HE DID NOT LOVE THE PEOPLE, SAYS BRANDES

Stuart Robson *and* William H. Crane *as the* two Dromios *in the* Comedy *of* Errors.

Methinks you are my glass, and not my brother: I see by you I am a sweet-faced youth.

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Jacob Adler *as* Shylock.

I pray you, give me leave to go from hence; I am not well.

W. J. Le Moyne *as* Gobbo *in the* Merchant *of* Venice.

That is the very defect of the matter, Sir.

Danish Critic Traces the Origin and Growth, Year by Year, of His Dislike for "the Mass"

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SHAKESPEARE'S aversion to the mob was based upon his contempt for their discrimination, but it had its deepest roots in the purely physical repugnance of his artist nerves to their plebeian atmosphere. It was obvious in Troilus and Cressida that the irritation with public stupidity was at its height. He now, for the third time, finds in his Plutarch a subject which not only responds to the mood of the moment, but also gives him an opportunity for portraying a notable mother; and he is irresistibly drawn to give his material dramatic style.

It is the old traditional story of Coriolanus, great man and great general, who, in the remote days of Roman antiquity, became involved in such hopeless conflict with the populace of his native city, and was so roughly dealt with by them in return that he was driven, in his bitterness, to reckless deeds.

Plutarch, however, was by no means prejudiced against the people, and the subject had to be entirely refashioned by Shakespeare before it would harmonize with his mood. The historian may be guilty of serious contradictions in matters of detail, but he endeavors, to the best of his ability, to enter into the circumstances of times which were of hoary antiquity, even to him. The main drift of his narrative is to the effect that Coriolanus had already attained to great authority and influence in the city when the Senate, which represented the wealth of the community, came into collision with the masses. The people were overridden by usurers, the law was terribly severe upon debtors, and the poor were subjected to incessant distraint; their few possessions were sold, and men who had fought bravely for their country and were covered with honorable scars were frequently imprisoned. In the recent war with the Sabines the patricians had been forced to promise the people better treatment in the future, but the moment the war was over they broke their word, and distraint and imprisonment went on as before. After this the plebeians refused to come forward at the conscription, and the patricians, in spite of the opposition of Coriolanus, were compelled to yield.

Shakespeare was evidently incapable of forming any idea of the free citizenship of olden days, still less of that period of ferment during which the Roman people united to form a vigorous political party, a civic and military power combined, which proved the nucleus round which the great Roman Empire eventually shaped itself—a power of which J. L. Heiberg's words on thought might have been predicted: "It will conquer the world, nothing less."

Much the same thing was occurring in Shakespeare's own time, and, under his very eyes, as it were, the English people were initiating their struggle for self-government. But they who constituted the opposition were antagonistic to him and his art, and he looked without sympathy upon their conflict. Thus it was that those proud and self-reliant plebeians, who exiled themselves to Mons Sacer sooner than submit to the yoke of the patricians, represented no more to him than did that London mob which was daily before his eyes. To him the Tribunes of the People were but political agitators of the lowest type, mere personifications of the envy of the masses, and representatives of their stupidity and their brute force of numbers. Ignoring every incident which shed a favorable light upon the plebeians, he seized upon every instance of popular folly which could be found in Plutarch's account of a later revolt in order to incorporate it in his scornful delineation. Again and again he insists, by means of his hero's passionate invective, on the cowardice of the people, and that in the face of Plutarch's explicit testimony to their bravery. His detestation of the mass thrived upon this reiterated accentuation of the wretched pusillanimity of the plebeians, which went hand-in-hand with a rebellious hatred for their benefactors.

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Thus much, at any rate, can be declared with absolute certainty, that the anti-democratic spirit and passion of the play sprang from no momentary political situation, but from Shakespeare's heart of hearts. We have watched its growth with the passing years. A detestation of the mob, a positive hatred of the mass as mass, can be traced in the faltering efforts of his early youth. We may see its workings in what is undoubtedly Shakespeare's own description of Jack Cade's rebellion in the Second Part of "Henry VI.," and we divine it again in the conspicuous absence of all allusion to Magna Charta displayed in "King John."

We have already stated that Shakespeare's aristocratic contempt for the mob had its root in a purely physical aversion for the atmosphere of the "people." We need but to glance through his works to find the proof of it. In the Second Part of "Henry VI." (Act IV., Scene 7) Dick entreats Cade "that the laws of England may come out of his mouth"; whereupon Smith remarks aside: "It will be stinking law; for his breath stinks with eating toasted cheese." And again in Casca's description of Caesar's demeanor when he refuses the crown at the Lupercalian festival: "He put it the third time by, and still he refused it; the rabblement hooted and clapped their chapped hands, and threw up their sweaty nightcaps, and uttered such a deal of stinking breath because Caesar refused the crown, that it had almost choked Caesar; for he swooned and fell down at it; and for mine own part, I durst not laugh for fear of opening my lips and receiving the bad air" ("Julius Caesar," Act I., Scene 2.)

Also the words in which Cleopatra (in the last scene of the play) expresses her horror of being taken in Octavius Caesar's triumph to Rome:

> Now, Iras, what thinkest thou?
> Thou, an Egyptian puppet, shalt be shown
> in Rome as well as I: mechanic slaves,
> With greasy aprons, rules, and hammers, shall
> Uplift us to the view; in their thick breaths,
> Rank of gross diet, shall we be enclosed
> And forced to drink their vapour.

All Shakespeare's principal characters display this shrinking from the mob, although motives of interest may induce them to keep it concealed. When Richard II., having banished Bolingbroke, describes the latter's farewell to the people, he says ("Richard II.," Act. I., Scene 4):

> Ourself and Bushy, Bagot here and Green,
> Observed his courtship to the common people;
> How did he seem to dive into their hearts
> With humble and familiar courtesy,
> Wooing poor craftsmen with the craft of smiles
> And patient underbearing of his fortune,
> As 'twere to banish their effects with him.
> Off goes his bonnet to an oyster-wench,
> A brace of draymen bid God-speed him well,
> And had the tribute of his supple knee,
> With "Thanks, my countrymen, my loving friends."

The number of these passages proves that it was, in plain words, their evil smell which repelled Shakespeare. He was the true artist in this respect, too, and more sensitive to noxious fumes than any woman. At the present period of his life this particular distaste has grown to a violent aversion. The good qualities and virtues of the people do not exist for him; he believes their sufferings to be either imaginary or induced by their own faults. Their struggles are ridiculous to him, and their rights a fiction; their true characteristics are accessibility to flattery and ingratitude toward their benefactors; and their only real passion is an innate, deep, and concentrated hatred of their superiors; but all these qualities are merged in this chief crime: they stink.

> Cor.—For the mutable rank-scented many, let them
> Regard me as I do not flatter, and
> Therein behold themselves.
> (Act III., Scene 1.)

> Brutus—I heard him swear,
> Were he to stand for Consul, never would he
> Appear i' the market-place, nor on him put
> The napless vesture of humility;
> Nor, showing as the manner is his wounds
> To the people, beg their stinking breaths.
> (Act II., Scene 1.)

When Coriolanus is banished by the people, he turns upon them with the outburst:

> You common cry of curs! whose breath I hate
> As reek o' the rotten fens, whose loves I prize
> As the dead carcases of unburied men
> That do corrupt my air.
> (Act III., Scene 3.)

When old Menenius, Coriolanus's enthusiastic admirer, hears that the banished man has gone over to the Volscians, he says to the People's Tribunes:

> You have made good work,
> You and your apron-men: you that stood so much
> Upon the voice of occupation and
> The breath of garlic-eaters!
> (Act IV., Scene 6.)

And a little further on:

> Here comes the clusters.
> And is Aufidius with him? You are they
> That made the air unwholesome when you cast
> Your stinking greasy caps up, hooting at
> Coriolanus' exile.

If we seek to know how Shakespeare came by this non-political but surely sensuous contempt for the people we must search for the reason among the experiences of his own daily life. Where but in the course of his connection with the theatre would he come into contact with those whom he looked upon as human vermin? He suffered under the perpetual obligation of writing, staging, and acting his dramas with a view to pleasing the Great Public. His finest and best had always most difficulty in making its way, and hence the bitter words in Hamlet about the "excellent play" which "was never acted, or, if it was, not above once; for the play, I remember, pleased not the million."

Into this epithet, "the million," Shakespeare has condensed his contempt for the masses as art critics. Even the poets, and they are many, who have been honest and ardent political democrats, have seldom extended their belief in the majority to a faith in its capacity for appraising their art. The most liberal-minded of them all well know that the opinion of a connoisseur is worth more than the judgment of a hundred thousand ignoramuses. With Shakespeare, however, his artist's scorn for the capacity of the many did not confine itself to the sphere of Art, but included the world beyond.

As, year after year, his glance fell from the stage upon the flat caps covering the unkempt hair of the crowding heads down there in the open yard which constituted the pit, his sentiments grew increasingly contemptuous toward "the groundlings." These unwashed citianes, "the understanding gentlemen of the ground," as Ben Jonson nicknamed them, were attired in unlovely black smocks and goatskin jerkins, which had none too pleasant an odor. They were called "nutcrackers" from their habit of everlastingly cracking nuts and throwing the shells upon the stage. Tossing about apple peel, cords, sausage ends, and small pebbles was another of their amusements. Tobacco, ale, and apple vendors forced their way among them, and even before the curtain was lifted a reek of tobacco smoke and beer rose from the crowd impatiently waiting for the prima donna to be shaved.

Characters of the Comedies

Henrietta Crosman *as* Rosalind.

From the East to Western Ind. No jewel is like Rosalind.

John Gilbert *as* Dogberry *in* Much Ado About Nothing

O villain! thou wilt be condemned into everlasting redemption for this.

Wendell Collection

E. L. Davenport *as* Benedick.

What, my dear Lady Disdain! are you yet living?

Collection of William P. Harvey.

The fashionable folk of the stage and boxes, whom they hated, and with whom they were ever seeking occasion to brawl, called them stinkards. Abuse was flung backward and forward between them, and the pit threw apples and dirt, and even went so far as to spit on to the stage. In the Gull's Hornebooke, (1609,) Dekker says: "The stage, like time, will bring you to most perfect light and lay you open: neither are you to be hunted from thence, though the scarecrows in the yard hoot at you, hiss at you, spit on you." As late as 1614, the prologue to an old comedy, "The Hog Has Lost His Pearl," says:

> We may be pelted off fro what we know,
> With apples, eggs, or stones, from those below.

Who knows if Shakespeare was better satisfied with the less rowdy portion of his audience? Art was not the sole attraction of the theatre. We read in an old book on English plays: "In the playhouse at London it is the fashion of the youthes to go first into the yarde and carry their eye through every gallery; then, like unto ravens, when they spy the carrion, thither they fly and press as near to the fairest as they can." These fine gentlemen, who sat or reclined at full length on the stage, were probably as much occupied with their ladies as the less well-to-do theatregoers. We know that they occasionally watched the play as Hamlet did, with their heads in their mistresses' laps, for the position is described in Fletcher's "Queen of Corinth" (Act I., Scene 2):

> For the fair courtier, the woman's man,
> That tells my lady stories, dissolves riddles,
> Ushers her to her coach, lies at her feet
> At solemn masques, applauding what she laughs at.

Dekker (Gull's Hornebooke) informs us that keen card playing went on among some of the spectators, while others read, drank, or smoked tobacco. Christopher Marlowe has an epigram on this last practice, and Ben Jonson complains in his "Bartholomew Fair" of "those who accommodate gentlemen with tobacco at our theatres." He gives an elaborate description in his play, "The Case is Altered," of the manner in which capricious lordlings conducted themselves at the performance of a new piece:

"And they have such a habit of dislike in all things that they will approve nothing, be it never so conceited or elaborate; but sit dispersed, making faces and spitting, wagging their upright ears, and cry filthy, filthy; simply uttering their own condition, and using their wryed countenances instead of a vice, to turn the good aspects of all that shall sit near them, from what they behold." (Act II., Scene 6.)

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With his necessarily slight historical knowledge and insight Shakespeare would look upon the old days of both Rome and England in precisely the same light in which he saw his own times. His first Roman drama testifies to his innately anti-democratic tendencies. He seized with avidity upon every instance in Plutarch of the stupidity and brutality of the masses. Recall, for example, the scene in which the mob murders Cinna, the poet, for no better reason than its fury against Cinna, the conspirator (Julius Caesar, Act III., Scene 3):

> Third Citizen—You name, Sir, truly.
> Cinna—Truly my name is Cinna.
> First Citizen—Tear him to pieces; he's a conspirator.
> Cinna—I am Cinna the poet. I am Cinna the poet.
> Fourth Citizen—Tear him for his bad verses. Tear him for his bad verses.
> Cinna—I am not Cinna the conspirator.
> Fourth Citizen—It is no matter, his name's Cinna; pluck but his name out of his heart, and turn him going.
> Third Citizen—Tear him, tear him!

All four citizens are alike in their bloodthirsty fury. Shakespeare displays the same aristocratic contempt for the fickle crowd, whose opinion wavers with every speaker; witness his complete change of front immediately after Antony's oration. It was the feeling, possibly, which was at the bottom of his want of success in dealing with Caesar. He probably found Caesar antipathetic, not on the ground of his subversion of a republican form of government, but as leader of the Roman democracy. Shakespeare sympathized with the conspiracy of the nobles against him because all popular rule—even that which was guided by genius—was repugnant to him, inasmuch as it was power exercised, directly or indirectly, by an ignorant herd.

This point of view meets us again and again in "Coriolanus"; and whereas, in his earlier plays, it was only occasionally and, as it were, accidentally expressed, it has now grown and strengthened into deliberate utterance.

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We have no interest, however, in refashioning Shakespeare. It is enough for us if our perception is fine and keen enough to recognize him in his works, and we must actually put on blinders not to see on which side Shakespeare's sympathies lie here. He is only too much of one mind with the senators who say that "poor suitors have strong breaths," and Coriolanus, who is never refuted or contradicted, says no more than what the poet in his own person would indorse.

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For the people he felt nothing but scorn, and he was now, more than ever, incapable of seeing them as an aggregation of separate individualities; they were merged in the brutality which distinguished them in the mass. Humanity in general was to him not millions of individuals but a few great entities amidst millions of nonentities. He saw more and more clearly that the existence of these few illustrious men was all that made life worth living, and the belief gave impetus to that hero-worship which had been characteristic of his early youth. Formerly, however, this worship had lacked its present polemical quality. The fact that Coriolanus was a great warrior made no particular impression on Shakespeare at this period; it was quite incidental, and he included it simply because he must. It was not the soldier that he wished to glorify but the demigod. His present impression of the circumstances and conditions of life is this: there must of necessity be formed around the solitary great ones of this earth a conspiracy of envy and hatred raised by the small and mean. As Coriolanus says, "Who deserves greatness, deserves your hate."