

## **The Dramatist**

No one who was alive at the time and interested in such matters will ever forget the first acting of *Arms and the Man*. It was applauded by that indescribable element in all of us which rejoices to see the genuine thing prevail against the plausible; that element which rejoices that even its enemies are alive. Apart from the problems raised in the play, the very form of it was an attractive and forcible innovation. Classic plays which were wholly heroic, comic plays which were wholly and even heartlessly ironical, were common enough. Commonest of all in this particular time was the play that began playfully, with plenty of comic business, and was gradually sobered by sentiment until it ended on a note of romance or even of pathos. A commonplace little officer, the butt of the mess, becomes by the last act as high and hopeless a lover as Dante. Or a vulgar and violent pork-butcher remembers his own youth before the curtain goes down. The first thing that Bernard Shaw did when he stepped before the footlights was to reverse this process. He resolved to build a play not on pathos, but on bathos. The officer should be heroic first and then everyone should laugh at him; the curtain should go up on a man remembering his youth, and he should only reveal himself as a violent pork-butcher when someone interrupted him with an order for pork. This merely technical originality is indicated in the very title of the play. The *Arma Virumque* of Virgil is a mounting and ascending phrase, the man is more than his weapons. The Latin line suggests a superb procession which should bring on to the stage the brazen and resounding armour, the shield and shattering axe, but end with the hero himself, taller and more terrible because unarmed. The technical effect of Shaw's scheme is like the same scene, in which a crowd should carry even more gigantic shapes of shield and helmet, but when the horns and howls were at their highest, should end with the figure of Little Tich. The name itself is meant to be a bathos; arms--and the man.

It is well to begin with the superficial; and this is the superficial effectiveness of Shaw; the brilliancy of bathos. But of course the vitality and value of his plays does not lie merely in this; any more than the value of Swinburne lies in alliteration or the value of Hood in puns. This is not his message; but it is his method; it is his style. The first taste we had of it was in this play of *Arms and the Man*; but even at the very first it was evident that there was much more in the play than that. Among other things there was one thing not unimportant; there was savage sincerity. Indeed, only a ferociously sincere person can produce such effective flippancies on a matter like war; just as only a strong man could juggle with cannon balls. It is all

very well to use the word "fool" as synonymous with "jester"; but daily experience shows that it is generally the solemn and silent man who is the fool. It is all very well to accuse Mr. Shaw of standing on his head; but if you stand on your head you must have a hard and solid head to stand on. In *Arms and the Man* the bathos of form was strictly the incarnation of a strong satire in the idea. The play opens in an atmosphere of military melodrama; the dashing officer of cavalry going off to death in an attitude, the lovely heroine left in tearful rapture; the brass band, the noise of guns and the red fire. Into all this enters Bluntschli, the little sturdy crop-haired Swiss professional soldier, a man without a country but with a trade. He tells the army-adoring heroine frankly that she is a humbug; and she, after a moment's reflection, appears to agree with him. The play is like nearly all Shaw's plays, the dialogue of a conversion. By the end of it the young lady has lost all her military illusions and admires this mercenary soldier not because he faces guns, but because he faces facts.

This was a fitting entrance for Shaw to his didactic drama; because the commonplace courage which he respects in Bluntschli was the one virtue which he was destined to praise throughout. We can best see how the play symbolises and summarises Bernard Shaw if we compare it with some other attack by modern humanitarians upon war. Shaw has many of the actual opinions of Tolstoy. Like Tolstoy he tells men, with coarse innocence, that romantic war is only butchery and that romantic love is only lust. But Tolstoy objects to these things because they are real; he really wishes to abolish them. Shaw only objects to them in so far as they are ideal; that is in so far as they are idealised. Shaw objects not so much to war as to the attractiveness of war. He does not so much dislike love as the love of love. Before the temple of Mars, Tolstoy stands and thunders, "There shall be no wars"; Bernard Shaw merely murmurs, "Wars if you must; but for God's sake, not war songs." Before the temple of Venus, Tolstoy cries terribly, "Come out of it!"; Shaw is quite content to say, "Do not be taken in by it." Tolstoy seems really to propose that high passion and patriotic valour should be destroyed. Shaw is more moderate; and only asks that they should be desecrated. Upon this note, both about sex and conflict, he was destined to dwell through much of his work with the most wonderful variations of witty adventure and intellectual surprise. It may be doubted perhaps whether this realism in love and war is quite so sensible as it looks. *Securus judicat orbis terrarum*; the world is wiser than the moderns. The world has kept sentimentalities simply because they are the most practical things in the world. They alone make men do things. The world does not encourage a quite rational lover, simply because a perfectly rational lover would never get married. The world does not encourage a perfectly rational army, because a perfectly rational army would run away.

The brain of Bernard Shaw was like a wedge in the literal sense. Its sharpest end was always in front; and it split our society from end to end the moment it had entrance at all. As I have said he was long unheard of; but he had not the tragedy of many authors, who were heard of long before they were heard. When you had read any Shaw you read all Shaw. When you had seen one of his plays you waited for more. And when he brought them out in volume form, you did what is repugnant to any literary man--you bought a book.

The dramatic volume with which Shaw dazzled the public was called, Plays, Pleasant and Unpleasant. I think the most striking and typical thing about it was that he did not know very clearly which plays were unpleasant and which were pleasant. "Pleasant" is a word which is almost unmeaning to Bernard Shaw. Except, as I suppose, in music (where I cannot follow him), relish and receptivity are things that simply do not appear. He has the best of tongues and the worst of palates. With the possible exception of Mrs. Warren's Profession (which was at least unpleasant in the sense of being forbidden) I can see no particular reason why any of the seven plays should be held specially to please or displease. First in fame and contemporary importance came the reprint of Arms and the Man, of which I have already spoken. Over all the rest towered unquestionably the two figures of Mrs. Warren and of Candida. They were neither of them pleasant, except as all good art is pleasant. They were neither of them really unpleasant except as all truth is unpleasant. But they did represent the author's normal preference and his principal fear; and those two sculptured giantesses largely upheld his fame.

I fancy that the author rather dislikes Candida because it is so generally liked. I give my own feeling for what it is worth (a foolish phrase), but I think that there were only two moments when this powerful writer was truly, in the ancient and popular sense, inspired; that is, breathing from a bigger self and telling more truth than he knew. One is that scene in a later play where after the secrets and revenges of Egypt have rioted and rotted all round him, the colossal sanity of Cæsar is suddenly acclaimed with swords. The other is that great last scene in Candida where the wife, stung into final speech, declared her purpose of remaining with the strong man because he is the weak man. The wife is asked to decide between two men, one a strenuous self-confident popular preacher, her husband, the other a wild and weak young poet, logically futile and physically timid, her lover; and she chooses the former because he has more weakness and more need of her. Even among the plain and ringing paradoxes of the Shaw play this is one of the best reversals or turnovers ever effected. A paradoxical writer like Bernard Shaw is perpetually and tiresomely told that he stands on his head. But all

romance and all religion consist in making the whole universe stand on its head. That reversal is the whole idea of virtue; that the last shall be first and the first last. Considered as a pure piece of Shaw therefore, the thing is of the best. But it is also something much better than Shaw. The writer touches certain realities commonly outside his scope; especially the reality of the normal wife's attitude to the normal husband, an attitude which is not romantic but which is yet quite quixotic; which is insanely unselfish and yet quite cynically clear-sighted. It involves human sacrifice without in the least involving idolatry.

The truth is that in this place Bernard Shaw comes within an inch of expressing something that is not properly expressed anywhere else; the idea of marriage. Marriage is not a mere chain upon love as the anarchists say; nor is it a mere crown upon love as the sentimentalists say. Marriage is a fact, an actual human relation like that of motherhood which has certain human habits and loyalties, except in a few monstrous cases where it is turned to torture by special insanity and sin. A marriage is neither an ecstasy nor a slavery; it is a commonwealth; it is a separate working and fighting thing like a nation. Kings and diplomatists talk of "forming alliances" when they make weddings; but indeed every wedding is primarily an alliance. The family is a fact even when it is not an agreeable fact, and a man is part of his wife even when he wishes he wasn't. The twain are one flesh--yes, even when they are not one spirit. Man is duplex. Man is a quadruped.

Of this ancient and essential relation there are certain emotional results, which are subtle, like all the growths of nature. And one of them is the attitude of the wife to the husband, whom she regards at once as the strongest and most helpless of human figures. She regards him in some strange fashion at once as a warrior who must make his way and as an infant who is sure to lose his way. The man has emotions which exactly correspond; sometimes looking down at his wife and sometimes up at her; for marriage is like a splendid game of see-saw. Whatever else it is, it is not comradeship. This living, ancestral bond (not of love or fear, but strictly of marriage) has been twice expressed splendidly in literature. The man's incurable sense of the mother in his lawful wife was uttered by Browning in one of his two or three truly shattering lines of genius, when he makes the execrable Guido fall back finally upon the fact of marriage and the wife whom he has trodden like mire:

"Christ! Maria! God, Pompilia, will you let them murder me?"

And the woman's witness to the same fact has been best expressed by

Bernard Shaw in this great scene where she remains with the great stalwart successful public man because he is really too little to run alone.

There are one or two errors in the play; and they are all due to the primary error of despising the mental attitude of romance, which is the only key to real human conduct. For instance, the love making of the young poet is all wrong. He is supposed to be a romantic and amorous boy; and therefore the dramatist tries to make him talk turgidly, about seeking for "an archangel with purple wings" who shall be worthy of his lady. But a lad in love would never talk in this mock heroic style; there is no period at which the young male is more sensitive and serious and afraid of looking a fool. This is a blunder; but there is another much bigger and blacker. It is completely and disastrously false to the whole nature of falling in love to make the young Eugene complain of the cruelty which makes Candida defile her fair hands with domestic duties. No boy in love with a beautiful woman would ever feel disgusted when she peeled potatoes or trimmed lamps. He would like her to be domestic. He would simply feel that the potatoes had become poetical and the lamps gained an extra light. This may be irrational; but we are not talking of rationality, but of the psychology of first love. It may be very unfair to women that the toil and triviality of potato peeling should be seen through a glamour of romance; but the glamour is quite as certain a fact as the potatoes. It may be a bad thing in sociology that men should deify domesticity in girls as something dainty and magical; but all men do. Personally I do not think it a bad thing at all; but that is another argument. The argument here is that Bernard Shaw, in aiming at mere realism, makes a big mistake in reality. Misled by his great heresy of looking at emotions from the outside, he makes Eugene a cold-blooded prig at the very moment when he is trying, for his own dramatic purposes, to make him a hot-blooded lover. He makes the young lover an idealistic theoriser about the very things about which he really would have been a sort of mystical materialist. Here the romantic Irishman is much more right than the very rational one; and there is far more truth to life as it is in Lover's couplet--

"And envied the chicken      That Peggy was pickin'."

than in Eugene's solemn, æsthetic protest against the potato-skins and the lamp-oil. For dramatic purposes, G. B. S., even if he despises romance, ought to comprehend it. But then, if once he comprehended romance, he would not despise it.

The series contained, besides its more substantial work, tragic and comic, a comparative frivolity called *The Man of Destiny*. It is a little comedy about Napoleon, and is chiefly interesting as a foreshadowing of his after sketches

of heroes and strong men; it is a kind of parody of Cæsar and Cleopatra before it was written. In this connection the mere title of this Napoleonic play is of interest. All Shaw's generation and school of thought remembered Napoleon only by his late and corrupt title of "The Man of Destiny," a title only given to him when he was already fat and tired and destined to exile. They forgot that through all the really thrilling and creative part of his career he was not the man of destiny, but the man who defied destiny. Shaw's sketch is extraordinarily clever; but it is tinged with this unmilitary notion of an inevitable conquest; and this we must remember when we come to those larger canvases on which he painted his more serious heroes. As for the play, it is packed with good things, of which the last is perhaps the best. The long duologue between Bonaparte and the Irish lady ends with the General declaring that he will only be beaten when he meets an English army under an Irish general. It has always been one of Shaw's paradoxes that the English mind has the force to fulfil orders, while the Irish mind has the intelligence to give them, and it is among those of his paradoxes which contain a certain truth.

A far more important play is *The Philanderer*, an ironic comedy which is full of fine strokes and real satire; it is more especially the vehicle of some of Shaw's best satire upon physical science. Nothing could be cleverer than the picture of the young, strenuous doctor, in the utter innocence of his professional ambition, who has discovered a new disease, and is delighted when he finds people suffering from it and cast down to despair when he finds that it does not exist. The point is worth a pause, because it is a good, short way of stating Shaw's attitude, right or wrong, upon the whole of formal morality. What he dislikes in young Doctor Paramore is that he has interposed a secondary and false conscience between himself and the facts. When his disease is disproved, instead of seeing the escape of a human being who thought he was going to die of it, Paramore sees the downfall of a kind of flag or cause. This is the whole contention of *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, put better than the book puts it; it is a really sharp exposition of the dangers of "idealism," the sacrifice of people to principles, and Shaw is even wiser in his suggestion that this excessive idealism exists nowhere so strongly as in the world of physical science. He shows that the scientist tends to be more concerned about the sickness than about the sick man; but it was certainly in his mind to suggest here also that the idealist is more concerned about the sin than about the sinner.

This business of Dr. Paramore's disease while it is the most farcical thing in the play is also the most philosophic and important. The rest of the figures, including the *Philanderer* himself, are in the full sense of those blasting and obliterating words "funny without being vulgar," that is, funny without being

of any importance to the masses of men. It is a play about a dashing and advanced "Ibsen Club," and the squabble between the young Ibsenites and the old people who are not yet up to Ibsen. It would be hard to find a stronger example of Shaw's only essential error, modernity--which means the seeking for truth in terms of time. Only a few years have passed and already almost half the wit of that wonderful play is wasted, because it all turns on the newness of a fashion that is no longer new. Doubtless many people still think the Ibsen drama a great thing, like the French classical drama. But going to "The Philanderer" is like going among periwigs and rapiers and hearing that the young men are now all for Racine. What makes such work sound unreal is not the praise of Ibsen, but the praise of the novelty of Ibsen. Any advantage that Bernard Shaw had over Colonel Craven I have over Bernard Shaw; we who happen to be born last have the meaningless and paltry triumph in that meaningless and paltry war. We are the superiors by that silliest and most snobbish of all superiorities, the mere aristocracy of time. All works must become thus old and insipid which have ever tried to be "modern," which have consented to smell of time rather than of eternity. Only those who have stooped to be in advance of their time will ever find themselves behind it.

But it is irritating to think what diamonds, what dazzling silver of Shavian wit has been sunk in such an out-of-date warship. In *The Philanderer* there are five hundred excellent and about five magnificent things. The rattle of repartees between the doctor and the soldier about the humanity of their two trades is admirable. Or again, when the colonel tells Chartaris that "in his young days" he would have no more behaved like Chartaris than he would have cheated at cards. After a pause Chartaris says, "You're getting old, Craven, and you make a virtue of it as usual." And there is an altitude of aerial tragedy in the words of Grace, who has refused the man she loves, to Julia, who is marrying the man she doesn't, "This is what they call a happy ending--these men."

There is an acrid taste in *The Philanderer*; and certainly he might be considered a super-sensitive person who should find anything acrid in *You Never Can Tell*. This play is the nearest approach to frank and objectless exuberance in the whole of Shaw's work. Punch, with wisdom as well as wit, said that it might well be called not "You Never Can Tell" but "You Never Can be Shaw." And yet if anyone will read this blazing farce and then after it any of the romantic farces, such as *Pickwick* or even *The Wrong Box*, I do not think he will be disposed to erase or even to modify what I said at the beginning about the ingrained grimness and even inhumanity of Shaw's art. To take but one test: love, in an "extravaganza," may be light love or love in idleness, but it should be hearty and happy love if it is to add to the general

hilarity. Such are the ludicrous but lucky love affairs of the sportsman Winkle and the Maestro Jimson. In Gloria's collapse before her bullying lover there is something at once cold and unclean; it calls up all the modern supermen with their cruel and fishy eyes. Such farces should begin in a friendly air, in a tavern. There is something very symbolic of Shaw in the fact that his farce begins in a dentist's.

The only one out of this brilliant batch of plays in which I think that the method adopted really fails, is the one called *Widower's Houses*. The best touch of Shaw is simply in the title. The simple substitution of widowers for widows contains almost the whole bitter and yet boisterous protest of Shaw; all his preference for undignified fact over dignified phrase; all his dislike of those subtle trends of sex or mystery which swing the logician off the straight line. We can imagine him crying, "Why in the name of death and conscience should it be tragic to be a widow but comic to be a widower?" But the rationalistic method is here applied quite wrong as regards the production of a drama. The most dramatic point in the affair is when the open and indecent rack-renter turns on the decent young man of means and proves to him that he is equally guilty, that he also can only grind his corn by grinding the faces of the poor. But even here the point is undramatic because it is indirect; it is indirect because it is merely sociological. It may be the truth that a young man living on an unexamined income which ultimately covers a great deal of house-property is as dangerous as any despot or thief. But it is a truth that you can no more put into a play than into a triolet. You can make a play out of one man robbing another man, but not out of one man robbing a million men; still less out of his robbing them unconsciously.

Of the plays collected in this book I have kept *Mrs. Warren's Profession* to the last, because, fine as it is, it is even finer and more important because of its fate, which was to rouse a long and serious storm and to be vetoed by the Censor of Plays. I say that this drama is most important because of the quarrel that came out of it. If I were speaking of some mere artist this might be an insult. But there are high and heroic things in Bernard Shaw; and one of the highest and most heroic is this, that he certainly cares much more for a quarrel than for a play. And this quarrel about the censorship is one on which he feels so strongly that in a book embodying any sort of sympathy it would be much better to leave out *Mrs. Warren* than to leave out *Mr. Redford*. The veto was the pivot of so very personal a movement by the dramatist, of so very positive an assertion of his own attitude towards things, that it is only just and necessary to state what were the two essential parties to the dispute; the play and the official who prevented the play.

The play of Mrs. Warren's Profession is concerned with a coarse mother and a cold daughter; the mother drives the ordinary and dirty trade of harlotry; the daughter does not know until the end the atrocious origin of all her own comfort and refinement. The daughter, when the discovery is made, freezes up into an iceberg of contempt; which is indeed a very womanly thing to do. The mother explodes into pulverising cynicism and practicality; which is also very womanly. The dialogue is drastic and sweeping; the daughter says the trade is loathsome; the mother answers that she loathes it herself; that every healthy person does loathe the trade by which she lives. And beyond question the general effect of the play is that the trade is loathsome; supposing anyone to be so insensible as to require to be told of the fact. Undoubtedly the upshot is that a brothel is a miserable business, and a brothel-keeper a miserable woman. The whole dramatic art of Shaw is in the literal sense of the word, tragi-comic; I mean that the comic part comes after the tragedy. But just as *You Never Can Tell* represents the nearest approach of Shaw to the purely comic, so *Mrs. Warren's Profession* represents his only complete, or nearly complete, tragedy. There is no twopenny modernism in it, as in *The Philanderer*. Mrs. Warren is as old as the Old Testament; "for she hath cast down many wounded, yea, many strong men have been slain by her; her house is in the gates of hell, going down into the chamber of death." Here is no subtle ethics, as in *Widowers' Houses*; for even those moderns who think it noble that a woman should throw away her honour, surely cannot think it especially noble that she should sell it. Here is no lighting up by laughter, astonishment, and happy coincidence, as in *You Never Can Tell*. The play is a pure tragedy about a permanent and quite plain human problem; the problem is as plain and permanent, the tragedy is as proud and pure, as in *OEdipus* or *Macbeth*. This play was presented in the ordinary way for public performance and was suddenly stopped by the Censor of Plays.

The Censor of Plays is a small and accidental eighteenth-century official. Like nearly all the powers which Englishmen now respect as ancient and rooted, he is very recent. Novels and newspapers still talk of the English aristocracy that came over with William the Conqueror. Little of our effective oligarchy is as old as the Reformation; and none of it came over with William the Conqueror. Some of the older English landlords came over with William of Orange; the rest have come by ordinary alien immigration. In the same way we always talk of the Victorian woman (with her smelling salts and sentiment) as the old-fashioned woman. But she really was a quite new-fashioned woman; she considered herself, and was, an advance in delicacy and civilisation upon the coarse and candid Elizabethan woman to whom we are now returning. We are never oppressed by old things; it is recent things that can really oppress. And in accordance with this principle modern

England has accepted, as if it were a part of perennial morality, a tenth-rate job of Walpole's worst days called the Censorship of the Drama. Just as they have supposed the eighteenth-century parvenus to date from Hastings, just as they have supposed the eighteenth-century ladies to date from Eve, so they have supposed the eighteenth-century Censorship to date from Sinai. The origin of the thing was in truth purely political. Its first and principal achievement was to prevent Fielding from writing plays; not at all because the plays were coarse, but because they criticised the Government. Fielding was a free writer; but they did not resent his sexual freedom; the Censor would not have objected if he had torn away the most intimate curtains of decency or rent the last rag from private life. What the Censor disliked was his rending the curtain from public life. There is still much of that spirit in our country; there are no affairs which men seek so much to cover up as public affairs. But the thing was done somewhat more boldly and baldly in Walpole's day; and the Censorship of plays has its origin, not merely in tyranny, but in a quite trifling and temporary and partisan piece of tyranny; a thing in its nature far more ephemeral, far less essential, than Ship Money. Perhaps its brightest moment was when the office of censor was held by that filthy writer, Colman the younger; and when he gravely refused to license a work by the author of *Our Village*. Few funnier notions can ever have actually been facts than this notion that the restraint and chastity of George Colman saved the English public from the eroticism and obscenity of Miss Mitford.

Such was the play; and such was the power that stopped the play. A private man wrote it; another private man forbade it; nor was there any difference between Mr. Shaw's authority and Mr. Redford's, except that Mr. Shaw did defend his action on public grounds and Mr. Redford did not. The dramatist had simply been suppressed by a despot; and what was worse (because it was modern) by a silent and evasive despot; a despot in hiding. People talk about the pride of tyrants; but we at the present day suffer from the modesty of tyrants; from the shyness and the shrinking secrecy of the strong. Shaw's preface to Mrs. Warren's *Profession* was far more fit to be called a public document than the slovenly refusal of the individual official; it had more exactness, more universal application, more authority. Shaw on Redford was far more national and responsible than Redford on Shaw.

The dramatist found in the quarrel one of the important occasions of his life, because the crisis called out something in him which is in many ways his highest quality--righteous indignation. As a mere matter of the art of controversy of course he carried the war into the enemy's camp at once. He did not linger over loose excuses for licence; he declared at once that the Censor was licentious, while he, Bernard Shaw, was clean. He did not

discuss whether a Censorship ought to make the drama moral. He declared that it made the drama immoral. With a fine strategic audacity he attacked the Censor quite as much for what he permitted as for what he prevented. He charged him with encouraging all plays that attracted men to vice and only stopping those which discouraged them from it. Nor was this attitude by any means an idle paradox. Many plays appear (as Shaw pointed out) in which the prostitute and the procuress are practically obvious, and in which they are represented as revelling in beautiful surroundings and basking in brilliant popularity. The crime of Shaw was not that he introduced the Gaiety Girl; that had been done, with little enough decorum, in a hundred musical comedies. The crime of Shaw was that he introduced the Gaiety Girl, but did not represent her life as all gaiety. The pleasures of vice were already flaunted before the playgoers. It was the perils of vice that were carefully concealed from them. The gay adventures, the gorgeous dresses, the champagne and oysters, the diamonds and motor-cars, dramatists were allowed to drag all these dazzling temptations before any silly housemaid in the gallery who was grumbling at her wages. But they were not allowed to warn her of the vulgarity and the nausea, the dreary deceptions and the blasting diseases of that life. Mrs. Warren's Profession was not up to a sufficient standard of immorality; it was not spicy enough to pass the Censor. The acceptable and the accepted plays were those which made the fall of a woman fashionable and fascinating; for all the world as if the Censor's profession were the same as Mrs. Warren's profession.

Such was the angle of Shaw's energetic attack; and it is not to be denied that there was exaggeration in it, and what is so much worse, omission. The argument might easily be carried too far; it might end with a scene of screaming torture in the Inquisition as a corrective to the too amiable view of a clergyman in *The Private Secretary*. But the controversy is definitely worth recording, if only as an excellent example of the author's aggressive attitude and his love of turning the tables in debate. Moreover, though this point of view involves a potential overstatement, it also involves an important truth. One of the best points urged in the course of it was this, that though vice is punished in conventional drama, the punishment is not really impressive, because it is not inevitable or even probable. It does not arise out of the evil act. Years afterwards Bernard Shaw urged this argument again in connection with his friend Mr. Granville Barker's play of *Waste*, in which the woman dies from an illegal operation. Bernard Shaw said, truly enough, that if she had died from poison or a pistol shot it would have left everyone unmoved, for pistols do not in their nature follow female unchastity. Illegal operations very often do. The punishment was one which might follow the crime, not only in that case, but in many cases. Here, I think, the whole argument might be sufficiently cleared up by saying that

the objection to such things on the stage is a purely artistic objection. There is nothing wrong in talking about an illegal operation; there are plenty of occasions when it would be very wrong not to talk about it. But it may easily be just a shade too ugly for the shape of any work of art. There is nothing wrong about being sick; but if Bernard Shaw wrote a play in which all the characters expressed their dislike of animal food by vomiting on the stage, I think we should be justified in saying that the thing was outside, not the laws of morality, but the framework of civilised literature. The instinctive movement of repulsion which everyone has when hearing of the operation in *Waste* is not an ethical repulsion at all. But it is an æsthetic repulsion, and a right one.

But I have only dwelt on this particular fighting phase because it leaves us facing the ultimate characteristics which I mentioned first. Bernard Shaw cares nothing for art; in comparison with morals, literally nothing. Bernard Shaw is a Puritan and his work is Puritan work. He has all the essentials of the old, virile and extinct Protestant type. In his work he is as ugly as a Puritan. He is as indecent as a Puritan. He is as full of gross words and sensual facts as a sermon of the seventeenth century. Up to this point of his life indeed hardly anyone would have dreamed of calling him a Puritan; he was called sometimes an anarchist, sometimes a buffoon, sometimes (by the more discerning stupid people) a prig. His attitude towards current problems was felt to be arresting and even indecent; I do not think that anyone thought of connecting it with the old Calvinistic morality. But Shaw, who knew better than the Shavians, was at this moment on the very eve of confessing his moral origin. The next book of plays he produced (including *The Devil's Disciple*, *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*, and *Cæsar and Cleopatra*), actually bore the title of *Plays for Puritans*.

The play called *The Devil's Disciple* has great merits, but the merits are incidental. Some of its jokes are serious and important, but its general plan can only be called a joke. Almost alone among Bernard Shaw's plays (except of course such things as *How he Lied to her Husband* and *The Admirable Bashville*) this drama does not turn on any very plain pivot of ethical or philosophical conviction. The artistic idea seems to be the notion of a melodrama in which all the conventional melodramatic situations shall suddenly take unconventional turns. Just where the melodramatic clergyman would show courage he appears to show cowardice; just where the melodramatic sinner would confess his love he confesses his indifference. This is a little too like the Shaw of the newspaper critics rather than the Shaw of reality. There are indeed present in the play two of the writer's principal moral conceptions. The first is the idea of a great heroic action coming in a sense from nowhere; that is, not coming from any

commonplace motive; being born in the soul in naked beauty, coming with its own authority and testifying only to itself. Shaw's agent does not act towards something, but from something. The hero dies, not because he desires heroism, but because he has it. So in this particular play the Devil's Disciple finds that his own nature will not permit him to put the rope around another man's neck; he has no reasons of desire, affection, or even equity; his death is a sort of divine whim. And in connection with this the dramatist introduces another favourite moral; the objection to perpetual playing upon the motive of sex. He deliberately lures the onlooker into the net of Cupid in order to tell him with salutary decision that Cupid is not there at all. Millions of melodramatic dramatists have made a man face death for the woman he loves; Shaw makes him face death for the woman he does not love--merely in order to put woman in her place. He objects to that idolatry of sexualism which makes it the fountain of all forcible enthusiasms; he dislikes the amorous drama which makes the female the only key to the male. He is Feminist in politics, but Anti-feminist in emotion. His key to most problems is, "Ne cherchez pas la femme."

As has been observed, the incidental felicities of the play are frequent and memorable, especially those connected with the character of General Burgoyne, the real full-blooded, free-thinking eighteenth century gentleman, who was much too much of an aristocrat not to be a liberal. One of the best thrusts in all the Shavian fencing matches is that which occurs when Richard Dudgeon, condemned to be hanged, asks rhetorically why he cannot be shot like a soldier. "Now there you speak like a civilian," replies General Burgoyne. "Have you formed any conception of the condition of marksmanship in the British Army?" Excellent, too, is the passage in which his subordinate speaks of crushing the enemy in America, and Burgoyne asks him who will crush their enemies in England, snobbery and jobbery and incurable carelessness and sloth. And in one sentence towards the end, Shaw reaches a wider and more genial comprehension of mankind than he shows anywhere else; "it takes all sorts to make a world, saints as well as soldiers." If Shaw had remembered that sentence on other occasions he would have avoided his mistake about Cæsar and Brutus. It is not only true that it takes all sorts to make a world; but the world cannot succeed without its failures. Perhaps the most doubtful point of all in the play is why it is a play for Puritans; except the hideous picture of a Calvinistic home is meant to destroy Puritanism. And indeed in this connection it is constantly necessary to fall back upon the facts of which I have spoken at the beginning of this brief study; it is necessary especially to remember that Shaw could in all probability speak of Puritanism from the inside. In that domestic circle which took him to hear Moody and Sankey, in that domestic circle which was teetotal even when it was intoxicated, in that atmosphere

and society Shaw might even have met the monstrous mother in *The Devil's Disciple*, the horrible old woman who declares that she has hardened her heart to hate her children, because the heart of man is desperately wicked, the old ghoul who has made one of her children an imbecile and the other an outcast. Such types do occur in small societies drunk with the dismal wine of Puritan determinism. It is possible that there were among Irish Calvinists people who denied that charity was a Christian virtue. It is possible that among Puritans there were people who thought a heart was a kind of heart disease. But it is enough to make one tear one's hair to think that a man of genius received his first impressions in so small a corner of Europe that he could for a long time suppose that this Puritanism was current among Christian men. The question, however, need not detain us, for the batch of plays contained two others about which it is easier to speak.

The third play in order in the series called *Plays for Puritans* is a very charming one; *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*. This also turns, as does so much of the *Cæsar* drama, on the idea of vanity of revenge--the idea that it is too slight and silly a thing for a man to allow to occupy and corrupt his consciousness. It is not, of course, the morality that is new here, but the touch of cold laughter in the core of the morality. Many saints and sages have denounced vengeance. But they treated vengeance as something too great for man. "Vengeance is Mine, saith the Lord; I will repay." Shaw treats vengeance as something too small for man--a monkey trick he ought to have outlived, a childish storm of tears which he ought to be able to control. In the story in question Captain Brassbound has nourished through his whole erratic existence, racketting about all the unsavoury parts of Africa--a mission of private punishment which appears to him as a mission of holy justice. His mother has died in consequence of a judge's decision, and Brassbound roams and schemes until the judge falls into his hands. Then a pleasant society lady, Lady Cicely Waynefleet tells him in an easy conversational undertone--a rivulet of speech which ripples while she is mending his coat--that he is making a fool of himself, that his wrong is irrelevant, that his vengeance is objectless, that he would be much better if he flung his morbid fancy away for ever; in short, she tells him he is ruining himself for the sake of ruining a total stranger. Here again we have the note of the economist, the hatred of mere loss. Shaw (one might almost say) dislikes murder, not so much because it wastes the life of the corpse as because it wastes the time of the murderer. If he were endeavouring to persuade one of his moon-lighting fellow-countrymen not to shoot his landlord, I can imagine him explaining with benevolent emphasis that it was not so much a question of losing a life as of throwing away a bullet. But indeed the Irish comparison alone suggests a doubt which wriggles in the recesses of my mind about the complete reliability of the philosophy of Lady

Cicely Waynfleet, the complete finality of the moral of Captain Brassbound's Conversion. Of course, it was very natural in an aristocrat like Lady Cicely Waynfleet to wish to let sleeping dogs lie, especially those whom Mr. Blatchford calls under-dogs. Of course it was natural for her to wish everything to be smooth and sweet-tempered. But I have the obstinate question in the corner of my brain, whether if a few Captain Brassbounds did revenge themselves on judges, the quality of our judges might not materially improve.

When this doubt is once off one's conscience one can lose oneself in the bottomless beatitude of Lady Cicely Waynfleet, one of the most living and laughing things that her maker has made. I do not know any stronger way of stating the beauty of the character than by saying that it was written specially for Ellen Terry, and that it is, with Beatrice, one of the very few characters in which the dramatist can claim some part of her triumph.

We may now pass to the more important of the plays. For some time Bernard Shaw would seem to have been brooding upon the soul of Julius Cæsar. There must always be a strong human curiosity about the soul of Julius Cæsar; and, among other things, about whether he had a soul. The conjunction of Shaw and Cæsar has about it something smooth and inevitable; for this decisive reason, that Cæsar is really the only great man of history to whom the Shaw theories apply. Cæsar was a Shaw hero. Cæsar was merciful without being in the least pitiful; his mercy was colder than justice. Cæsar was a conqueror without being in any hearty sense a soldier; his courage was lonelier than fear. Cæsar was a demagogue without being a democrat. In the same way Bernard Shaw is a demagogue without being a democrat. If he had tried to prove his principle from any of the other heroes or sages of mankind he would have found it much more difficult. Napoleon achieved more miraculous conquest; but during his most conquering epoch he was a burning boy suicidally in love with a woman far beyond his age. Joan of Arc achieved far more instant and incredible worldly success; but Joan of Arc achieved worldly success because she believed in another world. Nelson was a figure fully as fascinating and dramatically decisive; but Nelson was "romantic"; Nelson was a devoted patriot and a devoted lover. Alexander was passionate; Cromwell could shed tears; Bismarck had some suburban religion; Frederick was a poet; Charlemagne was fond of children. But Julius Cæsar attracted Shaw not less by his positive than by his negative enormousness. Nobody can say with certainty that Cæsar cared for anything. It is unjust to call Cæsar an egoist; for there is no proof that he cared even for Cæsar. He may not have been either an atheist or a pessimist. But he may have been; that is exactly the rub. He may have been an ordinary decently good man slightly deficient in spiritual expansiveness.

On the other hand, he may have been the incarnation of paganism in the sense that Christ was the incarnation of Christianity. As Christ expressed how great a man can be humble and humane, Cæsar may have expressed how great a man can be frigid and flippant. According to most legends Antichrist was to come soon after Christ. One has only to suppose that Antichrist came shortly before Christ; and Antichrist might very well be Cæsar.

It is, I think, no injustice to Bernard Shaw to say that he does not attempt to make his Cæsar superior except in this naked and negative sense. There is no suggestion, as there is in the Jehovah of the Old Testament, that the very cruelty of the higher being conceals some tremendous and even tortured love. Cæsar is superior to other men not because he loves more, but because he hates less. Cæsar is magnanimous not because he is warm-hearted enough to pardon, but because he is not warm-hearted enough to avenge. There is no suggestion anywhere in the play that he is hiding any great genial purpose or powerful tenderness towards men. In order to put this point beyond a doubt the dramatist has introduced a soliloquy of Cæsar alone with the Sphinx. There if anywhere he would have broken out into ultimate brotherhood or burning pity for the people. But in that scene between the Sphinx and Cæsar, Cæsar is as cold and as lonely and as dead as the Sphinx.

But whether the Shavian Cæsar is a sound ideal or no, there can be little doubt that he is a very fine reality. Shaw has done nothing greater as a piece of artistic creation. If the man is a little like a statue, it is a statue by a great sculptor; a statue of the best period. If his nobility is a little negative in its character, it is the negative darkness of the great dome of night; not as in some "new moralities" the mere mystery of the coal-hole. Indeed, this somewhat austere method of work is very suitable to Shaw when he is serious. There is nothing Gothic about his real genius; he could not build a mediæval cathedral in which laughter and terror are twisted together in stone, molten by mystical passion. He can build, by way of amusement, a Chinese pagoda; but when he is in earnest, only a Roman temple. He has a keen eye for truth; but he is one of those people who like, as the saying goes, to put down the truth in black and white. He is always girding and jeering at romantics and idealists because they will not put down the truth in black and white. But black and white are not the only two colours in the world. The modern man of science who writes down a fact in black and white is not more but less accurate than the mediæval monk who wrote it down in gold and scarlet, sea-green and turquoise. Nevertheless, it is a good thing that the more austere method should exist separately, and that some men should be specially good at it. Bernard Shaw is specially good at it; he is

pre-eminently a black and white artist.

And as a study in black and white nothing could be better than this sketch of Julius Cæsar. He is not so much represented as "bestriding the earth like a Colossus" (which is indeed a rather comic attitude for a hero to stand in), but rather walking the earth with a sort of stern levity, lightly touching the planet and yet spurning it away like a stone. He walks like a winged man who has chosen to fold his wings. There is something creepy even about his kindness; it makes the men in front of him feel as if they were made of glass. The nature of the Cæsarian mercy is massively suggested. Cæsar dislikes a massacre, not because it is a great sin, but because it is a small sin. It is felt that he classes it with a flirtation or a fit of the sulks; a senseless temporary subjugation of man's permanent purpose by his passing and trivial feelings. He will plunge into slaughter for a great purpose, just as he plunges into the sea. But to be stung into such action he deems as undignified as to be tipped off the pier. In a singularly fine passage Cleopatra, having hired assassins to stab an enemy, appeals to her wrongs as justifying her revenge, and says, "If you can find one man in all Africa who says that I did wrong, I will be crucified by my own slaves." "If you can find one man in all the world," replies Cæsar, "who can see that you did wrong, he will either conquer the world as I have done or be crucified by it." That is the high water mark of this heathen sublimity; and we do not feel it inappropriate, or unlike Shaw, when a few minutes afterwards the hero is saluted with a blaze of swords.

As usually happens in the author's works, there is even more about Julius Cæsar in the preface than there is in the play. But in the preface I think the portrait is less imaginative and more fanciful. He attempts to connect his somewhat chilly type of superman with the heroes of the old fairy tales. But Shaw should not talk about the fairy tales; for he does not feel them from the inside. As I have said, on all this side of historic and domestic traditions Bernard Shaw is weak and deficient. He does not approach them as fairy tales, as if he were four, but as "folk-lore" as if he were forty. And he makes a big mistake about them which he would never have made if he had kept his birthday and hung up his stocking, and generally kept alive inside him the firelight of a home. The point is so peculiarly characteristic of Bernard Shaw, and is indeed so much of a summary of his most interesting assertion and his most interesting error, that it deserves a word by itself, though it is a word which must be remembered in connection with nearly all the other plays.

His primary and defiant proposition is the Calvinistic proposition: that the elect do not earn virtue, but possess it. The goodness of a man does not

consist in trying to be good, but in being good. Julius Cæsar prevails over other people by possessing more virtus than they; not by having striven or suffered or bought his virtue; not because he has struggled heroically, but because he is a hero. So far Bernard Shaw is only what I have called him at the beginning; he is simply a seventeenth-century Calvinist. Cæsar is not saved by works, or even by faith; he is saved because he is one of the elect. Unfortunately for himself, however, Bernard Shaw went back further than the seventeenth century; and professing his opinion to be yet more antiquated, invoked the original legends of mankind. He argued that when the fairy tales gave Jack the Giant Killer a coat of darkness or a magic sword it removed all credit from Jack in the "common moral" sense; he won as Cæsar won only because he was superior. I will confess, in passing, to the conviction that Bernard Shaw in the course of his whole simple and strenuous life was never quite so near to hell as at the moment when he wrote down those words. But in this question of fairy tales my immediate point is, not how near he was to hell, but how very far off he was from fairyland. That notion about the hero with a magic sword being the superman with a magic superiority is the caprice of a pedant; no child, boy, or man ever felt it in the story of Jack the Giant Killer. Obviously the moral is all the other way. Jack's fairy sword and invisible coat are clumsy expedients for enabling him to fight at all with something which is by nature stronger. They are a rough, savage substitute for psychological descriptions of special valour or unwearied patience. But no one in his five wits can doubt that the idea of "Jack the Giant Killer" is exactly the opposite to Shaw's idea. If it were not a tale of effort and triumph hardly earned it would not be called "Jack the Giant Killer." If it were a tale of the victory of natural advantages it would be called "Giant the Jack Killer." If the teller of fairy tales had merely wanted to urge that some beings are born stronger than others he would not have fallen back on elaborate tricks of weapon and costume for conquering an ogre. He would simply have let the ogre conquer. I will not speak of my own emotions in connection with this incredibly caddish doctrine that the strength of the strong is admirable, but not the valour of the weak. It is enough to say that I have to summon up the physical presence of Shaw, his frank gestures, kind eyes, and exquisite Irish voice, to cure me of a mere sensation of contempt. But I do not dwell upon the point for any such purpose; but merely to show how we must be always casting back to those concrete foundations with which we began. Bernard Shaw, as I have said, was never national enough to be domestic; he was never a part of his past; hence when he tries to interpret tradition he comes a terrible cropper, as in this case. Bernard Shaw (I strongly suspect) began to disbelieve in Santa Claus at a discreditably early age. And by this time Santa Claus has avenged himself by taking away the key of all the prehistoric scriptures; so that a noble and honourable artist flounders about

like any German professor. Here is a whole fairy literature which is almost exclusively devoted to the unexpected victory of the weak over the strong; and Bernard Shaw manages to make it mean the inevitable victory of the strong over the weak--which, among other things, would not make a story at all. It all comes of that mistake about not keeping his birthday. A man should be always tied to his mother's apron strings; he should always have a hold on his childhood, and be ready at intervals to start anew from a childish standpoint. Theologically the thing is best expressed by saying, "You must be born again." Secularly it is best expressed by saying, "You must keep your birthday." Even if you will not be born again, at least remind yourself occasionally that you were born once.

Some of the incidental wit in the Cæsarian drama is excellent although it is upon the whole less spontaneous and perfect than in the previous plays. One of its jests may be mentioned in passing, not merely to draw attention to its failure (though Shaw is brilliant enough to afford many failures) but because it is the best opportunity for mentioning one of the writer's minor notions to which he obstinately adheres. He describes the Ancient Briton in Cæsar's train as being exactly like a modern respectable Englishman. As a joke for a Christmas pantomime this would be all very well; but one expects the jokes of Bernard Shaw to have some intellectual root, however fantastic the flower. And obviously all historic common sense is against the idea that that dim Druid people, whoever they were, who dwelt in our land before it was lit up by Rome or loaded with varied invasions, were a precise facsimile of the commercial society of Birmingham or Brighton. But it is a part of the Puritan in Bernard Shaw, a part of the taut and high-strung quality of his mind, that he will never admit of any of his jokes that it was only a joke. When he has been most witty he will passionately deny his own wit; he will say something which Voltaire might envy and then declare that he has got it all out of a Blue book. And in connection with this eccentric type of self-denial, we may notice this mere detail about the Ancient Briton. Someone faintly hinted that a blue Briton when first found by Cæsar might not be quite like Mr. Broadbent; at the touch Shaw poured forth a torrent of theory, explaining that climate was the only thing that affected nationality; and that whatever races came into the English or Irish climate would become like the English or Irish. Now the modern theory of race is certainly a piece of stupid materialism; it is an attempt to explain the things we are sure of, France, Scotland, Rome, Japan, by means of the things we are not sure of at all, prehistoric conjectures, Celts, Mongols, and Iberians. Of course there is a reality in race; but there is no reality in the theories of race offered by some ethnological professors. Blood, perhaps, is thicker than water; but brains are sometimes thicker than anything. But if there is one thing yet more thick and obscure and senseless than this theory of the omnipotence of race

it is, I think, that to which Shaw has fled for refuge from it; this doctrine of the omnipotence of climate. Climate again is something; but if climate were everything, Anglo-Indians would grow more and more to look like Hindoos, which is far from being the case. Something in the evil spirit of our time forces people always to pretend to have found some material and mechanical explanation. Bernard Shaw has filled all his last days with affirmations about the divinity of the non-mechanical part of man, the sacred quality in creation and choice. Yet it never seems to have occurred to him that the true key to national differentiations is the key of the will and not of the environment. It never crosses the modern mind to fancy that perhaps a people is chiefly influenced by how that people has chosen to behave. If I have to choose between race and weather I prefer race; I would rather be imprisoned and compelled by ancestors who were once alive than by mud and mists which never were. But I do not propose to be controlled by either; to me my national history is a chain of multitudinous choices. It is neither blood nor rain that has made England, but hope, the thing that all those dead men have desired. France was not France because she was made to be by the skulls of the Celts or by the sun of Gaul. France was France because she chose.

I have stepped on one side from the immediate subject because this is as good an instance as any we are likely to come across of a certain almost extraneous fault which does deface the work of Bernard Shaw. It is a fault only to be mentioned when we have made the solidity of the merits quite clear. To say that Shaw is merely making game of people is demonstrably ridiculous; at least a fairly systematic philosophy can be traced through all his jokes, and one would not insist on such a unity in all the songs of Mr. Dan Leno. I have already pointed out that the genius of Shaw is really too harsh and earnest rather than too merry and irresponsible. I shall have occasion to point out later that Shaw is, in one very serious sense, the very opposite of paradoxical. In any case if any real student of Shaw says that Shaw is only making a fool of him, we can only say that of that student it is very superfluous for anyone to make a fool. But though the dramatist's jests are always serious and generally obvious, he is really affected from time to time by a certain spirit of which that climate theory is a case--a spirit that can only be called one of senseless ingenuity. I suppose it is a sort of nemesis of wit; the skidding of a wheel in the height of its speed. Perhaps it is connected with the nomadic nature of his mind. That lack of roots, this remoteness from ancient instincts and traditions is responsible for a certain bleak and heartless extravagance of statement on certain subjects which makes the author really unconvincing as well as exaggerative; satires that are saugrenu, jokes that are rather silly than wild, statements which even considered as lies have no symbolic relation to truth. They are exaggerations

of something that does not exist. For instance, if a man called Christmas Day a mere hypocritical excuse for drunkenness and gluttony that would be false, but it would have a fact hidden in it somewhere. But when Bernard Shaw says that Christmas Day is only a conspiracy kept up by poulterers and wine merchants from strictly business motives, then he says something which is not so much false as startlingly and arrestingly foolish. He might as well say that the two sexes were invented by jewellers who wanted to sell wedding rings. Or again, take the case of nationality and the unit of patriotism. If a man said that all boundaries between clans, kingdoms, or empires were nonsensical or non-existent, that would be a fallacy, but a consistent and philosophical fallacy. But when Mr. Bernard Shaw says that England matters so little that the British Empire might very well give up these islands to Germany, he has not only got hold of the sow by the wrong ear but the wrong sow by the wrong ear; a mythical sow, a sow that is not there at all. If Britain is unreal, the British Empire must be a thousand times more unreal. It is as if one said, "I do not believe that Michael Scott ever had any existence; but I am convinced, in spite of the absurd legend, that he had a shadow."

As has been said already, there must be some truth in every popular impression. And the impression that Shaw, the most savagely serious man of his time, is a mere music-hall artist must have reference to such rare outbreaks as these. As a rule his speeches are full, not only of substance, but of substances, materials like pork, mahogany, lead, and leather. There is no man whose arguments cover a more Napoleonic map of detail. It is true that he jokes; but wherever he is he has topical jokes, one might almost say family jokes. If he talks to tailors he can allude to the last absurdity about buttons. If he talks to the soldiers he can see the exquisite and exact humour of the last gun-carriage. But when all his powerful practicality is allowed, there does run through him this erratic levity, an explosion of ineptitude. It is a queer quality in literature. It is a sort of cold extravagance; and it has made him all his enemies.