

# The New Books

## SHAW DISCOVERS CHRISTIANITY

Bernard Shaw's latest volume of plays and prefaces, *Androcles and the Lion*, *Overruled*, *Pygmalion*, marks a very interesting stage in his intellectual development. He has at last discovered the existence of Christianity, and been so struck by it that he wrote an excellent play and a preface of 115 pages to tell us what he thought about it all. *Androcles and the Lion* is a sympathetic comedy of the Christian martyr. The play is full of Shaw's merriest laughter, but no one who has read or seen it can fail to note that he is laughing with the Christians rather than at them. It is the emperor and the Roman mob that are made to look the fool; not Lavinia who outfaces death and laughs it down, not Androcles who is shamefully bullied by his wife but has no fear of lions, not Ferrovius who slays six gladiators in a moment of moral weakness and is made a member of the Pretorian Guard. In the submission of Ferrovius to the cult of Mars on the ground that force still rules the world and "the Christian God is not yet," Shaw tells us that he has exprest the antagonism between the Christian ideal and the conduct of the nations of Christendom which still, with the full approval of the organized church, settle their destinies on the battlefield.

In the long theological essay which precedes this play Shaw discusses the value and meaning of Christianity. He concludes that Jesus was one of the greatest and wisest of men, and that his principles of human brotherhood, communism, repudiation of revenge and rejection of private interests in the service of God (whom Mr. Shaw will persist in making a hyphenated deity, the Life-Force) would redeem society if there were any serious attempt to put them into practise. But the Christian Church, he insists, immediately wandered from the ideals of Jesus as fast and as far as it could and erected in His name an elaborate metaphysics of original sin, the atonement, salvation by orthodoxy, and essential sacraments.

Paul was largely to blame. "The conversion of Paul was no conversion at all; it was Paul who converted the religion that had raised one man above sin and death into a religion that delivered millions of men so completely into their dominion that their own common nature became a horror to them, and the religious life became a denial of life." We are sorry that a critic who has seen so much (tho far from enough) of the greatness of the Master should see so little of the greatness of the Apostle. He forgets entirely the strong

points of Paul's character and teaching: his unfailing dignity and tact; the urbanity with which he faced dignitaries while in chains and seemed the greater for them; his patriotism ("I am a citizen of no mean city") and civic sense; the faith that never faltered and the courage that never broke; the good common sense of most of his practical regulations for the early church; the mingled fervor and philosophical grasp which have made his epistles the model textbooks of theologians from that time to this. Shaw's failure to appreciate Paul is unfortunately but typical of his failure to understand the worth of the organized Christian Church and the great work it has done in the world. If it has rarely been what its Founder would have wished, it is not wholly the Church of Barabbas that Shaw would make it out.

*Overruled* is one of Shaw's farce-comedies of sex relationship, adding little to what he has often said before. *Pygmalion*, on the other hand, is a play of importance. Shaw takes the driest of earthly topics, phonetics, and turns it into an interesting human play; quite as remarkable a feat as the subject of the plot, the transformation of a flower girl into a society lady, by cultivating her pronunciation. The author becomes so enamored of the creations of his hand that he supplements the play by a very long prose narrative which details the future career of all the principal characters. So far as we know, this has never been done before in literature, at least on such an elaborate scale. People are fond of looking at the last pages of books; why not extend Mr. Shaw's idea to serial stories and publish in each number not the conventional summary of previous instalments, but an abstract of the subsequent instalments? This would destroy forever the torment of Tantalus which has hitherto afflicted all readers of the serial-story magazines.

*Androcles and the Lion, Overruled, Pygmalion,*  
by George Bernard Shaw. Brentano. \$1.50.