

## ON NOT INTERVIEWING SHAW

By Virginia Rice

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW is generally considered one of the greatest intellectual figures of the day. The reporter tried to relate that digested bit of information to the unique fact that she was sitting in Mr. Shaw's library waiting for an interview. An unlimited range of subjects at her disposal, she was trying to select the one best suited to the momentary taste of the American public. What about "The Future of the Drama in America"? Or "Socialism in America"? Or better still, "Why Mr. Shaw Never Visits America"? At all events, he was coming in at any moment.

The reporter pulled out her fountain pen and started the first paragraph of the impending interview. "Atmosphere", she wrote, and underlined it; then, "Home—10 Adelphi Terrace, ten minutes from the Strand and around the corner from an art shop and the Little Theatre, near Charing Cross—"The Nation' published on ground floor of house." She looked around the room for the atmosphere proper. "Walls literally covered with etchings—high bookcases jammed with books." It was necessary to find out the names

of some of the authors. She took a courageous stride toward the nearest bookcase, and started to read: "'Plays for Puritans' by George Ber..."

And then it happened. Mr. Shaw appeared suddenly and vigorously, smiling down on his astonished visitor. Was he young or old or both? It was the only thought the reporter was able to formulate clearly. A firm, erect physique and the evidence of superabundant energy urged youth and yet, there were the rumors to the contrary—the white beard and, most disturbing of all, his omniscience. It twinkled out of two keen eyes and made her think of supermen. But her thoughts swept on past them into the realm of more modern speculation. Recently she had read about a new human species, "Ancients", who lived thousands of years and during the centuries accumulated such stores of wisdom that no child of eighty or under could gaze on one without suffering a fatal shock. Some even died of discouragement on the instant. Very possibly the author was in earnest, and she had mistaken realism for fantasy. But this was no time for contemplation. Doubtless, Mr. Shaw was accustomed to giving his interviewers sufficient time to overcome their awe, but the silence must not be allowed to grow to unnatural proportions. The reporter made her maiden effort.

"Did you get my notes, Mr. Shaw?"

That was not a searching or brilliant interrogation but it was at least in the nature of approach.

"Oh yes, dozens of them." This in a bland English voice, well modulated, not monotonous but with a delicious, rising inflection. "That's why I'm seeing you now, out of human kindness to my secretary. Her clerical work has been too much for her since your arrival in London."

The reporter stiffened, then realized this was a superman and forced a smile.

"I wrote only three," she reminded him with a faint show of dignity.

"But you *can't* interview me," Mr. Shaw informed her, and his smile was engaging.

"Surely, now that I am here and you..."

"Oh no, you *can't* interview me. You can say you've seen me but you *can't* interview me."

"It would take such a short time, and really..."

"What do they give you for seeing me? Any special sum of money or reward of some sort?"

The reporter tried flattery and confessed it would give her prestige. She clutched her pen with shaking fingers. It was evident Mr. Shaw was in a mood for dalliance. He was going to be delightful. All this evasiveness was, after all, very charming and oh, "so Shavian"! She decided to waive all persiflage and take the interview for granted.

"What we Americans are particularly anxious to know", she began with a jaunty self-confidence, "is just why you never visit America. We are so eager to. . ."

"What sort of person are you?" The tone was genial but curious, and Mr. Shaw fixed the weak kneed foreigner with a glittering eye while he waited for the answer.

The reporter tried humility.

"Commonplace," she admitted with a timid smile.

"And you've come to see *me*?"

Mr. Shaw was mildly reproachful.

"How about your profession? What do you think of journalism?"

She had a vague suspicion she was being heckled, but resolved to try simplicity and suppress all adjectives.

"I like it," she ventured, and it sounded unexpectedly stark.

Mr. Shaw raised dubious eyebrows.

"Are you clever?" he inquired.

Obviously, this question was posed merely to test her sincerity and candor. Her reply was glib: "Oh no!"

"What? Not clever?"

Mr. Shaw was, on the whole, shocked. He paused to let his mock surprise travel down the spine of the reporter, and when he felt reasonably sure that the pain was at its height, he continued: "Not clever!" His voice was pained. "Why, in your profession, you are *supposed* to be cleverer than other people! Well—really!"

The reporter tried uncton.

"Or able to interview clever people, Mr. Shaw."

She had a sense of dwindling hope and lessened self-respect. But Mr. Shaw looked thoughtful.

"Whom are you betting on, Carpenter or Dempsey?"

There was a tentative ring to the question as if something actually hinged on the answer. The reporter grew panicky and lost her head.

"Dempsey," she blundered.

Mr. Shaw looked satisfied.

"Then you have no intelligence," he assured her, but just then a happier thought occurred to him. His tone was barely hopeful.

"What do you think of the turf matches?"

There was that in the mention of the foreign sport which aroused what is sometimes called "the proud American spirit", and the reporter announced boldly that she never thought of them at all.

"Are you married?"

Intellectual curiosity may have subsided but human, or, rather, inhuman interest had supplanted it.

"No."

She had answered that question before but this was the first time she had ever experienced a feeling of guilt.

"Have you any children?"

The reporter collapsed.

"Oh, Mr. Shaw!" she murmured.

"Because", Mr. Shaw went on in his most agreeable manner, "if you aren't married and you haven't any children . . ."

Crushed as she was, the interviewer recognized Shavian philosophy and took it from the mouth of its own oracle.

"I will have to justify my existence," she finished for him.

"Yes, quite," Mr. Shaw agreed. "If you aren't married and you haven't any children, you'll have to write a great *many* interviews. Have I said anything you can publish, so far?"

There was one last flicker of hope.

"Not so far. You see, there are so *many* things I would like to ask you. For instance . . ."

"Why, I could write *at least two* columns on *you*." Mr. Shaw let the horror of this sink in. "If you can't write two columns on me — why, really — you're no good whatever!"

The reporter was downstairs. She was out on Adelphi Terrace. She walked past an art shop and the Little Theatre and caught a bus at Charing Cross. Eventually, she reached her hotel and found herself the centre of a group of admiring and inquisitive friends. Everyone shrieked a question and one undergrad took out a notebook and pen. She alone was morosely silent. At last there was a lull. In spite of her exploit, it was evident the reporter appeared to be dispirited. Suddenly a new thought seemed to strike her. They could fairly see her morale rise under its happy influence.

"You may as well know", she in-

formed them all with pride, "that I have had the unique honor of being interviewed by Mr. Shaw."