

GLAZIERS' HOUSES
OR
THE SHAVING OF SHAGPAT

I will write him a very taunting letter.—*As You Like it.*

In these latter days, when (too often) a newspaper proprietor is like a Buddhist monk, afraid to scratch his head lest he should incommode his vermin, it is indeed a joy for a young and nameless author to be presented with a long sword by a cordial editor, with the injunction: "There, my lad, sweep away, never mind what you hit—I'll stand the racket."

Whoosh! off we go. One, two, three—crash! What's that? "Aere perennius"? Or a perennial ass?

Let us see—a very curious problem.

A problem not to be solved by mere surface scraping. Well then?

A thankless and invidious task it may seem to pierce deeper than the "wolf in Dr. Jaeger's clothing" of our wittiest woman and most alluring *morphinomane*. That task is ours. For last night in the visions of mine head upon my bed I beheld, strangely interwoven with this striking picture, the scene between Little Red Riding Hood and her sick grandmother—how perverted! For in my dream it seemed that the old lady had devoured the wolf and that the scourge of the Tories was but a bed-ridden and toothless hag, mumbling the senile curses and jests which she could no longer articulate.

True it is that the Word of Shaw is quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword. Yet the habit of sword-swallowing is probably fatal to the suicidal intentions of a Brutus, and it has certainly grown on him until he can no longer slay either himself or another.

A dweller in the glass houses of Fad, he has thrown stones at the fishy god. A Society Shimei, he has spat against the wind, and his beard is befouled.

True, every thought of Shaw is a great thought; and so equable and far-seeing is the artist, that its contradictory appears with it. His births are all Siamese twins; his god is Janus; his sign is Gemini . . . but his end is (I fear) not to rise above the equilibrium of contraries by a praeter-Hegelian dialectic, but to sink wearily between his two stools, a lamentable loon. . . . This Nulli Secundus, inflated with fermenting Grape-Nuts!

For in all that mass of analysis lucid and terrible I cannot recall a single line of beauty, rarely a note of ecstasy; with one exception (John Tanner), hardly a hero. Even he not a little absurd.

He has seen through the shams of romance, and marriage, and free love, and literary pose, and medical Ju-Ju, and religious rant, and political twaddle, and socialist Buncombe and—every phase of falsehood. . . . But he has hardly grasped that each such falsehood is but a shadow of some sun of truth. He does not perceive the ineffable glory of the Universe in its whole and in each part. He has smitten at the shadow of a shadow: it falls—the world is filth. Let him rather new-edge his sword for a deeper analysis, and cut away the veil from the face of our Mother. 'Sdeath, man, is there nothing we may love?

He is wrong, anyway, to gibe at Scripture. For, like Balaam, I came to curse, and appear to be blessing him! (with scarce a monitory word). And, like Balaam, too, I have been reviewed by G. K. Chesterton.

To pass from this painful subject. . . .

Let me rouse myself to a really resolute effort to denounce Shaw as a niddering. Aha! I have it. The man is a journalist after all. We have to thank him for semi-educating a few of our noodles, for applying the caustic of Ibsen (right) and Wagner (wrong—the book's drivel) to that most indolent of ulcers, the British Public, but for nothing more. His own work, bar "Man and Overman" (why the hybrid Superman?), is a glib sham. If it proves anything, it proves nothing.

But are we to writhe in the ecstasies of Pyrrhonism? For this prophet claims to be Zoroaster.

Can we be sure even of that? He has educated the British goat to caper to his discordant Pan-pipe, so that without the nuisance of crucifixion he may scourge the money-changes from the temple.

Yet is this true cynicism? Doth he delight, the surly Diogenes, in his solitary gambols—that insult both Lydia and Lalage? Or is he doing it to tempt them—to coquette with them? Is he a man deadly serious in positive constructive aim, yet so sensitive to ridicule that he will always seek to turn it off as a jest—and so a stultifier of himself? A Christ crucified, not upon Calvary, but upon Venusberg, and so no redeemer?

If so, ave atque vale, George Bernard Shaw, for a redeemer from the Overmen we want, and we will have; another we will not have. Rather than your mock-crucified castrato-devilry, Barabbas!

But if it be your serious livelong purpose to slay all ideas by ridicule. . . . then we must claim you as an adept, one fit for the scourge and the buffets, for the gives and the slaver of the lick-spittle English, whose only notion of a jest is a smutty story.

There is room for another hand at my bench.

See! if thou be indeed Achilles, why should we be in doubt? The gilded arms of Pandarus—the speech of Thersites. Sir, these things trouble us!

Thou seest it! If thou art journalist, the very journalists may rise from their slime, bubbling with foul breath, and suck thee down to their mother ooze unspeakable; but if not, then I too (no journalist, God knows!) must praise thee.

Thee—not thy work. For the manner thereof is wholly abominable. What have all we done, that for Pegasus we have this spavined and hamstrung Rosinante, for Bucephalus this hydrocephalic hydropath?

Even as god Gilbert begat the devil-brood musical comedy, so hast thou begotten the tedious stage-sermons to which our priest-loving, sin-conscious slaves now flock. Refinement of cruelty! Thou hast replaced the Trappist cell by the Court Theatre!

For this, I, who prefer the study to the theatre, forgive thee; for I love not the badger-reek of Suburbia and Bohemia in my nostrils. But for this also I praise thee, that lion-like thou turnest at last upon the jackal-crowd at thy heels. That ungainly dragon, the Chesterbelloc, hast thou ridden against, good St. George Bernard Shaw! With a spear thou hast pierced its side, and there floweth forth beer and water.

Turn also, gramercy, upon the others, even unto the lowest. As Ibsen hawked at carrion birds with a Wild Duck, so do thou create some harpy to torment them. Who is this that followeth thee? Behold this mumbler born to butcher the English language, and educated to hack it with a saw! This stuttering babler, this Harpocrates by the compulsion of a Sloane Square Mammurra! Who is this hanger-on to the bedraggled petticoats of thy lousy Thalia—this beardless, witless filcher of thy fallen crab-apples? This housemaid of the Court theatre, the Gittite slut whose bleary eyes weep sexless crocodile tears over the crassness of the daughters of the Philistines?

Arise, and speak to this palsied megalomaniac, this frowsy Moll Flanders of a degenerated Chelsea, this down-at-heel *flâneur* on the outer boulevards of a prostituted literature, this little mongrel dog that fawneth upon the ill-cut trousers of thee, O St. Pancras Pulchinello—this little red-coated person that doth mouth and dance upon the kakophonous barrel-organ of New thought fakirs and Modernity mountebanks.

Speak to this parasite—itself unspeakably verminous—of the long-haired brigade, who has “got on” for that it had neither sufficient talent to excite envy, nor manhood enough to excite apprehension, but wit well to comprehend the sycophancy of the self-styled court and the tittle-tattle of the servants’ hall.

It is an Editor—dear Lord my God! it is an Editor; but he who employs it has an equally indefeasible title to employ the pronoun “We.”

It hat never had aught to say; but, then, how affectedly it hath said it! . . .

Will not the late *New Quarterly* take note of this?

O these barbers, with their prattle, and their false expedients—and scarce even a safety razor among them!

For let each one who worships George Bernard Shaw, while ignorant of that magnificent foundation of literature and philosophy—the Cubical Stone of the Wise, on which a greater than Auguste Rodin hath erected the indomitable figure of Le Penseur—take these remarks individually to himself, and—oh! Thinker, think again. Let not posterity consider of this statue that its summit is no Overman, but a gibbering ape! Not filth, not sorrow, not laughter of the mocker is this universe; but laughter of a young god, a holy and beautiful god, a god of love and light.

And thou, since thou hast the ear of the British ass at thy lips, sing to it those starry songs. It can but bray. . . .

But why, as hitherto, shouldst thou bray also? Or if bray thou must, let us have the virile and portentous bray of the Ass of Apuleius, not (as hitherto) the plaintive bray of the proverbial ass who hesitated so long between the two thistles that he starved to death. I warn thee, ass! We who are gods have laughed with thee these many years; beware lest in the end we laugh at thee with the laughter of a mandrake torn up, whereat thou shouldst fall dead.

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