

for my own personal credit. I accuse them of hatred, malice, and uncharitableness against a vanquished foe whose dirty fighters were no dirtier than those on our side, and whose gallant fighters were as gallant as any of ours. I am not ashamed of our having fought Germany; but I am very much ashamed of our being afraid to fight her again to-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow, to the last syllable of recorded time if necessary. I have an enormous contempt for the terrified wretches who want to kill everyone else (when they get them down) in order that they may live in security ever after. Security is a coward's dream: the brave Briton is he who believes he can always give the German or any other mortal man as good as he brings, any day of the week. As between the nation which says 'Live dangerously' and the nation which says 'If we do not starve, maim, and utterly disable these dreadful Germans forever and ever and ever, we shall all be murdered in our beds,' I back the dangerous livers, though neither of them have had sense enough to get to the bottom of the matter.

I have no space for more defiance. I cannot pull Mr. Blatchford's nose or shout 'Yah!' after Mr. Chesterton in the street; but I hope what I have said is sufficient to establish the fact that I have thrown my glove down to both of them, and that unless they pick it up I shall claim a verdict by default.

The New Witness

## II. *Mr. Shaw and the Danger of Living*

BY G. K. CHESTERTON

IN returning to one of the happy sports of boyhood, replying to Mr. Bernard Shaw, it is right to reply first on the point that he puts first. He

VOL. 15-NO. 738

will find that reply among the comments of the week.

But what is the use, I sometimes wonder, of all this detailed refutation, when I know quite well what is the matter with Mr. Shaw. He is simply irritated at the wrong people being right. And, at the very start, I refuse to allow that undoubtedly irritating fact to irritate me into being wrong. He sees that vulgar and vicious capitalist papers and politicians talk vulgar and vicious nonsense when they happen to be on the right side, as they do when they are more frequently on the wrong side. I should not dream of denying that much of what is said against Germany, in the form in which it is said, is enough to make any sensible man sick. But it ought not to make a sensible man silly. It ought not to make him say that the quantity and quality of dirty fighting was the same on both sides; in the face of towering human testimony and experience; because the question of proportion is a question of fact. It is like saying that the quantity and quality of dirty clothes is the same in Whitechapel and Mayfair. That is, it tries to ignore the colossal fact of a *contrast*, which millions of witnesses have instantly felt as a contrast; and which cannot be reversed by saying that *some* people even in Mayfair have dirty clothes. I know that there has been such an impression about German war, as compared with more Christian war; not only in this war, but in twenty other wars. I do not mean merely that they have recorded the crimes, I mean they have recorded the contrast. They have felt the difference as men feel the economic difference between the East End and the West End, whatever incidental poverty there may be in the West End or wealth in the East End. Froissart lived to belaud fighting, but he speaks with quite a special disgust

of German fighting. Sismondi has to wade in gore to glorify the mediæval republics, but he speaks of a prince popular among Germans as found to be a tyrant when transferred 'to a civilized country.' It is a particular historic type of callous soldiering which has startled, not humanitarians, but other callous soldiers. Wellington was hard-headed, if not hard-hearted; Wellington was not trying to 'utterly disable' the Prussians, but to enable them to win; but the Prussians shocked him not by their militarism, but by their Prussianism. Now I decline to allow the reaction from bad journalism to drive me into bad history. Our fashionable press might lie about Germans; as it lies about Bolsheviki, and lied about Boers, and did not prevent Mr. Shaw being against the Boers. But the whole history, literature, and legends of European culture do not lie about Germans. So, in the late war, the first massacres by the Germans gave their first shock to the pro-Germans. A man can no more minimize such an effect than hide an earthquake. It is as if a man should deny that the Black Death was a pestilence, because people died from other causes, or the Reign of Terror a harsh rule, because men did not all die by guillotine. In short, such a man is making a fool of himself before all history; and I decline to be remembered only as having denied the daylight, out of annoyance with the *Daily Mail*.

I will limit myself here to Mr. Shaw's letter; and later give him his belated review of the *Hints for the Peace Conference*, when I have read it. But the chief hint he gives at present to the Peace Conference is that it need not bother so much about Peace, since there is much to be said for living dangerously; and that it will really be a much bolder and stronger settlement if it does not settle. Unfortunately,

to begin with, it is not Mr. Shaw who will live dangerously, nor primarily the English among whom he lives; and least of all, the Americans among whom he has his large circulation. It is people like the Poles and the Belgians who will have to live dangerously, when we have broken our promise to help them to live comparatively safely. In short, what Mr. Shaw is doing, is quite simply, to tell the store-keepers of Syracuse, Neb., how romantic it will be for the shopkeepers of Dinant to know that their shops may be burned down by the barbarians at any minute. I have not the smallest respect for this very vicarious romance of living, either in Mr. Shaw or his American readers. It is plain that any point of honor, about running a wild risk, cannot apply to the rights of other people, and certainly not of other nations. If Mr. Shaw likes to go and live somewhere where savages can plunder and torture him when it takes their fancy, he may obtain the nimbus of a martyr; but the people who have already been plundered and tortured certainly have a right to say whether they wish to be plundered and tortured again, or rather again and again and again, to thrill Mr. Shaw and his Yankees across the sea.

This would be true for anybody, but it is in a particular and pointed sense true for us. England must insist on it, not so much because she is right as because she has been wrong. It was England who guaranteed and supported Germany, with all the solid Victorian sentimentality which was smashed by the invasion of Belgium, but of which Mr. Shaw is still trying to pick up the pieces. It was we who said the Germans could be trusted, and the French who said they could not, and the French, of course, were proved right. I need not write down the names we shall deserve, if we continue to

live dangerously at Adelphi Terrace or Beaconsfield, at the office of the *New Republic*, or the *New Witness*, while the men we have misled or overborne are not so much living dangerously as dying systematically, in those raids on France and Flanders which have been as recurrent as floods. The case is quite as plain as any private story could be. Suppose I have proposed a man for a club and introduce him to a social circle, in spite of Mr. Shaw's warning that the man is given to occasional arson and murder for the sake of insurance. Suppose I get him a lease in Adelphi Terrace and he blows up or burns out his neighbors, so that Mr. Shaw wanders homeless round the hotels (as Thiers did round the courts of Europe); suppose he finally wrecks all the Strand with dynamite, including our office in Essex Street; so that at last I am forced to come round to Mr. Shaw's opinion of him. I might do many things; but there is perhaps one thing that I ought not to do. I ought not to live comfortably down in Beaconsfield and wire to Mr. Shaw to console himself for the continued activities of my friend the anarchist, by noting the glorious colors of the conflagration and the beauty of the bright eyes of danger.

In other words, it is not a question of the destruction or preservation of Germany, but of the restoration of Europe. What we have to do is to prevent something, of which the name is not Germany but barbarism, boiling up again in a new abnormal shape, as it has so often done before. It will not be the last particular shape in any case. To provide for Germany is like planning the future of an imaginary kingdom called Hunland, after the defeat and death of Attila. Germany was only a name given to a tangle of tribes held together by the hope of one great raid on civilization. That raid has

failed; and *that* explains, what Mr. Shaw cannot explain, both their wildness in war and their comparative mildness in peace. During the crime they behaved with the brutality of criminals, and after the capture with the equanimity of convicts. In that sense I have far more sympathy with the Germans than Mr. Shaw has; it is the very genuine sympathy I have always had with burglars. But Mr. Shaw's prediction is falsified, and Mr. Shaw's theory is thrown all out, by the fact that the conquered German does not say 'Death rather than slavery,' but something more like 'It's a fair cop, guvner.' But our business is not either to break or mend Germany; it is to mend the much more valuable things that Germany has broken. Poland must be made again the great power in the East; the Latin civilization must be restored to its leadership; the citizen must set the standard instead of the savage making the pace. Now in order to do this, as it will probably be necessary to show in detail when I deal with Mr. Shaw's book, it is necessary to do certain definite things which the Germans do regard, or profess to regard, as hostile and oppressive. You cannot create Poland without destroying Prussia; for Prussia never was anything but a heap of spoils. You cannot secure France without affecting some German-speaking people; and the other cases are the same. But we English owe a primary debt to people like the Poles and the French because we were wrong when they were right; and we gave a passport to the robber who ruined them. I am certain that if Mr. Shaw could see this fact simply and solidly as it is, he could not doubt for an instant where our first duty lies. The truth is that he has been so steeped in the English Victorian prejudice, that he cannot even now bring himself to believe that

the Victorians were so wrong as they were. Under these circumstances it is utterly useless for him to try to fix on me charges of Jingoism or insular insolence. I am, I hope, a patriot, and I am glad his very attempts to parallel German oppressions with English ones in Germany just now merely repeat the enormity of the old contrast. But I am no more of a Jingo than Mr. Shaw; and far less of an Imperialist. I have denounced every British oppression he had denounced. I have denounced some that he has defended. I have urged much more than Mr. Shaw's own case, for Mr. Shaw's own country. But though I believe in patriotism for England and Ireland, I am not speaking here as a patriot; but in the only intelligent sense, as an internationalist. And it is quite useless to represent me as talking like a stupid Englishman, because I am talking like an intelligent European.

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### 'HAMLET' IN BAGHDAD

ON the evening of February 12, 1919, there was performed at the Central Theatre, Baghdad, a play called *Khun-i-Nahag*, and I read in the Baghdad *Times* of the following day that 'owing to the unprecedented demand for tickets' another performance would be given in a few days' time. The play was the Urdu version of *Hamlet*, acted by Indians. The actors were obviously under the impression that Shakespeare miscalled the play 'tragedy,' and they acted accordingly. Some thousands of Indians were present, sitting entranced in the cold night air, and apparently found the entertainment highly satisfactory.

We arrived just after the curtain had been raised, making our way over the stage to the seats in front, and at

once realized that we had come under a total misapprehension as to the nature of the performance. Against a bright background of English country scenery in springtime there were placed a number of Victorian chairs and a sofa of the same period. On the sofa a gentleman of villainous appearance reclined, clothed in a long red dressing gown with a Christmas-cracker crown on his head. At his feet sat a lady of uncertain age in emerald green. As she was employed in the curious pursuit of singing an Oriental song in a loud, grating voice, punctuating the stanzas by pushing the gentleman in the ribs, and as also the latter appeared supremely unconscious of her playful little performance, we were led to believe that he slept. I asked the attendant who showed us to our seats whether *Hamlet* was to be performed that night, and if so; when it was to begin. He replied, rather hurt, 'This is *Hamlet*, sir!' and then, seeing me unconvinced, added condescendingly, 'The Indian version, of course.' I apologized, displayed keen interest, asked for the names of the lady in green and the gentleman in red — which he did not know — and applied myself to the plot.

The song continued, accompanied by an inhuman excess of rib-prodding. It now appeared either that the gentleman's ribs were padded or that they were not made after the usual pattern or that he was dead: mere sleep could not have withstood the lady's importunity. I decided in favor of death. At length the lady stood up, advanced toward the footlights, and cracked a few jokes. She was ultimately joined by another gentleman, attired in the uniform of a Rear Admiral, who made it plain that he was not there for the mere fun of the thing, by retiring up-stage, backwards, in a series of spiral movements, probably