a central theme; indeed, save when for purposes of parody he adopts a scheme ready-made, his plays amble along in go-as-you-please fashion, the idea only half carried through, the episodes only loosely connected.

A capital example of Mr. Shaw's limitations is furnished in "Candida," which is in part a seeming burlesque, in part a fresh handling of the triangular situation of sex, and may fairly be described as one of the best made and most reasonable of the Shaw plays. The husband, it will be remembered, is an East End clergyman of the Christian Social Union sort, only half-emancipated from "conventionality." The lover is a Shelleyan boy-poet, over whose dreams Mr. Shaw lingers with uncharacteristic tenderness. And Candida herself is a charming idealisation of the type of sym-