

Hague. One of his pleasantest recollections was that of meeting Chancellor Schober. 'What a hard time he had there! I got to know him well. An able and extraordinary man, with energy, repose, and, what is best of all, humor. That quality is valuable even at the most tragic moments and is especially useful to the politician and statesman. We often noticed that trait in your Chancellor during the great struggles he had to put up at the Hague.'

When I left the wonderfully hospitable country of England I knew that Austria has awakened extraordinary sympathy in both Conservatives and Laborites, and I believe that there was a significance in the King's gesture when he chose an Austrian play as the first work in German to attend since the end of the War.

One of Bernard Shaw's most persistent and friendly adversaries takes his last play as a text for a witty sermon on our times. The essay might well have been entitled, '*The Apple Cart—Upset.*'

Keeping up with Mr. Shaw

By G. K. CHESTERTON

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AS ONE WHO HAS HAD the honor of conducting a continuous controversy with Mr. Bernard Shaw about everything in earth or heaven, ever since the time of the Boer War, I should like to be allowed to tell him that I think I did see the point of the admirable play called *The Apple Cart*—or rather, several points most of the critics have strangely failed to see. I should also like to say that, allowing for the very comparative truth in all such comparisons, I think *The Apple Cart* about the best play he ever wrote.

To take the most trivial matter first, the veteran dramatist is the only dramatist who seems to have any notion of what is really happening in the world to-day. He has really heard the news of the day; which is much too new to appear in the newspapers. That is why he was accused of senility and fossilized reaction by Mr. Hannen Swaffer, whose onward march of progress seems to have stopped somewhere about the time of the execution of Charles the First. Mr. Swaffer evidently does not know that monarchy is now the mood of the hour everywhere, whether rightly or wrongly; and that popular government is actually less popular than it deserves. I should have every sympathy with Mr. Swaffer if he stood up as a Democrat with the outlook of a Diehard. I have never been able to understand why this last nickname is always used as a sneer, when it seems rather too heroic a compliment. If an old radical like myself refused to support those who would die in the last ditch for the mere privilege of landlords or capitalists, it was because of what he thought about the dirtiness of the ditch, not about the doggedness of the dying. And if any other old radical would own himself old, and even old-fashioned, and die in the radical ditch waving a ragged old red flag, I should feel the warmest regard for him; I am not sure that I should not subside into the ditch beside him. But when he has the impudence to accuse a great man of over seventy of being blind with age because the older man can still see to read the proclamations of Mussolini, while the younger is still reading the earlier works of Mazzini, I think it is only fair to insist that it is obviously the younger man who is dated and the older who is up-to-date.

I SAY this is the most trivial aspect; and I am well aware that it has already worked to the disadvantage of Bernard Shaw's plays, which sometimes seem dated because they were so much up-to-date. A play like *The Philanderer* contains admirable dialogue; but the atmosphere of the Ibsen Club seems stale, precisely because the boast is not so much that Ibsen is a great topic as that Ibsen is a new topic. In that sense it is always a weakness to boast of being abreast of the times, like Mr. Shaw; but it is worse weakness to boast of being abreast of the times when you are actually behind the times, like Mr. Swaffer. The weakness is in the boasting, and in being primarily concerned about times at all. If Mr. Shaw lives for three hundred years, after the order of Methuselah (as I hope he will), the play of *The Apple Cart* may be as much behind the times as the play of *The Philanderer*. But *Everyman* and *Samson Agonistes* will not be behind the times, but rather beyond time. Anyhow, *The Apple Cart* is not behind the times now, as are nearly all its critics. And there are several examples of this even more amusing, I think, than the case of the modern reaction to monarchy.

Thus Mr. Shaw mentions one point which I particularly noticed and enjoyed; though many critics, it seems, never noticed it at all. I mean the fact that the Prime Minister's rages, which are so ridiculous considered as rages, are perfectly intelligent and calculated considered as tricks. That is a vital fact of modern government; and nobody has noted it in a play before. The new cunning consists not in hiding the emotions, but in showing the sham emotions. Familiarity is the instrument of falsity; we are no longer deceived by distance or disguise or mystery, but stifled in an embrace and swindled in a heart-to-heart talk. We used to complain that rulers were revered as if they were more than human. Our complaint may have been right, but we had not foreseen the filthy and ghastly results of being ruled by those who claim to be human, all too human. We rebelled, and perhaps rightly, when a king was made stiff with gold and gems like an idol, and set on a throne as if it were an altar. We are often tempted to-day to wish that the new ruler had the good manners of a stone image. We wish he were as well-behaved as a wooden idol or even a wooden-headed king. The king in Mr. Shaw's play is far from wooden-headed; but part of our sympathy with him comes from the vivid vulgarity of the other method, as used by Proteus, who will stoop to pretend weakness in order to preserve power. Politics have never been so frank or so false; we have never before heard so much about the politician's pet dog and so little about his party fund. Thus the monopolist newspapers, all ruled strictly and secretly by the caprice of one or two millionaires, appear to the public eye as one vast sea of slush and sob-stuff, of people weeping over what they never suffered or confessing what they never did. Emotional expediency, the method of Mr. Proteus, is now familiar to many people, but not to many dramatists or dramatic critics.

BUT my real reason for submitting this comment on Mr. Shaw's communication is concerned with a third example, in which he is especially abreast of the crisis and ahead of the critics. Hardly anybody has really understood the point about 'Breakages, Ltd.,' because nearly everybody is about six stages behind in the actual development of individualism into industrialism. Mr. Shaw is exactly on the very last lap or turn of intelligent criticism. First, of course, there was the time when capitalism boasted of competition, and dreaded a trust as much as a trade union. The hard-headed Manchester man of this period still lingers on the stage, along with the comic curate and the French maid. Then came the time when capitalism crushed competition; for it was capitalism, and not Socialism, that crushed it. Those who had denounced trusts were told to defend trusts; and they did so, hurriedly explaining that monopoly is the same as efficiency, that amalgamation is the fashion and

must be followed, and that the individual trader is a relic of the past. So we let ourselves be completely conquered by trusts; an appropriate title, for it was a touching manifestation of trust.

When trusts were finally established, they began, for the first time, to be seriously considered. And then the fun began. It is as yet only fun for a few; but among the few are Mr. Shaw and, if I may say so, myself. To some of us at least it is more and more obvious that there is not a word of truth in the eulogy on the capitalist trust, even in the muddy, materialistic eulogy that its flatterers give it. It has not only destroyed the virtues it despises, such as independence, individuality, and liberty, it has also destroyed the very virtues that it claims—efficiency and modernity and practical progress. Big business is not businesslike, it is not enterprising, it is not favorable to science and invention. By the very nature of its monopoly of machinery and mass production it works entirely the other way. Millions are sunk in plants that cannot be changed or brought up to date. Machinery is made so that it must be used, even when it is useless. Things are made badly so that they must be mended. Things are even made badly so that they may be mended badly, and, therefore, mended again. Under the beneficent influence of the merger, we are actually ruled by inefficiency; not by individual or accidental inefficiency, but by sustained and systematic inefficiency; by the principle of inefficiency; by the sacred rule and religion of inefficiency. In other words, as the dramatist notes, we are ruled by Breakages, Ltd.

Lastly, few seem to have realized that the play is a tragedy, that it does not turn on the comedy of the conversation between the American ambassador and the King, but on the tragedy of the absence of any conversation between the American ambassador and the Cabinet. Compared with the Cabinet squabbles, the visit of the American ambassador to the English court is like the visit of a vast comet to the earth. And it is implied that the Cabinet is quite capable of continuing to squabble, even if a comet did visit the earth. Those who worship the colossal, whether in comets or commerce, might possibly even rejoice that England was merged in America, or rejoice (for all I know) that the earth was merged in the senseless star dust of a larger luminary. But men of imagination never worship the colossal. King Magnus is made a man of imagination; he is made a subtle and attractive personality; he is made sympathetic, in fact, for the very simple reason that he is the hero of a tragedy. There is exactly the same type of attractiveness deliberately attributed to Hamlet or to Othello. For great tragedy is only great when it describes loss so as to increase value, and not to decrease it.

LETTERS AND THE ARTS

BARRIE AT SEVENTY

PRESIDING over a dinner given on his seventieth birthday for the benefit of the Royal Literary Fund, Sir James Barrie made a characteristic speech devoted to four of God's most important creations: women, children, fairies, and himself. Unlike most imaginative writers, the author of *Peter Pan* does not have to contend with the problem of creating and controlling characters, for they have the cutest way of leaping spontaneously into being, refusing to submit to his wishes and even—hey, presto—popping right into his after-dinner speeches:—

‘The characters we think we create—that must be the most comic word in an author's vocabulary. Heroines are the worst—patient and pleasant until they get into your books, and then you are a lucky author if you know them by sight a week after. You may have taken the greatest care and pains with a woman and then you find her being quite civil to her father. It is so dampening. You want her to be a real woman.

‘In my notebooks all my women are real women so long as they are just in the notebooks—tremendously determined to tell everything about themselves, to inquire into themselves, to cut themselves open. It would scarify you if you knew the things I intended my heroines to say. But they utterly turn away from me and remain that ghastly word, respectable.’

The labors of the creative mind need no longer mystify us, for we now possess this precious confession from Sir James himself, describing how he returned to the same Bloomsbury lodgings where his earlier masterpieces came into being:—

‘I found even my old table there and the hole my foot had made in the mat. There I sat down in the old, joyous way to fight it out again with the stars. I think the days and nights that followed were

about the happiest in my life, unless I except the days and nights I had spent long ago in the same place. You know what the feeling is. The little room as night advances gets smaller and more kindly. The inkpot hopes to goodness it won't give out, the candle and the lamp come closer to serve your poor eyes. All of them are on your side, peeping, whispering. You have done it this time. Listen to the nightingale. They are ready to drop, next morning, a lodging-house tear when it turns out to be only a sparrow.

‘My subject, you cannot think how sordid it was. The best of all stories used to end in dots, not merely dots here and there but a whole row at the end. They never will let me have dots. And then one night—I don't know if I can go on with this—I heard a female voice, a cooing voice, and then I saw her, and I said, with a sinking, “Who are you?” and she replied, “I am our seventieth mistake.” I think she was a little sorry for me, for she said, “It is no use your trying to get rid of me, for I am inside you.” I clutched my manuscript and cried, “At any rate it is going to end with dots,” and she said, “Yes, darling, dots.”’

Which, we reflected, was about enough Barrie for one issue. But seventy is a garrulous age and no sooner had Sir James made this speech than he hied him back to receive the freedom of his native town of Kirriemuir and to make another oration, this time in praise of a cricket pavilion that he was helping to dedicate. He spoke with real feeling—not with trumped-up literary emotionalism—about his youthful memories and described a walk that he took two years ago with a boyhood friend, James Robb:—

‘I want to tell you about a very happy affair that is closely connected with this pavilion. Robb and I used to play together “till mysterious night fell,” and then the one would accompany the other