

Modern industrial society is based on capital. Whether a given industrial field shall grow green and luxuriate or turn yellow and dry up, depends chiefly on the direction of the flow of capital. Whether we broaden the opportunities of life for persons of talent and enterprise or restrict them, depends upon how we manage the flow of capital. Whether we succeed in multiplying opportunities or leave talent to waste under the régime of blind chance, determines the soundness or unsoundness of our social system. Do we do well in leaving the control of the capital flow entirely to private initiative?

ALVIN S. JOHNSON.

## Telegrams

**I**N my simple world a cablegram is so rare that I should treasure the mere envelope. I should not be likely to resurrect it. It would be buried in a bureau, like a political badge or a cigar-cutter—but there is a silly magpie in every man and a cable I would preserve. To discuss cablegrams or even cut-rate wireless, however, would be an affectation. These are the orchids of communication. It is the ordinary telegram I sing.

There was a magnificence about a quick communication in the days before the Western Union. Horsemen went galloping roughshod through scattering villages. It was quite in order for a panting messenger to rush in, make his special delivery, and drop dead. This has ceased to be his custom. In Mr. Veblen's "Theory of the Leisure Class" there is one omission. He neglected to deal with that great adept in leisure, the messenger-boy. "Messenger-boy" is a misnomer. He is either a puling infant or a tough, exceedingly truculent little ogre of uncertain age and habit. His life is consecrated. He cares for nothing except to disprove the axiom that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points. Foreseeing this cult of the messenger service, the designers of the modern American city abandoned all considerations of beauty, mystery and suggestion in an heroic effort to circumvent the boy in blue. But the boy in blue cannot be beaten. By what art he is selected I know not. Whether he is attributable to environment or heredity I dare not guess. But with a possible inferiority to his rival the coat-room boy, and of course nature's paradox the crab, he is supreme.

It is not a telegram in its last stages that has magic. Much better for the purposes of drama to have Cleopatra receive a breathless minion, not a laconic imp with a receipt to be signed. Yet a telegram has magic. If you are hardened you do not register. It is the fresh who have the thrill.

But no one is totally superior to telegrams. Be you ever so inured, there is one telegram, *the* telegram, which will find your core.

Sometimes at a hotel-desk I stand patiently aside while an important person, usually a man but occasionally a woman, gets a handful of mail without any sign of curiosity, and goes to the elevator without even sorting out the wires. Such persons are marked. They are in public life. It is pardonable. There must be public men and public women. I should not ask anyone to give up his career for the peculiar ecstasies of the telegram. But no one can deny that these persons have parted with an essence of their being. What if I find a solitary notice? "It is under your door." I bolt for the elevator, thrilled, alive.

It may be suggested that my over-laden predecessors are not in public life, that they are very distinguished, very wealthy personages, receiving private advices as to their stocks, their spouses, their children, their wine-bin, their plumbing, or any other of their responsibilities, accessories, possessions. With every deference I answer that you are mistaken. Unless their riches are in a stocking, these are the custodians of tangible goods and chattels. Their title may be secure, but not their peace of mind. Whatever they may wish, they are obliged to administrate. Whoever their attorney, the law of gravitation keeps pulling, pulling at their chandeliers. And so in some degree they are connected with, open to, shared by, innumerable people. Without necessarily being popular, they are in the center of a populace. They have to meet, if only to repel, demands. I do not blame them for thus being public characters. It is often against their desires. But being called upon to convert a part of their souls into a reception-room, a place where people can be decently bowed out as well as in, it follows that they give up some of their ecstatic privacy in order to retain the rest. This I do not decry. For certain good and valuable considerations one might be induced to barter some of one's own choice stock of privacy, but for myself I should insist on retaining enough to keep up my interest in telegrams. To be so beset by Things as to be dogged by urgent brokers and punctilious butlers, no.

"There's a telegram upstairs for you, sir." "A telegram? How long has it been here?" "It came about half an hour ago." "Ah, thank you. . . No, never mind, I'm going upstairs." What may not this sort of banality precede? Perhaps another banality, in ink. But not always. A telegram is an arrow that is aimed to fly straight and drive deep. Whether from friend or rival, whether verdict or appeal, it may lodge where the heart is, and stay. From an iron-nerved ticker the message has come,

singing enigmatically across the country. But there is a path that leaps out of the dingy office to countless court-rooms, business buildings, homes, hospitals. That office is truly a ganglion from which piercing nerve-fibres curve into the last crevices of human lives. When you enter it to send a telegram it may depress you. You submit your confidence across a public counter. But what does it matter to a creature glazed by routine? He enumerates your words backwards, contemptuous of their meaning. To him a word is not a bullet—just an inert little lump of lead.

Some messages come with a force not realizable. Tragedy dawns slowly. The mind envisages, not apprehending. And then, for all the customary world outside, one is penned in one's trouble alone, like those sailors who were imprisoned in a vessel on fire in the Hudson. Cut off from escape, red-hot iron plates between them and the assuaging waters on every side, they could see the free, could cry out to them, could almost touch hands. But they had met their fate. It is strange that by a slip of paper one may meet one's own. There are countries to-day where the very word telegram must threaten like a poised spear. And such wounds as are inflicted in curt official words time is itself often powerless to heal. As some see it, dread in suspense is worse than dreadful certainty. But there are shocks which are irreparable. It is cruel to break those shocks, crueller to deliver them.

All urgency is not ominous. If, like a religion, the telegram attends on death, it attends no less eagerly on love and birth. "A boy arrived this morning. Father and child doing well"—this is more frequently the tenor of the wire. And the wire may be the rapier of comedy. Do you remember Bernard Shaw's rebuff to Lady Randolph Churchill for asking him to dinner? He had the vegetarian view of eating his "fellow-creatures." He chided her for inviting a person of "my well-known habits." "Know nothing of your habits," came Lady Randolph's blithe retort, "hope they're better than your manners."

The art of the telegram is threatened. Once we struggled to put our all in ten words—simple, at least, if not sensuous and passionate. Now the day-letter and night-letter seduce us into garrulity. No transition from Greek to Byzantine could be worse than this. We should resist it, as we resist all profligacy. The time will doubtless come when our descendants will recall us as austere and frugal in our use of the telegram. But we should preserve this sign of our Spartan manhood. Let us defer the softness and effeminacy of long, cheap telegrams. Let us remain primitive, virginal, terse.

FRANCIS HACKETT.

## Plato, Dante and Bernard Shaw

ACCORDING to Bernard Shaw, most of the critics who have been talking about "Major Barbara" are fools and liars. Not that he has bestowed these names on any of them individually, but it would seem to be a fair inference from the final sentence of his preface to the play. "This play of mine, 'Major Barbara,' " he says in that last sentence, "is, I hope, both true and inspired; but whoever says that it all happened, and that faith in it and understanding of it consist in believing that it is a record of an actual occurrence, is, to speak according to Scripture, a fool and a liar, and is hereby solemnly denounced and cursed as such by me, the author, to all posterity." In the face of this appeal and of the plain testimony of the play itself, the critics proceed to take "Major Barbara" as a literal transcript from life instead of as a work of creative art, with the result that they have been saying preposterous things about it.

Some of them appear to find it the most brutal document in militarist literature, which is an odd thing to think of a play that is all about religion. Others find it so pacific that they conjecture it to have been the inspiration of Henry Ford, which seems equally queer in view of the part played in it by cannon and gunpowder. Many of them complain that Shaw gets nowhere in the last act, which is like saying that Bunyan gets nowhere at the end of "The Pilgrim's Progress." And practically all of them talk about Barbara's ultimate conversion as if it were the surrender of salvation to worldly power—which leaves totally out of account the fact that conversion does not turn on whether you accept a thing or not, but on what you do with it after you have accepted it. Barbara and her husband accept the cannon factory. But does not Barbara vow to die with the colors, and does not Cusins promise to make war on war? The trouble with every one of these judgments is that the critic is blind to the poetry of the play. To talk of the poetry in Bernard Shaw may sound absurd to people brought up on nineteenth century definitions of poetry; but others, if they have read and seen Shaw with their imaginations, will understand the statement that to be blind to the poetry of one of his plays is generally to miss its main point.

To read "John Bull's Other Island," for instance, and miss the fact that the firm of Broadbent and Doyle prefigures a real as contrasted with a merely nominal union of England and Ireland, is to read that play prosaically and to miss its creative mainspring. To read "Captain Brassbound's Conversion" and miss the fact that the