

Arms and the Man—An Explanatory Note.

Compiled by

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George Bernard Shaw was an Irish playwright, critic and political activist. Born in 1856, Shaw moved to London in 1876 and struggled to establish himself as a literary person. By mid 1880s he had become a notable theatre person and music critic. Following a political awakening, Shaw joined the Fabian Society and became its most prominent pamphleteer. However his first public success came with *Arms and the Man* in 1894. Influenced by Henrik Ibsen, Shaw sought to introduce a new realism into English language drama, using his plays as vehicles to disseminate his political, social and religious ideas. He wrote more than sixty on various subjects and in 1925 was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature.

Arms and the Man- Plot Overview.

The play is divided into three acts. Act I begins in the bedroom of Raina Petkoff in a Bulgarian town in 1885, during the Serbo-Bulgarian War. As the play opens, Catherine Petkoff and her daughter, Raina, have just heard that the Bulgarians have scored a tremendous victory in a cavalry charge led by Raina's fiancé, Major Sergius Saranoff, who is in the same regiment as Raina's father, Major Paul Petkoff. Raina is so impressed with the noble deeds of her fiancé that she fears that she might never be able to live up to his nobility. At this very moment, the maid, Louka, rushes in with the news that the Serbs are being chased through the streets and that it is necessary to lock up the house and all of the windows. Raina promises to do so later and Louka leaves. But as Raina is reading in bed, shots are heard, there is a noise at the balcony window, and a bedraggled enemy soldier with a gun appears and threatens to kill her if she makes a sound. After the soldier and Raina exchange some words, Louka calls from outside the door; she says that several soldiers want to search the house and investigate a report that an enemy Serbian soldier was seen climbing her balcony. When Raina hears the news, she turns to the soldier. He says that he is prepared to die, but he certainly plans to kill a few Bulgarian soldiers in her bedroom before he dies. Thus, Raina impetuously decides to hide him. The soldiers investigate, find no one, and leave. Raina then calls the man out from hiding; she nervously and absentmindedly sits on his gun, but she learns that it is not loaded; the soldier carries no cartridges. He explains that instead of carrying bullets, he always carries chocolates into battle. Furthermore, he is not an