

MR. SHAKESPEARE

BY
"EMILE"

Writes Radio Thriller "The Merchant Of Venice" For The NBS

THE trouble with most of us in our relations with Shakespeare is that we are too polite toward him. And you never get intimate with people to whom you always have to be polite.

From the time English-speaking people are introduced to Shakespeare at the age of 12 or so, in the schools they are taught to look on him with reverence and awe. He is put on a pedestal so high that he seems to be quite out of reach of the ordinary person's grasp.

I suggest that this is one of the worst crimes that English teachers, parents and writers commit. It is a crime against the young and against literature and against Shakespeare himself.

Letter To The Paper

SHAKESPEARE himself would be both amused and saddened about it. It would make him laugh at man's folly and sigh at his stupidity. If he were alive to-day he would no doubt write to "The Times" about it like Mr. Bernard Shaw. He would say:

"I am, I know, the greatest writer the world has known, but in imagination at least I have been, too, the greatest sinner and the greatest lover and the greatest hater. In my life I was sometimes pure in heart and noble in my dealings with my fellow-men, and sometimes the world's worst cad.

"I wrote my works so that I could make a competence that would enable me to live comfortably, but I wrote them also because I had to write them. There was a fury in me for setting down on paper the wonderful and the horrible things I saw in the hearts of men.

"And I knew what I was writing was good, and that it would live on after I had gone to my death, the thought of which filled me often with loathing and horror and later with resignation and submission to the Divine will.

"But I did not want to live on as an idol, I wanted to be in the minds of all people and in their lives. If there is a film I want to be in it, if there is a radio I want to be in it.

"But, for Heaven's sake, if you put my work on the films or on the radio, remember how I would have adapted it if I were still alive to do it.

"You live faster to-day than we did in Elizabethan times. Our blank verse and our full, lusty, rounded words and periods don't catch your ears as they did ours. You go to the

THE theory that, through being treated with pedantic respect, Shakespeare has lost the affection that is his due from the people is put forward in this article by "Emile." He sees a hopeful sign in the modern dressing for radio of "The Merchant of Venice," the latest Shakespearean production of the NBS, which is due for early release at the National stations.

quick of the business with sharper, deeper cuts of the pen.

"Very well, then. Adapt my work, speed it up and cut it down. You will find it can stand the operation. You will find it is so shrewd and so brilliant and so fundamentally sound in con-

struction that it will stand any test. Isn't it the best in the world?"

Radio Preview

THIS is why I am sure Shakespeare would have been so pleased with the NBS production of "The Merchant of Venice," if he had heard it, as I did, in a radio preview last week.

The play that takes over three hours on the stage has been shorn to a performance of just over the hour. The blank verse that usually beats relentlessly against the ear has been spoken in a way that gives the words freshness and charm and the ring of the twentieth century.

And the plot has a pace that stirs the blood and speeds on its way to a climax that comes with all the impact of a first-class thriller.

Considered purely as a thriller, Edgar Wallace couldn't have bettered this version of "The Merchant of Venice."

THE cast for the production was something new for New Zealand. For the first time in radio, players were drawn from the Auckland, Canterbury, Otago and Taranaki as well as Wellington, provinces.

They came to Wellington over the Easter vacation for a fortnight to make "The Merchant of Venice," Galsworthy's "Strife," and Edmund Barclay's "Mingled Yarn" and "Shanghai," a radio serial of the China Seas.

WITH this cast one would expect something good. It was good. From the first scene, sharp, clear and explanatory, until the tension of the last scene in the court room, when Antonio is saved from death and Shylock is defeated and humiliated, every word is audible. The play has a flow, natural and easy.

There is a small scene between Portia and Nerissa that is charming. It is lit with soft laughter and it sparkles with wit. The lines, shorn of Shakespeare's wonderful verbiage, stand out sharp and clear:

Nerissa: How like you the young German?

Portia: Very vilely in the (Continued on page 41.)



THE AUTHOR

... At the microphone.