

CHAPTER -VI

Political Plays of Shaw

It is only natural that the critical insight of a revolting son of the middle class should fall on politics and that he should ransack the whole field. Shaw's critical genius was attracted to politics in a very large sense of the term and he took immense interest in the political problems of his day - problems that include economics and finance. A vast amount of his writings - actually the majority of them - concern themselves with the study of social classes, wealth and poverty, rent, wages, and interest and, at the same time, with international relations, the World War, the Irish Question, Labour party etc. He wrote so much on politics and spoke so much on it that it seemed to some of his critics and biographers including such an erudite one as Archibald Henderson that "art played a very secondary part in the life of this international publicist"¹. This view is erroneous in spite of the zeal shown by Shaw in the politics of his time -- national as well as international. His interest in politics is expressed in many of his plays; but he remains an artist all the same for he dramatized his views and ideas through the action in the play or rather through "discussion" which is the "action" in a Shavian play; and secondly, his expression of political ideas is seldom allowed to work like just propaganda. Some of the political problems dealt with

1. G.B.S. : Man of the Century. Vol II. Appleton-Century-Crofts Inc. 1956. p. 618.

by him in these plays have already become completely dated, yet the dramatic interest of the plays still remains. He dealt with the problems in the plays like an artist; he did not write mere political tracts.

Shaw's interests were varied as his mind was gigantic. He was a progressive who was much ahead of the progressives of his time --- a fact which made him inconceivable to the people of his day. His intellect was piercing and he could expose the hollowness of an idea or a system with unanswerable arguments: this turned him into an enemy of the establishment and the common, conventionally brought up and educated people. He is quite often misinterpreted; the critics who misunderstand and misinterpret him often forget very conveniently that they are criticising the plays and not simply the views expressed in them. The artist is taken to task for whatever is said and done by his characters. Of all his plays The Apple cart and Too True to be Good are possibly the most maligned and misunderstood, and yet in them we find the indelible mark of a great dramatist. Shaw proclaimed himself a socialist who never forsook his belief in Socialism as a system. But it has been pointed out by his critics that he turned his back upon his own faith in The Apple Cart in which, actually, the cart of democracy has been thrown by the wayside. The critics were quick to point out further, that Shaw's comments on the Fascist and the Nazi marauders proved that he had lost all faith in socialism. His praise for Stalin, who hunted down the counter-revolutionary voices, is pointed out by them as a proof that Shaw wanted a

system in which people not dittoing the ruler would be mercilessly liquidated.

It should be pointed out that Shaw had little or no faith in democracy which is proclaimed as the best form of government. In his book An Intellectual Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism, which is sometimes hailed as the best work on the subject, shaw says in his characteristic way, "The naked truth is that democracy or government by the people through votes for everybody, has never been a complete reality; and to the very limited extent to which it has been a reality, it has not been a success. The extravagant hopes which have been attached to every extension of it have been disappointed" He continues, "If there were any disfranchised class left for our democrats to pin their repeatedly disappointed hopes on, no doubt they would still clamour for a fresh set of Votes to jump the last ditch into their Utopia; and the vogue of democracy might last a while yet. Possibly there may be here and there lunatics looking forward to votes for children, or for animals, to complete the democratic structure. But the majority shows signs of having had enough of it."¹

Shaw argued that Capitalism was the greatest evil because it only produced ignorance. It was the disuse of mental faculties which led the people under capitalism to fill their heads with "romantic nonsense out of illustrated newspapers and novels and plays and films"². Such stuff, Shaw

1. A Intellectual Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism.
G.Bernard Shaw. Constable & Co.Ltd.London.1928. P 452-53
2. Ibid. P 164.

held, falsified everything for us so absurdly that it left us more or less dangerous lunatics in the real world. It is this which led Shaw to pin his faith on some super-power. The more power given to the people made it necessary and urgent that some rational and well-informed super-power should come to dominate them.

Shaw's association with Fabianism is of great importance, for he was the leading theoretician together with Sidney Webb of Fabian Socialism. In some respects Shaw possibly was the most clean-headed among the Fabians. The earlier Fabians had, as Shaw complained, shared many of the prejudices of the so-called advanced people of the Victorian era and they had neglected to study trade unionism, foreign affairs, and much of the machinery of government. Shaw studied them all from close quarters, examined them, and successfully made many of his gentle and patriotic countrymen angry with him.

Shaw has heavily been taken to task for having blatantly flouting democracy. It is always remembered that democracy is a form of government and may even be the best form so far invented; it is seldom remembered that it is a way of life. When democracy is accepted and practised as a form of government without being accepted and practised as a way of life, it becomes, so to say, half-democracy which is worse than no democracy. Shaw found that democracy is used by some people in blatant ignorance of its workability as a philosophy of life. Democracy may be regarded as an ideal,

and like all other ideals it can never be fully realized. When Shaw discovered how the slogans of democratic rights ended in empty slogans only, without any effort on the part of the slogan-makers to realize these rights for everybody; when he saw that democracy was understood and interpreted in terms of political equality only without any reference to the more urgent economic equality; when he painfully found that the democratically elected leaders of the people had no qualities becoming of leaders, and they only served only their own selfish ends, he came to think that the dictatorship of a Mussolini or a Stalin was better than this misnomer of democracy.

Shaw had another arrow to shoot at democracy. He thought that it could never be a government by the people, for there was no method which could ensure the election of the best qualified persons to the helm of affairs. He thought that in order to make democracy a success, it was necessary for every citizen to be an intellectual giant, or he would be led by the nose by the self-seeking and clever politicians, as so often happens, by dint of their gift of the gab. Shaw himself did not practise the politicians' art, but knew their way. Though his view about the pre-condition of democracy may not be completely right, the essential and unpalatable truth in his view is too important to be ignored. Shaw had nothing to do with democracy as it was being practised in Europe and the other side of the Atlantic. Shaw's praise for the

1. C.E.M. Joad discusses this point admirably in his "Shaw" Victor Gollancz Ltd. London, 1949. P 169-171.

dictators cannot surely go unblamed, but it has to be borne in mind that it was the behaviour of the democratically elected leaders and the fact that democracy is not accepted as a philosophy of life which led him to praise them.

It would be wrong to suppose, however, on the strength of this that Shaw became a Fascist or a Nazi, though he sometimes thanked a Hitler or a Mussolini in public. But most of his readers did not notice Shaw's clear opinion about Fascism which he looked upon as dangerous to human kind. In Everybody's Political What's What Shaw states, "Now-a-days Capitalist's cry is : 'Nationalize what you like; municipalise what you can; turn the Courts of Justice into Courts martial and your Parliaments and Corporations into boards of directors with your most popular mob orators in the chair, provided the rent, the interest, and the profits come to us as before, and the proletariat still gets nothing but its keep,"¹ According to Shaw this cry signifies Fascism which he calls State Capitalism. He holds that "This is the great Corruptor of Socialism. It calls itself Fascism in Italy, National Socialism (Nazi for short) in Germany, New Deal in the United States, and is clever enough to remain nameless in England, but every where it means the same thing; Socialist production, but Unsocialist distribution -- "so far, out of the frying pan into the fire ".

The above makes it abundantly clear that Shaw was against Fascism; nor could he, an avowed socialist, be in

1. Everybody's Political What's What - G.B. Shaw.

favour of it. He was against nineteenth-century Liberalism, too, which appeared to him to be anti-social. He divined the nature of the nineteenth century liberalism as Free Enterprise. Shaw believed that Liberalism and Fascism, apparently so far away from each other, are but different names given to Capitalism. None of these systems, he held, ensured freedom from want for the masses.

But Shaw was not a political philosopher, for he did not propound a systematic body of political thought; there is no 'ism' in Political Science which might be called "Shavianism". That is, I believe only natural for the artist. And if Shaw sometimes contradicted himself and as alleged, wrongly, betrayed his loss of faith in Socialism, it makes scarcely any harm so long as we view him as an artist. Whatever Shaw had to say about politics and political theories, he dramatized, and it is his dramas with which I am primarily concerned. It may, however, be contended that the opinions expressed by his characters should not be reduced to a Shavian doctrine of political thought. Another point which need be stressed is that inspite of his putting the ideas in a challenging manner, he did not say anything original about politics and political thoughts. His contribution to the whole body of political thought, thus, is not considerable. Even his denunciation of democracy has nothing really new in it; it only makes him a kin of Mill and Carlyle. But he was a politically conscious man who refused to be carried away by popular beliefs and thus he belonged to the minority. The interesting thing is the manner in which he sets down ideas.

As Shaw's public utterances were often misinterpreted and denounced, so also were his dramas. It is difficult to judge "political plays" because in matters of politics it is very difficult for the critic to attain a scientific, that is, objective outlook and to give a dispassionate judgement. Naturally, people react to the "political plays" of Shaw according to their political leanings and interests. Shaw made himself insecure by uttering unpalatable things. It is always unsafe to speak the truth, particularly when patriotism is regarded as one of the greatest virtues.

My concern in this chapter being mainly with the "political plays" of Shaw, I shall not discuss Everybody's Political What is What, or An Intellectual Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism, or Common Sense About the War, though these books, particularly the second, are a vast fund of practical knowledge about politics. In many of his earlier plays, particularly in the so called "social plays", Shaw discussed politics, in John Bull's Other Island, for example. He discussed politics in some of his "philosophical plays" too, for instance, in Major Barbara. But it is particularly in the plays written after the thirties of the twentieth century that politics became the primary themes in Shaw's plays. These plays include The Apple Cart (1929), Too True to be Good (1931), On the Rocks (1933), The Millionairess (1935-36), Geneva (1938), and In Good King Charles' Golden Days. But political ideas cannot be kept in compartments completely separated from social ideas and so in these so

called "political plays" we shall find the admirable sense and knowledge of the playwright of Sociology.

As a man of affairs Shaw's interest in politics was intense and fortunately for literature he cast his sight definitely upon political issues of national and international import. It has already been noted that a great many of his speeches and writings concern with economics and finance; it is further to be noted that with it politics is so mingled that one cannot be thought of without a reference to the other. Political systems and economic systems are really one.

In John Bull's Other Island, which was published in 1904 when the Irish Question was burning the whole of England and the whole of Ireland, the entire Anglo-Irish question with its social, political, economic and religious implications, is dramatised. We cannot fail to notice the beautiful structure of this play which earned the praise of W.B. Yeats, who is not a great appreciator of Shaw and his dramas, as the "first play of Bernard Shaw's that has a geography"¹. The conflict between the racial types has been dramatized here in a masterly manner that reminds the method of Moliere. Though the subject is taken from the contemporary political arena, the appeal of the play is international; the play reaches a poetic height in the last lines. It would not be out of place to quote Shaw at length from The Tatler of November 16, 1904 : "I never achieved such a feat of

1. As in George Bernard Shaw : Man of the Century. Vol II. Archibald Henderson. Appleton-Century-Crofts Inc. 1956. P 619.

construction in my life. Just consider my subject - the destiny of nations! Consider my characters - personages who stalk on the stage impersonating millions of real, living, suffering men and women. I have had to get all England and all Ireland in three hours and a quarter. I have shown the Englishman to the Irishman and the Irishman to the Englishman, the Protestant to the Catholic and the Catholic to the Protestant".

Shaw surpassed his countrymen in objectivity; he possessed the essential dramatic quality of abstraction, the ability to rise above the limitations and weakness of mere patriotism. It was possible for him, by virtue of that quality, to see through the Irish no less capably than through the English preserving a remarkably even balance in his portrayal and criticism of the two peoples.

John Bull's Other Island is uncompromising in its presentation of the real old Ireland. The age-long conflict between the English and the Irish is displayed by the easily prosperous, short-sighted, thick-skinned and yet admirable Englishman and the poor, suffering, struggling, imaginative and no less admirable Irishman. Rosscullen, the scene of action in the play, is a segment of the living Ireland. Here are encountered all those conflicting elements which have been made a hopeless enigma of the Irish Question for so many generations. The root of the trouble was that Ireland was a conquered country. John Bull's Other Island was written when Ireland was still ruled by English folly instead of its own

1. Quoted in G.B.S. : Man of the Century - Archibald Henderson. Vol II. Apleton-Century-Crofts Inc. 1956. P 619.

and when talk about the Home Rule for Ireland grew high. The preface to the play is a strong plea for Home Rule. Shaw spoke of the "clumsy thumb" of English rule and declared : "If you would be good enough, ladies and gentlemen of England, to take your thumb away and leave us to do something else than bite it", there would be the end of discord¹ between the two peoples. Since then the Irish Question has been settled but, as Shaw said in 1929, making an addition to the Preface, ". . . . not as civilized and reasonable men should have settled it but as dogs settled a dispute over a bone"²

In Rosscullen, the miniature Ireland, we find the dreamer and the bigot, the superstitious and the unilluminated, jostling. Instead of the great land-owner, there is a group of small proprietors, who treat their employees and tenants with a harshness and thoughtless cruelty which only results in the ruin of the latter. Religion actually rules the community, and the clergy, who are held in high esteem, show profound political sagacity and unscrupulousness when they play upon the superstition and credulity of the peasants. But the sense of oppression has not destroyed the sense of humour of Ireland; neither are destroyed her passion for mysticism and her native charm.

Much of the interest and brilliance of John Bull's Other Island lies in the contrast between the English and the Irish characters. The Englishman is unmistakable. Broadbent

1. Preface of John Bull's Other Island. The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw. Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1956. P 449.

2. Ibid. P 473.

is a true character of a classic comedy. He has the exaggerated confidence of the typical Englishman. He resolves to study the Irish Question, which has been nagging both Ireland and England, on the spot. But he is incurably ignorant of the nature of Ireland's plight and so comes to think that "the great principles of the great Liberal Party" will be able to put an end to Ireland's misery and solve the Irish Question. The Celtic melancholy, the Irish voice and the poetic language have an irresistible appeal to him. When Father Keegan speaks of the various evils, he says that some of these evils are "absolutely necessary for the preservation of society and others are encouraged only when the Tories are in office"¹. Shaw describes Broadbent as "a robust full-blooded, energetic man in the prime of life, sometimes eager and credulous, sometimes shrewd and roguish, sometimes portentously solemn, sometimes, jolly and impetuous, always buoyant and irresistible, most likeable, and enormously absurd in his most earnest moments"². This shrewd, roguish, and enormously absurd man announces himself as a candidate for the parliamentary seat on the ground that he is a Home Ruler, a Nationalist, and the truest friend of the Irish.

Larry Doyle, Broadbent's foil, is a grown-up man compared with his English friend, but much less practical and less adaptable. This is a subtle portrait, a character of great significance in the Shavian drama. This self-expatriated Irishman has become a victim of disillusionment - a terrible

1. John Bull's Other Island - Shaw.

2. John Bull's Other Island - Shaw.

disease. He realizes the charm of Ireland's dreams and the brutality of the hard facts of England; and in his heart kindless a longing for a country to live in where facts are not brutal and dreams are not unreal.

In this play there is no Shavian character in the strict sense of the term. Yet in the character of Father Keegan we get a glimpse of the poet and mystic in Shaw. The poet and the mystic Bernard Shaw, who is known only to a few, reveals himself in various degrees in Marchbanks, in Caesar in his apostrophe to Sphinx; the artistic creed of Shaw is revealed in the character of Dubedat. The tragic despair of Barbara in Major Barbara and the mystic utterance of Mrs. George in Getting Married reveal the poet and the mystic. Shaw possibly is at his noblest in the last speech of Lilith in Rack to Methuselah and in the adoration of Saint Joan. Once again he is revealed in the speech of Father Keegan where he reaches poetic height.

"In my dreams heaven is a country where the State is the church and the church the People : three in one and one in three. It is a commonwealth in which work is play and play is life : three in one and one in three. It is a temple in which the priest is the worshipper and the worshipper the worshipped : three in one and one in three. It is a godhead in which all life is human and all humanity divine : three in one and one in three. It is, in short, the dream of a madman". The "Preface for Politicians" is a masterly

1. John Bull's Other Island - Shaw. A portion of this speech appears also in another place of this work.

performance whether read as a literary essay or a political pamphlet. Shaw studied some of the greatest pamphleteers England has ever produced - Swift, Cobett, Carlyle. Shaw's analysis of the Irish Question is tinged with an insight which is found in the prophetic utterances of Carlyle. John Bull's Other Island, in which a political-social question is dramatized, has solidity of workmanship; and the characters are firmly set upon solid ground. The interest of the play has not diminished in as much as behind the topicality of the theme dealt with in it, the real theme is the destiny of nations.

From the question of Home Rule for Ireland in John Bull's Other Island we are transported to the question of democracy in The Apple Cart. Thomas Mann was correct when he included The Apple Cart, "the stunningly clairvoyant political satire",¹ among the best of the plays of Bernard Shaw. Yet it is open to doubt whether Mann looked at The Apple Cart as a play, for he praises only its wit and poetic idiom. It is true - and I have pointed it out in the chapter on the dramatic technique of Shaw - that The Apple Cart is a piece of music; and in this respect only a few of Shaw's plays can rival this play. But the play has not been fully appreciated as a work of dramatic art. Here the drama lies in the imaginary conflict between the King of England and his Labour Cabinet in the year 1962. Subtitled "A Political

1. He was Mankind's Friend - Thomas Mann in G.B.S. : A Critical Survey - Ed. L. Kronenberger. P 254. The World Publishing Company. 1953.

Extravaganza", it has two Acts and an Interlude. The popularly elected Prime Minister makes an attempt to deprive the King of almost the only real power left him, namely, the right to influence and guide public opinion through the two media of expression, the press and the platform. King Magnus is exceedingly clever and he outwits the Prime Minister not only by declining to play the role of cipher offered him but also by threatening to abdicate to run for Prime Ministership by winning a Parliamentary seat. This solution the Prime Minister dares not accept, for that would rally the royalist votes against himself and impose on him a rival of whose ability he has everything to fear. The comic paradox of the situation is that the King wins, not by exercising his royal authority, but by threatening to resign and to go to the democratic poll.

Politically The Apple Cart was rashly misunderstood. Shaw was roundly denounced as a traitor to Socialism and a convert to Monarchy. The play is a terrific blast at democracy as it is practised to-day; the system ensures the victory of the man who most glibly promises the people what they desire. By implication Shaw asserts that the people who allow themselves to be hoodwinked by the makers of promises are also to be blamed; that men and women must be educated to make democracy, as a form of government, meaningful. But it is not the apple-cart of democracy only that the playwright upsets here; he upsets the apple-cart of royalty too, exposing "the unreality of both democracy and royalty as our

idealists conceive them¹. As a matter of fact, Shaw says more about royalty than about democracy in this play arguing in favour of men who have a good and genuine training for ruling the country. In the play the clever King gets the better of his ministers, but is left in a worse plight than they. The King wins by making a desperate bid for dictatorship which is nothing more than a personal victory destined to collapse with the death of the dictator; the play does not dramatize the unquestionable success of dictatorship. The solution, given by Shaw in the preface, is to construct a political system for rapid, positive work made to fit into the twentieth-century conditions. What that new system should be depends on the people who are trained for government and citizenship and are controlled and guided by conscience and reason, not by emotion.

In The Apple Cart there is an inner and a deeper conflict which does not make itself obvious to everybody. It is the conflict between royalty and democracy in one camp and Capitalism in the other. Capitalism, according to Shaw, has brought the world to its present pass; all the evils of western civilization of today have Capitalism as their source. Shaw's solution, here, is men and women of character, politicians and statesmen of efficiency; the elimination of private property, equitable distribution of national wealth; in other words, the very essence of Socialism. Those who

1. Preface to The Apple Cart. The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw. Paul Hamlyn Ltd. London. 1965. P 325.

maintain that Shaw turned himself into a traitor to Socialism in The Apple Cart do not see deep enough.

But the play is not a tract on Political Science. The charm of the plot lies in the conflict and in its comedy. The play consists in two long discussions in which the characters sit in a semi-circle; the conflicts are dramatized through these discussions in which we find the witty Prime Minister outwitted by the King. The discussion is suspended in the middle to make room for amatory episode in which, as it is often seen in a Shaw-play, the woman takes the lead. This little episode is a brilliant piece of dramatic relief. The stage is arranged in a masterful manner which confounds the academic critic. There is no pretence of physical action in the play, but the dialogue is fresh and alive with movement. The theme of the play has become quite dated, but The Apple Cart as a comedy is still alive. The play is not easy to act, for it seems that a few characters from political arena assembled and talked. But the success of acting this high comedy with a satirical vein in it depends largely on the realization that it is a musical composition. The devoted student of Wagner is almost at his best in The Apple Cart. The theme of the conflict between democracy and monarchy or between democracy and monarchy and Capitalism has little appeal to a modern theatre-goer; we have had enough of it. But the music of The Apple Cart is always a source of joy; it signifies the success of Shaw as an artist.

Shaw is a master of composing political fantasia and Too True to be Good stands among the best-known of this type.

This play is a dream in which nothing rational but everything absurd happens. The characters are bodily transported, in the dream, to the wilds of Northern India from their habitat in England. Here once again Shaw takes up the Capitalist system to show that its effect upon the rich is no less terrible than its effect upon the poor; in Major Barbara Shaw shows the effects of the capitalist system upon the poor and here he shows its effect upon the rich. And then he takes up the condition of the post-war generation which is all but lost, morally that is. This theme, of course, is familiar, but the treatment transports the familiar theme to the realm of the absurd. When considered purely as a drama, however, Too True to be Good shows itself to be one of the weakest plays of Shaw. The mechanism of the plot is a dream much like that of Heartbreak House. The opening of the play is farcical and only now and then there is a slap-stick comedy; the contrast in every character between profession and pretence is satiric; the setting and the incident are those of an opera. In a characteristic stroke of satire the Monster announces at the end of the First Act that the play is virtually over, but the characters shall discuss what has happened in the play for two more Acts and that the exit doors are in order. Obviously nobody leaves. This is only an exposure of the moral bankruptcy of the lost generation. Into the fantastic frame of this play the playwright introduces a burglar who is a professional preacher, a private soldier who is more efficient than his Colonel, a sergeant who is a student

of Bunyan and is well-versed in the Bible, and the father of the burglar who is a disillusioned secularist. These characters discuss between and among themselves subjects like health, riches, idleness, the army and, above all, the meaning of life. The Patient is actually the central figure, for the play is her dream. It is she who has found out that she has something sensible to do. The main idea of the play - everyman must have something worthwhile to do and he can discover for himself the way to good life by finding the work -- is expressed through her. This idea is again exploited by Shaw in The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles in which it is maintained that he who fails to find something worthwhile to do shall be regarded as a social nuisance to be liquidated. It is evident that Too True to be Good may not be regarded as a purely political play precisely because the undertone of philosophy runs through it. It is discussed under the heading "political plays of Shaw" only because it has been shown in this play how the post-war generation has outgrown the prevailing political system.

It, however, seems that Shaw's ideas are in a chaos in this play. What the clergyman-burglar says seems to be his own words when he seemingly suffers from a loss of faith : "we have outgrown our religion; outgrown our political system; outgrown our strength of mind and character". But it would be incorrect to say that Shaw has become pessimistic here. If we have outgrown our religion and political system, the cry of the burglar-clergyman urges upon us to strive to

find a newer and better religion and political system, and not to yeild. We do not get the picture of a discouraged Shaw here. He never lost his faith, but rather steadfastly celebrated the forces of life set against the forces of death; as the existing situation is one of doubt and disorientation, he calls upon men to find a new faith and religion. The spiritual longings of the new generation find expression in the final monologue in which once again we see a Shaw who is primarily a poet. The post-war situation is described in the poetic monologue put into the mouth of the Elder : " But. I have no Bible, no creed ; the war has shot both out of my hands. The war has been a fiery forcing house in which we have grown with a rush like flowers in a late spring following a terrible winter.... The fatal word NDT has been miraculously inserted into our creeds". But the Elder continues to say that NDT is not enough and we will have to find a new religion, a new way to life. In this monologue we listen to the unmistakable voice of Shaw who preaches the gospel of will, of life.

Though weak, Too True to be Good as a play is not an absolute failure. The mechanism of dream has been used skilfully and the characters are sharply differentiated as social types. It is true, of course, that none of the characters is outstanding. They are more typical expressing various prevailing modes of thought than individuals. The discussions in the play are long and too monotonous to be dramatic. Yet the skill of the dramatist is unmistakable,

particularly in deftly managing the knock-about fun, Shaw strings together a multitude of observations, often pungent, upon the post-war generation which has become bankrupt and disillusioned. Though the overall impression remains what Archibald Henderson says "Too talkative to be dramatic",¹ there is enough of theatricality in the play which depends on the character of Private Meek and, more particularly, on the Burglar who is young, lively and an accomplished talker of the Shavian brand. But neither Meek with all his energy nor the Burglar with his niceties of expression is the leading character. The leading character is the patient who comes out to be quite fit physically. The play is her dream; the characters are the creation of her dream.

Wealth is discussed in Too True to be Good. The question of what is to be done with the fabulously wealthy millionaires under democratic capitalism, that is, what is to be done with the bosses, is the problem in the fantastic play The Millionairess. Shaw, who from time to time tinkered with situation, sent his secretary a play called The Millionairess, completed in 1935. Preface to Bosses which created a sensation was written in 1936 at Malvern and is immensely readable.

It has been recorded by Henderson that "when the Shaws sailed for South Africa toward end of December, 1931, he was working on the play, the embryo of the The Millionairess which in the original draft, ended with the volcanically

1. G.B.S : Man of the century. Vol II. Appleton-Century-Croft Inc. 1936 P 632.

erupted shout of the ungovernable Epifania : "In Moscow I shall not be a millionariess; but I shall be in the Sovnarkom within six months and in the Politbureau before the end of the year"¹, The main problem, thus, is the irresistible power of the able man who governs but is ungovernable. The solution found by shaw to the problem echoes Too True to be Good which deals with vast personal wealth.

But the problem is too big to be easily solved, even if the attempt at finding a solution is made by a Shaw. The solution found by the dramatist is not satisfactory, though we do not demand a solution from an artist. That he has dramatized a problem of great bearing on the conditions of our time is something which must not be mixed up with the unsatisfactory solution to the problem given by him. The problem was not solved by a devastating world war which destroyed two great political bosses--Hitler and Mussolini. The bosses, the talented individuals with commanding ability in money making, in politics, in church, and in everything, cannot be liquidated. But something has to be done for our deliverance from the tyranny of these talented individuals. The abolition of private property would not solve the problem, as Shaw writes in the Preface, for even then we shall remain at the mercy of "the decider, the dominator, the organiser, the tactician and the mesmerizer"². The remedy found by Shaw was manifold increase in the number of

1. Ibid. P 635.

2. Preface to The Millionairess - Preface to Bosses - G.B. Shaw. The Complete Preface of Bernard Shaw. Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1965. P 490.

talented persons. In the Preface to the play Shaw maintains that talented persons should be multiplied "to what may be called their natural majority limit, which will destroy their present scarcity value. But we must also eliminate the mass of ignorance, weakness and timidity which force them to treat them according to their folly"¹. In other words, the masses must be adequately educated and made enough intelligent to distinguish the worthy from the unworthy; they have to be sufficiently powerful to prevent the rulers, who have ceased to be efficient, from ruling over them. Shaw sees the success of his solution in the creed of Creative Evolution. He says : "Only a creed of Creative Evolution can set the souls of people free"².

The Millionairess is in four Acts and it "does not pretend to be anything more than a comedy of humorous and curious contemporary characters" ³ This play is actually a "well-made" play for here we find the dramatist having recourse to the "mechanical rabbits" and "clock-work mice" which he himself attacked so often. Shaw used a female boss with exceptional talent for making money and lording over others in this comedy which lapses now and then into slapstick farce. The plot, which is filled up with pugilist, judo expert, conscienceless crook, clown, and sexless doctor, is not important . Various elements of the so called "well-made" play are here with the difference that in Shaw's play there is a bit too much of discussion covering a wide field

1. Ibid. P 490.

2. Ibid. P 493.

3. Ibid. P 479.

of interest. The situation is fantastic, but the discussions are lively and entertaining, as always in a Shaw-play.

The Millionairess opens with the scene introducing the millionairess, Epifania Ognisanti di Farerga, interviewing a solicitor in his office at Lincoln's Inn Fields. She gives out her intention of making a will and tells the story of her husband. As they talk, the husband of Epifonia, Alastair Fitzfassenden, arrives with his girl friend. In the discussion that ensues the conditions of the millionairess' marriage with the champion boxer and tennis player are brought out elaborately. He had discovered that she was not the woman who could be his soul's mate and so deserted her. She too has a male friend with whom she discusses things beyond the capacity of perception of her husband. This gentleman also arrives after a lot of discussion which is interesting in its own way, but not very necessary for the play. In the Second Act at the river-side inn we discover that Epifania herself is a good boxer; she boxes her friend out. Then arrives an Egyptian doctor, very much cultivated, who speaks English well. A romance develops between the doctor and the millionairess. It seems that both of them had made promise --- the doctor to his mother and the millionairess to her father --- about their marriage. In the Third Act, in the East End of London, the millionairess is found earning her livelihood in an ugly den where, by virtue of her merits, she automatically becomes the controller. It has been shown how talent can never fail and how the talented

individual will have the affairs in his or her hand. In the Fourth, that is, the Final Act in a river-side hotel, the former inn, the millionairess is discovered at the helm of affairs. The husband of the millionairess, his girl friend, the solicitor of the opening Act and the male friend of Epifania all assemble in the hotel. The Egyptian doctor also arrives to complete the denouement; he is found to have fulfilled the conditions of the millionairess. The millionairess has also fulfilled the doctor's conditions. Then Epifania gives the solicitor instructions to proceed to prepare the will.

We find that there is very slight action; what is there in the name of action is only slapstick fun. It is purely a discussion play, a play of ideas. Though ideas run riot, the main discussion centres round the question : who is the able man, the great man? Shaw's conception of the great man has some novelty because he made him "immoral" in the Shavian sense of the term. This great man is unconventional and has self-confidence to wield the power and remain at the centre of power, be it management of a hotel or earning money or governing a state. It is impossible to govern such an individual because he submits to no established authority. The Millionairess, like Geneva and In good King Charles's Golden Days which follow, deals with the problem of leadership; in the play the problem is how to choose the leader. The answer is that the leader will choose himself; the average men lack the necessary ability to choose the leader for themselves. I have already maintained that Shaw

lacked the art of the politician and his incursions into practical politics were, more often than not, unhappy. The burden of all "political plays" of Shaw is elimination of ignorance. The state will go on the rocks without a leader, but there is the possibility that the self-chosen leader shall become a dictator. Shaw was not in favour of dictators and heroes as such and his praise of the dictators is nothing but an expression of his intolerance with the pretensions of democracy. Shaw's "political plays" really deal with the prevailing state of human civilization and his answer always is to educate men --- to break the shackles of ignorance --- and to make them capable of self-leadership. Shaw wanted politics to be a means, the end being the alround development of man and human culture. The redeeming creed, thus, has to be Creative Evolution. All his life Shaw was preoccupied with the problem of the quality of the people and how to get them rightly governed. These preoccupations appear in The Millionairess. Only with a little understanding we realize that a large number of men and women are no better than children moving about in the bodies of adults. It was absurd, Shaw thought, that the fate of mankind should depend on the whims of half-educated and ill-educated mob of children. Shaw's main idea is reasonable enough --- a disciplined democracy can be achieved only by the labour of exceptional people.

The Millionairess is a farce with a considerable difference. Here a woman has been presented who has never been subjected to any discipline. Yet she finds herself

frustrated by her uncontrolled authority; she herself declares that her life has been completely sorrowful because she finds none on whom she can trust; she finds none who is selfless. Only when she meets the Egyptian doctor who is completely disinterested about himself but interested in leaving the world a better place, does she find any hope of fulfilling her function in the world. The attack on the conventional idea of happy marriage is no less interesting in the play. Epifania is taken aback by the complete indifference of the doctor about her money and finds her husband in him. In a lengthy passage the conventional idea about happiness in conjugal life is demolished : "And I tell you that in the happiest of marriages not a day passes without a thousand moments of unfaithfulness What do the unmarried know of this infinitely dangerous, heart-tearing, ever changing life of adventure we call marriage?"

Geneva is a fancied page from history like the political play which follows it, that is, In Good King Charles's Golden Days. It was a rough time for the world, particularly for Europe with Hitler in Germany and Mussolini in Italy making preparations for a holocaust that was to engulf all the continents shortly. The time was out of joint and even the efforts of a Bernard Shaw could not have set it right. When Shaw treated this boiling condition with his characteristic levity, he was upbraided. Shaw replied that it was beyond his power to alleviate the tragedy of Europe and so he would exercise the rights of the comedian to extract

what comedy he could out of the serious, blasting atmosphere. In "A Note on Geneva" Shaw explained how the play began. He began with the Intellectual Co-operation Committee, set up with good intentions but dying within a month of its birth, and said ". . . it came about that I found it growing on me that there was some fun to be got on the stage out of the ¹ Committee".

When we look at the theme of the play we find that it is completely "dated", for both Hitler and Mussolini were thrown away from their seats of power within a few years of the publication of the play. But it is worthwhile to note that dictators of this type have not become an extinct species with the defeat of the two war-lords; this type may arise again and so the interest of the theme of Geneva is not quite dead. When the hysteria of war-time -- a time in which people talk hysterically --- is over, we can look at the dramatic representations of Hitler, Mussolini and General Franco more objectively. The play presents the war-lords as objectively as possible, for Shaw as a dramatist has the power to see both the sides of a case. Moreover, he does not believe that there can be a man who is hundred percent evil or that there is a human *deus ex machina*. So the much-hated dictators have been given fair play; they are allowed to put forward their own case.

The play is not a "Well-made" one; it is disquisitory

1. A Note on Geneva - G.B. Shaw. Malvern Festival Book. 1938. P 8-9. (Quoted in G.B.S. Man of the Century Vol II. Archibald Henderson. Appleton-Century-Crofts Inc. 1956. P 653.

in nature and fits well in the canon of the drama of ideas. Here, too, we find that nothing happens; the characters only talk giving voice to ideas which cut across one another. It is Begonia Brown, the secretary of the Intellectual Co-operation Committee, who sets the ball rolling though she herself is unaware of what is going to happen or of the significance of the Committee. The play only reveals a situation, but does not try to solve the problem of how to negotiate the dictators. When Shaw was charged with failure to solve all the political problems, he retorted that he was not Omniscient or Omnipotent and that as a playwright he could only "extract comedy and tragedy from the existing situation"¹. When he allowed the dictators fair play it was further said that Shaw had converted his political faith. This was not the case; he was simply drawing attention to the situation, posing the problem of leadership. More, he had the dramatist's objective view to see the worth of the dictators like Mussolini and Hitler. We may have many things to say against them as the destroyers of half of the world, but one would do well to remember that they might also have had their say; also we cannot help acknowledging, even grudgingly, that they dragged out their father-lands from a position of degradation to that of the dreaded--and even respected--countries in Europe. It is the artist's capacity to look at things dispassionately which is to be seen in Shaw's

1. A Note on Geneva. G.B. Shaw. Malvern Festival Book. 1938 P 8 (As in G.B.S: Man of the Century Vol II.A. Henderson. Appleton Century-Crofts Inc. 1956. P 653.

portrayal of the Nazi and the Fascist dictators.

It is to be noticed that Shaw had a peculiar partiality for anybody who was in possession of power over his fellows; such persons appeared to him to be particular experiments of Life Force to reach higher and higher; they have a claim for the name of Superman or at least for the role of a superman. It is not once only that Shaw took up his pen in support of such men, to praise them and to commend their actions. Shaw, it seems, was constantly in search of the sign of the superman in the great and powerful rulers, in the philosophers and in the artists. This possibly is the reason why he gave the rulers like Mussolini and Hitler their due, even more than their due, which compelled him to live through many embarrassing years before, during, and after the second world War.

The theme of this play had become dated even in 1940, because in the play Mussolini refers to Hitler as "my understudy". But the play Geneva as a play of ideas evokes some emotions which cannot be lightly dismissed. It is the emotion of the marvellous which keeps the interest of the play when the Fascist and Nazi dictators are dead. There is no "action" but there is music--the music of words. The whole long last Act is composed with a mastery which shows the symphonic quality of the Shavian drama. There is an orchestral design in this play which reminds us of the playwright's marvellous achievement in the Apple Cart; here once more we see the perfect Wagnerite at work.

It is only a useless conjecture what shaw would have done if he had taken the very dramatic reign and situation of King Charles II in his sixties when he was at his best, as evident from his handling of Saint John. As it is, the political play In Good King Charles's Golden Days is not among the best dramatic achievements of Shaw. He did not dramatize the romantic, passionate love-episodes of king Charles; neither did he dramatize the intrigues of the time though in this sphere the Restoration period is at least as dramatic, if not more, as the Elizabethan period. Dramatization of passionate love affairs and intrigues are completely beyond Shaw. Here lies the difference between Shaw and Congreve and between the drama of ideas of the twentieth century and the Restoration drama of manners.

King Charles II, if we are to depend upon the chroniclers, was a witty, wise, and ungovernable King who had himself as his sole adviser. He knew that the time was rough and that he had been beset with enemies to monarchy as well as to the person of the monarch. But with almost unerring judgement and courage he wielded the power of the sovereign and at the same time multiplied the number of illegitimate children. Shaw, in the Preface to In Good King Charles's Golden Days dwelt on the first part of this observation; about the second part, we already know his attitude. There are historians who have already done the job of portraying the polygamous King and his art of government nicely enough. Shaw did not write a chronicle play with king Charles II, and when he called the play "a true history that never happened" he

knew what he was saying. If the play were a chronicle drama Shaw would have presented us the Mechiavellian qualities of King Charles in addition to his championship of science and art.

The play remains what it really is : a fancied page from history with some historical personages presented at the height of their powers; they assemble in the house of Newton. We find on the stage a bright constellation of luminaries from various fields -- art, science, and religion. Above all there is the figure of King Charles himself who takes active interest in the high intellectual discussion. We find Newton, Kneller, George Fox, James, the Duke of York, and the King discussing almost endlessly to the bewilderment of the critics. This is a perfect discussion play in which ideas about various things are argued and examined by the characters. The result is that the play, as Maurice Colbourne points out, "... may resemble a Platonic symposium"¹. But there is this difference : Plato allows all the characters in Symposium freedom to express their own opinion without taking sides, but Shaw may take side as he really does in this play; here he sides with the champion of art, Kneller.

At least for once, Shaw in this play lays aside Creative Evolution, Socialism and all the others of his favourite ideas; neither does he bring in questions of philosophic speculations and great abstractions that defy definitions. Unencumbered by his own ideas, Shaw considered

1. The Real Bernard Shaw - Maurice Colbourne J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd. London. 1949. P 217.

the mysteries; it is the curious mind of Shaw that particularly attracts us here.

This play is, save a little bit of fun, all talk. Being a dramatist and an artist, here Shaw allows all the characters to explain themselves. He arranges the characters with skill and so we find a variety of combinations : Louise, the Duchess of Portsmouth, the only one intellectual among the women characters in the play, Newton and Kneller discuss science and art, and the King and the Duke of York discuss Kingship. In the talk between Newton and Kneller we get a glimpse of the real Bernard Shaw. Though the dramatist seems to be fair enough to Newton, the scientist, he holds him to ridicule, for Shaw always sides with the artist and has little faith in Science. Kneller expresses the artist's view and expounds the conflict between the man of science and the man of art. The artist, Kneller declares, is the hand of God. In a passage of high poetic beauty Kneller says : ". . . the hand that can draw the image of God and reveal the soul in them, and is inspired to do this and nothing else even if he starves and is cast off by his father and all his family for it : is not his hand the hand used by God, who, being a spirit without body, parts and passions, has no hands?" In this passage we hear the true voice of Shaw who set a very high ideal and standard for the work of the true artist.

In In Good King Charles's Golden Days once again we find the mind of Shaw turning towards the question of leadership, which is a recurring theme in his political

plays, and the inadequacy of the methods of finding out the true leader. The characters in the play, save women characters, are leaders in their own spheres. Of course, the women are also presented as the mistresses in their own arts; we find them, except the Duchess of Portsmouth, interrupting the intellectual talks of the men; they would not allow the men of intellect to forget them. It is possible that here Shaw once again points out, as he does in Man and Superman through the mouth of Tanner, that the woman would try to drag the man of intellect and the man of art down to the mundane level and that the truly great ones have to be indifferent about women. To go back to the problem of leadership, Shaw states the problem through the mouth of King Charles without trying to give a solution. The problem is stated thus : "No beloved, the riddle of how to choose a ruler is still unanswered; and it is the riddle of civilization". This question of leadership is the main theme in the three last political plays of Shaw and may be studied as a trilogy. The fact that the methods employed today are very inadequate to find out and elect the popular leader is the dominant note in each of those plays.

In Good King Charles's Golden Days inspite of its weakness, is a work of high distinction. The First Act is too long and, though there are sparkling dialogues throughout this Act, it appears to be beyond an audience to maintain intellectual alertness for so long a time. As a sort of comic relief, therefore, Shaw introduces a little fun where we find Newton and James, the Duke of York, having a scrap on the

floor. The short Second Act is a sort of an epilogue. But the play has its design which cannot be understood if we constantly remind ourselves that the play is only full of talks. As in the previous play Geneva we noted the orchestral design, so also in this play we have an orchestra with the great ones of arts, science, and religion, and kingship playing the various tunes; but often it is something like a duet that we hear being played when the different combinations of characters discuss various ideas. But the musical design of Geneva seems to be more mature. In I, Good King Charles's Golden Days the dialogue is maintained at a very high level which cannot easily be equalled. In a Shavian play of ideas we do not expect "action"; the dramatist rather ridicules the critic who demand "action" by introducing funny, nonsensical incidents in the name of action. The academic critics feel irritated to see the characters discussing for hours, even though absorbingly, doing nothing and causing nothing to happen.

The play dramatizes not any historical incident, though the time of the Merry Monarch Charles was nothing if not dramatic. But it dramatizes current ideas and ideologies through discussion which at times reaches poetic height. The drama rehabilitates the character of a monarch who is always shown, by historian no less than by dramatists and novelists, as lustful, faithless, and polygamous. The characters in the play are distinctly drawn. The women characters have, always excluding Louise, little or nothing to do with the

intellectual discussion; yet they are also differentiated from each other skilfully.

A spiritual likeness between Shakespeare's The Tempest and Shaw's In Good King Charles's Golden Days has been noticed by Maurice Colbourne and one cannot dismiss his views lightly. Shakespeare is said to have climbed to the towers of philosophic calm after surviving the tumult and passion of his great tragedies. So, we may say, did Shaw in this play climb the towers of calm. Shaw's towers are marked with serenity and curiosity. The functions of art, the laws of mathematics, the ethics of government, the great secrets of the universe are treated with a humility by the author which is quite surprising for him. Here we get a glimpse into a curious playwright advancing great questions of universal application, but without insisting on the answers. In this sense In Good King Charles's Golden Days is a typical play of ideas.

1. The Real Bernard Shaw - Maurice Colbourne. J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd. London. 1949. P 218.