

one bellows and no one blushes. The entire future of this magnificent planet depends on the chance that, amid the millions of cheerful cinematograph-haunting, revue-going, picture-paper-reading, careless human beings there are a few thousand discontented creatures somewhere esurient after knowledge, greedy to know the name of things (if it is only of germs or Greek

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figures of speech, or the bones of an owl's leg, or the races of man), and eager to relate one fact to another till these become, in an adaptation of Browning's phrase, not a third fact but a star. Oh, we human beings are in a very black hole — a hole quite as black as the Black Hole of Calcutta. That is the first lesson in spiritual geography.

## BARBERS

WHEN we talked of Wigs the other day; we said we might find something to say of barbers. And we have, as you will see.

Barber, from barba, a beard. What a title for the man who chiefly lives by shaving! Adam, says tradition, wore a beard. The kings of Persia plaited theirs with golden thread, and the Winged Bulls of Assyria are but types of those kings. The Chinese are a shaven people; the Egyptians were the same. But the Mahometans are bearded, and Saladin's son, Turkish historians tell us, wept for fear when he saw the shaven envoys of the Crusaders. The world is, and always has been, divided into shavers and bearded. Flint razors, oyster-shell razors, in prehistoric tombs; think of them, shudder, and acknowledge the omnipotence of the great goddess Vanity.

The greatest benefactor of barbers in the world's history is Alexander. He, who shaved himself to preserve his youth, shaved his army to prevent the enemy seizing their beards. He set a fashion which was followed by every Greekified beard-wagger in his empire,

philosophers by profession alone excepted; and this in Greece itself, a country near enough to the East for a full beard to have been considered a sign of manhood.

How pleasant shaving is, says Alciphron of the *Letters*, the Walter Savage Landor of Lucian's day, though his were imaginary letters, not conversations. The barber says good morning politely, you sit down on a high chair, and a sharp new razor is gently passed over your chin. The shop is the regular Athenian lounging place, with chairs and instruments all complete, and a nice 'symmetrical' bronze mirror not to make you look askew. Here you sit and gossip, here you hear the betting odds and the latest conjugal scandal, here you meet your friends, have your nails cut, and your whitlows removed and any superfluous hairs you happen to be troubled with, and (if you are a dandy) have a little of that precious dye put on to get the right shade worn by the heroes of the stage. This is a picture at Athens in the third century, A.D.; but does it not remind one of the labors of a young stock-exchange 'half-book' man, at his club, any afternoon

except Saturday or Sunday, in pre-war times?

Shaving was just one of those new-fangled ways brought in by those nasty Greeks from Asia Minor — 'Mounseer tricks' our own ancestors would have called them — which your true old Roman could n't abide. A barber comes over from Sicily in 300 B.C., sets the fashion in Rome, and your pater-familias, your hairy and humorless Cato, has the annoyance of seeing that horrid foreign habit spreading everywhere. But if you sent your son to a Greek university instead of into the army or on the land, what could you expect? Not many ancient bearded portraits survive. A few, however, may be found among the portraits of ancestors struck on their descendants' coins. Hundreds of clean-shaven Republicans can be seen in our museums, and the Roman barbers' shops did a roaring trade. Each razor lived in its own case; each customer had a wrapper tucked round him to protect his toga, each barber ran the comb through his customer's hair and said, as to-day, 'Long or short, sir?' Or, 'Have it out with the tweezers, sir?' Or, 'Try our infallible salve for superfluous hairs, we "put it up" in alabaster boxes, sir?' You have only to look at the plays of Plautus and the epigrams of Martial to find out all about it. For a thing to be known at the barber's is Horace's test of publicity; 'I'm tired of hunting in the barbers' shops,' says the man, wearily, in the *Amphitryon*.

Was it because the barbers of the classical world dabbled in drugs that we meet with that truly imposing personage the Barber-Surgeon of the Middle Ages? There he is, anyhow, proud, dictatorial, mysterious; remember Olivier le Dain, soft-footed and policy-pervading, the true agent of the sinister Louis XI. When the Heralds' Office wanted to find an ancestor for

the Newcomes, that Very Respectable Family, they could do no better than that Barber-Surgeon to King Edward the Confessor in whom Clive believed so devoutly as a boy, and at whom he was to laugh so bitterly when he came to blows with Cousin Barnes. A great race truly, those Barber-Surgeons, though it had its humble members, the barber to whom good King Dagobert paid his *deux sous* in the nursery rhyme, for instance, when good Saint Eloi told him he wanted shaving and the King promptly borrowed the fee.

The barbers of England were incorporated by Edward IV, in 1461. But, like Caxton's gentleman, who, 'for fere and doubte the barbour's made his daughters to lerne shave,' in the Game and Playe of the Chesse, Henry VIII was probably right when he made barbers and surgeons into one corporation and granted them a charter, as we see in Holbein's picture. He confined the barbers' share in surgery to blood-letting and drawing of teeth. On the other hand, to make things fair and square, he forbade the surgeons to practise 'barbery or shaving.' Does not the word 'barbarian,' by the way, denote him who wears a beard, and not the sound *bar-bar-[os]* in mockery of the foreigner, stumbling ludicrously in Attic Greek? Milton speaks contemptuously of Barber-Surgery; and Defoe makes his Cavalier complain in his Memoirs that no surgeon was to be had but a sorry country barber; no wonder then that George II finally separated the two corporations in 1745.

Still, enough was left him, even in the eighteenth century to make the barber an important person. When Mr. Geoffrey Wildgoose, the Spiritual Quixote, sets out on his pilgrimage to convert the world, it is to an 'affable and benevolent barber' that he goes, nominally to get shaved, really to pick up information in that 'grand office of intelli-

gence.' It is that same barber who points out, 'for the credit of his trade,' that barbers must have existed in King David's days, since that monarch alludes to lies cutting like a sharp razor. Had he known his Wycliffe, the barber might have found a still earlier authority, Delilah, who, according to that translator, calls in 'a barber,' where our version only calls 'a man,' to cut off Samson's locks.

It was, and is, the barber's business to attract custom. He used to do it by keeping caged singing birds and cats, whence the phrase 'as restless as a barber's cat before a storm'; by having a musical instrument, viol, or cittern, handy to amuse his waiting customers, whence Pepys's 'Barber's Music made to amuse My Lord,' on the 5th of June, 1660; (what a use for the gramophone, did our barbers only know it!), by encouraging idlers, whose gossip came in handy to pass on to the next customer; and by a never-ending flow of the latest intelligence, whether from the coffee-houses or the news sheets. He does it now by those illustrated weekly papers which fill the eye, but fail to nourish the mind. Gone is the barber's pole, with its striped ribands representing the fillets once bound about the bloodlet arm; it played the part at once of the tavern bush and the doctor's red lamp; gone the barber's basin in miniature hung to the pole, a sign universal still in Normandy, and to be found yet in the back streets of East Anglian seaports. What of that barber's basin which Cervantes was to glorify to all eternity as Mambrino's Helmet? That helmet, 'which looks for all the world like a barber's basin,' worn by Don Quixote, has become forever the symbol, at once ludicrous and pathetic, of its noble owner, and embalms the memory of a half-forgotten craft, the more grotesquely that Master Nicholas

the Barber was himself the Knight's own intimate, and his Basin a familiar sight in the streets of La Mancha. It was through the barber Caxon, dresser of the only three wigs left in the parish, that Scott's Antiquary gathered all his local news, and it was that *laudator temporis acti*, hard hit by the powder tax, who gave vent to the sorrowful ejaculation, 'Hegh, sirs! nae wonder the commons will be discontent and rise against the law, when they see magistrates, and bailies and deacons, and the provost himself, wi' heads as bald and bare as one o' my blocks!' It was a sad time for barbers, 1798; wigs were going out, crops were coming in, and the good days of the Regency and curled polls had not begun. That was a Restoration indeed when the barber enjoyed his own again. Well oiled, well curled locks; Macassar oil and bear's grease — 'a bear will be killed to-morrow' was a notice seen within living memory, like the turtle announcing its own doom in Birch's window — plenty of hair of your own (or someone else's) growth, 'craped' over the forehead; here was the barber's Paradise Regained. And they were not slow to take advantage of it. Even the anonymous inventor of the Anti-Macassar bears witness to the omnipotence of the barber's craft, and the pages of the magazines are full of relishing advertisements. Oily, supple, smiling, the Georgian barber bends and smirks to us still; curled himself, he would curl others; dandy in *excelsis*, he would dandify his fellows. Beau Brummel's barber made a fortune; County D'Orsay's curls still nod ambrosially from Frazer's Gallery; Disraeli's ringlets adorn the face of history.

Dandies are gone, tall silk hats have disappeared, but barbers remain. They smirk and smile, and gossip, and apologize if their razor makes a mistake and the Barber-Surgeon's art is again called

for. But the scope of their art is sadly limited: hair no longer 'curls lovely'; it 'lies well,' or is 'easily mastered.' One day, perhaps, when the war is over and the minor horrors are no longer to be apprehended, we may put razors aside and bring out our tall hats. We do not shave as Alexander's army did, lest the enemy should seize us by the beard; the army orders of to-day are less practical, and the toothbrush moustache has neither use nor beauty.

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But a nation in the trenches cannot indulge in beards, and flowing locks below tin hats are abhorrent to our taste. Will reaction come in this as in so much else, and peace rejoice the heart of the barber with a new greasier and curlier régime? But whatever happens let's stick to calling him a barber and leave the 'hairdresser' to those whose concern about personal appearance is more appropriate to a woman than to a man.

## MR. SWINNERTON'S NEW BOOK\*

'BECKWITH' was a small suburban town encircling a common. The men go to 'town' every day; the women form their little circles and occupations. Near the station lives Miss Lampe, an inquisitive, malicious old maid, who observes what train everyone catches, and who walks back with who and what young people seem 'attracted' by each other, and how it was time that this or that girl got married. The other ladies are weaker editions of Miss Lampe except in so far as they have children of their own and become predatory on their behalf. In Mr. Swinnerton's vision nothing big, death or sorrow or ruin, ever enters this chattering world, and, so far, his vision is incomplete. Death lays his icy hand on shopkeepers as often as on other people, and ruin rather oftener.

However, perhaps these things do not specially concern Louis Vechantnor or his cousin Dorothy. Louis is the

son of the Vechantnors, the ruling family of the place. Dorothy is the daughter of William, the descendant of a Vechantnor 'bad hat' of some generations before. William inadvertently sets up as a grocer in the same district as the main branch of the family. Hence a social awkwardness. To call or not to call, that is the question. The occasion is one that causes old Mr. Vechantnor to blurt out against his son the pent-up grievance of years about his outlook, his mentality, his Oxford ways, his thinking himself clever. Louis, who is unconscious of anything special in outlook or pretense, feels as if he had been suddenly struck in the face by his father, with whom he had believed himself on the best of terms. It is the revelation of division and the beginning of a rift. In this mood of hostility Louis goes to visit these grocer cousins, and finds the parents friendly, but the children resentful. The book is the story of three dramas, the effort of Beckwith to glare and stampede the

\* *Shops and Houses.* By Frank Swinnerton. Methuen. 7s.