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IS THE WORLD GROWING BETTER?

Ask G. B. Shaw and C. E. M. Joad

[In a recent issue of "The Listener," G.M. suggested that the disappearance of duelling was one of the many answers that could be given to those who argue that human nature does not change. An issue of the "New Statesman" that has since reached us carries the discussion a little further; and since those taking part in it are two of the most famous controversialists in England, we extract passages for the benefit of our own readers. It will of course be understood that to condense such men in some respects to misrepresent them.

The "New Statesman" discussion was begun by Joad, who contributed an imaginary dialogue between himself and Shaw. This was shown to Shaw, who replied in about a thousand words. We quote about half of each contribution.

Imaginary Dialogue

JOAD: "You know, Shaw, I am and have always been one of your most enthusiastic disciples. I grew up in a world, the world of 1910-1914, in which all advanced young men who knew what politically was what acknowledged you as their natural leader. Socialism seemed just round the corner, a corner which, marching gaily under the Shavian banner, we were about to turn. For me, then, and for many like me, you were never just a playwright who succeeded in producing plays which were more or less entertaining; you were a philosopher and a prophet who preached the gospel of a new world. Nor have the 30 years that have since elapsed shown us your equal in any one of these departments. This verdict is amply borne out by Hesketh Pearson's book, from the pages of which you emerge as large as life, and if possible, twice as natural."

SHAW: "Yes, it is a good biography. I wrote most of it myself."

JOAD (lyrically): "What a stream of ideas, what a flow of wit, what speeches, what letters, what gorgeous conversations, and, as a consequence, what exhilaration in the reader who gets a glimpse of life lived at a higher potential than he has known in himself or his fellows. And yet, and yet, when I put it down I was sensible of a feeling of depression."

SHAW: "A dull dog, eh?"

JOAD: "Not at all. My depression was rooted not in me, but in the times. It was the contrast between the effort and its result that depressed me. Such an appearance of achievement, so vast a listening public, so apparently respectful a world—and then look at the world!"

SHAW: "I deluged the public with novelties. You cannot expect my gospel to be assimilated in a mere 60 years or so by a race as incorrigibly thick-headed as the English."

JOAD: "But they have assimilated it, or so they believe. The young maintain that they know all your ideas inside out, and regard you as an entertaining old buffer announcing period-piece platitudes and striking period-piece attitudes."

SHAW (chuckling): "That is because they owe whatever they have got in the way of minds to me. I have tinted the intellectual spectacles of this generation. so, naturally enough, when they look out on the world they see everything in my colours. It is the Nemesis that waits upon the man who tells the truth for the first time that after a time people think they have always known what he told them."

JOAD: "Perhaps. But you are evading the main point which is the spectacle



PROF. C. E. M. JOAD
Would he say Amen?

presented by the contemporary world. How much of your teaching do you suppose has been learnt by the world to-day? And by 'learnt' I don't only mean accepted in theory, but acted on in practice."

SHAW: "Far more than you seem to think. Have you read the Labour Party's pamphlet on the *Old World and the New Society*?"

JOAD: "I have glanced at it."

SHAW: "Have you, indeed! Very good of you I'm sure. If you were to take the trouble to read it properly, instead of merely glancing at it, you would find it full of Shavings."

JOAD: "Yes, of course I agree that in a lot of small, incidental ways, the world to-day is saner, more humane, and less prejudiced than when you began to preach to it, and I should be the last to belittle the share which your teaching has had in producing enlightenment."

"But it is at the overall picture that I would have you look. Who said, for example, 'a civilisation cannot progress without criticism, and must, therefore, to save itself from stagnation and putrefaction, declare impunity for criticism'? Do you find that that condition of civilisation is satisfied in the contemporary world?"

SHAW: "You forget there is a war on, and wars always run dramatically to legs and teeth."

JOAD: "But it was in the 'twenties that you yourself were apologising to posterity 'for living in a country where the capacity and tastes of schoolboys

(Continued on next page)