

DANAKIL WOMEN

BY

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A REMARKABLE book by a traveller named Nesbit, since dead in an air crash, gave me information about the Danakils in Abyssinia which had the effect of securing for Signor Mussolini, when he invaded and annexed that region, the support of a party of three, these being the late Lady Houston, Mr. J. L. Garvin, and myself.

From Nesbit's book we learnt that no decent Danakil woman would marry a man who could not produce trophies proving that he had killed at least four adult males.

There was nothing unreasonable in this. No Danakil woman could hope to bring up a family of children or escape the worst that can happen to an unprotected female in an unpoliced wilderness unless she had an efficient fighting man as a permanent escort. The most highly civilized subscriber to TIME AND TIDE, if thrust back into such conditions, would refuse to marry any man who was not a practised killer. Her daughters would be brought up to admire and encourage male pugnacity, to despise timid sedentary men and be ashamed of being related to or connected with them (this would condemn the literary profession to monastic celibacy), until at last the vicarious pugnacity of women would become more ferocious than male militancy.

In a policed civilization like ours literary cowards not only find wives without any difficulty, but are married by methods which hardly fall short of rapine in spite of their efforts to retain a polygamic bachelorhood. Nevertheless, the old vicarious pugnacity persists; and the moment there is a threat of war, or a declaration of it, the suppressed Danakil breaks loose, and the women are all for the slaughter. Just now, whilst the man-controlled weeklies have become unreadable with their cacklings as of scared ganders, their schoolboy professions of knight errantry, their inept hypocrisies, their ill-concealed misgivings, their mental bewilderment, their attempts to encourage themselves by wild assertions that we must win, TIME AND TIDE, woman-controlled, hurls itself into the fray with a clear conscience, an impatience for battle and victory, and a generous and unashamed militancy. The men's speeches and articles sicken me: the women's delight me in spite of my loathing of the war as a horrible consequence of the British Government having become a brainless anachronism through adult suffrage combined with obsolete religious and political education or no political education at all, the casting vote being now with Miss Begonia Brown, who is not among the readers of TIME AND TIDE.

There is no hypocrisy about the editorials, or about Naomi Mitchison, Rebecca West, and Odette Keun, who have played the men off the stage. Of the three Odette alone is mortally pugnacious: she hates the enemy and really wants him to be killed, whereas I would trust Hitler himself in the hands of either Naomi or Rebecca. Odette is the typical Feroeious Female, the Superdanakil, the Bitterenderess, not to be wooed successfully by any man who cannot decorate her wigwam with 400 trophies blown from the dead bodies of as many blond beasts. At least that is the impression left by her contribution, which is useful because it calls attention to a neglected and relevant fact: namely, that the English and French are unlike enough to disagree if they do not bear their differences carefully in mind. Apparently it did not occur to the French Government the other day to consult us before starting a persecution of the Communists; and tomorrow we may do something equally inopportune from the French point of view, though to us it may seem too obvious

to be worth mentioning. In 1918 our relations with our ally had become so strained that the Hun was in contrast quite a friend. We had a hundred petty bickerings with the French, having a thousand petty bargains to settle with them, whereas we had none with the Germans, having had nothing to do with them for four years except kill them.

That may occur again as Odette warns us. But she seems to suggest as a remedy that we should all pretend to be stage Frenchmen until the war is over, overlooking the alternative of the Frenchmen becoming stage Englishmen, like Lord Allcash in *Fra Diavolo*, with his green veiled white hat, weeper whiskers, his "Aoh yess" and "Goddam", and his wife with impossibly projecting teeth. The difficulty is that neither of us would know how to do this convincingly. The real bond between us is the knowledge that if we do not hang together we shall hang separately, no matter how we may come to hate one another.

The men of all parties, from Lord Halifax to Lord Snell, have nothing to say but that as God is on our side because England is as ever in the right, and "Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just", we are sure to win, though we are in for a hard time at the cost of six millions a day.

Herr Hitler takes precisely the same view, *mutatis mutandis*.

For my part, as even God cannot have it both ways, I console myself with the fact that in war there are great advantages in being entirely in the wrong. Captain Kidd's sailors fought more desperately than Nelson's because they knew that if they were defeated they had no mercy to expect. We certainly have none, right or wrong; and neither have the Germans. Lord Snell declares that though the British world is perfect, we are fighting to create a new world, being presumably tired of perfection just as some of us are tired of Bach's music, and that our first act of creation must be to smash the German Reich (cheers from Odette). Herr Hitler claims to have already created a new world, but points out that its security cannot be guaranteed until the British Empire is smashed.

My objection is that I see not the slightest likelihood of either of them being able to smash the other; but they can easily ruin me in the attempt. The pumber they have already ruined is so considerable, and the war consequently so very unpopular, that I doubt if it will go very far either way, unless indeed God, called in piously by all Parties, has unexpected things up His sleeve, as in 1918, when the victorious rulers would so willingly have returned to the *status quo ante* had that been possible.

The Russian intervention has been the first surprise. I happen to be a native of the British Finland; and the possibility of an attack from the west is always present to my mind. In that case we could no doubt make Germany find her Gallipoli in Galway Bay, but hardly without cutting the Irish Republican Army to pieces first, and having to swallow a peck of our own indignant words about the reintegration of Finland and Russia.

But I must not anticipate. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

G. B. S.

[It was Bernard Shaw who, more than any other one person, exploded the Dickensian Nineteenth Century view that "women must be admitted to the fellowship of the Holy Ghost on a feminine instead of a human basis". It is queer to find him today attempting to

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